

Lutheran Spokesman



CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF SPEAKING GOD'S WORD OF TRUTH

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Scary/Merry/Blessed Christmas

What sights and sounds does your mind conjure up when you contemplate the Christmas season?

Let me suggest: Television programs, Christmas cards, and holiday songs; snowflakes falling; folks hurrying about to get bargains; parties being planned and cards sent out; front yards twinkling and dancing with a menagerie of decorations (both secular and holy); trees decked out and presents underneath; choirs brushing up on sacred selections; children attempting to keep their attention focused on the recitation they'll be presenting rather than the presents they are anticipating.

The sights and sounds of Christmas are many and varied. Each of us has very personal and special memories associated with this most precious of holidays.

Do any of your thoughts of Christmas involve the flash of metal and screams of terror? The hoarse calls of angry men ringing out over the cries

of infants and the wails of mothers? Soil covered with very unholiday-like blood?

Although occurring some time after Jesus' birth, King Herod's slaughter of the children of Bethlehem (see Matthew 2:16ff) is a very real if overlooked chapter of Christ's birth story. "The Slaughter of the Innocents" (as this incident has been called) has an important lesson for us as well; it may show us a proper perspective on Christmas.

When we are born into this world, in the eyes of some we are innocent, but not in the eyes of God. We are conceived and born in sin—with the inherited natural depravity of thousands of generations before us. As such, we were marked for slaughter, an easy prey for the sin of this world, for our own evil desires, and for the enslavement of Satan. Without a Deliverer we would have nothing to which we might look forward except a very scary

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Christmas, for Christ would come at the end of time to judge us according to our deeds, and who would be able to stand before Him?

“There is none righteous, no, not one...there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside...There is none who does good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:11-12).

False Securities?

How does the world handle the guilt of misdeeds and the natural knowledge of God’s law? Many turn to a “merry” Christmas. But ‘out of sight, out of mind’ doesn’t work too well unless we have something to replace the undesirable situation.

When consciences are plagued, people often ignore the inevitable. Sin? It doesn’t exist! Sin is just something created by religious fanatics to scare little children and the simple into preplanned behavior! So, people of the world fill their time and lives with enjoyment of the pleasures of this life—and Christmas is their prime time! “Giving is the spirit of the season,” we are often told. Others may say, “Family is the most important thing.”

And let’s not forget the uniter of most races, creeds, and ethnic backgrounds—the jolly old elf himself, Santa. With Old Saint Nick around, who thinks of nasty things like sin and death? Oh sure, he wants you to be ‘good’, but everyone knows that if you give it a good try, he’ll come through with the goodies anyway.

This kind of a “merry” Christmas is no better than a “scary” Christmas—which may be even worse! A “scary” Christmas gives the individual a false sense of security in one’s deeds. It is human nature to suppose that if one’s



‘good will’ toward other people is pretty good—or at least better than most—of course there will be a reward waiting on the other side of the grave. The true reality, however, is still the same: the righteous Judge will open His ledger and look for a perfect keeping of God’s holy law in thought, word, and deed from each one.

There is only one way to have a truly “blessed” Christmas. The truly “blessed” way to celebrate Christmas is to see Christ’s cross in His cradle!

The Lord Jesus Himself knew and told others of His purpose for coming into this world. “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things...and be killed, and be raised the third day” (Mt. 16:21).

For those people living without Christ, it is truly a very “scary Christmas.” That Babe in Bethlehem will one day return as the righteous Judge. The individuals running around with the secular “merry Christmas” on their lips and in their hearts have but a hollow shell trying to cover their insufficiencies; also they will have no excuse on that last day.

But to those who have had the Christ revealed to them by the Holy Spirit as the true Son of God, the Redeemer and Savior of all—to such, Christmas is just

the opening chapter of a beautiful story of love, suffering, and redemption that will conclude with a glorious celebration with Him forever.

How can we not desire, with all our

being, to share this true meaning of Christmas with everyone we meet?!

—*Teacher David W. Bernthal*
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin



An Advent Devotion—

Thy Kingdom Come

As the daylight hours shorten and the darkness increases, we may be reminded of a number of the truths of which our Lord Jesus has spoken concerning His advent.

In the last days love for the truth will grow cold (cf. Mt. 24:12), lovers of self will increase (cf. 2 Tim. 3:2), and the remnant of believers will become smaller and smaller. The darkness of unbelief, of laying aside the truths of Holy Scripture, will increase for many reasons (such as self-importance, money, numerical numbers, popularity, and the feel good of emotions). With all this, the shadows of the last times in which we live are lengthening and deepening.

Along with the shortening of the daylight hours comes the growing cold of late fall and winter. This may serve as reminder of the fact that love for the simple, clear truth of Holy Scripture and seeking for sound doctrine has grown cold—for the same reasons as mentioned above.

Seeing these things should not come as a surprise, since Jesus has told us that such things will take place, just as we are not surprised when the calendar turns from the summer months to the fall months to the winter months.

We are not greatly affected by the longer hours of darkness or the



increasing cold which come during these months: flip a switch and lights in the house come on; turn a dial and the heat warms the house; dig out warmer clothes when we go outside; put on gloves, hats, and scarves to protect from that cold.

But what are we doing against the growing spiritual darkness and coldness which is present and growing year by year? Do we open the Holy Scriptures? Do we read them with the purpose in mind to learn more? Do we dig deeper into them that we might become more enlightened and able to see where the dangers lie?

Awaiting the Eternal Kingdom

Through His servant Paul, our Lord wrote in Ephesians chapter 6 (cf. vv. 13-20) about “taking up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” To keep with the picture of going out into winter’s bitter cold, we might speak of it as putting on the winter clothes—heavy coat, scarf,

gloves, boots, and so on—that we might be able to withstand the cold and stand firm on and in the truths which our gracious God has given in His Holy Word.

It is for this Light, for this Armor of God, for the protection which He gives, that we pray “Thy Kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer.

For God’s kingdom comes through the Word by the power of His Holy Spirit. That kingdom is not food and drink, but righteousness and holiness in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom. 14:17). That kingdom is in you (cf. Lk. 17:21). That kingdom is not of the things of this world. The darkness and coldness brought on by the devil will not and cannot prevail against that Kingdom.

The kingdom for which we wait is the coming of our Lord Jesus in all His

glory, majesty, and power. All who believe in Jesus will inherit that Kingdom.

It is for the revealing of and inheriting of that eternal Kingdom of Heaven for which we look and wait with certain hope during these dark and cold days, even as we look forward to the coming again of the warmer, brighter, longer days of spring and summer.

We look forward to and pray for the final end of darkness and cold—that our Lord Jesus who once came for our salvation will soon and quickly come again to give us eternal peace in the Kingdom of Heaven with Him and with our Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit.

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

—Pastor Roland Gurgel
Weslaco, Texas



Ordinary Shepherds with an Extraordinary Message!

There wasn’t anything particularly special about being a shepherd. It wasn’t a highly esteemed job. I imagine you would have been hard pressed to find young Jewish boys and girls saying, “I want to be a shepherd when I grow up!” You didn’t need any special education to be a shepherd. It was a lowly, thankless, dirty job.

Nor was there anything especially exciting about being a shepherd. A shepherd may have to climb down a cliff to retrieve a sheep that had strayed from the fold. Or wolves may be lurking in the shadows looking for a bite to eat, and he would have to fend them off. But as far as excitement goes, that was about it. I can hardly imagine

shepherds going home and saying to their wives, “You’ll never guess what happened tonight!”

But there was one night, two thousand years ago, when something extraordinary happened to some ordinary shepherds. In the outskirts of Bethlehem some shepherds were doing what they had done countless nights before—“keeping watch over their flocks by night” (another ordinary night of watching sheep).

Little did they know that on this night something very special had taken place in Bethlehem. A baby boy had been born—a baby whose birth had been promised for four thousand years! A Baby whose Father was God

Himself—the Messiah who had been promised of God to take away the sin of the world! On this night the eternal Son of God had taken on flesh and had been born of the Virgin Mary.

What had begun as an ordinary evening soon turned extraordinary. The night sky was lit up by the arrival of God’s holy messengers. “Do not be afraid,” the angel said to those shepherds, “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. 2:10-11).

Comforting and Glorious!

What might have been a startling and fearful sight, was suddenly a comforting and glorious one—a Savior had been born for them! The promised Messiah had arrived! And this extraordinary message God had chosen to announce to these ordinary shepherds.

The angel told the shepherds where to find this special Baby and what to look for. Suddenly there appeared a vast number of the heavenly host praising God for what He was doing.

The shepherds knew just how extraordinary this was! They hurried into Bethlehem and found everything exactly

as God’s messenger had told them.

Having seen the Christ child, His mother and step-father, these lowly shepherds realized what they had heard and seen was not just for themselves. Luke writes that “they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child” (Lk. 2:17).

These shepherds became the first missionaries of the New Testament. They spread the good news that Christ the Lord had been born. God had sent a Savior into the world, and the shepherds wanted as many people as possible to hear this Good News! What an extraordinary message these ordinary shepherds had!

When you go to church this Christmas, what do you expect to hear? Just another “ordinary” Christmas program or sermon?

Like those ordinary shepherds, may we ordinary folks rejoice at the extraordinary news that a Savior was born to redeem us from our sins. May we ordinary Christians ever imitate those shepherds and make widely known the truth about this unique, extraordinary Child!

—*Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer*
Hecla, South Dakota



CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS AS THE SHEPHERDS DID

(See Luke 2:15-20)

One day at school a first-grade girl saw an intriguing present. It was the tiniest Christmas present imaginable, less than an inch on each side, with white glossy paper tied up with a sliver of red cellophane.

The little girl was captivated. Her active imagination tried to guess what miniature treasure could be inside such a small package. It had to be something wondrous beyond description. She longed to look into that package.

One day when she arrived early to school, she grabbed that little package, tore away the wrapping, and inside she found—nothing! Staring at the mess she had made, she suddenly realized that the little package itself was nothing more than a hollow Christmas ornament. Anticipation dissolved into disappointment, and then an empty feeling sickened her with the guilt of knowing she had ruined somebody’s ornament.

How often hasn’t something similar happened to you and me? The world entices us with all kinds of exciting packages—brightly wrapped gifts that catch our eyes and our hearts, promising instant gratification—yet when we rip open the package, expectations turn to disappointment and sometimes even to a guilty conscience.

The gift we have been given by God was not wrapped in brightly ornate, shiny trimmings. It was found in a stable and laid in a wooden manger, and yet that Gift is guaranteed to last more than a lifetime.

This Christmas I doubt that any of us will receive a gift that will last more than a lifetime. A tool or electronic gadget that is guaranteed for a lifetime will not last beyond a lifetime, but this gift given us by God—the gift of our Savior—is guaranteed; it is certified to never wear out, to never grow old, to last for eternity. It is a gift that lasts for eternity, and therefore it deserves a celebration that lasts all year long.

And we can make sure of that BY WELCOMING GOD’S GIFT AS THE SHEPHERDS DID!

If only we could celebrate Christmas that way! No Santa Claus to clutter the view of the Christ-child; no endless TV and newspaper advertise-



ments for things, things, and more things; no media celebrities singing about jingle bells and about a Baby many don’t even know—just the Lord speaking to us about the birth of His Son, the Savior.

Think of that first Christmas night! Lowly shepherds were doing what they always did—taking shifts keeping watch over their sheep in the field. No doubt that night was no different than a thousand other nights—until suddenly...*“An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.”*

Simple And Uncluttered Worship

Not only were their eyes amazed, but their ears heard an amazing message: *“Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”* What news could be that good—good news that would affect all people of the whole world?!

This kind of Good News: *“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”* A Baby is born! A Baby who is the Christ—the Anointed One, the One promised for some four thousand years! This is the Savior who rescues sinners from eternal death and hell. He is God and Man in one person. What a message!!

The shepherds asked no questions. They had no doubts, just excitement, wonder, and amazement. In childlike faith they ran to welcome their newborn King. *“Let us now go to Bethlehem”*...forget about the sheep; forget about our livelihood; forget about other distractions...*“Let us see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

We can celebrate Christmas as the shepherds did when we take the time to forget about things that distract and worry us—and then with joy-filled, faithful hearts welcome Jesus into our hearts and homes.

And so they hurried to find the Baby lying in the manger. Before their wondering eyes lay their Lord, their Savior, their King—the One who would live a perfect life of obedient love for them and offer His life as a sacrifice for their sins.

What uncluttered, simple worship it was! All alone in the darkness of the stable with Mary and Joseph, the heart and core of their worship was the Baby who had come to bring true peace between holy God and sinful men.

Is that how we worship the Christ-child today? Is our worship simple and uncluttered? Do we hasten to Jesus’ cradle, to His house, to His Word—thus to bow before Him in repentance and thankfulness? If so, then we **CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS AS THE SHEPHERDS DID AND WORSHIP**

JESUS AS THEY DID.

These words and this event forever changed the lives of these shepherds. They didn’t quit their jobs and become preachers of the Word or missionaries to some foreign countries—no, they returned to their everyday routine, but now as Christmas missionaries! They were the first people to be able to say to others: **“THE CHRIST HAS BEEN BORN”** (rather than “the Christ is coming”)! So excited about what they had seen and heard, they went and told others!

May the Holy Spirit fill us with the same zeal and eagerness that the shepherds had, so that we find it impossible to remain silent, but rather tell others that we have a Savior—a Savior who has gone from the cradle to the cross, and from the empty tomb to heaven’s glory—all for us!

We too are surrounded by people who need to hear that message. We may be the first ones to tell the Good News to a neighbor, a classmate, a fellow worker, a good friend, a spouse, or a relative. By thus telling the Good News, we celebrate Christmas as the shepherds did—this year, all year long, and every year.

Then the gift of our Savior will never be an empty, hollow, disappointing decoration, but a gift that lasts not only for a lifetime, but into eternity.

—Pastor Mark Bernthal
Madison, Wisconsin



Story, page 17

A Christian's Advent Prayer

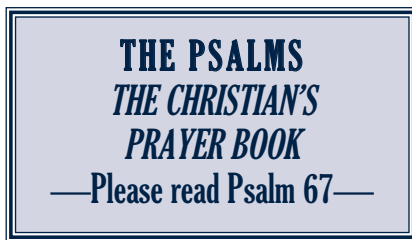
During this Advent season, as we focus on the peace and joy that is found in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, this psalm is especially appropriate for our meditation.

In this beautiful psalm the Holy Spirit leads the child of God to pray for the very blessing of which the LORD assures us in the Benediction at the close of each of our regular worship services. We know that the Lord is merciful and gracious, and that He has caused His face to shine upon us. He looks upon us with His divine favor and smiles upon us with the grace that is found in the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the way the Lord makes Himself known to the world. This is the way of life and salvation. So at this Adventide, our prayer is that this way of the Lord's grace and salvation in Christ Jesus may be known on Earth among all the nations.

This Spirit-inspired prayer then goes to the next step, leading us to ask that the Kingdom of God's grace come into the hearts of those who hear the Word. We pray that the gospel message might fill hearts the world over with the joy that we know, the joy with which the Babe of Bethlehem has filled our heart. In this festival season the child of God loves to sing the praises of our Savior. It is our Advent prayer that this praise should fill all the earth, that the nations should be glad and sing for joy.

For the generations that have gone before us this prayer has been answered by the faith that has come to us, the people of gentile nations, and



by the praise that flows from our lips. By the Spirit's direction their prayer has become our own. As we call to mind the countless thousands who dwell in the darkness of unbelief, we pray that the Spirit open their hearts to hear and believe the message of Jesus' coming into the world.

God Reveals His Righteousness!

The judgment which they now know and feel in their hearts is the righteous judgment of the law. Though that law is righteous, there is no joy to be found in it, there is no peace there for the wicked. In the coming of Jesus as the Child of Mary, God reveals His righteousness as the gift of life and peace for a fallen mankind.

It is through this grace that God governs our hearts, and it is for the spread of this grace that He rules the world. The song that filled the night sky over the hills of Bethlehem is the same song that we ask the Spirit to call forth from the hearts and mouths of people around the world. "Let the people praise You, O God, Let all the people praise You" and sing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:14).

The harvest for which we pray in this psalm is a spiritual harvest. The Lord Jesus saw that "the harvest truly

is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Mt. 9:37,38).

As we rejoice in the Lord’s coming, we become part of the answer to this prayer. We join in the harvest as we show forth the Lord’s praises before the world in everything—from our Christmas greetings to our missionaries sent to distant lands. We do this with the confidence that the Lord Himself shall bless us. He shall bless the words we speak in His name. He shall bless the labors we perform for

His kingdom. He shall bless His holy Word as it goes forth to the ends of the earth. Then all the earth shall know the Lord, and shall stand in holy awe of the wonder of His grace which has come to us in the Word made flesh.

Our Advent prayer of Psalm 67 is heard and answered continually. By the power of the Spirit working through the Word, the Earth has yielded its increase. Let all people join in singing the praises of our God and King!

—Pastor Theodore Barthels
Austin, Minnesota



Cooking preparations for Graduation Feast



Members Hearing the word of God

The angel said: “...I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people...”



Closing prayer by
Pastor Nireekshana



Graduation Love Feast

More pictures correlated to the CLCI Seminary graduation (story, p. 17f).

**Noting the 75th Anniversary of the
Brief Statement of the Doctrinal
Position of the MISSOURI SYNOD
(1932-2007)**

**A Trumpet Which Gave—and Gives!—a Clear Sound
(See 1 Corinthians 14:8)**

Brief Statement
Of the Public Ministry

Introductory Thoughts:

The public ministry has to do with the Office of the Keys which is “the power, or authority, to preach the Word of God, to administer the Sacraments, and especially the power to forgive and retain sins” (LC-MS Catechism, 1943 ed., p. 182).

The exercise of the office of the Keys is the ministry of the Word. It is God’s will that Christians provide for the public administration of the keys, the public proclamation of the Word. This is known as the “Public Ministry.”

Thesis 3 of *Concerning Church and Ministry*, a statement of faith of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, states: “The office of the public ministry is not limited to any divinely fixed form as such....In Christian liberty, as circumstances require and as the Lord supplies diversity of gifts, operations and ministries...the Church may separate the various functions of the public ministry of the word and apportion them to whatever number of qualified persons it may choose to call, (for example, pastor, teacher, etc.). It is essential that each call thus extended shall specify the area of responsibility

and the type of duty thereby assigned, and that each laborer abide by the terms of his call.”

While among Lutherans of the former Synodical Conference (LC-MS, WELS, ELS), there was not unanimity on who is a “public minister,” there was unanimity among the same Lutherans on the substance of what constitutes the public ministry. Hence we of the Church of the Lutheran Confession happily confess what is declared in the *Brief Statement* of 1932.

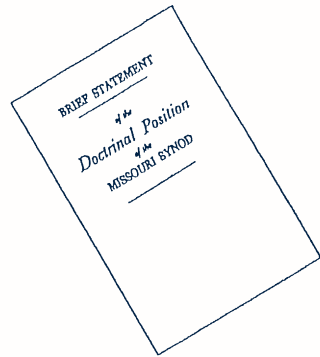
Brief Statement text [with comment]

Of the Public Ministry

31. By the public ministry we mean the office [*office is not a position of honor, but an activity*] **by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered by order and in the name of [or in behalf of] a Christian congregation. Concerning this office we teach that it is a divine ordinance** [*The Lord instituted the office*]; **that is, the Christians of a certain locality must apply the means of grace** [*gospel in Word and Sacrament*]

not only privately and within the circle of their families nor merely in their common intercourse [*communication*] with fellow-Christians, John 5:39; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:16, but they are also required, by the divine order, to make provision [*take measures to see*] that the Word of God be publicly preached in their midst, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work, whose qualifications and official functions are exactly defined in Scripture, Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:28; 2 Tim. 2:2. [*The office of the public ministry is bestowed upon qualified individuals who have been called by the assembly of believers to whom the Lord has given the ministry of the keys, or the authority to issue such a divine call. With the Lutheran Confessions we teach "that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called"—Augsburg Confession, Article 14.*]

32. Although the office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, 1 Pet. 4:11; that is to say, it is the duty of Christians to yield unconditional obedience to the office of the ministry whenever, and as long as, the minister proclaims to them the Word of God, [!!!] Heb. 13:17, Luke 10:16. [*"He who has my Word let him speak my Word faithfully"—Jeremiah 23:28*]. If, however, the minister, in his teachings and injunctions, were to go beyond the Word of God [*preach contrary to Scripture; preach false doctrine*], it would be the duty of Christians not to obey, but to disobey him, [*Christians do not have free license to disobey the minister of*



God on a personal whim, but will be sure, before doing so, to test the minister's teaching in the light of the Word of God] so as to remain faithful to Christ, Matt. 23:8. [*Christ is our Master. A minister is to remain the voice of the Master.*] Accordingly, we reject the false doctrine ascribing to the office of the ministry the right to demand obedience and submission in matters which Christ has not commanded. [*The minister's authority starts and ends with the Word of God. Beyond that, his opinion is no more valid than that of any of God's people.*]

33. Regarding ordination we teach that it is not a divine, but a commendable ecclesiastical [*church*] ordinance. (Smalcald Articles, Triglot, p. 525, paragraph 70; M., p. 342.) [*Ordination does not make the minister who takes up the pastoral office in a congregation. The call from the Christian congregation makes one the pastor of the congregation whose call he has accepted. Ordination is a public ratification of his fitness to serve in the high office which by the grace of God he is about to assume. It occurs once, as a candidate enters the public ministry.*]

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
Corpus Christi, Texas

The Discourses of Christ

Keeping the Word/Seeking a Sign—Luke 11:27-32

“Don’t Let Go”

In the Fifth Article of our *Augsburg Confession* we learn that God instituted the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments in order for us to receive saving faith in Christ. He gave the gospel for professing, for baptizing, and for serving Holy Communion. Later on, in the expansion and defense of this article (in the *Apology*), these three items are described as the marks or signs of the Church. They are not part of the Holy Christian Church (the Church is people who believe in Jesus), but they are sure indications that where they are used as provided, the Church exists right there.

They indicate that Jesus Christ is there, in and with His Church which He creates through these signs.

This is helpful for us, especially when people want some kind of proof that Christianity is the right religion or that our Bible is the right book or that Christ is the true and only Savior and Messiah—as well as whether our CLC is a true and reliable denomination.

We don’t argue or debate. We simply present Christ to them in Word and Sacraments. And we pray that they will receive Him—and treasure Him.

Jesus was confronted with the whole issue of “proof,” which Christians have faced all down through history. In the Old Testament, our Triune God always gave signs to indi-

cate where believers had been and were being created. Jesus refers to “Moses” (the Torah) “and the prophets” (later on in Luke 16), and specifically in our chapter—to Jonah and Solomon.

The preaching and teaching of these two men contained calls to repentance and promises of the gospel for faith’s sake. Like Moses, Jonah and Solomon taught the Wisdom of God—who is Jesus in person (as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:24). By the use of God’s words, these and other Old and New Testament men were capable, as our preachers and teachers are today, of casting out sin and the devil, overcoming death and hell, bringing forgiveness, hope, and eternal life.

They didn’t let go of the words—nor do we want to.

God Himself is Talking!

Here in Luke we read how Jesus had been ministering in several areas of the Holy Land, moving relentlessly towards Holy Week and the Atonement. He demonstrated His power over Satan’s realm. He is the living Word, “the Word made flesh” (John 1), the living sign from heaven. This sign is greater than Jonah and Solomon—and Moses.

Skeptics would love a sign from heaven that would exempt them from

confessing sin and clinging to Christ, but no such sign is given. Jesus cast out demons, stressing the fact that no one dare remain empty after such a cleansing. “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16) is the counsel today, lest the devil come and fill the vacuum, and the person be seven times worse off than before. Hold on to Jesus’ words!

And while Jesus was performing and explaining His work, a woman burst out with admiration for His mother. Perhaps what Jesus had just said was something she had seen or experienced with regard to a neighborhood boy (or maybe even one of her own sons?) who had turned out to love life on the wild side. Perhaps she thought that this Jesus was such a fine young man—who must certainly have had a good mother to raise such a boy, who obviously taught Him to know how to recognize trouble and stay out of it!

Jesus wouldn’t let the woman’s admiration stand for a moment. “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and hold onto it.” It is God Himself Who was talking to her. Hold on to that, dear woman!

We have loved that Bible passage all our lives. We take it to apply to the

whole of Scripture. We don’t need “something else”—some other proof of God’s love, so that we can push the Bible aside into second or third place. Nor do we have a Bible “on show” on a prominent shelf or coffee table—and maybe refer to it as “the Good Book”—but never really get around to reading it again very much after Confirmation or between Sunday sermons.

We could paste a new label on the cover where it says “Holy Bible”—and write “Different Book” on it. The word *Bible* means *book*, and the word *Holy* has strong overtones of being something *separate*. The new title might raise a few eyebrows but would provide opportunities to declare that this book has one thing that no other book has. It is different. It has a Savior from sin.

The Bible portrays sin as no other book does; it gives rescue and relief which no one else has written except the Holy Spirit Himself. No other so-called “holy book” of the world even comes close.

You can see then why we keep holding onto the words of the Bible, guarding and keeping them—these words from our gracious God and Savior!

—Warren Fanning, *Pastor Emeritus*
Phoenix, Arizona



	<h2>CROSS PURPOSES</h2>	
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CHRISTMAS WITHOUT CHRIST

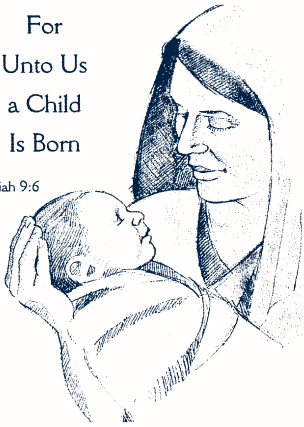
When Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem, there was no room for them in the inn, so Jesus was born in a

stable and laid in a manger.

In a small town in West Virginia last Christmas, there was no room in the sta-

For
Unto Us
a Child
Is Born

Isaiah 9:6



ble. We read that “the community’s holiday display has a manger with shepherds, a guiding star, camels and a palm tree, but no baby Jesus, Mary or Joseph.” The mayor of the town said Jesus was omitted for purely technical reasons. Too difficult to “put a light-up representation of a baby in a small manger scene...,” he said. The park superintendent was more honest. His explanation was that the concern is “about the separation of church and state.” In other words, the town leaders bowed to the politically correct crowd! [Because of public protest, they returned Jesus, but not Mary and Joseph.]

There is something suggestive about the empty manger. Christmas parties, Christmas sales, Christmas presents, Christmas balls, Christmas cookies, Christmas pageants, Christmas caroling, Christmas worship—all find their reason because of the birth of Christ.

If CHRIST is not the center of our CHRISTmas observation—yes, the center of our worship—but is simply an excuse for celebrating who knows what, and if Christ finds no dwelling in the heart, how is that different from a politically correct manger scene without Christ?

Many Christians of all stripes lament the dumbing-down of the season. A Christ-less manger display is indicative of a mindset that recognizes Christmas as nothing more than a holiday; this is done for fear of offending other religionists who would not tolerate it if their religious festivals were similarly dumbed-down.

Yet Christians who are upset at the political correctness that openly and without shame attacks the Christian faith are compelled by that very attitude to engage in self-examination. It begins with asking oneself, “What is Christmas really all about? Whose birth are we celebrating?”

Unless one is ready to acknowledge and confess that all people are sinners and under the wrath of God and by sin separated from God, any protest of a politically correct Christmas is a sham. Unless one recognizes and confesses that the Christ of Bethlehem is the incarnate Son of God—true God from eternity, and true Man born of the virgin Mary—any protest about a politically correct Christmas is hollow. Unless one recognizes that the Christ of Bethlehem is the Savior of the world apart from whom there is no eternal life, any protest of a politically correct Christmas is hypocrisy. Unless one recognizes that the cross of Christ is as important as the manger in which He was laid, any protest of a politically correct Christmas is empty rhetoric.

Anyone who turns the Christ of Bethlehem and the cross into nothing more than an example of Christian living might as well give up the protest of a politically correct Christmas! Anyone who professes to be upset at a politically correct Christmas but at the same time denies the Word of God is

deceiving self and engaging in empty protest.

Furthermore, to protest the world's mistreatment of Christ is meaningless if, after the celebration of His birth, a Christian should be neglectful of Him and His Word.

There is no Christmas without Christ. Celebration of Christmas without Christ is a contradiction and hypocrisy. Christ will find room in the heart of each believer who knows and confesses the purpose of His coming,

how He came to bear the sins of many and to give life to all who believe in Him.

Let the world do what it will. With Christ in the manger of our hearts, we rejoice that He was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4: 4,5). How glad we are each Christmas day and every day!

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
Corpus Christi, Texas



The Word From Immanuel

*Chapel Talks to the student body of Immanuel
Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

To our young readers - This is for you!

"...In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

YOU ARE SEALED AS GOD'S OWN

How many here have pierced ears? What if I asked about tattoos? How many with tattoos? Throughout history folks have done a variety of things to their bodies as an expression of beauty or courage or manhood. Some folks had numbers tattooed into their arms to indicate that they were prisoners of the state.

Do you know what this is? (Hold up an awl.)

This is an awl, like a nail with a handle. These days it is used to make a scratch mark on wood or metal, to

pierce holes in soft materials such as leather, or as a preset for a nail or screw. In Old Testament Israel an awl was used to pierce ears. This became a sign of voluntary, perpetual service of someone who had been a slave—one who now loved his master and wanted to serve him for the rest of his life (cf. Exodus 21:5,6).

In our society we also use special seals to establish the legality of documents and signatures. Mrs. Pfeiffer is a notary, and she has a special stamp

which she uses to assure that people signing documents are the ones actually applying their signatures. Prof. Ron Roehl has a special seal which creates an embossed impression on the transcripts he sends to schools all over the country, verifying that these are the genuine grades which a student has earned while attending Immanuel.

The Holy Spirit has set a seal in each one of us. It is not one which can be seen, but it is just as real as Mrs. Pfeiffer's or Prof. Roehl's. The Holy Spirit of God assures us of the forgiveness of sins earned for us by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is a mark of God's adopting us, making each of us His very own and freeing us for voluntary service in His kingdom.

The Holy Spirit is God's assurance and proof that all of God's promises in Jesus Christ are real and true for us. The seal of the Holy Spirit is described as a guarantee—that is, a down payment, assuring the awarding of future benefits.

The Spirit creates this seal and guarantee through the gospel. It is all "in Him"—in Christ, the text says. In His creating reliable assurance and confidence in us that our spiritual life is real and our future eternal life secure in Jesus, the Spirit overcomes a mass of false assurances:

...Our normal and natural inclination to accept the pronouncements of science and technology to be the way it is, the only reality.

...Our in-born natural inclination to want to atone for ourselves and earn our salvation by what we do rather than by what God has done and does.

...Our sinful nature within, which pleads for us time and again, night and day, that any behavior we think of is certainly acceptable.

However, the Spirit convinces us that we are sinners and under the condemnation of death for failing the demands of God's law. The same Spirit also shows us the beautiful Savior, the world's Redeemer who offered His blood for the forgiveness of our sins, convinces us that it is true, and gives us an extraordinary personal benefit.

The Spirit has put His seal on us and given us the down-payment assurance of future blessings—all in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

Dear Lord, in these days of uncertainty and in times of personal doubts and confusion, give us a firm assurance and confidence in your redemptive work. Amen.

—Prof. Michael Sydow
Chapel talk 9/4/07



2007 CLCI SEMINARY GRADUATION

The big day is over, a day filled with ceremonies, crowds, and many people working hard to make things as perfect as possible. This year's CLCI graduation was a wonderful time of the year as we saw the fruits of our labor, our graduates, going out into the world

to fulfill their calling.

Graduation ceremony is always an emotional and exciting time. Though it happened a few weeks ago, I think it is worth sharing a few thoughts from that evening. On June 15 things were buzzing around the CLCI mission cam-



Commencement address by Rev. V.S. Benjamin



Graduates settled in their seats

pus; chairs were being set up, stage and tents put up, food prepared, members, pastors, and parents taking walks, graduates in neat clothes and ties. The CLCI Theological Seminary celebrated its 9th commencement at Nidubrolu.

All graduating students along with regular seminary students and correspondence course students attended the commencement ceremony. We're very pleased to inform you that God has led twelve students all the three years to complete the seminary course successfully.

The majority of the graduates had other careers before attending seminary but received the calling to go into the holy ministry. Their dedication to their goals and their enthusiasm for life were inspiring. They had discovered that it is never too late to reach for their dreams. I am sure that each of the graduates will touch many lives during this new phase of their lives. These twelve men, committed to the Word, dedicated their lives to do the Lord's work, as St. Paul said in the book of Philippians chapter 4: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." ...May the Lord continually bless these twelve young men as they go into the field of the Gospel as shepherds to spread the Word of God to the sheep.

Favorite portions of our graduation ceremony were the singers from different CLCI churches singing melodious

songs. They so enjoyed singing with full musical orchestra. Also Seminary students presented some melodious Hymns and Christian songs.

Sunday School children gave a special program with action songs, welcoming all the guests, pastors, members, and the graduates to the ceremony. One of the Sunday School girls invited all the leaders of the CLCI to join with an Indian traditional classical dance.

Sunday school children sat in front of the stage; ladies, members, and pastors occupied all the seats. The twelve graduates and ten correspondence students settled in two rows on the right side of the stage. On the stage sat the leaders and seminary faculty.

Rev. V.S. Benjamin gave the commencement address. He spoke from 1 Thessalonians 5:14-25. He congratulated the graduates and in his words he said like this, "You represent a tremendous hope for our CLCI churches. You are now leaving the seminary ready to serve the Lord. God has called you to a ministry of service in the CLCI, which is the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I am here to tell you that you are a gift of which we may all be proud." The chairman repeated his warning to the graduates, "I call on you to keep your life pure. Do not be consumed by things of the world. Think only about where God has called you to serve."

Seminary professors Rev. Isaiah and Rev. Paul conveyed their greetings to the graduates and said that it is easy for ministers to become so absorbed with ministry that they fail to cultivate intimacy with God. This intimacy with God, they said, must be the core of every believer's life.

...The Principal of the seminary, in his closing words,...encouraged the assembled graduates to be faithful in proclaiming the good news despite apathy or opposition. He compared the graduates to the Lord's angels and his ministers a flaming of fire (Hebrews 1:7). He also said that the graduates would be "angels/messengers" who spread the good news of Jesus Christ. He encouraged them to be angels in the troubled Hindu world. The Principal especially mentioned the response of the shepherds, from Luke 2, which is the natural reaction of a hurting heart. "The shepherds said, 'Let us go and see for ourselves.'"

Immediately following the graduation ceremony, (all) were invited to a love feast on the CLCI campus to honor the graduates. The CLCI women fellowship members were the head of food service, busy all day, preparing meals....Those wonderful ladies are the best in preparing delicious food...More than 850 members attended the graduation ceremony.

In the past nine years, forty-three pastors have been graduated from this CLCI seminary, and all of them have been rendering their valuable services in various CLCI congregations. Now the Seminary students are enjoying their new educational year 2007. At present there are thirty-two students in the seminary. Fourteen students are in the final year, six are in the second year, and twelve are in the first year. Please remember them in your daily prayers.

—Missionary Koenig forwarded this report (written by Pastor Jyothi Benjamin), as well as accompanying photos.



Installation of Joel Gullerud—

A New Professor at ILC

With the induction of Joel Gullerud into his new calling on August 26, 2007, the Lord has blessed Immanuel Lutheran College (ILC) in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, with a new faculty member (to replace long-time servant Ronald Roehl).

As part of the opening ceremonies at ILC, Pastor Theodore Barthels (Austin, Minn. and member of the ILC Board of Regents) conducted the rite of installation, as Prof. Gullerud accepted the commission of our Savior to serve Him wholeheartedly.



President Pfeiffer (l.) and Pastor Barthels (r.) with the new professor

It was refreshing to be reminded that our called servants of the Word in the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) pledge themselves to both the Scriptures and to the Lutheran

Confessions. The assembly conveyed its appreciation by prayer for our proper reception and use of God's blessing.

Prof. Gullerud brings to ILC this background: Born in 1978 at Winner, S.Dak. to Pastor and Mrs. Mark Gullerud; attended ILC for his high school and college years (graduated in 2001 with a B.S. in Education degree); at UW-EC earned an additional teaching degree (2004); served as upper grade teacher at St. John's Lutheran School, Okabena, Minn. (2004-2007).

Prof. Gullerud's assignments at ILC include Spanish I and II, Social Studies, Educational Psychology, Algebra II, and American Literature. His interests and talents in music, band, and theater may be put to good use as opportunities develop.

We thank the Lord of the Church for this gift to our children!

—Paul R. Koch, reporter

Announcements

Installation

In accord with our usage and order, Pastor Edward Starkey, who was called as pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Stambaugh, Michigan, was installed on July 8, 2007. Also participating in the service were Pastor Philip Matzke, as well as Mr. Michael Bjorkman, Mr. Martin Heisel, and Mr. Paul Tiefel.

—Pastor Joel Fleischer
Calvary, Marquette, Mich.

Daily Devotional Insert

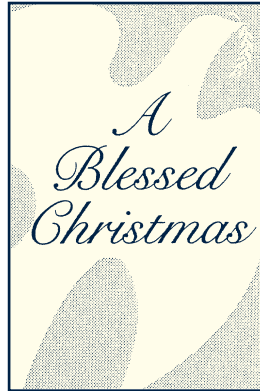
From the Editor: Again this year we have retired Prof. Paul R. Koch to thank for the compilation of daily devotional readings for the coming year of grace (inserted booklet). Besides assisting the editor, Prof. Koch, who resides in Eau Claire, conducts weekly worship services in a local nursing home. "Thank you for your willing service to the Lord and to all of us!"

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*More light than we can discern,
More wealth than we can treasure,
More love than we can earn,
More peace than we can measure,
Because one child is born.*



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—Benno Sydow, Business Manager

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