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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”

(2 Corinthians 5:19)



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God and Sinners Reconciled!

Are there any more amazing words than that? We sing these words of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” (TLH 94) every year. Those words might roll off our tongues with hardly a thought. In fact, many secular choirs sing this famous hymn of Charles Wesley at this time of year without even pausing to wonder what “God and sinners reconciled!” actually means.

Could there be two more polar opposites than the holy God and wretched sinners? Could there be any more irreconcilable differences? It would be an astonishing thing that would grab the attention of the whole world if North and South Korea could be reconciled and find peace with each other. It would make your jaw drop in amazement if a serial killer would become best friends with the families of his victims.

Could irreverent rebellious creatures, who mock and blaspheme the God Who created them and revel in everything God forbids, be reconciled to the God Whom they despise? Should God, Who cannot tolerate sin and Who must punish every sin—yes, the God Who destroyed the entire world in a flood because of the wickedness of mankind—be reconciled to the sinners who hated Him and even crucified His own Son? That would be the news of all the ages.

And indeed it is! There is no more astonishing or more wonderful news than this, “God and sinners reconciled.” That is what we celebrate in this Christmas season. Christmas, of course, is just the beginning; and what a beginning it was. Four millennia of promises began to be fulfilled when Christ was born in Bethlehem.

The eternal Creator of all things became one of His creatures. The almighty God was born as a helpless little



There is no more astonishing or more wonderful news than this, “God and sinners reconciled.”

baby. The eternal, immortal Lord took on our mortal flesh and blood. Why? “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.*” (2 Corinthians 5:19) He came to do what we failed to do and could not do—live a truly God-pleasing life in absolutely everything. He came to do the unthinkable—bear the wrath of God against our sins. God was punished for the sins His people commit against Him. All so that we could be reconciled to Him; made at peace with God, to live with Him without fear.

No wonder the angel hosts sang of that amazing truth, “Glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.” This is what we celebrate in the weeks to come. Look into the manger once again. Look there with new wonder and amazement: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity, Pleased as Man with man to dwell; Jesus our Immanuel.”

Christmas may be just the beginning, but where God begins, it is as good as done. Christ has fulfilled all that He came to do. “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30) We sinners have been reconciled to God. Therefore we will also be glorified with Him in heaven. So we sing: “Hail, the heav’nly Prince of Peace! Hail, the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all He brings, Ris’n with healing in His wings. Mild He leaves His throne on high, Born that man no more may die; Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth.”

May we truly “Join the triumph of the skies; with th’ angelic host proclaim, ‘Christ is born in Bethlehem!’ Hark! the herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King!’”



David Reim is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Vernon, British Columbia.

On Watch

“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:37)

“Place your order today to receive it by December 24.” Modern shipping services are pretty remarkable. Most orders we place online arrive on our doorstep three days later. If we’re in a real pinch, we can pay extra and receive that package by the very next day. Using our smart phone or computers, we can even track those Christmas gifts we ordered and learn the day of their arrival. The more important the package, the more we want to be aware of when it will arrive.

Each Sunday, the church keeps tracking another, more important arrival—an arrival that will change everything forever! “He shall come again to judge the quick [the living] and the dead” we confess to one another in the Apostles’ Creed.

Our Savior, Who came once as a lowly Servant, Who lay in a manger to live for us, Who was later nailed to a cross to die for us, is coming again. This second coming, however, will be in glory, on His kingly throne, and surrounded by angels. At that moment, a trumpet will sound, all the dead will be raised, the believers will be separated from the unbelievers, and *“we shall always be with the Lord.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

While Holy Scripture is abundantly clear about the impending return of Jesus, there is no “app” for our phones to track the important arrival of that Day. *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* (Mark 13:32) Many false prophets have tried to convince us that they have “an app for that” and are able to track the day and hour of Jesus’ return, despite the simple, clear words of our Savior.

Because we cannot track the precise arrival of that Day, nor the day of our death (*“My times are in Your hand”* Psalm 31:15), the Lord wants His people always to be spiritually alert and watchful. *“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. . . . But you,*



Because we cannot track the precise arrival of that Day, nor the day of our death, the Lord wants His people always to be spiritually alert and watchful.

brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6)

How then can we stay alert and watchful? Just as the Lord used His Word and sacrament to call you to faith in Him, He uses His Word and sacrament to keep you alert for His return. He’s doing it right now through the Word you are reading. He does it as He speaks His Word to you at church or in your home devotions. We stay watchful through prayer, as we speak to Him. *“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.”* (Mark 13:33)

Our Lord also uses His sacrament of Holy Communion, *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”* (1 Corinthians 11:26) As we receive the body and blood of our Savior, we are reminded of His sacrifice to save us from our sins.

The Lord also uses our brothers and sisters in Christ to help us stay watchful for His return. *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

When I know an important package is being shipped to me, I keep a close eye on my phone for any alerts of its arrival. We know that He who came once on that first Christmas to save us is coming again to take us to be with Him forever.

Therefore our Savior says, *“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”* Amen.

Nathan Pfeiffer is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Spokane, Washington.



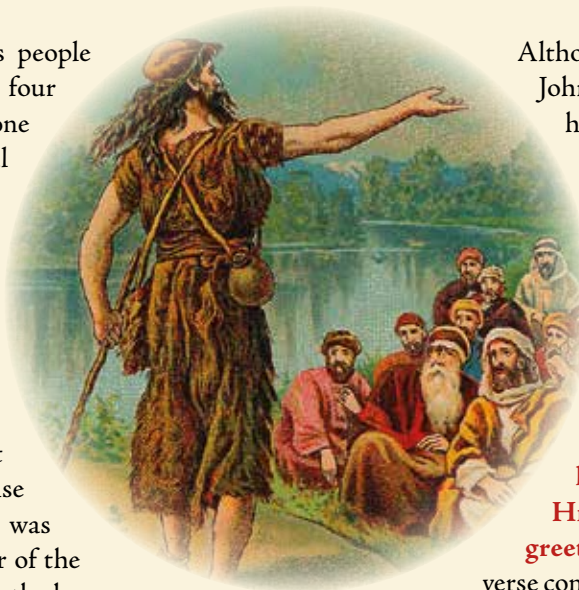
HYMN 272

“When All the World was Cursed”

God had not spoken to His people for 430 years. More than four centuries had come and gone since Malachi had declared God’s final Old Testament promise, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” (Malachi 4:5)

The prolonged silence was broken, and that final prophecy fulfilled, when an angel of the Lord appeared to the elderly priest Zacharias as he was burning incense in the temple. The angel’s message was that Malachi’s prophesied forerunner of the Messiah would be born by Elisabeth, the barren wife of Zacharias. “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. . . . He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’” (Luke 1:11-17)

We know that son of Zacharias and Elisabeth as John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. Hymn 272 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is the only hymn in the section designated “ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.” Verse 1 says, “With true forerunner’s zeal/ The Greater One he named,/ And Him, as yet unknown,/ As Savior he proclaimed.” What? “As yet unknown”? Yes, John was preparing the way for the Messiah even before he knew Who that Messiah was. That recognition would come later, when he saw the sign that God had given him. (see John 1:33).



Although it was not until Jesus’ baptism that John recognized Him as the Messiah, he had in fact met and recognized this same Messiah some thirty years earlier, when both John and Jesus were in their mothers’ wombs. Did you notice that the angel told Zacharias that his son would be “filled with the Holy Spirit, *even from his mother’s womb*”? Read Luke 1:39-41 for the account. Johann Olearius¹ therefore writes of John, “Before he yet was born,/ He leaped in joyful meeting,/ Confessing Him as Lord/ Whose mother he was greeting.” (v. 2) Olearius then in the same verse connects this first meeting between the two with John’s later identification of Jesus as the Savior.

“By Jordan’s rolling stream,/ A new Elijah bold,/ He testified of Him/ Of whom the prophets told.”

Verse 3 sings the content of John’s proclamation: “Behold the Lamb of God/ That bears the world’s transgression,/ Whose sacrifice removes/ The Enemy’s oppression./ Behold the Lamb of God,/ Who beareth all our sin,/ Who for our peace and joy/ Will full atonement win.”

This hymn exemplifies the traditional Lutheran chorale: it is strictly Scriptural, teaching and applying the objective truth of God’s Word rather than appealing to shallow, subjective emotionalism. Notice that the first three verses are *exposition* of Scriptural truth, then verse 4 is *application* (“Thrice blessed every one/ Who heeds the proclamation/ Which John the Baptist brought,/ Accepting Christ’s salvation”), and finally verse 5 is *supplication* (Oh, grant, Thou Lord of Love,/ That we receive, rejoicing,/ The word proclaimed by John,/ Our true repentance voicing;/ That gladly we may walk/ Upon our Savior’s way/ Until we live with Him/ In His eternal day).

May it be so with us also, now and always. Amen.



Craig Owings is a retired teacher and serves as assistant editor of the *Lutheran Spokesman*. He lives in Cape Coral, Florida.

1 Johann G. Olearius (1635-1711), a Lutheran clergyman, also wrote Hymn #55, “Come, Thou precious Ransom, come” as well as entire books of hymns, devotional works, and a Bible commentary.

Listen to the hymn at <http://lutherantacoma.com/hymns/272.mp3>

When God Comes with a Still Small Voice

(Please read 1 Kings 19:1-18 for context.)

Elijah was feeling tired and dejected. To him, all his devotion and hard work in serving the Lord seemed to make little difference. He felt as if he had reached the quitting point and just wanted to die. The Lord, however, had more planned for Elijah, and He prepared him for what was yet to come.

When Elijah reached his appointed destination, God gave him the opportunity to express the disappointment lying on his heart. The great prophet was still a humble human being who struggled with weariness and despair. The Lord listened and then showed Elijah that there was much more going on than he realized—things of great significance—and the Lord would provide him with everything he needed to serve and glorify the God of his fathers.

Wind, earthquake, and fire were sent—signs of power and judgement. While such things are impressive, they are not how the Lord works in hearts. Extraordinary power was in abundance when Elijah stood against the prophets of Baal—God’s fire consumed the sacrifice, the altar, and even the water; but how many people were moved to repent? The king himself redoubled his efforts to hound the prophet. God showed Elijah that he was to focus just on what God said and continue working in the kingdom. It was no time to be distracted by how poorly others responded to what God revealed.

Believers love to hear how God came to Elijah in “*a still small voice*.” When God comes in that way, it shows intimacy and tenderness between God and His people. They really need this, and perhaps even more so when they are feeling down and out. It is His way of reassuring them that He remains at their side and will be with them whatever comes their way. And what is coming their way? It is nothing less than what

God intends to use to support His children and extend His kingdom. There may be times when we consider how things are going in our lives and conclude that everything is going to pieces. What we don’t see is how God is working everything together in His grand fashion to fulfill His good and gracious will and to glorify His name. That means we can relax and focus on the role He has given us, knowing that He is fully aware of the big picture and working all together for the good of those already in His kingdom and those He is going to bring into it.

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We can become excessively preoccupied in what *we* are doing and hyper-focused on *our* strategies. It’s not about us! “*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ . . .*” (2 Corinthians 5:20) We know that the message we share may be an aroma of death or an aroma of life to the hearer (2 Corinthians 2:16), but how it turns out is not our primary concern. First and foremost, we want to be faithful and convey accurately what the Lord has revealed in His Word.

It does not help to worry about what people may think of us when we faithfully proclaim God’s Word. Once again, it’s not about us. Not ever. It is always about serving the Lord and glorifying Him; and He is glorified most of all when we proclaim the Gospel, for the Gospel alone is “*the power of God unto salvation*” (Romans 1:16), and our ministry, as laypeople and clergy, is first and foremost about seeking and saving the lost. “Repent and believe” is the foundation and substance of our message and why we are here. Jesus says to us all, “*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*” (John 20:21) We pray that the Lord will equip us to serve exactly where He has placed us in His grand plan of seeking and saving the lost!



Delwyn Maas is pastor of Gift of God Lutheran Church in Mapleton, North Dakota.

The Calculation of Faith

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.”

(Hebrews 11:23-26)

“Life is like a coin. You can spend it any way you wish. But you only spend it once.” This helpful insight, attributed to American author Lillian Dickson, helps us to see time as a valuable and limited commodity. We can use it for many different purposes, but no matter how we use our time, we are ever exchanging it for something else; and once we have done that we will not get it back. No matter how we spend our days, there is a calculation involved. We pay out the coin of life for what we believe to be worth it.

These verses from Hebrews tell us of people of faith who made calculations about their time in this world.

The parents of Moses risked their lives by hiding their son, in defiance of the command of Pharaoh that all the male children of the Israelites should be killed. This evidently involved something greater than the natural love and concern of parents for their child. They saw that there was something special about Moses and believed that God had a special purpose for him. It was that conviction that moved them to take extraordinary steps to hide the child Moses and preserve his life, for their courageous act is held up to us here as an act of faith.

But it is Moses himself that the writer especially presents as a man of faith in the unusual and surprising choices he made in spending his life. He had the enviable position of grandson to Pharaoh. Rank, power, wealth, and comfort were all his. But he gave it up, choosing instead to suffer affliction with the people of God. He believed that for him to live in luxury

How could Moses make a calculation such as this that was so at odds with the world’s view of things? *“He looked to the reward.”*

and ease as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter would be to enjoy “the passing pleasures of sin” among idol-worshiping people who were persecuting God’s people. It would be to rebel against God, Who had called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. By faith Moses saw that to suffer with his people was to endure “the reproach of Christ.” He was pleased to be identified with the coming Savior. He was not only willing to accept the reproach of the world because of his faith, he even regarded that reproach as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. How could he make a calculation such as this that was so at odds with the world’s view of things? *“He looked to the reward.”* He kept on looking away from the troubles of the life to which God had called him to the promised reward of eternal life that he had in Christ.

We have the hope of that same reward of eternal life in Christ. It is what keeps us following Christ even though that means making sacrifices and enduring the contempt of the world. In the Bible God teaches us that these things are not only to be endured, but even valued as marks that we belong to the Lord and not to the world. Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”* (Philippians 1:29) Paul said that they were to take this as proof from God of their salvation.

Suffering the reproach of Christ in this world is the best way to spend the coin of life.

John Klatt is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado.



“You can have a relationship with Jesus Christ, just invite Him into your heart.”

“I made a decision for Christ last week.”

These statements and others like them are examples of what is broadly termed “decision theology.” Decision theology is taught in many denominations. It is frequently encountered in Christian literature and in conversations with other Christians.

What can you do when decision theology comes up in conversation? Share what you believe about your own inability to accept Jesus and then invite your conversational counterpart to look at God’s Word with you. As starting points, you might consider the following passages and, with the Word, “be ready to give an answer.”

“You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”
(Ephesians 2:1)

The first ten verses of Ephesians chapter two are the spiritual biography of a believer. The life-story begins in death: “[You] were dead in trespasses and sins.” There is no wiggle room to get around the reality of death in this passage. Paul is not merely using “death” as a symbol. God is not being figurative with these words. We all, from the beginning of our life, are spiritually *dead*.

No dead body can get up and walk. A dead body can’t invite life into itself nor can it make a decision to accept life, and neither can a dead soul. For a dead body or soul to live, there must be a resurrection accomplished by an outside source. Jesus was the life-giving source that raised the dead during His ministry. Likewise, only God can effect spiritual resurrection. “You He made alive. . . .”

Decision theology denies the effects of original sin. Additional passages that show our spiritual deadness and our utter inability to decide for Christ include Romans 8:6-7 and 1 Corinthians 12:3.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” (John 15:16)

Jesus Himself states matter-of-factly to His disciples, “*You did not choose Me, but I chose you.*” Jesus was not speaking about His specific call to apostleship. Rather, He spoke of choosing and appointing all of His followers to bear fruit—the fruit which branches can bear only when connected to the Vine (John 15:1ff). Our spiritual death can only produce the works of the flesh (Ephesians 2:2-3, Galatians 5:19-21).

Paul’s biography of a believer in Ephesians chapter two reflects these words of Jesus. The believer begins in death, but God makes him alive by grace. The whole package of salvation—from death to life to the faith which lays hold of that life to the fruits of faith produced by the believer—is a gift of God, and none of it comes from ourselves.

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth.”
(Psalm 115:1)

Human nature gravitates toward decision theology because it can’t let go of its fierce independence and desire for self-honor. The pride of human nature doesn’t like giving God all the credit and glory. This leads to inserting man’s will, man’s choice, man’s decision, man’s power into the plan of salvation. It’s possible for a sinner to insert himself into his *view* of salvation, but that doesn’t change the reality. The truth of genuine salvation is that it doesn’t spring from the sinner in any way.

Salvation is a pure gift of God’s undeserved love. The psalmist declares “*not unto us . . . give glory.*” Rather the glory is all the Lord’s “*because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.*”

Decision theology takes away honor from God and robs Him of His glory. Nothing that does so can be true.

Wayne Eichstadt is pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley, Washington.



THE ROAD TO REFORMATION

In observation of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are presenting a brief survey of the life of Martin Luther. The series continues with major events in the life of the Reformer that took place after 1517.

Life of Luther—1520

At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Martin Luther would be asked to recant what he had written about the Catholic Church.

Several of those writings important to the Reformation were written in 1520.

To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation (August)

Earlier in his life Luther had defended the pope, believing that the pope was unaware of the abuses and false teachings promoted by his underlings. By 1520 Luther was convinced that the pope was at the heart of the problem. In *To the Christian Nobility*, Luther attacked the church hierarchy of Rome, asserting that it had established a threefold wall around itself to immunize it against any reform.

The first wall was the papacy's claim that it was supreme over all earthly authorities. Luther argued for the "priesthood of all believers" as taught in Scripture (see I Peter 2:9). Since all Christians were on an equal footing before God, Catholic clergy had no authority over others beyond God's Word, to which all are subject.

The second wall protecting the papacy was the claim that only the pope could interpret Scripture. Luther countered that the power of the keys, that of forgiving and retaining sins, was something owned by the entire priesthood of believers, not exclusively the pope. He held, too, that the pope himself was capable of error. And a pope capable of error could not claim infallibility when it came to interpreting Scripture.

The third wall guarding the papacy was the claim that only the pope could convene a church council. If indeed the pope was capable of error, then it was not only the right but also the duty of the church to apply church discipline, as prescribed in Matthew 18. Action taken against a pope may require that a council of Christians convene for such a purpose.

In this pamphlet Luther was providing the German civil authorities ammunition to refuse submission to papal authority, and to rise up as leaders of church reform. Papal courts, indulgences, expensive masses, and unnecessary bureaucracy all drained the wealth of Germany. Luther sought to decentralize the Roman church and support

greater German independence. Luther also condemned the pompous ceremonies centered on the pope, pilgrimages to Rome, monasticism, the required celibacy of priests, the canonizing of new "saints," and mendicant begging.

Babylonian Captivity of the Church (October)

In this treatise Luther compared what the Catholic Church was saying about its seven sacraments with what the Bible teaches. Luther believed the church was being held in exile by the pope just as the Israelites of the Old Testament were held in exile by Nebuchadnezzar during the Babylonian Captivity. Luther openly denied that there were seven sacraments.

Luther regarded Baptism and the Lord's Supper as true sacraments. Nevertheless, the Lord's Supper was being abused by three false teachings: the refusal to share Christ's blood with the laity, the doctrine of transubstantiation, and, above all, by the teaching that the Lord's Supper was a sacrifice offered by the priest to atone for the sins of the living and the dead.

Confirmation, marriage, ordination (Holy Orders), and extreme unction (Last Rites) could not be established as sacraments by Scripture. Luther believed a true sacrament needed to have a divine promise that calls forth faith with a visible sign attached to it. Baptism and the Lord's Supper clearly have that. In view of all these false teachings Luther, in *Babylonian Captivity*, forthrightly accused the pope of being the Antichrist.

On the Freedom of a Christian (November)

In the last of the 1520 treatises, Luther expounded on the truth that Christians fully forgiven by God are no longer under compulsion to keep His law in order to be saved. Rather, as a fruit of their faith, they will freely and willingly serve God and their neighbor. In this sense he could state,

"A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."

Joe Lau is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.



A SLICE OF LIFE IN THE CLC SNAPSHOTS OF CONGREGATIONS
FROM AROUND THE CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

Mankato, Minnesota

On September 15, 1866 five German Lutherans, Henry Himmelman, John Dreher, Jacob Traub, Simon Blume, and Frederick Steuernagel, signed articles of incorporation for “The German Lutheran Emanuel Church of Mankato.” The next year, the congregation’s first pastor, William Vomhof drew up the congregation’s constitution and changed the spelling from “Emanuel” to “Immanuel.”

From its founding Immanuel belonged to the Minnesota Synod, which was a founding member of the Synodical Conference in 1872. Eventually, in 1917 the Minnesota Synod became a district of the Wisconsin Synod, of which Immanuel remained a member until 1956.

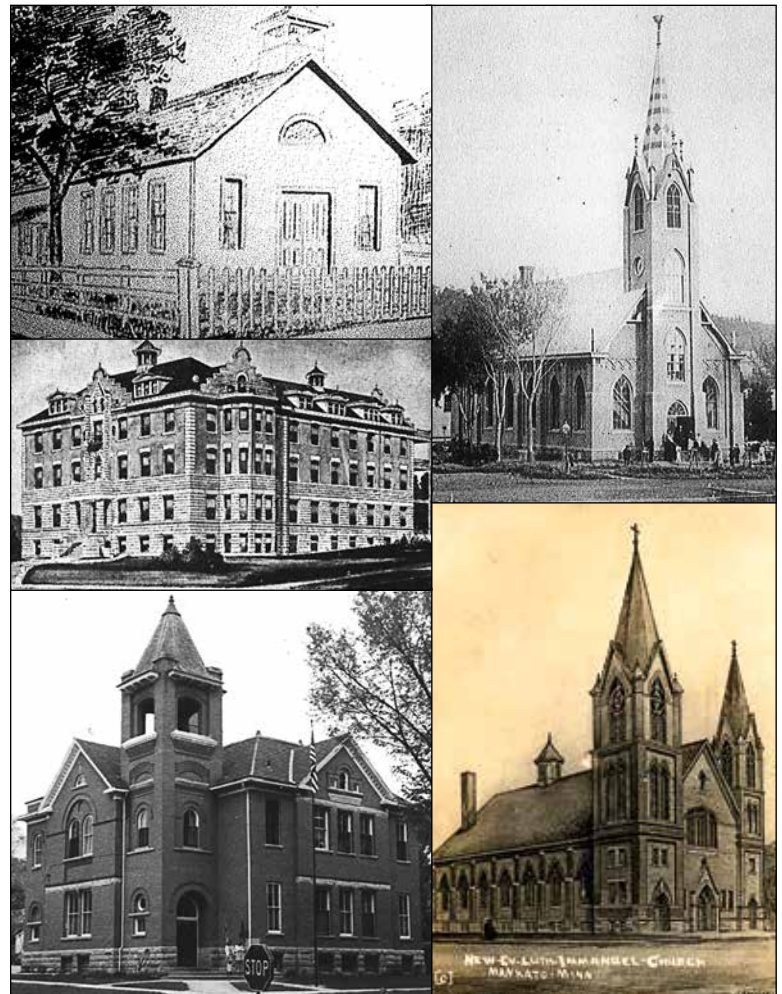
Throughout its history Immanuel has undertaken many sizeable building projects. The first church, built in 1867 less than a block away from the current church, was a combined church and parsonage. The second church, with a single spire in the front, was built on the site of our current location and dedicated on October 12, 1884. The previous church, then functioning as the school, became too small for that purpose. Therefore, the congregation built a new school in 1887. A third school was built at that same location in 1903.

Immanuel was also instrumental in the community of Mankato. The church took a leading role in the establishment of Immanuel Lutheran Hospital, built in 1906 and later purchased and operated by Mayo Clinic Health Systems. A few years later Immanuel helped found Bethany Ladies College, which is now Bethany Lutheran College, and is operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In 1913 Immanuel built its third church in the same location as the second one. In typical German style, the bricks from the second church were carefully preserved during demolition and reused on the back of the third church. The third church had two steeples in a similar style to the current church, but considerably taller.

In 1956, Immanuel was one of the very first congregations that felt compelled by the Word of God to withdraw from the Wisconsin Synod due to Wisconsin’s ongoing fellowship with the Missouri Synod. As a result, Immanuel became a natural gathering place for many who shared its conviction.

A few years later, in 1959, Immanuel Lutheran College—with high school, college, and seminary departments—was



Photos clockwise from top left: first church and school, 1867-1883; second church, 1884-1913; third church, 1913-1971; third school, built 1903; Immanuel Lutheran Hospital, built 1906.

founded in Mankato. A building that had been purchased years earlier was converted to a school building. In 1963, Immanuel Lutheran College moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, but Immanuel/Mankato continued operation of its own local high school, and does so to this day.

In 1969, Immanuel’s fourth school was built, attached to the church. The old school was sold.

On July 4, 1971, the church was struck by lightning, causing severe damage to the structure of the building. Pastor Robert Reim, thinking quickly, saved the new school by shutting the fire doors. Amazingly, the sturdy old bricks were still stable and sound. So, the new sanctuary was able to be designed



Top: some of those who have been members of Immanuel since the CLC was formed.

Middle left: attendees of the "interim conference," held at Immanuel in 1959.

Middle right: church fire, July 4, 1971.
Bottom: the fourth church

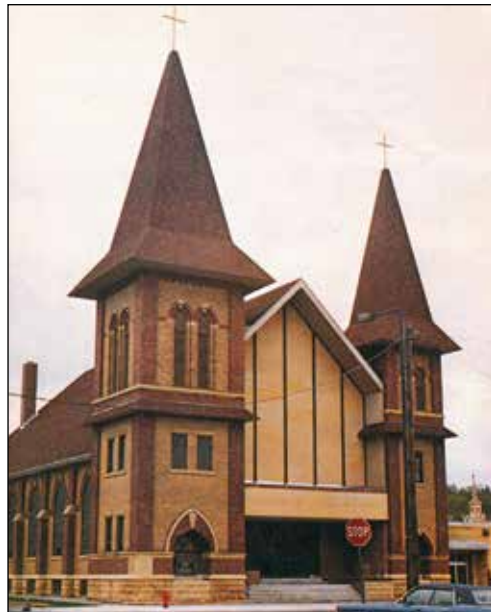


Sunday service attendance averages 326 people. Several weekly and monthly Bible studies are regularly hosted, including Sunday morning, Wednesday evening, Friday Men's Breakfast, Women's Service Organization, Women's Auxiliary, men and women's county jail visitation, and a local assisted living home. In addition, monthly worship services are conducted at three nursing homes.

within the old shell. In 1972, the current fourth church was rebuilt and dedicated. It has slightly shorter steeples than the previous church.

In 1979, Immanuel High School moved to the school building next to the church. In 1991, a Multi-Purpose Facility was completed which added three new high school rooms and a gymnasium.

Members of Immanuel continue to be very active in the work of the church, the school, and the synod. Immanuel sponsors a Christian women's retreat held every year in Winona, Wisconsin; an annual arts camp for children in 5th-8th grade, an annual "Whitewater Winter Camp" for young men and women of high school and college age, and a biennial youth conference.



Immanuel maintains a weekly fifteen-minute radio ministry which plays throughout southern Minnesota. The entire Sunday worship service is also played twice weekly on local cable television. This past summer, Immanuel began holding worship services and Bible Class on Saturday nights as well as Sunday mornings, a practice that has been well received by our membership.

Immanuel has a very active evangelism committee which does both outreach and "in-reach." Some activities include an outreach booth at the Blue Earth County Fair, decorating a float for several local parades, hosting the annual church picnic, hosting an ice cream social, and putting on a one-day Christmas Bible School and an Easter Bible School for K-6th graders.

Immanuel also owns and operates Pilgrims Rest Cemetery. Every year on Memorial Day a service is held at the cemetery to honor those who have died for our freedom and, most of all, to give honor to Christ who died for our freedom from sin.

At the start of 2017, Immanuel's overall membership was 920 souls (716 communicants; 204 pre-communicants).

At the celebration of Immanuel's 125th anniversary, member Lowell Schreyer summarized, "While changes in personnel and property were many in the first 125 years, one factor remained constant for the critical decisions that enabled

Immanuel Lutheran Church to endure—adherence to Scripture in the face of forces that would have veered it from that course." That was true then and continues to be true 25 years later.

Immanuel means "God with us." Our gracious Jehovah God has continued to be with and to bless the members of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church. Through the power of His Word, many individuals have been blessed through the work of the ministry in this corner of God's kingdom!



Joe Naumann is pastor of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

Mission Helper Trip to Nepal—2017

The participants in the 2017 Mission Helper Trip to Nepal landed in Kathmandu at 6:00 A.M. on Wednesday, July 12. Our hotel there was the Norwegian House, so named because of all the Norwegian guests it accommodates. We had about seven hours of rest before we piled onto our first bus.

Nine days later, we rolled back through the gates of the Norwegian House around 11:30 P.M. It was all but impossible to process everything that had happened thus far, and we were only at the halfway point of the trip! We had traveled several hundreds of miles through cities and hills (we were told not to call them mountains because that is offensive to the people who climb actual mountains). We had taught in many churches and schools.

We'd broken into small groups when we went out to teach, each group made up of five or six people, including a translator. Often we would travel as one large group to a general area, then break up into our small groups to teach in specific villages. We all took off our sandals before entering a building, as is customary. Each helper would be introduced by a translator, the name followed by the syllable "oh" as required by Nepali grammar (Drew-oh, Sam-oh, Dani-oh, and so on.) Then we would teach an hour-long presentation using the "Seven C's" teaching device, following the history of the world through Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Confusion, Conception, Crucifixion and Consummation. After each lesson, all the children would line up to receive some juice, cookies, and a drawstring bag with the text of Matthew 28:19 ("Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,") printed across the back.

Many times we were offered meals or gifts after presenting. Once, we were treated to a two-liter bottle of Pepsi which we drank on top of a hill while conversing with the pastor and members before hiking back down. This may not sound like a grand gesture, but it represented a significant sacrifice for the people in that remote village. We, who had spent a good chunk of the morning getting there, understood and appreciated their gift.

Music pervaded our time in Nepal. Every place in which we taught welcomed us with an outpouring of enthusiastic song, usually accompanied by a hand drum. Even when we went to



Nepalese children sing a joyful song to their Lord Jesus.

church in Kathmandu, much of the service was made up of singing.

Talking to the people we met in Nepal, we were surprised at how much we had in common. They had seen many of the same movies that we had, listened to much of the same music we do, and wore many of the same brands of clothing that we wear. It was also quite staggering to find how much more we did not have in common. Many homes were little more than huts of clay and mortar. Very few had cars, instead riding a bus or having a motorbike to commute.

With all these similarities and differences to consider, perhaps no connection was more evident than our shared faith in Christ Jesus. To come halfway around the world and find thousands of people teaching and preaching the same Jesus Christ and Him crucified that we also confess is nothing short of a miracle—one that only the Word could accomplish.

Inspiring, too, was the willingness and devotion of those who organized this Mission Helper Trip, and worked to make it successful. One cannot help but call to mind Jesus' words to Martha in Luke 10:42, "*but one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*"



Drew Naumann is currently a senior in the Pre-Theology Department at Immanuel Lutheran College. He lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Flooding in Nepal

This past August, South Asia was devastated by major flooding during the yearly monsoon season. While seasonal monsoon rains, a lifeline for farmers across South Asia, typically cause some loss of life and property every year between July and September in the region, this year's flooding was the worst in many years. In Nepal, in what the United Nations has called the worst flood in a decade, approximately 150 people lost their lives and more than



460,000 people were forced to leave their homes. In mid-August, Pastor Raju Bhitrakoti reported that approximately 350 families from the congregations in our sister church body, the HCLCN (Himalayan Church of the Lutheran Confession, Nepal), were badly affected, having been displaced by flooding and landslides.

In order to help with relief efforts, the Board of Missions authorized \$5,000 to be sent to Nepal from the Mission Development Fund. Raju, along with other members of the HCLCN in Kathmandu, acted quickly to provide aid to those in need. As soon as it was safe to travel, they went, first, to the mid-west section of Nepal. In the Dang district, they were able to distribute rice bags, lentils, and cooking oil to more than 120 families. In the Tulsipur area, they handed out relief materials to thirty families. On their way back to Kathmandu, they distributed relief aid to another fifty-four families.

Upon returning to Kathmandu, they gathered more relief materials from Eternal Life Church and went southeast to Bardiabas in the Mahottari district. This district was among the hardest hit by the flooding. Most of the houses were damaged and uninhabitable. The government was providing some food in that area. Raju and his team were able to provide



rice, oil, and lentils, as well as other needed relief materials such as tarps (to make shelters), flashlights, mosquito nets, and clothing. Approximately one hundred fifty families were assisted.

Raju reports, "We appreciate the prompt response from the CLC that helped us to move quickly with relief aid to our brothers and sisters in Nepal. Altogether more than three hundred fifty families were helped with food, tents, blankets, used clothes, and cooking utensils. The people who received aid were glad and thankful to the CLC for sending them love gifts in their time of need."

There is still much work to be done in Nepal, as resources are needed for the reconstruction of homes and businesses. Please continue to keep the people of Nepal and our brothers and sisters in the HCLCN in your prayers.



Robert Sauers is pastor of Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Morris, Minnesota, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions.

Above: villagers negotiate a flooded street. Upper right: distributing food to families in the Dang district of Nepal. Lower right: Distributing relief supplies in the Mahottari district; HCLCN Pastor Raju Bhitrakoti in the red T-shirt, his father, Pastor J.B. Bhitrakoti in straw hat.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS DECEMBER 2017

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; LSB = Lutheran Service Book, 2006

Date	Verse	Reading	Comments
Dec 1	TLH 415	Matthew 24:1-14	Before the end comes, things will get worse, but salvation is in store for the believers in Christ.
Dec 2	TLH 526; LSB 659	Matthew 24:15-34	The destruction of Jerusalem would be a tremendous tragedy, but not all would be lost. God would still care for His children.
Dec 4	TLH 611	Matthew 24:35-51	Heaven and earth will pass away suddenly, but believers will be safe in the arms of their Savior, Jesus.
Dec 5	TLH 609	Matthew 25:1-13	May God give us heavenly wisdom so that we are eager and prepared for the Last Day.
Dec 6	TLH 606	Matthew 25:14-30	Christ will come again and bless His faithful.
Dec 7	TLH 607	Matthew 25:31-46	The bad news is that some will be lost. The good news is that anyone in Christ will go to eternal life.
Dec 8	TLH 205	John 20:1-18	Our own resurrections from the dead are certain because of Jesus' resurrection.
Dec 9	TLH 208	John 20:19-31	Trust that He lives for you, and have everlasting life through Him!
Dec 11	TLH 61	Isaiah 40:1-5	The Lord more than covers our sin with forgiveness and comfort.
Dec 12	TLH 63	Isaiah 40:6-11	The Word of God stands forever, and the Word says, "Christ is coming to tend His flock like a shepherd!"
Dec 13	TLH 19	Isaiah 40:12-26	Who can doubt God? He made the universe and all that is in it!
Dec 14	WS 701	Isaiah 40:27-31	Jesus comes to give rest to the weary.
Dec 15	WS 715	Isaiah 7:1-14	A sign of God's love and faithfulness toward us for all time: The Virgin bears the Infant.
Dec 16	TLH 86	Isaiah 7:15-25	Isaiah promised that the enemies of Ahaz would be laid waste in the less time than it takes a young boy to grow up. Jesus, God with us, defeated our greatest enemies.
Dec 18	TLH 62	Jeremiah 31:1-6	The LORD promised restoration to His people in exile. When we consider Jesus' birth, we remember how we who were once exiled in sin are restored in Him.
Dec 19	TLH 92	Jeremiah 31:7-9	Surely it is God who saves us!
Dec 20	WS 706	Jeremiah 31:10-14	Proclaim the salvation of the Lord! Or maybe we should say, "Go tell it on the mountain!"
Dec 21	TLH 273	Jeremiah 31:15-20	Jeremiah foretells the violent reaction to Christ's birth (see Mt 2:16-18). The Good News was not (and still is not) received by the proud and self-seeking people like Herod.
Dec 22	TLH 646	Jeremiah 31:21-30	The theme of restoration again returns to the prophet's lips. We realize that spiritual restoration as well as physical was on the Lord's mind (v. 22).
Dec 23	WS 713; TLH 94	Jeremiah 31:31-40	The new covenant is founded on Christ. It is not a covenant of law, but rather of forgiveness.
Dec 25	WS 714; TLH 87	Luke 2:1-20	The time has come and our salvation is revealed!
Dec 26	WS 711; TLH 137	Luke 2:21-40	Lord, now let us depart in peace, for we have seen our Savior through the eyes of faith.
Dec 27	WS 762; TLH 84	Luke 2:41-52	Jesus grows up, taking the first steps in His journey toward the cross.
Dec 28	TLH 410	Revelation 21:1-14	Heaven will be a complete separation from everything that is evil.
Dec 29	TLH 656	Revelation 21:15-27	This stunning picture language tells us that heaven will be beautiful beyond what we can imagine.
Dec 30	WS 800	Revelation 22:1-21	Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

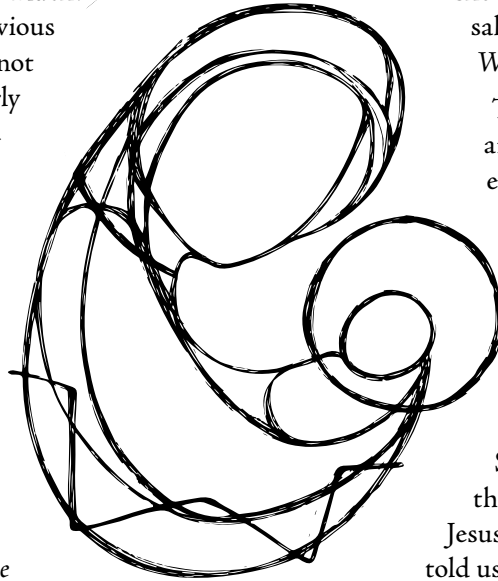
Who Won?

What can a baby do? “Not much!” would seem to be the obvious answer. A newborn cannot walk or speak or send a text. Much of early infancy is spent in eating and sleeping. Yet there is one thing babies can do better than almost anyone else. Without any effort of their own, they fill those around them with a sense of wonder and expectation.

Mom and Dad carefully cradle the new member of the family in their arms and marvel at how she opens and closes her little fists. They smile as she scrunches up her face while she naps. They share David’s sentiments: “*You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” (Ps. 139:13-14 NIV84) Expectations of grandparents and friends soar as they imagine what God has in store for this new life. Will he grow up to serve the Lord as a doctor, farmer, or perhaps be the first one in the family to study for the public ministry? Anything seems possible.

Yet the wonder and expectations are tempered by the realization that this child, too, is a descendant of Adam, and therefore has inherited Adam’s sinful nature. Jesus told Nicodemus, “*Flesh gives birth to flesh.*” (John 3:6 NIV84) Along with the child’s gifts and future accomplishments, there will be failings and rebellion against God and parents. There will be the need for correction and repentance. He may grow up and discover a cure for cancer, but he cannot overcome the fatal curse of sin at work in all of us.

What chance is there then that a baby could rescue mankind from sin and death? But that is just what God promised. No sooner had sin infected the world than God announced that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. Eve’s confidence in the promise is reflected in Luther’s translation of Genesis 4:1. After giving birth to her firstborn son, Cain, Eve said, “*I have the Man, the LORD.*” Luther felt that Eve supposed her child was the Messiah. “Although this was a false hope, it nevertheless is clear that Eve was a saintly woman and that



What chance is there then that a baby could rescue mankind from sin and death?

she believed the promise concerning the future salvation through the blessed Seed.” (Luther’s Works, vol. I, p. 242, ©CPH 1958)

The Advent and Christmas seasons are filled with the greatest wonder and expectation, not because of the material gifts we exchange with one another, but because of God’s priceless gift of His own Son. What could the Baby in the manger do? What a wonder that the eternal God would take on our flesh and blood to live on this sin-ravaged earth! From day one He was our perfect Substitute under God’s law. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, Jesus did not inherit Adam’s sin. If He had not told us, could you ever imagine that the holy God would be willing to do what you are supposed to do, and then suffer the death you deserve?

Because Jesus was born, every other birth is accompanied with the wonder of that child already being redeemed and reconciled to God by Jesus’ blood. Parents can have the highest expectations for their child, trusting that the Lord loves little ones and receives them as His lambs in the water of Baptism. He will nurture their faith with the milk of the Word and strengthen them to fight the good fight of faith until they receive a crown of glory.

No matter what your age or situation in life, look to Jesus in wonder and expectation. Live in awe of His love toward us who by nature are totally unlovable. Come to Him with the expectation that He will never turn away a broken and contrite heart, but instead will daily provide His blessings in our personal lives, families, congregations, and church body.

What can a baby do? When the Baby’s name is *Jesus*, the answer is, “Anything at all!” There is nothing He cannot do in carrying out His saving will. May the love of God in the person of the Christchild fill us all with the greatest wonder and expectation.



Michael Eichstadt is pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, and president of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

SEEN IN PASSING

Items of interest from various sources of religious news and opinion, in print and on the web.

Obama-Era Restrictions on Freedom of Religion Reversed.

In a huge gain for proponents of religious liberty, Attorney General Jeff Sessions on October 6 issued a memo to all federal agencies announcing plans to strictly enforce the terms of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. The memo effectively cancels Obama-era regulations that compelled individuals and institutions to act contrary to their religious beliefs or face government sanctions. The memo begins, “The freedom of religion is a fundamental right of paramount importance, expressly protected by federal law.” “The RFRA,” affirmed Sessions, “prohibits the federal government from substantially burdening any aspect of religious observance or practice,” including requiring that hospitals provide abortions or else risk losing federal Medicaid funding, requiring Catholic schools to provide birth control, and requiring church institutions to hire and retain employees who do not share their religious beliefs. Sessions, Jeff. “Memorandum for All Executive

Departments and Agencies.” *Press Release. Justice.gov*, 6 Oct. 2017. Web. 11 Oct. 2017.

Scientific Support Growing for “Conscious Universe.”

In an article for NPR, Dartmouth physics professor Marcelo Gleiser reported on the small but increasing number of astronomers and physicists who are convinced that there is some kind of overarching “consciousness” inherent in the universe, and possibly even an overarching purpose. They say that many observed phenomena cannot be explained by a mechanistic, Darwinian, “it-all-happened-by-accident” approach. Examples include electric-charge conservation, the fact that physical laws apply at all scales from subatomic to galactic, and Einstein’s so-called “spooky action at a distance,” where one particle seems to “know” what another particle is doing even when separated by very large distances. Gleiser, Marcelo. “Is the Universe Conscious?” *Cosmos & Culture. NPR.org*, 12 Jul. 2017. Web. 10 Oct. 2017.

Study Confirms: Church-Going Youth Less at Risk.

Recent work by Columbia University professor of psychology Lisa Miller lends credence to what various studies have been indicating since the early 1970s – that religious belief, far from being antithetical to the mental wellbeing of youth (as was long thought), is actually a strong predictor of mental and social wellbeing. Miller’s study, recently promoted in a national lecture tour, shows that “religiously aware adolescents who feel connected to a higher power” are 40 percent less likely to abuse substances, 60 percent less likely to suffer depression, and 80 percent less likely to engage in at-risk sexual behaviors. VanDen Berghe, Betsy. “Spiritual IQ in a Secular Age.” *Newsletter. RealClearReligion.com*, 29 Apr. 2017. Web. 19 Sept. 2017.

Bones Found in Rome Church Said to be St. Peter’s.

A workman restoring a small church in the Trastevere neighborhood of Rome moved a stone slab and uncovered two Roman-era clay pots containing bones. The inscriptions on the lids indicated that inside were the bones of St. Peter, as well as those of early popes Cornelius, Callixtus and Felix. The human remains were turned over to Vatican authorities for investigation and analysis. A Vatican spokesman said that the bones would be compared to other bones in the church’s possession that are said to be from St. Peter. “A DNA comparison between these bones and those kept by the Vatican would shed light on the issue,” he said, though he didn’t specify how. Squires, Nick. “Bones attributed to St Peter found by chance in 1,000-year-old church in Rome.” *News. Telegraph.co.uk*, 11 Sept. 2017. Web. 19 Sept. 2017.



Attendees at the Minnesota Pastoral Conference, held October 3-4, 2017, at Grace Lutheran Church in Fridley.

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