

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN." — JOHN 10:35



Do You Believe In Miracles?

Pastor David Fuerstenau • Ketchikan, Alaska

An almost palatable taste of hope was in the air. Much had been promised and much was expected—at least by the faithful. The elements of success had been carefully brought together. People waited with bated breath. Finally, the winning shot went home and the team held on for ultimate victory. The USA hockey team had beaten the Russians and went on to capture the gold.

A nation, perhaps with many throughout the world, erupted with joy. The announcer could only gasp: "Do you believe in miracles?!"

Ice again covers the lakes, and excitement wafts through the air. Much has been promised; much is expected. It's not Lake Placid in 1980, but it's Christmas. And the question should again be asked with great awe and wonder, "Do you believe in miracles!?"

If your answer is yes, you are on your way to celebrating in a way that is pleasing to God and profitable for yourself. For, you see, Christmas is a time to celebrate miracles.

There are three miracles especially that are both noteworthy and essential.

MIRACLE ONE THE INCARNATION!

"There is born to you this day... a Savior... who is Christ the Lord"
(Luke 2:11).

Do you believe in this miracle that Jesus of Nazareth, the Babe born in a stable in Bethlehem, is the one and only Son of God?

Many would answer "no" to that question. They say: "Jesus as a prophet, teacher, philosopher, moral example, even a social reformer?—Yes." But "Jesus as God's own divine, eternal Son?—Of course not!"

Yet the Father testified from heaven, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). Jesus said that He and His Father are one (see John 10:30), and that He is the Living Bread from heaven (see John 6:51). He challenged people to believe in His divine miracles, if they would not believe His words (see John 10:38).

Because of the Lord's claims, the Jewish religious rulers, most of the people, and even some of Jesus' early followers turned away from Him.

But some believed. Consider the Christmas account. The shepherds, for example, heard the angel's announcement, went to Bethlehem to check it out and, finding it to be true, glorified God. The wise men followed the miraculous star and went to worship the newborn King.

Consider also that, at Jesus's death on the cross, the Roman centurion confessed: *"Truly, this was the Son of God!"* (Matthew 27:54)

The Christian faith is built upon miracles, and the basic truth of the gospel is that Jesus Christ is God come in human flesh. If our Savior is not God's Son, there is no redemption, no atonement, no reconciliation, and therefore no hope. Without the miracles of Christmas—as well as of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost—our faith is baseless, built on nothing.

MIRACLE TWO THE VIRGIN BIRTH!

"...Behold, the virgin shall conceive"
(Isaiah 7:14).

When God offered Ahaz, king of Judah, a miraculous sign to convince him that the invasion plan of Syria would not succeed, Ahaz evidently didn't believe in miracles, for he refused God's offer. So, despite his unbelief, God gave Ahaz (and the whole world) a great sign: a virgin would conceive and bear a Son! It was a reaffirmation of the first gospel promise which said that the Crusher of Satan's head would be the Seed of the woman (see Genesis 3:15).

Despite the fact that the virgin birth of Jesus is a clear teaching of the Bible (see Matthew 1:23), many today deny it. They say it was not possible or even necessary.

God the Holy Spirit surely could have "overshadowed" (see Luke 1:35) any woman. But the fact that He caused Mary, who was a virgin, to conceive removes any possibility that Jesus's begetting Father was human.

If Jesus had been born of human parents, He could not have been our Savior. He Himself would have been 'born of flesh,' meaning that He would have been sinful, and thus incapable of procuring for us the righteousness we poor sinners so desperately need. Then His human-only blood could not have paid the ransom price for our sins.

Let us not call God a liar. Rather, let us rejoice in the miraculous virgin birth, for without it our very salvation is called into question—yes, it is in fact impossible!

MIRACLE THREE OUR OWN SAVING FAITH!

We are told that Mary answered the angel,
"Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to Your Word"
(Luke 1:38).

Do you believe in miracles? In fact, are you one? Some noted names from the past have doubted 'impossible' births. Aged Sarah laughed at the idea that she would bear the son of the covenant (See Genesis 18:12). Her husband Abraham nodded his head at the promise, but then made other plans (see Genesis chapter 16). Similarly, when Zacharias doubted the 'impossible' conception of his son John, he was struck dumb for not believing God's angel messenger (see Luke 1:20).

Do you believe in miracles? If you do, know that it is because you yourself are an 'impossible' birth, a miracle of grace, a sinner reborn by the will of God! Faith itself is a miracle—work of God, and true miracles can be comprehended only by faith!

Many people claim to have witnessed miracles. The Pharaoh of Egypt saw a bunch of them but did not believe. Mary and Joseph believed in the miracle-birth of Jesus because God convinced them that nothing is impossible with Him.

The union of Christ's two natures—divine and human at the same time—is a great miracle. It is a mystery to us still, yet we know it is possible for God to accomplish and for us to believe.

Do you believe in miracles? The atheist doesn't, for they are against his ideology. The materialist doesn't, because for him all things can be explained only by natural phenomena. The liberal theologian doesn't, for to his mind the miracle accounts are only fables. Some false religions claim miracles, but if the supposed miracles are stripped away, their religion is not affected. Such religions are based not on miracles and grace but on human work-righteousness and foolish pride.

Not so Christianity, which is one Grand Miracle from beginning to end! Miracles were not just added on, but were and are central and essential.

And so we celebrate Christmas with faith and joy, praising and thanking God for the gracious miracles of the incarnation, the virgin birth, and our own saving faith! ✨

A "silent" lesson in the promise of Christmas

Pastor Mark Bernthal • Middleton, Wisconsin

➤ Dear reader, please have Luke 1:5-25 before you ✨

"Silence is golden" is the old saying.

To a frazzled mom with noisy, active little ones, it is a golden time when the children are put to bed and the house is quiet. For a teacher after a long day, it is a golden time when the students go home and the classroom is silent.

Well, the silence that affected Zacharias was also a golden moment, even though it was given as a chastening for his unbelief.

As Zacharias was serving in the temple, the angel Gabriel appeared with great news. Zacharias and his wife would have a son in their old age. The angel said, "*You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.*"

One would think that Zacharias would praise this God he was serving, telling everybody the joyous news. But instead, he asked a doubt-filled question, "*How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.*"

Because of that unbelief, Zacharias would be silenced. Until the time that John was born, he would not be able to use the voice with which he had questioned God.

Think of it. For nine months Zacharias was mute. In that way he would be reminded that nothing is impossible for God. God's ways are not man's ways. God could have

given him a son years earlier. He could have opened Elizabeth's womb, but He chose it to be this way and at this time because the son to be born was to be the forerunner of the Savior, and because the fullness of the time was near at hand.

Zacharias believed this promise of the Messiah. But when the message came about his son being born to pave the way for the Messiah, his faith failed. He could not get beyond what he could see with his eyes. Since he and his wife had aged bodies, he just knew that it was not humanly possible to have a child. He forgot the principle that with God nothing is impossible.

No doubt Zacharias thought about that meeting with Gabriel many days over the next nine months. Though his silence was a penalty, it was at the same time a blessing. He learned to not doubt God's promises or ways but to humbly submit to His will.

Before we "tsk, tsk" at Zacharias, let's examine ourselves. Have there been times in our lives when we should have been praising God for His blessings, but instead we questioned His timing and ways?

For example, when we heard the sad news of the death of a loved one or the bad news of a serious disease, could we really trust God's promises to see us through?

In God's Own Time

What a blessing that when we express such doubts the Lord does not strike us dumb and silent! At such times we should learn to declare His praise, knowing that the Lord is God! His great promises will be fulfilled in His own time.

Our good health, our recovery from illness, our possessions, friends, family, our jobs and everything else—all are in God's control. He dispenses such things as He knows best. He does not do this to hurt us but because He loves us. He would bring us closer to Himself through humble submission.

During the season of Advent may we be led to prepare for Christ's coming with a heart that doesn't doubt God's promises but humbly clings to His Word.

We too wait and wonder. We wait to celebrate again the birth of our Savior and we also wait for our Savior's promised return. With wonder we look at the baby in that manger and see true God and true Man, the only substitute and Savior of all mankind.

We wonder how God could be so loving and gracious that He could sacrifice His own Son for us. We wonder how the Son of God could be so loving that He would give up His glory, taking our place as a human being under the Law, and then suffering and dying for us.

And as we look forward to His

Second Coming, we wonder why the seemingly long delay, and what that coming will be like.

But through God's revealed Word we are brought to understand that His love is perfect. His grace is undeserved. His patience is enduring. He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Elizabeth waited patiently for her promised child, John the Baptist, to be born. No doubt her husband's silence was a lesson also for her. She humbly praised and thanked her God for this great gift, saying, *"Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."*

The birth of our Savior into human flesh is that way for us too. As we prepare to celebrate His first coming and look forward to His second, let us wait with confidence and faith rather than with doubt and unbelief.

May the silence of Zacharias then be a lesson for us to simply believe the promises from our Savior-God. Then on our part we will not remain silent but lift up our voices to sing God's praises here in time and hereafter in eternity. Ω

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CHRIST ENTERS IN. (TLH #647:3)

Thoughts About Christmas Greetings

Pastor Theodore Barthels • Austin, Minnesota

I got to thinking about some of the Christmas greetings we hear and use.

"Happy Holidays!"

"Merry Christmas!"

"Blessed Christmas!"

What will you say?

Out in the world it has become controversial to use a truly Christian Christmas greeting. We hear people exclaim "Happy Holidays!" with great exuberance, but that greeting rings artificial for the child of God.

It has become common to say "Merry Christmas!" Certainly that greeting can be understood correctly among Christians, but again, doesn't it seem rather shallow and tinny to our Christian ear?

That's why many of us prefer to wish one another a "Blessed Christmas!" Surely that is what we wish for others—that the Lord would bless them this Christmas.

What we truly wish for other people is that the spiritual blessing which the virgin Mary drew from that first Christmas day would enter their hearts also.

It was indeed an eventful day for Mary and Joseph. The Child to be born of Mary was to be the Son of God, and His name was to be Jesus, for *"He will save His people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:21).

On that first Christmas night the promised Child was born into the world in the humble surroundings of the stable, with a manger as His first bed, while GLORY filled the skies in the Bethlehem hills as angels told the shepherds of Jesus' birth. They hurried to see and worship their Savior and were quick to tell the wondrous things that had been told them about this Child.

Other people marveled or wondered at the things that were told them, but what about Mary? Not only did she "wonder" about everything that was happening, but we are told that she *"kept all these things and pondered them in her heart"* (Luke 2:19). Yes, these were things to be treasured in the heart—things worthy of meditation!

**Pondering
the Christmas Miracle!**

And so it is today. Whether the truths of that first Christmas are heard from the lips of children, from the pastor in the pulpit, or from our reading them once again

The Only Savior

Pastor Em. Daniel Fleischer, Oakdale, Minnesota

Before the fall into sin there was no need for salvation. Adam and Eve already enjoyed perfect bliss and happiness in paradise. But since the fall and the consequent loss of paradise, restoration of perfect bliss and happiness (eternal salvation) is regained only through the One who was promised by the Father and who came from the Father to rescue mankind from its lost condition.

Upon the giving of the first promise in Eden after the fall, there is no salvation apart from faith in the One promised by the Father. In the face of contrary opinions and false assertions suggesting that it makes no difference in whom or what one believes as long as one believes in someone or something, the Christian Church has confessed with the apostle Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Only through the Seed of the woman, the promised Son of God who was born of the virgin and "suffered for our salvation, descended into hell; [and] rose again the third day from the dead" (Athanasian Creed) can the sinner attain eternal life.

Scripture says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Of the significance of believing in "the only begotten Son of God," Scripture says, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Who is the One to whose name is attached such significance? Who is the Lord of whom Peter was speaking? His name is Jesus, the name assigned to Him from heaven. Joseph was told concerning that child to be born of Mary, "She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1: 21).

Already in eternity the offended God had resolved to send the Savior for all people; in other words, from eternity God's incomprehensible love includes all. "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). Anyone who teaches that sinners are outside the circle of those whom God loves is a false teacher. At the same time, the ultimate fulfillment of eternal salvation is exclusively linked to faith in Jesus. "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life

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from Holy Scripture, here the true joy of Christmas is found! As the Spirit opens our hearts, we believe and treasure all the things that the Scriptures tell us concerning this Child.

These truths are to be **pondered**. They not only make our Christmas observance more meaningful but they are the truths that bring us the gift of eternal life!

Back to the question about the various Christmas greetings. How about using, "Wishing you a 'ponder-ous' Christmas!"? — That just won't work, and while 'A contemplative Christmas to you!' could get our meaning across, it's just too awkward and cumbersome.

We want Christmas joy to be more than the superficial

merriment of a company "holiday party." We want family, friends, and acquaintances to know the spiritual joy the Spirit works in the heart as, with Mary, we ponder together the mystery of God's Son born of a woman.

Christmas celebrates the birth of our Savior, who is Christ the Lord. May this truth fill your hearts and minds so that this becomes a most blessed and joyous Christmas for you and yours.

How about that as a Christian Christmas greeting? "A blessed and joyous Christmas to you!" If any raise their eyebrows and ask us, "What do you mean?", a door has been opened to tell them the true meaning of the season! ✚

"A blessed and joyous Christmas to you!"



Installation of Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer, Trinity, Spokane, Washington: Pastors Robert List, David Reim, new pastor, David Naumann, Ivan Zarleng; Front: Councilmen Dennis Lux, Tim Martin, Stan White, Luke Lillquist, John Kaehn

FROM THE EDITOR'S PEN

A TALE THAT IS FINALLY* told!

Pastor Paul Fleischer

“ Finally... finally... finally...

finally... finally... finally...

finally... the split came! ”

Count 'em—seven times the word “finally” appears in two short articles (August & September 2011 issues) in *Forward in Christ*, the Wisconsin Synod's counterpart to our *Lutheran Spokesman*.

Everything suggested and implied by that telltale word goes a long way to explain why a new synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), came into existence fifty years ago. You see, the articles to which we refer are intended to give current-day Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) members a perspective on a small portion of American church history in which we—personally, and as a synod—have been quite intimately involved.

The year 2011 marks fifty years since the WELS broke its ties with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). From 1868 to 1961 WELS had been in fellowship with the LCMS; in fact, from 1872 WELS and LCMS had been partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. All that changed in August 1961 when delegates to a WELS convention in Milwaukee voted—“after intense discussion and prayerful voting” (article quote)—to “finally” terminate fellowship with the LCMS.

In three brief articles *Forward in Christ* reviewed the history of “the break” from the WELS perspective. The series was titled “The split: Remember the past.”

Having personally lived through those days, this writer read the articles with considerable interest. From our vantage point, we were struck by the frequent use of that telltale word.

*Defined in Webster as 1) at the end, in conclusion; 2) decisively; conclusively, irrevocably

Note, please, the following quotations (emphases and word-numbering are ours):

“...The [Missouri and Wisconsin] synods were drifting apart, but WELS hesitated to sever the tie that had bound us together for so many years—a tie it treasured. **FINALLY (#1)** in 1961 the split came...”

“...The smaller sister [WELS] had tried. In love it had witnessed to, encouraged, and rebuked what was once its larger and cherished sister [LCMS]. **FINALLY (#2)**, no recourse was left but in obedience to God's clear command to pass this courageous resolution pointing out what Missouri's unionistic trends had done to our valued fellowship...”

“...While the [1955 WELS] convention was in session.... **FINALLY (#3)** ...a resolution... stated that the time was right to suspend fellowship...” [The resolution did not pass!—Editor]

“...Between 1957 and 1960 discussion at various levels continued. It was a difficult time for the Wisconsin Synod. Many memorials came to the Wisconsin Synod conventions calling for a break. Some congregations left the Wisconsin Synod because they opposed the continued discussions with the LCMS, which they felt were useless and wrong according to the scriptural principles of fellowship... In 1961 the Wisconsin Synod **FINALLY (#4)** voted to sever ties with the LCMS...”

“...‘We had this going on for 20 years; **FINALLY (#5)** we took the action we had to take... I suppose (it takes) a courage in your convictions, that you are **FINALLY (#6)** ready to take the action your convictions led you to take... I think we can learn the importance of listening to Scripture... Don't try to interpret passages by injecting reason and practical situations that modify the passages. **FINALLY (#7)**, isn't that using the historical-critical method of interpretation when we become critical of Scripture?’” [from the 'personal perspectives' of a WELS professor who lived through those days]

These quotes demonstrate the fact that there was an inexcusable delay—we would add, disobedience!—to what is recognized as “God's clear command” (cf. **FINALLY #2**).

Throughout the months of the CLC's own fiftieth year of existence (2010), our own *Lutheran Spokesman* recounted those trying and difficult

days as they were experienced by a good number of CLC charter members, including this writer. What the seven quotations above imply we experienced personally—the putting off of a God-pleasing course of action until "finally" (in the human-judgment estimation of WELS) the time was considered right.

There was no recourse for those whose consciences were bound in and by the Word. The WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) were following a path which exhibited disobedience to God's Word. (The withdrawing congregations referred to in the FINALLY #4

...**"finally"**
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foot-dragging...

quotation were, for the most part, future CLC congregations, even as the mentioned "memorials" came from many who would become CLC pastors.)

Granted, the word and concept "finally" isn't bad in and of itself, and in theological discussions time will pass while it is determined exactly what is being said and taught. Yet, "finally" is bad when it reveals theological foot-dragging in the area of a godly practice of church fellowship—"putting off to tomorrow what should be done today." When false teachers have been "marked"—observed carefully and if found in fact to be teaching falsely—they are to be "avoided" lest the hearts of the simple be deceived by smooth words and flattering speech (Romans 16:17-18).

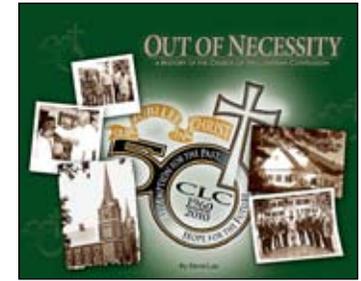
Again, the seven "finally" statements cloak the WELS's mistaken idea set forth back then that false teachers are to be avoided only

...**"finally"** statements
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no further avail."...

"when one has reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail." We wondered then, and continue to wonder today, where in the Bible does that idea come from? (Put another way, when will the passing of time and circumstances "finally" arrive to obey and apply the "avoid," if it ever does?!)

Doubtless much more could be said in reviewing the history of "the split." Those interested in reviewing more of that history are

referred to resources such as the book *OUT OF NECESSITY—A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession* by David Lau; and the tract "This is your Church—the Church of the Lutheran Confession" produced by the CLC Board of Education & Publications. These items are available from the CLC Bookhouse at www.clcbookhouse.com.



Some pertinent excerpts from the tract "This is your Church..."

...The Synodical Conference upheld the scriptural fellowship doctrine steadfastly and consistently for over fifty years. But in the 1930s breakdown began, mostly within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Sound doctrine was undermined by false teaching and practice in such matters as scouting, the government chaplaincy, and worshiping, praying, and working together with other Lutherans who did not share the one true faith. Important issues were at stake. These doctrinal differences within the Synodical Conference eventually brought about the establishment of the CLC. (Part II. Weariness in Well-Doing Sets In)

...We note that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod voted to suspend fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1955 on the basis of Romans 16:17 but continued to practice fellowship with this synod until 1961. Note also that in 1955 the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod affirmed that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had created divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of scripture but did not suspend fellowship until 1961. In both cases the separation required by Romans 16:17 was delayed. Both synods said that separation of fellowship is required, but that it is not to be done right away. They said that it is necessary to enter into a process of admonition until our human judgment tells us it isn't doing any good. This goes beyond what the Bible says. In connection with false teachers we don't have to establish or prove anything else other than that error is being taught. It is neither required nor possible to determine whether they will continue in error. It was on this point that some members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod separated themselves from their synods and eventually reunited in the Church of the Lutheran Confession. (More on this is to be found in the confessional writing of the CLC, Concerning Church Fellowship, see especially paragraphs 46 and 65). (Part III. Further Separation)

ADVENT — A TIME FOR PENITENCE

Pastor Andrew Schaller • Watertown, South Dakota

He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9)

By the time the season of Advent (coming) arrives in our churches, many in our country will have already begun preparations for Christmas.

For many the Advent season is unknown or at least unfamiliar. It is to be a season of preparation, making ready for the Coming of the Savior.

For many people Christmas preparation is an entirely external exercise. They prepare by dusting off festive knickknacks and placing them strategically around the house. Christmas lights are hung with care. Cookies, fudge, and other seasonal treats are prepared. Christmas music is piped into busy stores as gifts are carefully chosen and purchased. With such externals completed, many consider themselves ready for Christmas.

Advent is indeed a season of preparation, but it is not merely a time to decorate house and yard with trappings of the season. As Christians our Christmas preparations are not merely external but internal. Our hearts need to be examined and sin rooted out so that they may be fit dwelling

places for the Christ Child. The knickknacks and distractions of everyday life need to be removed so that Christ the King may come to reign supreme within our hearts.

If we understand the source of true joy in the Advent season, then it will be a time for penitence. When we examine ourselves against the backdrop of God's holy Law, we will see that the past eleven months have been filled with sin and failure—that we have in no way measured up to God's perfect standards, to His demand for holiness.

Even though our faith has been watered and fertilized by God's Spirit through the Word of God, due to the sinful nature our faith has not always borne much fruit. Have we not often been unloving, unmerciful, and impatient toward both God and our neighbor? Have we not often been unprofitable servants, loving the things of the world, being guilty of lust and greed? Too often this is the case despite the fact that Christ Jesus has freed us from the law and from sin and death so that, enabled by His Spirit, we might

serve our God with joyful hearts.

God is looking for servants who delight in bringing forth fruit for Him. Yet have we not often been like the barren fig tree?

Yes... but still the keeper of God's vineyard, Jesus, intercedes for us. He will continue to remove the weeds and thorns that spring up to choke the vitality of our faith. He will continue to provide the nutrients necessary so faith can mature and produce fruit. He will still have mercy on us... not only

during Advent but also as we go forward into the New Year.

The Lord Jesus will continue to prepare us for His Second Coming even as we celebrate His first coming in meekness.

May He grant us sober, penitent hearts so that, though crushed under the load of our sin, we may rejoice in His long-suffering, mercy, and forgiveness... through the power of the Spirit yearning to bring forth fruits of faith to His glory. 

THE DISCOURSES OF CHRIST

MEDITATIONS ON JESUS'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT MATTHEW CHAPTERS FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

Jesus, the Great Fulfiller

Pastor Mark Gullerud • Bowdle, South Dakota

Both in and outside of Christian denominations today, Jesus has been mischaracterized in a number of ways.

Some depict Jesus as the greatest human role model of moral virtue who has shown us how to live in order to win the favor of God and finally gain access into heaven. Others portray Him as a new lawgiver—with Reformed denominations viewing the

sacrament of Holy Baptism as a new commandment of God, rather than a means of grace through which God offers and gives forgiveness, life, and salvation. Still others consider Jesus to be just a reformer who came to shake things up by righting the wrongs of social injustices.

If these characterizations were true, the Pharisees would have accepted Jesus with open arms as

the promised One. How can we say that? Because they believed it was possible for a man to live a life acceptable to God and thus go to heaven. They were approving of adding new religious laws to Holy Scripture. They were looking for a messiah to deliver them from the injustices of the Roman government.

But Jesus was not that kind of messiah. And so they turned against Him, accusing Him of being guilty of trying to destroy the teachings and commandments of the Law and the Prophets, yes, to abolish the very Word of God set forth in the Old Testament.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wanted to set the record straight about His mission and purpose. He desires all to know that He did not come as the great destroyer of Holy Scripture, but rather as the Great Fulfiller of it. He came to perfectly fulfill all the commandments of God which had been delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai. He also came to fulfill all the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

In order to debunk the faulty notion of sinful man meriting eternal life, Jesus declared, *"I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (v. 20). The Pharisees prided themselves in being able

to keep all the commandments of God down to the finest detail. However, Jesus busted their bubble of work righteousness when He said that a person would have to be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the Law of God demands absolute perfection. And there simply is no one—with the exception of Jesus—who can achieve this, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23).

Because we cannot live a perfect life as the Law of God demands, it was necessary for Jesus to perfectly **fulfill** that law in our stead. Through faith in Him, Jesus's life of holiness, His righteousness, is credited to our account (Romans 4:20-24). Also, because we could not pay the hellish penalty for our sins (Romans 6:23a), it was necessary for Jesus to **fulfill** all the messianic prophecies, including bearing our sins, suffering our punishment, and rising victoriously from the dead. Through faith in Jesus's vicarious atonement we are forgiven all sins and are eternally saved (Romans 3:21-26).

To drive home the truth that He is the Great Fulfiller, Jesus said, *"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."* This word of promise assures

us that Jesus would perfectly **fulfill** all the commandments and messianic prophecies as our Savior; it also assures us that in the future all God's promises will be **fulfilled** until we believers are ushered into eternal glory in heaven.

When it comes to testifying of Christ and following His Word, the Lord Jesus sounds a word of caution as well as a promise, saying, *"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* Every teacher of God's Word needs to be mindful that any departure from God's Word not only can lessen his

standing in God's kingdom, but also can eventually cause him and his listeners to lose the precious truths that save.

We cringe whenever anyone mischaracterizes Jesus or in the name of Christianity teaches and lives contrary to the Word of God, because this undermines the gospel of Christ and could ultimately rob us of the blessed hope of eternal life through Him.

Let us then rejoice in the wondrous truth that Jesus is indeed the Great Fulfiller! Trust alone in His righteousness and redemptive work! Faithfully proclaim the Word of salvation so that others too might come to rejoice in their salvation through Him alone. †

PORTRAITS OF CHRIST

Jesus, the Model Sufferer

Pastor Andrew Schaller • Watertown, South Dakota

So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" (John 18:11)

OK... raise your hand if you like pain... anyone?

Who enjoys suffering... anyone?

It's fair to say that human beings are averse to suffering. The moment a headache or sore muscle begins to bother... there is a good chance we reach for aspirin, ibuprofen, or some other pain killer.

I sometimes wonder if we come close to concluding that 'all pain

and suffering is contrary to God's will for me.' However, such a sentiment—call it the 'wine and roses sentiment'—is simply wrong. God never promised us that life THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN would be all joy without tribulation (see John 16:33; Acts 14:22).

In fact, God allows adversity and even pain to come our way that we may learn to cling more closely to Christ. That was the case with the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians

12:7-10), who suffered many things as a servant of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 11:24-28). The Lord delivered him through them all.

In His Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus went so far as to say that the Christian is blessed if he is persecuted and reviled for His name's sake (Matthew 5:10-12). The apostle Peter wrote something equally striking when, by divine inspiration, he said: *"For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps..."* (1 Peter 2:19-21).

We can understand why Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus in the early morning hours of Good Friday. He cared about Jesus and didn't want Him to be arrested or hurt—even if his defense of Jesus was shortsighted and futile. Peter's thinking wasn't in tune with God's will (see Matthew 16:22-23), and he probably had some wrong ideas about what the Messiah was supposed to accomplish.

Following the Father's Plan

But Jesus's thinking was always in sync with the Father's will. Jesus as the Son of God didn't come down from heaven to return a largely wayward nation to national prominence and to a new golden age (that would be too small a thing indeed). Rather, He came to deliver humankind from sin, death, and Satan. In order to accomplish this, He had to follow the Father's plan... perfectly!

When the Father's plan required Jesus's suffering... He was completely willing.

At the start of His ministry Jesus suffered in the wilderness when He fasted for forty days (a month and a half without regular food would be more than painful for both body and mind)!

Jesus is certainly the Model Sufferer in that He sought God's will first, even though it meant pain and suffering.

In this respect we, according to our new natures, are also willing to suffer. Moreover, He Himself will provide us the will and the strength to seek God's will first, not being overly concerned if He sends temporary and endurable

worldly loss, or even pain or suffering.

The Lord Jesus is MORE THAN A MODEL; He is the only one whose suffering and death could atone for our sins and remove our guilt. He alone exhibited perfect love in laying down His life for us.

May He grant us grace that we reflect (imperfectly this side of heaven) His love. Be assured we won't suffer in the same way as He did (that is, for human sin); and certainly, neither will our suffering achieve the same purpose (the world's redemption)! 🛎



EIGHTH & LAST IN A SERIES Christian Apologetics

James Arndt • Member at Peace Thru Christ Lutheran Church and School - Middleton, Wisconsin
"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear..." 1 Peter 3:15

The Apologetical Encounter

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."
(2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

In this series we have seen the importance of apologetics and learned about what makes up a worldview. We have seen that the Christian worldview is in complete conflict with all others on all points. Only Christianity can account for the existence of objective morality, the uniformity of nature, and the existence of the laws of logic.

Because God is the origin of all knowledge, *"we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Those who do not do so must, by definition, have contradictions in their worldview. By defending Christianity on a worldview level we

don't need to be experts in biology, astronomy, archeology, geology, or chemistry. We can argue indirectly and ask which worldview makes those fields of study possible.

Arguing indirectly may seem evasive, but its value is in the ability to get to the heart of the matter quickly. Christ did this very same thing in Luke 18 when the rich young ruler asked, *"Good teacher, what must I do to be saved?"* We might expect Jesus to have answered, *"Believe in me and you will be saved."* Instead, Jesus asked, *"Why do you call me good?"* Rather than argue on that man's definition of good, Jesus answered his own question by saying, *"No one is good—except God alone."*

"Portraits of Christ" in John's Gospel:

Ch. 1 The Son of God	Ch. 8 The Defender of the Weak	Ch. 15 The True Vine
Ch. 2 The Son of Man	Ch. 9 The Light of the World	Ch. 16 The Giver of the Holy Spirit
Ch. 3 The Divine Teacher	Ch. 10 The Good Shepherd	Ch. 17 The Great Intercessor
Ch. 4 The Soul-Winner	Ch. 11 The Prince of Life	Ch. 18 The Model Sufferer
Ch. 5 The Great Physician	Ch. 12 The King	Ch. 19 The Uplifted Savior
Ch. 6 The Bread of Life	Ch. 13 The Servant	Ch. 20 The Conqueror of Death
Ch. 7 The Water of Life	Ch. 14 The Consoler	Ch. 21 The Restorer of the Penitent

Let us follow Jesus's logical chain. If Jesus is good (as the rich young ruler believed) and no one is good except God, then Jesus must be God. Only God has the authority to tell that young man how to be saved. Rather than accept that man's definition of good, Jesus establishes Himself as the authority and proceeds to answer based on that.

The apostle Paul argued on a worldview level when he witnessed to the philosophers in Athens. We see him practice what he would later teach in Romans chapter 1. He did not try to establish some neutral ground and argue towards Christianity. Instead he appealed to God as the Creator (Romans 1:20; Acts 17:24), to God's control over history (Romans 1:24; Acts 17:26), to man's dependence upon God (Romans 1:18-20; Acts 17:28), and to the fact that God's existence is evident to all (Romans 1:19; Acts 17:27-29). Only when Paul mentioned man's need for repentance and the necessity of belief in the risen Christ did the philosophers interrupt and begin to mock him.

There is another Bible verse with good advice on how to defend the faith. In Proverbs 26:4 we are told, "Don't answer a fool according to his foolishness, or you too will be like him." If the Christian doesn't sublimate every thought to Christ and allows the non-Christian to believe he has authority apart from the Lord,

that Christian will end up like the unbeliever, a fool.

Instead, we are told that we should "Answer a fool according to his foolishness, or he will think he is wise" (v. 5). In other words, we might say something like, "Okay, let's say for a moment that God does not exist. How do you explain...?" Basing all of reality, knowledge, and ethics on something other than the lordship of Christ will always lead to contradictions and errors in thinking, and it is our hope and prayer that we might be able, with the Spirit's help, to expose their foolishness.

In order to justify unbelief, many will try to throw up intellectual smokescreens to distract the conversation from the true heart of the matter. While training in apologetics will help to diffuse that smoke, it is important to remember that someone's rejection of God's authority is not philosophical or scientific, it is ethical. The last thing Paul relayed to the Athenian philosophers was a call to repentance together with an assertion of Christ's resurrection. How did they react? They threw up a smokescreen by mocking Paul about the resurrection. Because the resurrection was ridiculous according to their worldview, they figured they didn't have to worry about repentance and God's judging the world by the Man whom He has appointed (Acts 17:30-31). They rejected Paul's

message to cover up their sin and their accountability before God.

Because man's problem is ethical in nature, we will have confidence only when our apologetic begins and ends with God's Word. That Word alone is sharper than a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), for it tells the non-Christian that he does not honor the Creator as he ought and that salvation does exist

alone in Christ Jesus.

Apologetics is defending God's Word by always being ready to give an answer for the hope that you have, with Christian meekness and godly fear (1 Peter 3:15). Some will indeed mock, yet some will believe (Acts 17:34). God expects only that all our answers be based on the authority of His Word. ☩

(The apologetic method and organization for these articles is taken from the book *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, American Vision, Powder Springs, Georgia, 2007.)

Seventy Five Years in Nigeria

Missionary David Koenig

Original Lutheran mission work began in Nigeria with Danish missionaries in 1913. This then was later supported by American Lutherans.

For those of our background in the Lutheran Synodical Conference, the work in Nigeria is dated from 1936, so that this year (2011) is the 75th anniversary of that beginning.

While the Danish work began in the eastern section at Yola, the Synodical Conference work was in the southeast. At the Lutheran Synodical Conference meeting held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 8-13, 1934, a resolution was taken to "undertake aggressive mission work in the Ibesikpo country and then, as God may prosper the work, to extend it into unoccupied fields in Nigeria or in parts of Africa adjacent to Nigeria."

That resolution was soon followed with a shipment of religious books to the Ibesikpo churches, so that they could start getting familiar with the teachings of Lutherans.

On January 5, 1935, a survey team consisting of three missionaries, Dr. Henry Nau, Rev. Emmanuel Albrecht, and Rev. O. C. A. Boecler left the United States for Nigeria, and arrived in Nung Udoe, Ibesikpo, on February 4, 1935.



On their return to the United States, and after a thorough evaluation of their report, a decision was reached to take up the work in the Ibesikpo area of Nigeria. Dr. Henry Nau and his wife arrived at Nung Udoe on April 24, 1936 to begin the missionary work of the North American Lutheran Synodical Conference in Nigeria.

Our own beginnings there date from the early '70's. Prof. Oscar Erpenstein of St. Stephen's, San Francisco had led Nigerian students in Bible study. When they returned to their home country, the contact continued, culminating in the first visitation team going there in January 1974.



Erpenstein

Since then, for thirty-seven years we have had the opportunity to work with brethren there to proclaim the Word of life. It was the Lord who brought us to Nigeria, a country with a reputation for moral shenanigans and financial scamming.

Our Jesus went into the house of crooked tax collectors and ate with open sinners, showing us the way. He died on the cross for such sinners, and we now work with our brethren to proclaim the whole counsel of God. – The NCLC has 978 souls served by 24 pastors. ✝

The Only Savior Continued from Page 9

is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11,12).

It is simply not Scriptural to hold to, allow, or teach that eternal salvation is attained in any other way than through faith in Jesus Christ. They who profess to be Christian cannot deny the above passages from Scripture and still be what they claim to be. The inspired word of the apostle John, who wrote under the influence of the Spirit of God, says, "*But these [words of Scripture] are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name" (John 20:31).* Apart from Christ Jesus and without faith in Him, there is no salvation. To teach or believe otherwise is a

denial of Christ as well as of the Word of God.

There is only one Savior—it is not Allah, Buddha, any other god of man's imagination, an amalgamation of deities, man himself, or man's works. There is only one Savior and His name is Jesus. It does make a difference what one believes and in whom one believes. "*Our Savior, Jesus Christ... has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light" (2 Timothy 1:10).* Lord, keep us steadfast in this faith and teaching!

**Jesus! Only name that's given
under all the mighty heaven
whereby man, to sin enslaved,
bursts his fetters and is saved.
(TLH #114:5)**

Book Review—

Enhance Your Christmas

Our CLC Bookhouse now carries the 80-page spiral-bound devotional titled

AT BETHLEHEM'S CRIB—

Seven Christmas Sermons

by Norman A. Madson, Sr. (1886-1962). \$8.50

In the preface to the booklet, Norman A. Madson, Jr. writes: "After being hidden for seventy-six years in the Norwegian language, this little collection of Christmas sermons by Norman A. Madson, Sr. has come to see the light of day in this English translation...."

Not many of us preachers would choose to use the evangelist Luke's familiar account of the Savior's birth as sermon text every Christmas season. However, it appears Madson did that very thing, at least during his early years in the pastoral ministry. Each sermon in this little volume expands upon Luke 2:1-14. Clearly, the preacher wanted his hearers/readers to come to know and appreciate the miracle/mystery of the occupant of Bethlehem's mangerbed: the enfleshed Son of God come to planet Earth on a rescue mission to save each and every one of its inhabitants!

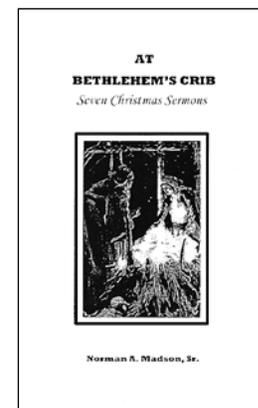
The preacher/author, Dr. Madson (from 1946-1960 Dean of Bethany Lutheran Seminary, Mankato, Minn.) became a member of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) for confessional reasons during the closing years of his life.

When he passed away, some of his Christian friends and colleagues made it a point to refer to his Christmas sermons contained in the booklet we are here reviewing.

For example, at the funeral at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minn. (Dec. 13, 1962), Prof. C. M. Gullerud had the following to say in connection with the oral "wreath" he laid at the casket of Dean Madson: "There will be memories that will linger on, and one of these memories will center on a little book that is entitled VED BETHLEHEMSKRYBBEN ('Beside the Manger Bed'). It is a collection of Christmas sermons preached by Madson to his beloved congregations...."

The December 1962 issue of the CLC's *Journal of Theology* contained a similar tribute. In connection with an article titled "Norman A. Madson: In Memoriam," Prof. E. Reim wrote: "...Madson left his mark in many a field. But he was pre-eminently a preacher....His first book, entitled 'Ved Bethlehemskrybben,' consisted of a collection of Norwegian Christmas sermons centering around the Manger of Bethlehem...."

Dear reader, enhance your own Christmas and/or that of a relative or friend by putting this special little devotional into their hands. —Pastor Paul Fleischer



This devotional of reprinted sermons from days gone by would be a gift to truly enhance one's spiritual observance of the holy-day.

2012 CLC Mission Helper Trip East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) July 2012

The CLC Mission Helper Program is taking applications and making preparations for the 2012 Mission Trip. The number one priority of this trip will be spreading the Good News of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. In July of 2012 Mission Helpers will travel to East Africa to teach child evangelism lessons to thousands of member and non-member children in village congregations of the CLC-Tanzania and CLC-Kenya.

For More Information Contact:

Pastor Todd Ohlmann

toddohlmann@clclutheran.com

www.mht.lutheranmissions.org

(application deadline: January 10th, 2012)



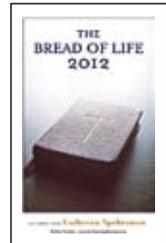
To see a video of the 2011 Mission Helper Trip to Nepal and other mission trips go to:

www.mht.lutheranmissions.org/videos/

The Bread of Life 2012

Day-by-day Bible readings

This booklet of daily Bible readings is once again available on the website of the *Lutheran Spokesman* (www.lutheranspokesman.org). We heartily thank retired Prof. Paul R. Koch, Eau Claire, Wis., who has again prepared these readings for us. — Editor



Lutheran Spokesman www.lutheranspokesman.org

“...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN.” — JOHN 10:35

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