

Lutheran Spokesman

"In my
Father's house
are many
mansions...."

John 14:2



The End

The phrase “the end” normally comes with the conclusion of a matter. It is the point where nothing more can be added.

This is not true, however, in life.

How many books have you read where the author says “the end”—and you know or you wish he would go on with the story? You desire that he would take the characters on another step or two or three. The story then is not truly ended because there is or are further points to which one could go.

This may be true when we sit down to a meal. We reach a point where we can eat no more and declare that the meal is at an end. Yet food or drink remains on the table. Your stomach may not be able to go on, though there is more that could be eaten (which usually ends up on the table again the next day as leftovers).

Or we put in eight or ten—perhaps, on some occasions, twelve—hours of work in a day, and then declare the day

is over. But it is not really so, because when we go to work the next day, there is again work to do; whether that work is new work or unfinished work, the work is not yet at a point where there is nothing more to do.

Think of all this in regard to how we as believer’s speak of the “end times,” referring to the day when our Lord will return in all His great glory and power and gather His sheep to Himself in heaven.

We speak of that day as “the end” because then the trials and tribulations of this world will cease. Then will come to a complete end the seasons of the year and this Earth as we know it. That will be the physical end of what our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—began when He created the universe.

A Day of Eager Expectation!

From a number of passages in Scripture, we remind ourselves of that

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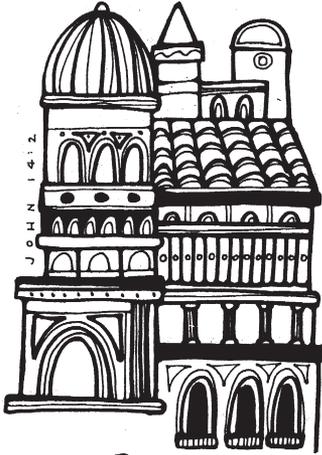
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*In my Father's house there
are many dwelling
places.*

wonderful day in order to encourage and strengthen ourselves as we struggle on through this weary wilderness. We could speak of the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem which John saw coming down out of heaven, its streets of polished gold, its jeweled foundation, its walls, its gates, its mansions. The Lord speaks of these things so that, through His Word, He might draw

us away from this world to our only home in heaven.

But I would draw you to another end—an “end” which has made the return of Jesus a day of peace and joy, a day of eager expectation, for all of us.

That day is the day when Jesus hung on the cross in great agony; the sky blackened, the earth trembled, and the voice of Jesus (rising above the insults and jeering of the crowd) cried out, “It is finished!”

Because of that day, never again can Satan successfully accuse us; never again can our sins be charged against us; never again can the Law condemn us.

In those hours there on the cross of Calvary was brought to “the end” the work of our salvation. There is the point at which nothing more can or need be done!

Without that day, the physical end of the world would be a day of great terror. With the day of Jesus’ death we can lift our voices with John, saying—by faith, and in joy and longing—“Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.”

—Pastor Roland Gurgel



YEAR-AROUND THANKSGIVING

“By the mercies of God...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

The ancients Israelites had seven major Feasts. The idea of thanksgiving was at least implicit in all of them. All of them involved blood and pointed to the mercy of God on the cross—the relentless driving thrust of Old Testament worship. All Feasts were to be observed faithfully and all implied that the worshipers’ thanksgiving

should take the form of self-sacrifice. The Feasts basically constituted the Israelite Church Calendar.

With the development of the Church after Pentecost, Christians drew away from the Christ-less Temple and the old Jewish Church Calendar. There would be no “Christian Church Calendar” for some time.

But one major Old Testament Feast remained—the Passover—transformed by Jesus into what came to be called “the Eucharist” (which actually means “The Thanksgiving”). This is because Jesus took bread and gave thanks, and took the cup and gave thanks. He was pleased to die for you. Pure mercy!

You hear it every time you commune—and maybe this optional Versicle/Response: “As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.”

Early Christians gladly included this precious Thanksgiving Feast regularly, usually every Lord’s Day (Sunday). It constantly reminded worshipers of the once-for-all-time sacrifice for all sins, and also by Christ’s mercy to offer themselves in God’s service.

But as centuries went by, it became perverted into a repeated sacrifice of Christ that was unrecognizable up against the words of Institution.

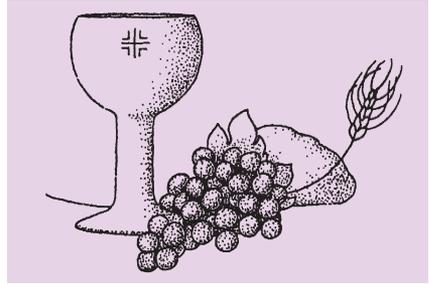
Over a thousand years went by before Christ used the Lutheran Reformation to restore its purity and prominence.

The One True “Feast”!

In both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology (Articles 24), the Lutheran Confessors recorded the accusation leveled against them that they have “abolished the Mass” (“Mass” was another term for “Eucharist” or “Communion”).

Yes, they did abolish the perverted one, but re-installed the original! The Apology says “we religiously maintain it and defend it,” and it is “celebrated every Lord’s Day and on other Festivals” (Christmas, Easter, etc.).

This is the one true “Feast” of the Christian Church, instituted by Christ on “Mandate” (Maundy) Thursday. For



Luther, the Church revolved around this marvelous Thanksgiving Meal—this Body and Blood of Christ, this mercy!

Since then, changes have taken place in Lutheranism regarding the observance of, and attitudes toward, the Holy Supper. Some changes have been negative (infrequency, for one). For another, we are still struggling against a hyper-individualized, penitential show of wallowing in our sin. We are trying to get past that, to the sense of utter relief, joy, and thanksgiving—and the sacrifice that follows, out in the world, at home, at work, on the road.

This is our “reasonable service,” a logical progression from grace to gratitude, ministry, dedication, and a worship of Christ that continues beyond sanctuary walls.

Therefore as we proceed through our Church Calendar, the notion of Thanksgiving is not just a once-a-year thing, but a regular occurrence, the way it should be in a Word-Sacrament Church like ours. Wouldn’t you agree?

In the meantime, we have this uniquely American superfluity—Thanksgiving Day. It’s an invention dating down through various days since 1621, and various State Governors and Presidents (notably Abraham Lincoln) settling on the last Thursday in November.

It's not in our Church Calendar (p. 3, front of *The Lutheran Hymnal*) and, being members of a church like ours, it often bothers us that it can degenerate into something shallow, social, and secular.

We have to work at it to keep Christ in focus.

One suggestion would be to make good use of the "A Day of General or Special Thanksgiving" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 85) by distributing donated goods to the needy, either that day or over the coming weekend.

Another idea would be to have Christ's Great Thanksgiving Feast beforehand, on that very day. The same could apply to Easter, Christmas, or any Communion Sunday—including a distribution of gifts.

This could go a long way in shaping a sense of need, grace, thanks, and sacrifice. All by God's mercy.

Have a blessed mercy-full and merciful Thanksgiving—whenever you celebrate it!

—Warren H. Fanning,
Pastor Emeritus



Begin With God

Where to begin?

The Thanksgiving festival calls upon us to consider the blessings we enjoy at the hand of our God. We don't have to look far or with difficulty to see the wonderful variety of ways He does bless us.

But what should be considered a starting point of thanksgiving?

In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul identifies a serious gratitude deficit because of which "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). What problem was that? "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful..." (v. 21).

Let us be thankful that God is God!

It shouldn't be that hard. God does not wish to be a mystery to man (although He does have aspects that are a 'mystery'). Rather, Paul tells us "what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For



since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen."

What attributes does Paul have in mind? "His eternal power and Godhead" (v. 20).

We can thank God that He was 'there' first; He pre-existed all matter and form. His "eternal power" is a reference to the work of creation, when He simply commanded all things into existence: "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind...and it was so'" (Gen. 1:11). "Then God said,

‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night...and it was so’” (Gen. 1:14-15). “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind...and it was so’” (Gen. 1:24).

Oh, how humans have lost the sense of wonder that God’s marvelous hand brought this world about! The ancients, “professing to be wise...became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things” (Rom. 1:23).

Of course, man is more sophisticated now. Evolutionary theory, so commonly accepted, proposes that the world that now exists, exists independently of God, if He exists at all. But either way, the result is the same—professed wisdom, actual foolishness; man’s rapid decline into ignorance, disobedience, and depravity (see the verses that follow).

Examples!

So, when bringing the gospel to the nations, Paul wisely began with God!

Two instances stand out in the book of Acts—one with the unsophisticated Lystrans, and the other with the

Athenians.

In Lystra (where Paul and Silas were mistaken for the gods Zeus and Hermes), Paul stopped them from sacrificing to them by protesting: “We preach to you that you should turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:15-17).

By His eternal power God still supplies our every need. It all traces back to Him—the sun and rain which supply our crops; the minerals and treasures of the earth which permit our technology and comforts today.

Any thought that we live independent from God is an illusion.

Even the Athenians, more sophisticated and philosophical in their orientation, recognized that. Paul quoted one of their poets: “In Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring’” (Acts 17:28).



Redeemer Lutheran Church, Bowdle, S. Dak. hosted the West Central District Delegate Conference last June. Some participants enjoy a meal.

Paul saw that the Athenians made the right observation about God, though they failed to draw the necessary conclusion about their religious practices: “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature (“Godhead” of Romans 1:20) is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (v. 29).

We are His offspring. His is the Godhead—that is, existence as God. We owe our whole being to Him; the fullness of the earth is His. It is right and wholesome that we give thanks to the One who supplies us with daily bread; Who, furthermore—despite our ingratitude, ignorance, and waywardness!—supplies us with the Bread of Life, the

Savior Jesus, whom Paul saw as the ultimate in God’s goodness and love.

That is why, regardless of how his gospel was received, Paul could maintain to the Romans, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

Before we give thanks for the things that God gives and does, let us give thanks that God is God—and that we have been reconciled to Him in His Son, Jesus Christ.

O Lord, whose bounteous hand again
Hath poured Thy gifts in plenty down,
Who all creation dost sustain
And all the earth with goodness crown,
Lord of the harvest, here we own
Our joy to be Thy gift alone. (TLH #567:1)

—Pastor Peter Reim



The Discourses of Christ

The Good Shepherd—John 10:7-30

THE GOOD SHEPHERD—Looking at the Complete Picture

(Please read the Scripture text given above.)

We are all familiar with various pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In most of these pastoral depictions, we see Jesus holding the lamb securely in His arms, walking through the pleasant pastures along the babbling brook. It is all so calming, so peaceful, so reassuring.

But what’s missing from that picture? Jesus was very specific about the things missing from the picture. What

makes Jesus the Good Shepherd is that He secures life for us. He came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). He alone is the Door, the entrance to life.

But what about those times when that life is threatened? There are wolves out there, dangerous wolves. The leader of the pack would steal the lambs from the flock and kill them. That wolf seeks every opportunity to bring a sneak attack against the flock,

and many would-be shepherds recognize that as the time to disappear.

The Good Shepherd did not retreat. The Good Shepherd went forward to meet the enemy.

It is not only the crouching and stalking wolf that is absent from the picture; also absent is the cross, where our Good Shepherd met the foe. Yes, there the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep. He gave His life to save us from the enemy, to save us from the death which the Old Evil Foe would have us die. Jesus took upon Himself the curse of the law to free us from the devil's accusation, to pardon us from the death sentence our sin deserves.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He freely, willingly, lovingly, gave His life for us.

But even that is not the end of the complete picture. Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He not only gave His life but gave His life that He might take it again!

The natural course of human events leads us to expect that death is the end of the story. While the cross must be fixed prominently in the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, we must also see the open tomb in that picture!

Jesus had the power to lay down His life for us. It was the will and com-

mand of the Father. Jesus also had power, by the command of the Father, to take up His life again, and on the third day He rose triumphant from death and the grave.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus leads us in the paths of life. He knows that we too shall face the specter of temporal death, and so, as our Good Shepherd, He went before us and took the sting out of death. His resurrection demonstrates the reality of the life we have in Him. It is a more abundant life—now, as this hope lives in us; and afterward, when we shall live with Him in heaven forevermore.

The next time you see one of those pictures of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and are comforted by the assurance of Jesus' protecting care, remember what made that possible.

Remember what it is missing from that picture. It was Jesus who took the wolf out of the picture. See the cross and the grave where the victory over the enemy was won.

And, of course, the open tomb is so important to that picture. It assures us of peace with God and the safety unto eternal life that can be ours only through the loving care of our living Good Shepherd.

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels*



Pastors present for dedication of the new facility in Batavia, Illinois (see p. 22) include David Schaller, Mark Bernthal, Theodore Barthels, current pastor David Baker, John Lau, Thomas Schuetze, David Naumann

SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

Twelfth and last in a series

Some Concluding Thoughts

When we began this series, we acknowledged the difficulty a pastor and congregation have in composing a suitable message for the church bulletin board. The message cannot be very long, not only because of the size of the church sign, but more importantly, because people driving by have only a few seconds to read it.

Many churches simply make use of short Bible verses. This may be one of the best uses of the church sign. But there have been clear, concise, meaning-filled messages that have appeared on church signs around the country from time to time. One of the shortest—and, in my opinion, one of the best—is the one we considered in the second article of this series:

*“Know God, know peace
No God, no peace.”*

The object of placing such a message on the church sign is to grab the attention of the passerby, to make him think about things spiritual, and then perhaps to get him to enter our place of worship or call the pastor in search of spiritual guidance.

Most of the signs studied in this series were the ones that left something to be desired, the ones that contained misleading statements or downright errors. Several others drew favorable comments because they revealed

important Scriptural truths in striking and innovative ways. The few remaining ones that are on the author’s list are of such a nature that not much needs to be said. This does not mean that someone else could not develop the thoughts here expressed in a more extensive way.

Consider, then, the following church signs:

*“When a man points to Christ,
the imbecile looks at the man.”*

This reminds us of the Scriptural teaching of the total depravity of mankind. By nature man is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). He cannot look to Christ for help and comfort. The Holy Spirit working through the gospel must draw him to Jesus, must turn his heart of stone into a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), must create faith in his heart.

Jesus told the disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (Jn. 15:16).

So we confess with Martin Luther, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Him” (*Small Catechism*, Explanation to the Third Article).

*“The sword of the Spirit
never becomes dull from use.”*

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). The Word of God always remains the same. It is our use of the Word that varies.

The way we use the Word can be proper or it can leave something to be desired. When we are ignorant of God's Word, we will not be able to bring to bear on the various situations of life the appropriate message from that Word. Then we are "dull," in that the Word will not be effective through us.

But the more we study God's Word, the better we will be able to apply it to our own lives and to the lives of others with whom we come into contact.

*"God honors no drafts
if there are no deposits."*

This message compares our relationship with God to a bank account. The lesson is: If you don't make any deposits, you can't make any withdrawals.

The danger in a message like this is that it implies a *quid pro quo* in our relationship with God. It implies that if we do such and such toward God, then He will respond by blessing us.

While it is certainly true that the Lord richly blesses those who are His dear children by faith in Jesus Christ, we must never get the idea, nor lead others to believe, that we earn these blessings by doing things for God, by obeying God's commandments, or by being engaged in activities that are above and beyond the call of duty.

One of the dangers of this kind of thinking is that a faithful Christian who is experiencing heavy chastening from the Lord may be led to despair, rather than to put his whole trust in the Lord. He may come to believe that he has done something wrong or that he has not performed enough good works.

So, rather than thinking in terms of a bank account where we make deposits and withdrawals, wouldn't it be better to use a picture that comes from the Bible itself? We drink deeply from the fountain of the Lord's rich blessings, brought to us through His Word. That water then becomes in us a fountain of life, springing up to bless others (cf. John 4:14).

In conclusion, we simply list a number of additional church signs—which at first caught our attention, but which, after further consideration, did not seem to merit any particular comment. Perhaps they might serve as a basis for continued discussion in Bible study classes.

"God has heard all of our excuses."

"The road to success is usually under construction."

"Life without Christ is a hopeless end."

*"Where the Word of God is proclaimed
and explained.
Our mission is to preach, teach,
and reach."*

"The Holy Spirit is calling you."

*"Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out
of life."*

*"Just pray for a tough hide and a
tender heart."*

"He who forgives most shall be most forgiven."

"You can't be sinless, but you can sin less."

*"The world rewards success. God rewards
faithfulness."*

*"Forget about 'Save the earth.' What about
your soul?
The earth will burn. How about you?"*

*"A Christian is one who makes it easier
for other people to believe in God."*

—Gene Rutz

(This concludes the series. We thank Mr. Rutz for this spiritually edifying critique of church-sign messages.—Editor)



CROSS PURPOSES



Appreciating, With Thanksgiving, the Gifts We Have

As children of God we have been blessed most richly. If we have to ask how, we indicate that we are taking them for granted.

Above all, we thank God the Father for His love in Christ Jesus. The precious gospel of salvation-assurance in Jesus is the greatest blessing. It is the most secure blessing we possess; it is the most certain; it is the most enduring; it translates from time into eternity. It is rooted in Christ and His cross. It is sealed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

As sheep of the Lord's flock we have the promise that not one of His sheep shall be snatched from Him (John 10). We have his promise that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life (John 3:16).

However, the love of God and the precious promises in our Redeemer Christ do not insulate us from the trials, afflictions, sorrows, and troubles of this life. Yet our Lord Jesus has opened the way to the Father so that we can pray to Him in such times. This too He does in love! We can pray, "I am afflicted very much; revive me, O Lord, according to Your Word" (Ps. 119:107). God's grace and the love of Jesus our Savior give us hope and sustain us in time of trial, for the Lord will not forsake us. We are blood-bought.

The salvation-love of our Father is



the basis for every other promise and blessing that He gives. It is the same Father who sends us rain and sun, and causes the fruits of the earth to grow. It is He who gives us the ability to study, learn, invent, and prosper.

The gifts of the Creator-God are summarized in the first article of the Apostolic Creed: "...Also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life...."

For all these we give thanks to Him, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. These gifts are reiterated in the 4th Petition where we confess, "God gives daily bread indeed without our prayer, also to all the wicked...." He clothes the flowers and feeds the beasts of the field, and He cares for the birds. He emphasizes His care for us in the words, "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Lk. 12:7).

Do we appreciate how blessed we are? Shall we complain when things

seem to be against us, as though somehow the Lord has forgotten us?

Paul Gerhardt, the great hymn writer, wrote:

God oft gives me days of gladness;
Shall I grieve if He give
Seasons, too, of sadness?
God is good and tempers ever
All my ill, And He will
Wholly leave me never.” (TLH, #523:3)

Hurricane Relief

The writer was reminded of all this when this past week he and his wife volunteered to work in hurricane relief. We were working in a distribution center. Citizens of the community have brought in clothing and other items in staggering and overwhelming amounts. Our job was to sort clothes that were brought in and to assist people who came in, needing clothes.

It was an enjoyable experience to assist people who literally lost everything they had and to befriend people who are now in a totally strange community. These are people who sleep in one large open “dormitory” in the coliseum under the continual glare of lights, all their personal belongings gathered in a heap around their cots.

When is the last time you were thankful for something so mundane as new undergarments—or even the darkness in which to sleep in one’s own bed? There was the little girl who asked for help to find a lunch bucket for school. There was a man who came in looking for a Bible Concordance. One man who was leaving Corpus Christi to return to Louisiana came specifically to give an emotional “thank you” to the volunteers who had helped him over the days he had been here; when he left, he laid his hand on my arm (though I had never met him) and said, “God bless you.”

Finally, as one lady was loading her things into a car, she said, “God has His reasons for things. One day we will know. God is good.”

The Lord does work according to His plan and for our good. When we forget or take things for granted, He gives us reminders of how richly blessed we are. We thank Him for bringing this to our remembrance without our losing all possessions. This time He gave us the reminder by giving us opportunity to help people who did. It is so: “Life consists not in the abundance of things that we possess” (Lk. 12:15). Nevertheless, the Lord gives things we need for our sustenance and maintenance; let us “receive with thanksgiving our daily bread.”

Finally, appreciate with thanksgiving also the advice the Lord gives when He says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:19-21).

All are blessed and may be at peace who receive all blessings from the Father with thanksgiving and who in faith count the blessing of eternal life in Christ the best of all.

In yonder home doth flourish
My heritage, my lot;
Though here I die and perish,
My heaven shall fail me not.
Though care my life oft saddens
And causeth tears to flow,
The light of Jesus gladdens
And sweetens every woe. (TLH #528:10)

For every blessing of body and soul, O Lord, help us to be thankful Christians.

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
(Corpus Christi, Texas)

Worship of God: To be continued...

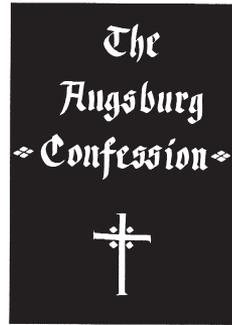
The worship of our Lord is a good thing that has continued uninterrupted for the entire existence of this Earth. Despite the fact that God's Word is despised—and worship of God is, in particular, despised even by many who call themselves Christians—it remains a good thing that we wish to see continued. This was the case for Christians after Pentecost. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The purpose of worship is really two-fold. In it is the opportunity to give our praise to God and also the opportunity to receive from God.

The Lord does not need our praise, but He certainly deserves it. God is the Creator of all things. He has made the Earth that, despite being infected with sin, is a wonderful place to live. He has made us, giving us our body, mind, and soul—which amazes us. The more we discover how God's creatures have been designed, the more we are amazed.

All material blessings pale in comparison with the spiritual blessings that our God has granted to us. He has taken us lost and condemned creatures and purchased us with the blood of Christ.

Would you let your son die for the sake of some scoundrels? This is what the Father did for us. Would you suffer the punishment for criminals who could care less about you? This is what Jesus did for us. With His suffering and



death, Jesus gained victory over the devil. With His resurrection, Jesus triumphed over the grave; being brought to faith by the grace of God, we share in this victory.

You can see why we come to worship such a Lord as this!

Not only do we have an opportunity to offer our prayers and praises to God, but we derive a lot from worship as well. Each Sunday we can learn more about our gracious God. A person might say, “Yeah, yeah, I know all about that church stuff. I know what I need to know about God.” That’s like saying one has mastered the English language when that person has merely memorized the ABC’s.

There is much to know about God, and much more than we could learn in a lifetime, yet that shouldn’t scare us off from striving to come to know better our holy Lord who has redeemed us from destruction.

Blessed Results!

When the worship of God does continue, there are blessed results. When

WE BELIEVE & CONFESS

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

A CONFESSION OF FAITH PRESENTED IN AUGSBURG
BY CERTAIN PRINCES AND CITIES TO HIS IMPERIAL
MAJESTY CHARLES V IN THE YEAR 1530

Psalm 119:46

*“I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings, and shall
not be put to shame.”*

ARTICLES OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE

XV. The Mass

We are unjustly accused of having abolished the Mass. Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents....

(article abbreviated)

we come together to worship, we learn more about God and the wonderful things that He has done for us. We learn to search the Scriptures when we need help in time of sickness or financial woes, or when a loved one dies. We learn that God is gracious and has given us many words of comfort and encouragement. Through His gospel our faith is increased and strengthened. When we meet together around the Word, we have the chance to encourage and build one another up.

With the many sweeping changes that took place in the Reformation, worship was also examined. The Reformers had to evaluate the Mass in the light of Scripture. Many aspects of worship were retained, but unscriptural elements were removed.

Noting the purpose and result of worship, hymns were written and sung in the language of the people rather than in the Latin of the priests. “No one has ever written or suggested that men benefit from hearing lessons they do not understand” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV).

The Lutherans were falsely accused

of abolishing the Mass. To the contrary, they saw the value of worship, and wanted it to continue and to be of value to everybody.

We constantly need to evaluate: Is the way in which we worship honoring God? Is it in a language that is understandable? Are we merely going through the motions of worship? Are our prayers and singing becoming vain repetitions, or are they coming from our heart?

If we fall in love with form over substance, then we are not only throwing out a precious part of our Lutheran heritage, we may also be missing out on true worship of our Lord.

When we realize the essence of our worship, we (like the Reformers) will see that sometimes changes are needed in external worship. Changes should not be made on a whim, but in order to meet the purposes and results that our Lord has intended.

Our Lord desires our worship in spirit and in truth. May we so worship Him to His everlasting glory!

—Pastor Michael Schierenbeck

THE MAGNIFICAT

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

Mary had been visited by the angel of the Lord who spoke to her a message that truly amazed her. She, a virgin, had been chosen by the Lord to be the mother of the Savior of the world. Betrothed, but not yet living with her husband, she was told, “Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS” (Luke 1:31), which being interpreted means Savior, “For He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

We are not surprised that Mary heard these words with wonderment. Never before and never again would a



woman have the singular experience to conceive by the Holy Ghost and bear a son. In the magnificent divine plan, that One born of Mary would be “true God begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man.”

In response, Mary (in the presence of Elizabeth) herself uniquely blessed as the mother of John the Baptizer) magnified the Lord; hence the title “Magnificat” (the musical score is on page 43 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*; Hymn 275 is also based on this song of Mary).

SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

In series:

**The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)*

The Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79)

The Gloria In Excelsis (Luke 2:14)

The Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32)

Mary was a sinner who, in contemplation of the angel's message, rejoiced "... in God my Savior." God had chosen her for this honor, which has caused her name to be remembered through the ages. "For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed"—not because of who she was, but because of that One who was born from her.

In her Son, the mercy of God would be upon them "who fear Him from generation to generation."

Speaking in the manner of Old Testament prophets, Mary spoke of the of the Child she was to bear. Through Christ all enemies will be dethroned—He "shall hold them in derision" (Ps. 2: 4). His kingdom shall be supreme, to the consternation of those who believe might or wealth or status in life makes right.

They who hunger in the spirit for

peace and rest shall be filled through the victory of the Savior over the devil, the world, and the flesh. The humble soul who trusts in Christ—though maligned on Earth for steadfast faith in Jesus— shall be vindicated, and that to the chagrin of all who haughtily rejected the Son of God and Son of Mary, and who laughed the Christ-believer to scorn.

The Magnificat closes triumphantly as it praises God for His faithfulness to Israel "in remembrance of His mercy." This mercy extends "to Abraham and to his seed"—to all who hold the faith of Abraham.

In time and in eternity all who trust in Christ shall rejoice as did Mary, who magnified the Lord for sending the Savior into the world.

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



FROM A PASTOR'S DESK—I.

THE ELCA: CONFUSION AND SURVIVAL

Much national publicity accompanied the recent church convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the nation's largest and most liberal Lutheran Church.

Decisions made at this Convention included proceeding with publication of a new hymnal which has eliminated any gender references to the Persons of the Godhead and has included songs of religious diversity (to promote open-mindedness toward other religions).

Yet the issues of homosexuality and the ordination of gay and lesbian cler-

gy captured the headlines. Many main-line Protestant denominations have struggled mightily with this issue. Churches such as the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, and the United Methodist Church have approved these steps—with others, such as the ELCA, clearly divided, yet moving in that direction.

We can only thank the Lord for the clear Scriptural witness provided by such churches as the Southern Baptist Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, and our

own CLC which recognize homosexuality as sin, not as an acceptable alternative moral lifestyle.

God's Word condemns all forms of homosexuality as being not only sin against God's moral law (Leviticus 18:22-24), but also perversion of God's natural order of creation (Romans 1:26-27). The pervasiveness of homosexuality in the city of Sodom led to God's judgment and the city's destruction (Genesis 18 & 19). The apostle Paul warns against both the spiritual danger for those who live in any unrepentant and unforgiven sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), as well as the lack of shame in such a lifestyle (Romans 1:32) that demonstrates the last stages of a spiritually and morally decadent society.

Yes, as with all sins, there is forgiveness to be found in repentance at the foot of the cross (Acts 3:19)—and with forgiveness, strength to live for the Lord (Philippians 4:13).

According to Scripture, these and all other truths are absolute and unchanging—and this remains today the position of God's faithful children.

On the other side are many (including a significant portion of the ELCA) who believe that spiritual and moral truth is conditioned by one's personal views and cultural environment and is therefore subjective, ever-changing, and elusive (the "blowing winds of doctrine" in Ephesians 4:17). In other words, man himself becomes the source and determiner of what is to be believed. Even the Bible itself, whose teachings are considered part of the church's "valued tradition," no longer is regarded as the inspired, inerrant, and absolutely exclusive authority in matters of faith and life. Once that

position gains a foothold in a church, the result cannot be other than uncertainty, confusion, and disunity. And if Scripture cannot be trusted in everything it says, what does that do to one's faith—confidence in the very saving gospel of Christ—revealed to us in the same Scriptures?

Ironically, the biggest concern of the ELCA convention—as openly expressed by church officials—was to keep the church together at all costs. This was accomplished by emphasizing love and tolerance, by stressing the strength of "religious diversity," and by adopting resolutions that dangle an "olive branch" to opposing positions.

And so, prior to the controversial vote, the delegates followed the counsel that "God cares for unity more than agreement" and voted 851-127 to keep the church "unified" despite any theological differences. Then they voted 603-490 to continue their synodical opposition to the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy, while at the same time doing nothing to prevent or discipline local churches (as here in the city of St. Paul) who extend a call to such a pastor. And while the ELCA convention did not vote to bless "same-sex unions," it did nothing to prevent or even discourage practicing gays and lesbians from full membership and participation in the church.

Such a confused and compromising religious approach may, in retrospect, be the only way the ELCA could have survived relatively intact. Yet, upon further review, what is it that has survived in its midst? Surely not a healthy church body with a deep love and regard for Holy Scripture; surely not true Lutheranism with its desire to be faithful to God's Word; rather, what we

see is a church body which is standing for nothing and seems to be falling for everything—and losing its life and Lutheran legacy in the process.

With 800,000 (1 in 5 state residents) being Minnesota ELCA members, we will likely have opportunities to leave our witness individually and congregationally. May we speak scripturally and lovingly to all who “ask the reason of

the hope that is in us...” (1 Peter 3:15). Through the power of God’s Word, may the Holy Spirit bless and move hearts to listen to and follow only one “voice”—that of the Good Shepherd (John 10:27) and respond in both faith and faithfulness.

—From the August 21, 2005, Sunday bulletin, Berea Lutheran Church, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota; David Schierenbeck is pastor.



FROM A PASTOR’S DESK—II.

Who sent the terrible wind...?

Who sent the terrible wind, surging seas, and flood waters to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast?

Everyone from the local authorities to the President has been blamed for something; but who sent this awful storm? The new National Director of Homeland Security ought to know. But the American people heard him, repeatedly blaming that mythical idol “Mother Nature.”

Let’s tell it like it is: God sent the storm that caused the surging seas to spill into New Orleans; that is, the real God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the minds of many is the thought that God sent a judgment upon the “Big Easy” (alias “Sin City”) because of the immorality so easily and proudly celebrated in that city year after year. What ought to be on everyone’s mind, however, is the thought that we all deserve the same and worse judgments from the holy God for the evil of our own hearts and lives.

But then what? Does it perhaps give the unbeliever a false sense of security

to speak of what “mother nature” does, rather than to talk about God? Surely! For we were never as fearful of “Mother-power” as we were of “Father-power.”

But more to the point: “Mother nature” brings no thought of divine retribution to mind, while talk of what God is doing with the forces of nature awakens the conscience to thoughts of sin and judgment. Modern man, raised on the poisoned pabulum of the godless theory of Evolution, wants nothing to do with a personal God of power who is just and holy. “Mother nature” is as close to the idea of “God” as the naturalist-materialist wants to be!

This is very sad from our point of view. For we Christians know from God’s revelation of Himself in Holy Scripture, as well as from our own experience, that His powerful judgments and His gracious deliverance always go hand in hand. Hope and salvation belongs to those who see both! God judged the sin of Adam and Eve with the Death He warned them about;

however, at the same time He promised the Savior from sin and death. God judged Adam and Eve by throwing them out of His perfect Garden; however, He did this to prevent them from eating the “tree of life” and living forever in a fallen world, afflicted with cancer, leprosy, arthritis, and countless other illnesses.

In Noah’s day God judged the wicked world by means of the worst physical disaster our planet will ever see until the end of time. Yet, for 120 years while Noah was preparing the Ark, he preached righteousness through the promised Savior of sinners, and God preserved Noah’s family for the sake of that promise to mankind (2 Peter 2:5). God judged the pride of man in the Tower of Babel incident, confusing human language so that mankind was divided into separate nations (Genesis 11); at the same time, God graciously separated the nation of Abram to bear the Savior of sinful man.

Remember also how God judged His holy Son upon the cross for our sins, and then raised Him up “because of our having been declared righteous” (Rom. 4:25).

Christians— God’s Instruments

Christians expect God to be and do the same today—to bring judgments, and follow up with His grace and mercy. Why shouldn’t He? “I AM the Lord, I do not change,” He tells us (Malachi 3:6). Never before have Americans seen such devastation, suffering, and loss of life from a judgment of God using the forces of nature within our borders.

Now where is “Mother nature”? It is God Who has been enabling American citizens and others from around the world to come to the aid of the poor and the afflicted. His is the power to bring down and also to raise up! “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things!” (Rom. 11:36)

As His believing servants, Christians especially are His instruments in revealing His grace and mercy to those in need. “Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). How can we help it? We are impelled for the love of Christ and our neighbor to



West Central Delegate Conference, Bowdle, S. Dak. (June 2005); Pastor Roland Gurgel, Chairmen Peter Reim, Secretary Mark Gurath

assist in our God's merciful deliverance of men, women, and children. Before Katrina they were all strangers to us; but now, displaced from their homes and what little they had, our God has placed them on our hearts that we might share what we still have.

Perhaps there are also fellow Christians—"members of the household of faith"—among the hundreds of thousands who need our help. But we would reach out to all, as we have opportunity—not to be part of a great work, or to bring glory to ourselves, but for the glory of our God.

Yes, to Him alone all glory is due! Since "Mother nature" did not send

this terrible judgment—because she is not—then she cannot have the glory that belongs to God in His mighty and gracious deliverance of bodies and souls in the months ahead.

Will anyone give God any "glory" for all this? Yes, His believing people will! For His great and ultimate purpose in all His temporal judgments is to awaken and alarm sinners everywhere, that we all may sense our own corruption and mortality—and come to find eternal peace and deliverance in the Savior He gave for a perishing world.

—Pastor Vance Fossum
(Holy Trinity Lutheran Church,
West Columbia, S.Car.)



SMORGASBORD

• **LETTER TO TIME MAGAZINE**—A recent worship bulletin from Messiah Lutheran Church, CLC, Eau Claire, Wisconsin contained a letter which one of the congregation's pastors had sent to *TIME*, after that magazine "had a special section on the question of whether one could believe in Jesus Christ and evolution..." The section had been prompted by "the current controversy in public education on whether the concept of intelligent design should be taught alongside the theory of evolution (just another reminder of the value of Christian schools, where there is no such controversy.)"

Pastor Paul Tiefel wrote the following letter to *TIME* Magazine:

Dear Editor,

In response to the comment in the August 15, 2005 issue, p. 34, that a person can harmoniously believe in

the theory of evolution and Jesus Christ.

It seems reasonable to let Jesus define His position: "If you continue in My Word, then you are my disciples" (John 8:31), and again to His followers, "Teach people to observe all that I have commanded" (Matthew 28:20).

What did Jesus teach about creation? "Have you not read, that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?" (Matthew 19:4) "For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be" (Mark 13:9).

Jesus reaffirmed the Bible account of the "beginning," including the historicity of God's creation of Adam and Eve.

To claim that we can believe in Jesus and His teachings while at the same time believing in the theory of

evolution is akin to saying “I am a loyal Democrat; I vote Republican all the time” or “I am a loyal reader of TIME; instead I read Newsweek,” It’s a glaring contradiction!

In an aside to his congregation, Pastor Tiefel added these remarks:

“We could have added so much more. For example, the teaching of creation is found literally hundreds and hundreds of times throughout the Old and New Testaments, from Moses to Paul, from David to Peter. It is one of

the most frequent teachings of the Bible.

“We also want to place the matter in perspective to the gospel. It is a foundation doctrine, though not part of the primary focus of the gospel. This means that a person may not believe it (creation—ed.) and yet go to heaven through that saving faith in the person and work of Jesus. However, it remains an inconsistency (and a serious error) to say ‘I believe in Jesus and the theory of evolution.’”



Installation of Professor John Ude

John Mark Ude was installed as professor in the Seminary department of Immanuel Lutheran College (ILC) in a service held at our Eau Claire, Wisconsin school on August 22, 2005.

Many of our readers are already acquainted with Professor Ude for one or more of the following reasons: he was born in Eau Claire on November 14, 1954 to Pastor Ruben (and Helen) Ude, then pastor at Ascension Lutheran of Eau Claire. Four years later his father accepted the call to serve St. John’s of Okabena, Minn., where they lived until his father’s death in 1970. The family then moved back to Eau Claire, where John was already attending Immanuel Lutheran High School.

With high school and college behind him, John attended the Seminary department “with great appreciation for the dedicated and faithful labors of the ILC professors,” vicared under Pastors John H. Johannes and Bertram Naumann, grad-



Prof. & Mrs. John Ude

uated in 1978, and in November was ordained as pastor of Faith congregation of Cambridge and Peace Thru Christ of Middleton, Wis.

The Lord of the Church next led him to serve Messiah congregation of Hales Corners, Wis. (1991-1998), where he had the privilege of seeing the congregation begin a Christian Day School.

From 1998 to the summer of 2005, he served Grace congregation of Fridley, Minn., from which he was called to ILC.

Over the course of these years, God blessed John and Deborah with nine

children: Amanda and Michael, already graduated from ILC; Matthew and Aaron, currently students in the Seminary department of ILC; Christopher is a student at UWEC; Laura and Nathanael are in the college department, David in the high school department of ILC; and Jesse is enrolled at Messiah Lutheran Christian School. They also have four grandchildren, children of Amanda and Jason Bailey.

Professor Ude will be teaching seminary Dogmatics, Homiletics, Pastoral Theology, and Comparative Symbolics (not all during the same semester); col-

lege Dogmatics and Symbolics, and Religion 12 in the high school department of ILC.

We pray that in the classroom—as in the pulpit—Prof. Ude will continue to be a vehicle for the Lord’s comforting love, upholding Isaiah’s vision of the Holy Lord, and proclaiming the forgiveness that cleanses lips and hearts to serve the Lord.

(Their new address is 507 Ingram Drive, Eau Claire, Wis., 54701-5913; phone is 715-955-4127; e-mail is john.ude@ilc.edu)

—Paul R. Koch, reporter



DAY OF CELEBRATION



Showing the interior of the new church

Sunday (June 12, 2005) was a day of celebration, joy, and thanksgiving at Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia, Illinois.

Nearly two and a half years previously the congregation had begun construction on its new church/parsonage facility. The first service in the new

building was held on Easter Sunday, March 27.

In the morning service on dedication day, the first pastor of the Chicagoland group, Prof. em. John Lau, preached the sermon. Prof. Lau had served the congregation even before it was incorporated. Using 1 Corinthians 3:11-17 as text,

—The Bread of Life—

Daily Bible readings for home devotions

December, 2005

<u>Date</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>A thought from the reading</u>	<u>Hymn selection</u>
1	1 Kings 20:31-43	A treaty with God's enemy is no blessing	261
2	21:1-26	Ahab and Jezebel sell their souls to do evil	295
3	22:13-23	A lying spirit can convince saints, too	264
4	22:29-40	God has tactics superior to man's devising	576
5	22:41-53	And so Judah's godliness dribbled away	575

For Advent we slide into Chronicles. The Kingdom of God will reach its goal in the arrival of the King of kings, of whom David was type. Jesus stands behind David's regency, and its prosperity depended on God's presence among them in the Ark of the Covenant.

6	1 Chron. 11:1-9	They anointed David king over Israel	59,1-3
7	13:1-14	How can I bring the Ark of God to me?	58,1-2
8	14:1-17	His kingdom was highly exalted	58,3-4
9	15:1-3,25-29	The Ark of the Lord came to the City	58,5-6
10	16:1-36	Oh, give thanks to the Lord!	58,7-9
11	17:1-15	And his throne shall be established forever	68,1-3
12	17:16-27	You have blessed us, O Lord!	68,4-6
13	18:1-14	He administered justice to all	73,1-2
14	19:10-19	Be of good courage, and let us be strong	73,3-4
15	20:1-8	King of kings and Lord of lords	73,5
16	21:1-17	Let me fall into the hands of the Lord	99,1-3
17	21:18-30	The offering must be paid for personally	165,1-4
18	22:1-19	Your heart and your soul to seek the Lord	278,1-5
19	28:1-10	I will establish his kingdom forever	130,1-3
20	29:1-9	The Temple is not for man but for the Lord God	655
21	29:10-20	Now bless the Lord your God	511,1-6
22	2 Chron. 5:1-14	The Lord enters His Temple	641
23	6:1-11	The Lord has fulfilled His Word	629
24	6:12-18	Will God indeed dwell with men on Earth?	97
25	6:19-23	If anyone sins, then hear and forgive!	99
26	6:24-31	Then hear from heaven and forgive the sin	635
27	6:32-42	From a far country for the sake of your name	129,1-3
28	7:1-11	And the glory of the Lord filled the Temple	249
29	7:12-22	If you keep My statutes and commandments	401
30	8:11-15	Where the Ark has come is a holy place	50
31	9:1-9	On His throne to be King for the Lord	59,4-6

he encouraged the congregation with the theme, "Good Advice for Builders of God's House."

At the close of the service, Mr.

Robert Nolan, president of the congregation, brought words of encouragement. Next, Mr. Jack Mayhew, representing the CLC Board of Missions,

did the same.

In the afternoon dedication service the sermon was delivered by Pastor Theodore Barthels, who had served the congregation for a period of about thirteen years. Sermon text was Ephesians 4:8-16 and the theme was: "Dedication to our Ascended LORD."

Following the sermon, Pastor David Baker of Ascension congregation conducted the Rite of Dedication. Then once again President Nolan addressed the group with words of encouragement.

The ladies of Ascension served a fellowship meal. After the meal Prof. Lau and Pastor Barthels did some reminiscing about how things were in the past, including the many hurdles and obstacles which the congregation had faced over the years. Finally, Jack Mayhew again addressed the group on the subject of the mission work of the CLC; this time his presentation focused on foreign missions.

Fellow CLC Christians from Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Nebraska were present for the festivities.

—*Pastor David Baker*

Announcements

Installation

In accord with our usage and order, John Ude, who was called to serve as professor at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire Wis., was installed on August 22, 2005.

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels,
ILC Board of Regents*

Send Change of Address to:

*Lutheran Spokesman
2750 North Oxford Street
Roseville, MN 55113*



Vacation Bible School, July 2005, Redeemer, Sister Lakes, Michigan