



LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35

*Thanks be to God for
His indescribable gift!*

2 Corinthians 9:15

THE BREAD OF LIFE 2014

Over the years the *Lutheran Spokesman* has been providing annual Daily Devotional readings from Holy Scripture in different formats. At one time these readings appeared month by month. More recently, a full year's worth of 365 daily readings for the next calendar year/church year had been included as a hard copy insert in our December issue (as well as its being included on the *Spokesman* internet website).

For the coming year of grace another change is happening; our budget allows us to make a hard copy edition of devotional readings available to our subscribers in pamphlet form as part of their annual subscription.

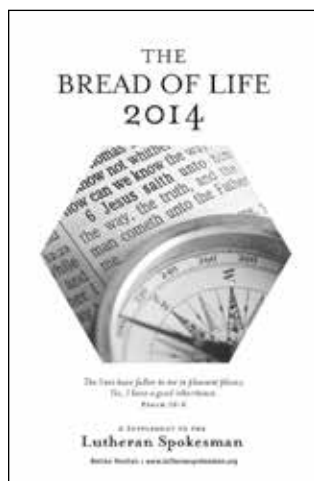
If you are a subscriber to the *Lutheran Spokesman*, look for “The Bread of Life 2014” pamphlet to arrive at your mailing address before the end of the year. CLC Pastor Emeritus David Lau originally compiled these daily-readings-with-biblical-theme-and-commentary for the year 1987, but we find that they fit the year 2014 quite well. We thank Pastor Lau for making these readings available from his archives.

God's pure and unsullied Word—divinely and verbally inspired and replete with godly comfort and encouragement all along our earthly trek—has been and remains our great heritage “from age to age” and “throughout all generations” (TLH #283).

Dear reader, you will surely be blessed as you look to God's Word for a daily faith-boost. In the words of the psalmist:

“Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life. The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law. I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD, and have comforted myself. Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law. Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, and I keep Your law. This has become mine, because I kept Your precepts.” (Psalm 119:49-56)

—Pastor Paul Fleischer, Editor



God's Gift Giving

Pastor Paul Krause • Markesan, Wisconsin

Years ago in my hometown an elderly woman crafted new pairs of mittens for my brother, my sister, and me every Christmas. It wasn't that this lady had forgotten what she had given us the year before. But she knew that the mittens she had made the previous year would likely wear out over the winter. She also knew that we children were still growing and would need larger sizes. So out of the goodness of her heart she dedicated her time and effort to keep our hands warm.

But our family friend isn't the only one who has given us the same Christmas gift every year. Our heavenly Father has too—for countless years! *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16).

Of course, we know that Jesus is not born as a Bethlehem Baby each and every year. Our annual Christmas celebration is a remembering of the first time God's Gift was given, when Jesus was *"born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons"* (Galatians 4:4-5).

That one-time, God-given Gift should remind each of us every year of what changes...and of what doesn't change!

What changes? Every year brings changes in our age, height, weight, and health.

What doesn't change? Our natural spiritual condition! Ever since our conception in our mother's womb we are "in sin" (see Psalm 51:5). And that "in-sin-ness" marks us as deserving of nothing but eternal punishment in hell.

Some clothing items given as Christmas gifts are marked as ‘one size fits all’—the idea being that it’s not necessary to know the recipient’s specific size. While the idea has some merit, the fact is that there will still be those for whom a particular item won’t fit.

But God’s Gift of His Savior-Son is truly a one-size-fits-all. When Jesus gave His perfect life into death on the cross, He paid for each and every sin of each and every person. Yes, the salvation Jesus came to bring is tailor-made for our forgiveness needs each and every day! Never do we need to be concerned that God’s grace for us will rip, wear out, or not fit. Never will God’s mercy for us have to be replaced because of weathering, aging, or unraveling.

God’s Gift of His Son—along with all the other gifts of His grace—is “good and perfect,” for it “comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). No matter how much forgiveness each of us needs at any given moment, no matter whether we need guidance or strength, mercy or help, God’s perfect Gift given once and for all (see Hebrews 9:12) is exactly what we need!

God’s one-time Gift never wears out and always fits—His only-begotten Son, our perfect Savior, Jesus Christ!

Glory to God in highest heaven, ★ Who unto us His Son hath given!

While angels sing with pious mirth ★ A glad new year to all the earth.

(TLH 85:15)



With Missionary Ed Starkey and wife Janice are the CLC clergy brethren who laid on hands at the commissioning service at Messiah Church, Eau Claire. Bd. of Missions Secretary Mark Gullerud (liturgist) is robed left; CLC Pres. Michael Eichstadt (preacher) is robed center. See story p. 26.

The Voice

Pastor Theodore Barthels • Austin, Minnesota

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

(ISAIAH 40:3-5)

In a current television talent show celebrity judges are facing away from the stage when the contestant begins to sing. When they are impressed by the voice they hear, the judges hit the button that turns them around to face the other direction.

As we prepare for the coming of Christ this Advent season, the Lord would have us listen to the Voice—not a voice on stage, but that special Voice “*crying in the wilderness.*”

Almost two millennia have passed since that Voice was first heard. Back then the voice of John the Baptist caused many to repent and be converted, facing a new direction for their lives—a direction that led into the kingdom of God.

John the Baptist was rough in appearance, and his ministry was inconveniently located out on the shores of the Jordan River—which didn’t cause people to turn. Neither was it the physical tone or quality of the Voice that caused them to turn around. The turning power was in the message itself, a message which the Lord gave to His prophet as the forerunner to the Christ—a message which John faithfully presented to the people: “*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29)

As the people heard “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,’*” the Spirit of God worked in their hearts so that many

turned away from sin, thus removing obstacles in the way of the coming One.

Twenty centuries later, is this Voice still relevant? As we poor sinners hear the voice of John the Baptist, does the Voice still summon us to turn around? Since we still have the obstacles of “pride and sin lurking within us” (cf. *TLH* 446:4), it does indeed!

During this pre-Christmas Advent season let us remember that it is not only a time to prepare to observe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is also a time to prepare for His other comings to us through the Means of Grace. By the grace of God the Holy Spirit we hear the gospel of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ. Day after day the same Spirit leads us to repent of our sins so that we are “turned around” in our hearts and lives.

Let us remember that this pre-Christmas Advent season is not only beneficial for us to continually examine our hearts and lives, for our sinful natures erect obstacles in our relationship to our Redeemer God.

It is so easy to become complacent concerning things spiritual as we get caught up in the affairs of this material, temporal life. The influence of the ungodly world on our spiritual thinking can be much more pervasive and invasive than we think. We can become like those who came to hear John but then continued to cling in pride to their own merit and righteousness (cf. Matthew 3:7ff).

It is so easy to become complacent concerning things spiritual as we get caught up in the affairs of this material, temporal life. The influence of the ungodly world on our spiritual thinking can be much more pervasive and invasive than we think.

We need to hear the Voice—that Voice of the one crying in the wilderness of this world. The Voice calls to us, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Matthew 3:2) It calls us to turn away from the world with all its lies and deceptions so that we daily repent of sin and look to Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer.

That Voice encourages us to keep our lives on course for our Lord’s final coming when we shall see Him in His glory—and He shall invite us to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world!



Christmas reminds us that...

THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY SEEM

Pastor Paul Naumann • Tacoma, Washington

“Appearances can be deceiving.” No one knows the truth of that statement more fully than does a Christian.

Most people understand the principle. They keep it in mind as a salutary warning against the false and deceptive product advertising that floods the media in our day. They use it to bolster their defenses against the subtle tricks of con men on the street and scam artists on the internet.

But it may be that no one understands the deceptive nature of appearances better than does a follower of Jesus Christ. For the Christian believer, almost nothing—certainly nothing important—is as it appears. And nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in connection with the Christmas event.

Christian faith, by definition, deals with the things which do *not* appear, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...”* (Hebrews 11:1).

By faith Christians know that things are not as they seem, especially when it comes to the most important questions of life.

• HOW DID OUR WORLD COME INTO BEING?

Rocks that seem to be ancient and starlight that seems to have taken eons of time to reach the Earth lead scientists to conclude that our universe originated in a big bang four billion years ago.

But things are not as they seem. For *“by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible”* (Hebrews 11:3).

• WHERE DID HUMAN LIFE COME FROM?

Judging by appearances, it might seem plausible to some that humans evolved from lower life forms, laterally through the great apes.

But things are not as they seem. The third chapter of the book of Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve were created fully formed by God, becoming the crowning achievement of His creation rather than the product of an evolutionary process.

• HOW CAN ONE ACHIEVE SALVATION?

The answer that seems most likely is that evil deeds must be atoned for with good deeds.

But things are not as they seem. Romans 3:20 says, “*By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.*”

And at Christmas especially, things are not as they seem. A young couple of modest means is delivered of their first child while traveling, even without the benefit of a room at an inn. How poor and inconsequential the Infant seems to be! A cattle-trough is His cradle, strips of cloth are His garments, and humble shepherds are His attendants.

Yet things are not as they seem! For in this crude stable in Bethlehem is a mighty Monarch, the Lord of all creation and the world’s Redeemer! Here is the fulfillment of the prophesy issued by the prophet Micah centuries ago: “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2).

And Christmas removes a final deceptive appearance for the Christian believer—the appearance that one’s sins are insurmountable. We confess with Dr. Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism* that “we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment.” Our flaws and failures seem innumerable, the sins of omission and of commission accumulate in our lives until it seems as though we will be crushed with their burden of guilt.

But things are not as they seem! “*Do not be afraid!*” the angel reassures us, “*for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*” (Luke 2:10-11).

Our Savior is born!!

*Softly from His lowly manger
Jesus calls, One and all,
“You are safe from danger.
Children, from the sins that grieve you
You are freed: All you need
I will surely give you.”*

*Come, then, banish all your sadness!
One and all, Great and small,
Come with songs of gladness.
We shall live with Him forever
There on high In that joy
Which will vanish never!*

(LSB #360:5-6)



“This is most certainly true!”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

(TLH, p. 12)

Jesus is True God

CDS Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

A forward-thinking person has the unique ability to head off a problem before it occurs. By thinking outside the box and casting a discerning eye to the future, such a person is able to take steps to ward off disaster.

Our sovereign God had forethought unimaginably greater than any human has ever achieved. Not only did He know the problem before it existed but He also had a Plan and Solution for the problem before anything existed—and it all centered on our Lord Jesus Christ!

Why did this divine plan have to focus on Jesus Christ? Was He simply the right man for the job? Many today think of Jesus as just that: an important man, a good example to follow, and a giver of great advice—but nothing more.

The Bible tells us differently, and so we believe something quite different. As we confess with Dr. Martin Luther in his explanation of

The Five SECOND ARTICLE Installments:

- 1) **Jesus is true God**
- 2) Jesus is true Man
- 3) Jesus has redeemed me
- 4) Jesus has made me His own
- 5) Jesus calls me to serve Him

the Second Article, we believe that “Jesus Christ, true God...is my Lord...”.

Before we can go forward to see God's plan unfold, we need to go back to its inception in eternity!

Since God foreknew Satan would rebel and cause the downfall of mankind, He also knew that because of sin, heartache, disaster, and death would result for all people.

So why did God go through with His plans of creation, anyway? So He could show, could prove, the height and depth of His love for mankind. God took counsel with Himself, and the Plan came together.

The Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus was not only present at creation but was a participant as well. In the prologue to John's Gospel we read, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him...”* (John 1:1-3). John then emphatically states that this Word became flesh and dwelt with men.

Jesus, the Son of God, would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born through the virgin Mary into His own creation! As was prophesied centuries before the event, *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2).

Being a perfect Man would have been good for Jesus. It would have given Him a good standing with the Father. But in order for Jesus to redeem us, He needed to be true God as well so that His perfect life and innocent death were valuable enough to give us the blessings of His righteousness. Jesus would not only be despised and rejected by those He came to save, but His own Father would leave Him forsaken on the cross as payment for the sins of mankind.

God forsaking Himself! Oh, the depth of our God's love!

The apostle Peter speaks of the eternal Christ and His redemptive work when he reminds us, *“...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ—He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you”* (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Jesus, eternal God, creator God, fulfilled all He came to do and longed to be restored to His former state after His resurrection and ascension. Shortly before He went the way of the cross, Jesus prayed, *“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”* (John 17:5).

THE SECOND ARTICLE

(About Redemption)

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He did this that I should be His very own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy; just as He is risen from death, lives and reigns in eternity.

This is most certainly true.

(Martin Luther's SMALL CATECHISM, Sydow edition, 2000)

God's forethought in creating this Plan of salvation wasn't, however, just some academic exercise. God had a specific purpose in mind—our salvation!

Though we would be born in sin and are guilty of sinning daily, God's plan takes care of that. The Apostle Paul puts us sinners squarely into God's eternal plan when he states, “[God] *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which He gave to us in Christ Jesus before time began...*” (1 Timothy 1:9).

What a release from the bondage of sin! What freedom to worship and serve our Savior God! Oh, the height of our God's love!

Now we can have some forethought as well. “(God) *chose us in (Christ) before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*” (Ephesians 1:4). That's a comfort, not only for the remainder of our days on this Earth but also for looking forward to the eternal blessings awaiting us in the home of our God.

Thank You, Jesus, our Lord and our God!



Missionary David Koenig

The Shocked

Those shocked by love (Fifth of a Series)

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

(ACTS 16:23-34)

And then there is the person who is shocked by a demonstration of love not in connection with a falling judgment. One could say that the Philippian jailer escaped the judgment that would have fallen on him over escaped prisoners. The main point we consider though is that the apostle Paul and Silas stayed in the cell—an unheard of action by those incarcerated.

[Editor's note: The previous installment in this series considered those "shocked" by a falling judgment—such as the "sinful woman" (John 8:3-12). Missionary Koenig continues....]

SERIES Backdrop

With examples from Holy Scripture we are trying to learn ways and attitudes which will better enable us to witness to our Lord. These examples, drawn from the four Gospels and from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, are by no means exhaustive.

As with the basketball strategy of one-on-one, we are looking at examples of one Christian witnessing to another individual. We are not considering what was said to individuals already in the faith, though that is also applicable. We are not considering what was said to groups, though that also is applicable as a witnessing technique. We will be considering various situations where it was one-on-one, and the one being witnessed to was living in unbelief...

The ultimate goal in all witnessing is to be like John the baptizer and point to Christ as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. While we want to try earnestly to develop our skills in this area, we don't want to forget John's motto, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30).

No matter what spiritual gifts we have and how we develop them, we are not looking for glory for ourselves. We are looking to have another soul join us in glorifying our Savior-God.

In other words, it was not the case that Paul didn't escape because his wounds kept him incapacitated. It was certainly not uppermost in Paul's mind that he would stay so that on the morrow the city authorities might exonerate not just him but the cause of Christ from any shame and disgrace. Yet uppermost in Paul's mind had to be his concern for the jailer who undoubtedly would face execution for losing the prisoners.

"And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, Do yourself no harm, for we are all here" (vv. 27-28). Although the jailer had treated Paul with no compassion at all, Paul had a great concern for the jailer.

Paul returns good for evil. *"Bless those who persecute you...Repay no one evil for evil...if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:14-21.) This we find in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount also (Matthew 5:10-12).

Peter likewise reminds us, *"...not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing"* (1 Peter 3:9). This is gospel pure and simple. It is love which the unbelieving of this world cannot understand. When this love is

demonstrated to an individual, he may well be “trembling with fear,” shocked into a sense of his own wickedness and unworthiness.

The jailer inquired, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Paul then spoke the gospel invitation, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved....*” That night the gospel which had been demonstrated in the act of love was verbalized as Paul and Silas went to the jailer’s house, even then baptizing the whole family.

This is one of those encounters we yearn for. But notice that the shock that woke up the jailer from his sleep of spiritual death was the act of love. It just cannot be otherwise. And it just cannot be underestimated that words so often are not enough. Our words also can be easily contradicted by our actions.

The love of our Savior from the cross—forgiving His very executioners and forgiving a criminal, none of whom deserved it—must permeate our soul as we seek to announce His forgiveness.



A CHRISTMAS DEVOTION

Christmas at “Just the Right Time”

Pastor Thomas Schuetze • Coloma, Michigan

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5, NIV).

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” So wrote Solomon in Ecclesiastes (3:1). Have you ever wondered why God picked the time that He did for sending His Son into our world?

Why didn't He make Christmas happen sooner? (No doubt many Old Testament believers prayed for this.) Or why didn't He cause His Son to be born at a later point along the timeline of history?

We can't look into God's mind and state with certainty why He chooses the times that He does for fulfilling His promises. However, we can point to a number of factors which show—at least from a human perspective—that the date God selected for fulfilling His promise of a Savior was “just right.” Under His guiding hand, a single language (Greek) was being used by a large segment of the world’s population. In the years leading up to Christ's birth there were no wars going on in the

Mediterranean world. The Romans had also built an elaborate system of highways which provided efficient travel from one country to another.

Such factors made it a good time for God's Son to make His appearance. It made it possible for the disciples to carry the gospel from the city of Jerusalem and to spread it quickly to the ends of the Earth.

Whatever the reason(s) God had for choosing that specific time for sending the Christchild into the world, we are just glad that He did! And since each messianic prophecy of the Savior has met its fulfillment *only in Jesus*—to name a few, His birth of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), of the family tree of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1)—we know beyond a doubt that His work of reconciling the world to Himself has been completed. The broken relationship that existed between sinners and the holy God has been mended.

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Jacob's Star in all its splendor</i> | <i>From the bondage that oppressed us,</i> |
| <i>Beams with comfort sweet and tender,</i> | <i>From sin's fetters that possessed us,</i> |
| <i>Forcing Satan to surrender,</i> | <i>From the grief that sore distressed us,</i> |
| <i>Breaking all the powers of hell.</i> | <i>We, the captives, now are free.</i> |

(TLH #90:5-6)

We also have reason to rejoice that the Lord continues to make Christmas happen at “just the right time” for each of us personally.

Did He not use the message of the gospel to bring you to faith, to comfort you with the glad tidings of great joy the angels sang about to the shepherds, of forgiveness for your sins, of Christ's victory over death for you, of His crushing Satan's power for your benefit, of your eventual participation in the eternal Christmas celebration above—the grandest and most festive party that will ever be held, where “*there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*” (Revelation 21:4, NIV), with Jesus as your beloved Host?!

*Oh, may we keep and ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind!
Trace we the Babe, who hath retrieved our loss,
From His poor manger to His bitter cross,
Tread in His steps, assisted by His grace,
Till man's first heavenly state again takes place.*

*Then may we hope, th' angelic hosts among,
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song.
He that was born upon this joyful day
Around us all His glory shall display.
Saved by His love, incessant we shall sing
Eternal praise to heaven's almighty King.*
(TLH #84:5-6)

Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Son into our world at just the right time for the redemption of our sinful world. We thank You for sending Him into our hearts through Your Word at just the right time, leading us to anchor our hope for forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation solely in Him. Amen!



CROSS PURPOSES

“On Earth Peace...”

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer · Oakdale, Minnesota

How shall we understand the expression? Does the angelic declaration of peace on Earth refer to some millennial peace during which Jesus allegedly returns to set up His kingdom on Earth? Does it refer to a cessation of war and violence among nations and peoples?

The suggestion of a millennial peace we reject because the very premise is contrary to Scripture. The second suggestion sounds appealing because we pray for peace between nations and an end to violence among mankind. David said, “*Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it*” (Psalm 34:14). However, when has there not been war somewhere on the globe? When has there not been violence since the time that Cain murdered Abel?

Were the angels then expressing an empty hope over the fields of Bethlehem? No, because the interpretation that society places on the message is wrong. The peace for which society yearns will not happen

“...On earth peace...”
**declared the angels
to the shepherds on
the night of the Savior’s
birth (Luke 2:14).**

unless all people everywhere acknowledge and repent of their sin before the holy God and understand the meaning of the peace that the heavenly messengers proclaimed. This is outside the realm of possibility in a godless world.

Relief from evil in the world can occur only if the heart of man is changed, as Scripture says, *“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies”* (Matthew 15:19). Unless sinners repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, things will continue as they are. Indeed, Scripture tells us that in the last times the downhill spiral will accelerate.

So, was the peace of which the angels sang an empty hope? No! They sang of peace which finds its substance in Jesus. *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:11).

Jesus was the Father’s answer to the sin problem. The wall which separated fallen mankind from God was knocked down by the Christ, the Son of God, who removed the wall by taking the sin of mankind upon Himself, then shedding His blood on the cross for the sins of the world. Thus St. Paul says, *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them...”* (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The Christmas angels were speaking of peace that fills the sinner’s heart when s/he makes confession of sin and believes that Jesus made peace with God. The peace of the angels’ song is the rest from fear which Jesus pronounced to the disciples, saying: *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid...”* (John 14:7).

The angels were not predicting a worldly peace in some distant time in the future, nor did Jesus speak to His disciples of some distant peace. He, the Prince of Peace, spoke of an immediate peace which He alone gives.

Note also this significant word of the Lord, *“These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace: in the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Through faith in Jesus we have peace in the midst of tribulation!

Jesus’ first disciples indeed had tribulation. Likewise, Jesus’ disciples in this world of sin today have tribulation. Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). The world hated Christ; it hates those who are Christ’s. Throughout the ages the blood of Christian martyrs has flowed.

“...On earth peace...” did not predict the cessation of trial, affliction,

sorrow, or even death. It is a peace that fills the hearts of believers who find comfort in knowing that they have been redeemed—and knowing that they are known by the Father (Isaiah 43:1). It is the peace that fills the hearts of those who confess, “*The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life...*” (Psalm 27:1).

Though enjoyment of the peace of heaven lies in our future, believers have peace now through Jesus, even while the whole world without Christ is quaking in fear.

“*Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all*” (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM OUR CLC PRESIDENT

Re-gifting Encouraged!

Pastor Michael Eichstadt • Hales Corners, Wisconsin

Have you ever re-gifted a present?

In recent years the practice of re-gifting has been promoted as a way to deal with unwanted or unneeded gifts. After all, what are you going to do with two identical DVDs? What if you already own three Green Bay Packer caps? You could shove them into the depths of a closet or let them gather dust in the garage. But the better solution, according to re-gifting fans, is to pass the items along to someone else who will appreciate and use them.

While it may be practical, few people are going to tell the original giver of the present what was done with it. Re-gifting often carries the stigma of ingratitude.

There is one Giver who doesn't mind at all when His present is re-gifted. In fact, He encourages it. He is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Daily He showers His blessings upon us in the form of food for the table, clothes in the closet, family, friends, health, employment, and stable government. “*The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the*

desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:15-16).

But on the first Christmas the Giver outdid even Himself. “*When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5).

God did not merely give us “things”; He gave Himself!

“*The Word became flesh*” (John 1:14) to make His home with us. He did not come as a guest expecting us to wait on Him. He came to “roll up His sleeves and get to work” by stepping into our place under God’s holy law.

Our talk about love is so often empty words, but Jesus put love for God and for mankind into perfect practice in our behalf. We have brought upon ourselves a crushing load of guilt. Jesus came to lift that load off our shoulders, taking full responsibility for it on the cross. Isaiah foretold: “*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...*” (Isaiah 53:5).

No gift is more practical or precious—not just for time but for all eternity! The Son of the Virgin Mary is none other than our God and Savior!

Are you ready to re-gift God’s Gift?

Who would ever consider giving away what they need most? But, in effect, isn’t that what the shepherds did? “*They made widely known the saying...*” (Luke 2:17). The prophetess Anna did it too: “*She spoke of [the Christchild] to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem...*” (Luke 2:38).

Whether your name is Bob, Mary, Mark, or Andrew, the Lord encourages you to pass along the Gift of Jesus to everyone you can. He is pleased when His children spread the news. Do it without hesitation, for re-gifting the gospel does not leave us empty-handed. There is plenty of forgiveness for all. “*The Lord... is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

This Christmas season go ahead and joyfully re-gift without apology. Pass along the Good News in your Christmas letters and cards. Invite the neighbor and coworker to Wednesday Advent services. Direct that friend who is disillusioned by the crass and cheap commercialism of the world to the priceless, profound mystery of the Baby in the manger—Immanuel, God with us!





This past summer a new entrance sign was erected for our CLC's Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary, 501 Grover Rd., Eau Claire, Wis. in memory of Prof. Michael Sydow (left, Dec. 19, 1941-Oct. 9, 2009) who taught at the school from 1996-2008. Doing the construction work for the family Memorial were the Prof.'s brothers James, Benno, Peter, and nephew Tony Sydow. Mrs. Kathy Sydow adds: "I asked that the cross be added because there wasn't one on campus and it portrays what the school is all about, what Immanuel stands for, and what Mike loved to do."

FIRST OF TWO INSTALLMENTS

What is Addiction ... and is It a Sin?

Chris Sumei, MD, member of St. Paul Lutheran Church (CLC),
Denver (Lakewood), Colorado

How often do you hear statements like, “I’m addicted to chocolate,” or “He’s such a workaholic”? But when someone develops a true addiction to drugs or alcohol, the results can be devastating.

This brief study of addiction was first presented at the CLC’s West Central District Delegates’ Conference in 2011.* It will be reprised here in two brief installments: 1) “What is addiction and is it a sin?” and 2) “How can Christians help those struggling with addiction?”

One can be addicted to all sorts of substances (alcohol, cocaine, tobacco, etc.) or behaviors (gambling, pornography, and so on). This article will focus primarily on the former.

First of all, we need to define some terms, since the word *addiction* is too loaded and vague. Clinically we use the words *dependence* [see box] and *abuse*.

Abuse is a dependence that also has clear interference in the individual’s personal life. Examples include getting into legal problems or hazardous situations, failure to fulfill obligations at work/school/home, and relationship troubles with family and friends.

Virtually all substances of abuse act directly on our brains, causing both short-term and long-term consequences. Drugs such as cocaine, amphetamines, and nicotine (found in tobacco) act on the basic reward

Dependence is defined as the presence of three or more of the following**:

1. Tolerance: Developing a tolerance to the substance/behavior such that more and more is needed for the same effect
2. Withdrawal: Absence of the substance/behavior leads to physical or psychological withdrawal
3. Overuse: Using larger amounts than what was intended
4. Desire to cut back
5. Time: A great deal of time is used in pursuit of the substance/behavior
6. Activities are given up due to the habit
7. Persistent use despite knowing the negative effects

pathways in the brain, which essentially “hard-wires” a person to want to use those substances again and again. Alcohol and other depressants decrease the activity of the main inhibitory signals in the brain, which helps explain the lapses in judgment often seen with abuse of drugs.

Anyone who has earnestly tried to break such an addiction can certainly identify with what the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans: *“For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me”* (Romans 7:19).

So, is substance abuse sinful?

With all the harm that we know these substances bring to the body, on-going use is clearly not honoring our body, which (as far as Christians are concerned) is *“the temple of the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). By definition, substance abuse means neglecting one’s duties and leads to many selfish acts. This temptation does not come from God. In other words, we have only our own sinful flesh to blame for this predicament (see James 1:13-15).

There is a strong temptation to imagine that we are somehow better or stronger than those struggling with addiction, that we would never allow something like this to happen to us. We need to remind ourselves that the sinful nature which we all have is essentially an addiction to sin. *“Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin’”* (John 8:34).

When we see those who abuse substances “fall off the wagon,” we need to be mindful of our own daily relapses into sin.

The apostle Paul includes *“drunkards”* among the list of the unrighteous who *“...will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* He goes on, however, to say: *“And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

In the next installment we will consider some of the ways Christians can minister to those struggling with substance abuse.



* After we heard Dr. Sumey’s presentation at our District Delegate Conference, we invited him to share a condensed version of his essay with our readers. We thank him for doing so. We (as well as Dr. Sumey himself) would encourage any who are suffering from an addiction to be in contact with their local pastor for further scriptural guidance and counseling. Part II will follow next month.—Pastor Paul Fleischer, editor

**American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text revision). Washington, DC.

“Blessings in the Family of God”

Pastor Mark Gullerud • Bowdle, South Dakota

An essay titled “What place does the church (small “c”) have in a Christian’s faith-life?” was presented to a CLC Pastoral Conference at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyoming, in September, 2013. This is a first of two parts from that essay (abbreviated by the editor).

During Israel’s wilderness journeys children lost their parents and wives lost their husbands. At such times it was comforting for these believers to know that they were not left alone as orphans or widows. The LORD was watching out for them. The psalmist declares, “*God sets the solitary in families...*” (Psalm 68:6). The community of Israelites was the support group for the orphans and widows.

The reassuring divine message that “*God sets the solitary in families*” applies not only to temporal familial relationships but also to the spiritual family of God. The LORD gathers His children into religious communities. In our New Testament times these religious communities are known as churches or congregations. In our religious heritage, the larger spiritual community God has brought together is known as a church body or synod.

As God’s children travel through the wilderness of this life with all its spiritual pitfalls, threats, and dangers, it is especially reassuring to know they don’t have to go it alone. The LORD Himself is with them as an ever-present help in time of need. In addition, God provides His spiritual family with religious leaders to minister to their spiritual needs and at the same time groups His family of believers together so that they can be of help and support to one another.

Called Servants

St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping*

of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” (4:11-15)

During our formative years, parents help us grow. Their nurturing promotes our physical growth, but they also help us become mature adults. The most important kind of growth is spiritual. The Lord wants us to grow in knowledge, faith, and love so that we become spiritually mature.

While parents have the primary responsibility of teaching and training their little ones in the Lord (see Deuteronomy 6:6,7; Ephesians 6:4), God also supplies pastors and teachers to assist in that teaching and training.

Jesus gave to the apostle Peter—and to all His called servants of the Word—the holy charge to “*feed My lambs*” (John 21:15). This role is carried out in our congregations through the Worship Services, Sunday Schools, Christian Day Schools, Catechism Classes, Vacation Bible Schools, Christian Secondary Schools, Youth Outings, Retreats, and Camps. (We realize some families may not have a Christian congregation nearby with the great blessing of pastors and teachers who are specially trained to carry out this work.)

As the apostle Paul spells out in the Ephesians passage (above), the great blessings which come through ongoing Christian education include coming to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, becoming more Christ-like, not being easily misled by destructive false teachings, and being better equipped to carry out the work of ministering to others.

Shepherding the Flock

When the Lord calls pastors to serve in local congregations, they are His under-shepherds. A pastoral ministry is a distinct blessing because sheep have the tendency to stray from the paths of God. As shepherds of God’s flock, pastors provide counseling and guidance in dealing with various issues of life; they minister to the sick and distressed; they comfort those who have suffered loss; they encourage those who are experiencing trials.

Think of it, dear Christians. Those who are not part of a congregation

miss out on receiving a shepherd's care. In the animal kingdom, how dangerous it is for sheep when they are out in the pasture all by themselves. Similarly, life in a world filled with wolf-like predators is neither easy nor safe for isolated sheep of the Good Shepherd.

Additional Uses of the Keys of the Kingdom

During Jesus' ministry He conferred on His Church of believers the keys of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 16:19; 18:18,20; John 20:22,23), entrusting to them the use of the Means of Grace, the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Each believer has the authority to use those keys in his personal life for the benefit of others (such as parents with their children, as mentioned above).

By gathering Christians into congregations and calling servants of the Word to minister the keys of the kingdom in their stead, members of the congregation are richly blessed.

Through the preaching and teaching of God's Word, both law and gospel, members of our congregations are spiritually comforted, uplifted, and strengthened in their faith. They are especially comforted through the words of absolution and forgiveness, as well as through the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The isolated believer misses out on receiving these great benefits of the local church. (to be continued)



Pastor Ed & Mrs. Janice Starkey with daughter Melissa (Twin Cites), son Kaiser and wife Kaitlyn (Ft. Bragg, N.C.); turn page for report on the Missionary's recent commissioning.

Farewell and God-speed to Pastor Ed Starkey, CLC Missionary

Spokesman Asst. Editor, Paul R. Koch, reporting

Good friends may be parted by the ocean, but not from our hearts and prayers. That holds true as Ed Starkey, pastor of our CLC congregation, St. Peter's of Stambaugh-Iron River, Mich., became Missionary Starkey for India.

The commissioning service was held on September 23 at Messiah church of Eau Claire, and early in October the missionary and his wife arrived safely at their new home and field of labor in Chennai, India. May God bless them in their new environment and among people who hunger for God's Word!

Pastor Starkey and Janice both grew up in Waterloo, Iowa, where he was a member of the American Lutheran Church, whereas Janice was born and raised in a large Roman Catholic family. Ed says that it is true that former Catholics make good Lutherans when they learn that the just shall live by faith.

After being united in marriage (1979), the Starkeys found themselves in various Lutheran fellowships (ELCA, LCMS, and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren of America); they were blessed with two children (Melissa and Kaiser) and, after some years of playing and coaching minor league hockey teams, at age forty-two Ed entered the Lutheran Brethren Seminary in Fergus Falls, Minn.

Upon graduation Ed served congregations in that fellowship until the Lord brought him into contact with the CLC. After due deliberation he terminated his fellowship in the CLBA, for he found he was in agreement with the CLC in Biblical doctrine and practice.

They enrolled Kaiser at Immanuel Lutheran College and then moved to Eau Claire, where Ed audited seminary classes during a two-year colloquy, and we at Messiah congregation got to know and appreciate the Starkeys.

Since 2007 Pastor Starkey has served St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church in Iron River (Stambaugh, Mich.) in the fellowship of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

He relates that during the summer of 2013 as he was leading his congregation through a series of sermon studies on the Book of Acts, the Lord’s words, “*you shall be witnesses to Me...to the ends of the earth,*” led him to accept His call to witness in South India as CLC missionary. “We look forward to working together with fellow foreign missionaries and everyone from the CLC who is witnessing for Jesus at home and abroad.”



Board of Missions Chairman, Todd Ohlmann, pastor of Faith Lutheran congregation, Manchester, Mo., pronounces blessing upon Missionary Starkey; waiting in turn in the background is CLC President, Michael Eichstadt, pastor of Messiah congregation in Hales Corners, Wis.

Pastor Mark Gullerud, Secretary of the CLC Board of Missions, conducted the evening worship service at Messiah of Eau Claire. CLC President Michael Eichstadt preached on the text of Isaiah 66:18-22, and two-dozen clergy brethren added their blessings in the “*laying on of the hands*” (1 Timothy 4:14).

May God bless the Starkeys, from whom we are separated by miles, but with whom we are joined in heart. As Missionary Starkey put it, “We thank the Lord for your prayers and encouragement. We know that we can't do this—but He can. Therefore we pray for trust in Him for all our care, direction, and the results of His Word as we enter this new area of His service.”



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CORRECTION

In our November 2013 issue, the author of the "Miracles of Christ" article treating the raising of the widow's son at Nain (p. 15) was mis-identified. The article was written by Pastor Andrew Schaller, Watertown, S.Dak. We regret the error. -- Editor

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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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

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