

December 2019 VOL 62 NO. 6

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



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The *Lutheran Spokesman* (USPS 825580) (ISSN 00247537) is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). Website address: www.clclutheran.org

Periodicals postage paid at Eau Claire, WI and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes (Form 3579) to *Lutheran Spokesman*, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701-7134

Editor: Paul Naumann, 3732 Claymore Lane, Eau Claire, WI, 54701, E-mail to paul.naumann@ilc.edu; Assistant Editor: Craig Owings; Art Director, Graphic Designer, Print Production: Matthew Schaser; Proofreaders: David Lau and Paula Naumann; Staff: James Albrecht, David Bernthal, Timothy Daub, Wayne Eichstadt, David Fuerstenau, Frank Gantt, Norman Greve, Mark Gullerud, John Klatt, Ross Kok, Joseph Lau, Delwyn Maas, Bruce Naumann, John Pfeiffer, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Sam Rodebaugh, Michael Roehl, Robert Sauers, Thomas Schuetze, Chad Seybt, Mark Weis.

Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Naumann three months before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Naumann.

Business Manager: Rev. James Sandeen, 501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701. E-mail to jim.sandeen@ilc.edu. Individual subscriptions (foreign-U.S. currency only): \$18.00 {\$36.00} for one year; \$34.00 {\$50.00} for two years; \$50.00 {\$72.00} for three years; sent in bulk to congregations: \$15.00.

Send address or payment question requests to: lutheranspokesman@ilc.edu

Spokesman Online Version at: www.lutheranspokesman.org

Printed in U.S.A.

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Stop Being Afraid

The sight, smell, and sounds of a little baby give no reason for fear. Quite the opposite; watching a sleeping baby can overwhelm one's heart with comfort, contentment, and joy. The world's noise, wickedness, and danger all fade away when one is gently rocking in a chair while cradling a baby.

Joseph and Mary experienced the love that saturates parents' hearts, but God was giving even more. The difficulties of life in the world may very well have faded into the background while baby Jesus was cooing and Mary was swaddling Him, but Jesus was born for much more than baby-joy. Jesus was born to defeat sorrow and to conquer its source, sin.

The words most frequently repeated throughout the account of Jesus' birth are, "fear not," or more literally, "stop being afraid."

These words always come from God, either directly or through His messenger—an angel. Every time these words are spoken, Jesus and His work are the antidote for fear.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, he said, "Stop being afraid." Why? Because God would give Zacharias a son who would be the forerunner of the Savior. He would ". . . make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17) Zacharias and Elizabeth had been praying and waiting for a child for decades, but Israel had been praying and waiting for the Messiah for millennia. The time was full, the Savior was coming—stop being afraid.

Gabriel appeared to Mary and said, "Stop being afraid." Why? "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS." (Luke 1:31) Jesus means "Savior." Stop being afraid, the long-promised Savior is coming to pay the ransom for your sins.

Similarly, as Joseph tossed and turned wondering what to

do about pregnant Mary and his betrothal to her, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, "Stop being afraid, and take Mary to be your wife." Why? "She will bring forth a Son and . . . He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)



"Journey to Bethlehem" Artist: Joesph Brickey

After Jesus was born, an angel appeared to shepherds watching their flocks in the field. The angel said, "Stop being afraid." Why? "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

The fear-stopping message of the Gospel was declared at Jesus' birth, and it would become the central message of Jesus' ministry.

Jairus was a father who had only experienced the joy of a newborn daughter one time, and twelve years later he heard a servant say, "Your daughter is dead." Jesus told Jairus, "Stop being afraid." (Luke 8:49-56)

Why? Because Jesus came to conquer death.

Once the disciples thought a ghost was approaching their boat in a battering storm. It was really Jesus and He said, "Stop being afraid." (Matthew 14:27) Why? Because Jesus is the Son of God and has power over wind and wave.

Fear prompted by sin's guilt is remedied by Jesus, Who has set us free from sin. The comfort for sorrow and fear as we face death—our own or that of a loved one—is Jesus, Who says, "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

Whenever sin or the world or your own troubled thoughts leave you anxious and fearful, go to the manger and pick up the baby Jesus in faith's arms. Rock with Him as you read

His Word. Be at peace as you hear your Savior whisper to your troubled heart, "Stop being afraid, for I have redeemed you." (Isaiah 43:1)



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

Watching Attentively for Christ's Return

Do you ever read to the bottom of a page and then double back to the top after realizing you didn't absorb any of it? Or have you ever been at the wheel of a car and encountered the unsettling realization that you've been rather inattentive while driving? If so, then you are familiar with the phenomenon known as "zoning out." It's a frequent occurrence for many of us. The trouble with zoning out is that you can easily miss important information.

We often think of Advent as the season of preparation for the Messiah's birth, but adjacent to this is another important Advent theme: watching for Christ's return. Jesus Himself describes this watching, *"It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning."* (Mark 13:34-35) His point is obvious, isn't it? Our Master, Jesus, is coming back. His return could easily come tomorrow, or even later today!

Are you zoning out?

As you watch for that day, do you ever find yourself zoning out? There's no Advent calendar counting down the twenty-five days to Judgment Day; preparation for Christ's return might be easy to let slip. Jesus tells us, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. . . . Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."* (Matthew 24:36, 44) We all know how quickly Christmas can sneak up on us when we still have shopping to do, and Christmas falls on the same day every year! So on Judgment Day—a day not circled on your calendar—when Jesus returns,

**Jesus isn't
returning to catch
you unprepared;
He is returning
to catch you up
to heaven!**

will He find us watching and waiting? Or zoned out and unprepared?

This Advent season, as you look back and watch the familiar nativity narrative unfold once more, do not neglect to also look forward and watch for Christ's re-arrival. As you watch the signs unfolding in the world around you, realize that for you these are signs of life! Jesus isn't returning

to catch you unprepared; He is returning to catch you up to heaven! For the Christian, there is no fear in Judgment Day.

I've read various articles that seek to improve your attention skills. It is suggested that to avoid regularly zoning out you ought to

- 1) remove distractions,
- 2) take frequent breaks, and
- 3) be mindful of the position of your body.

We ought to make use of these suggestions as we watch for Christ's return as well.

- 1) Take note of things in your life that threaten to supplant God's Word, and put them in their proper place.
- 2) Set time aside daily to find rest in the life-giving words of the Savior Who was born to take your burdensome load away.
- 3) Drop to your knees in repentance before your God, clinging to His cross and the assurance of forgiveness which He promised you through it.

Because of Him, watching for Christ's return is now pure joy, like watching a morning sunrise. As you see the glow of Judgment Day on the horizon, rejoice! It will be for you the sunrise of eternal day.



Samuel Rodebaugh is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

TLH HYMN 85

“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”

Can you guess what all the following products have in common? **Victor Radio** (early 1920’s), **Hotpoint Appliances** electric range (1928), **DuMont Electronics** television with AM/FM/Shortwave radios (1948), **RCA Victor** televisions (1963), **Kodak Camera** (1977), and **Godiva** chocolates (2016)?

Hint: the common element showed up in their Christmas advertisements in the years in parentheses. For another clue, here’s the actual ad copy used by the first two companies I listed: “When you go to your Victor Dealer’s to hear the three models of Victor-radio, you will find them beautiful, compact, and soundly built, as become Victor instruments. You will recognize them as the gift that keeps on giving.” “Give Mother what she really wants this season, this all-white Hotpoint electric range. A gift that keeps on giving!”

“The gift that keeps on giving.”

That may well be one of the most effective advertising slogans ever used to motivate buyers, and it has been used by many companies over the years. But it’s not true, is it—at least not in connection with material gifts. Ultimately, they all stop “giving.” However, there is one Christmas gift that does, indeed, “keep on giving,” because it is the only gift of infinite value and eternal consequence. That Christmas gift was given two millennia ago, in Bethlehem of Judea, and it’s a gift for all people. It is the gift of God Himself—both the giver and the actual gift—and its consequence is forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. That alone is the gift that keeps on giving.



“Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her” (“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”) is a hymn text relating to the Nativity of Jesus, written by Martin Luther in 1534. The hymn is most often sung to a melody that first appeared in 1539 and that was likely composed by Luther as well. That version became a classic Christmas carol, and many composers referred to it in their compositions. Listen to hymn melody at: <http://lutherantacoma.com/hymns/085.mp3>

Martin Luther’s Christmas hymn “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” celebrates this gift and its consequences. **“He will on you the gifts bestow/ Prepared by God for all below, / That in His kingdom, bright and fair, / You may with us** [the angels announcing Christ’s birth to the shepherds] **His glory share.”** (v. 3) Verse 6 invites us to be partakers of the gift: **“Now let us all with gladsome cheer / Go with the shepherds and draw near / To see the precious Gift of God, / Who hath His own dear Son bestowed.”** The gift of God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior is uniquely “the gift that keeps on giving.”

Quite unlike the gifts you may find under your Christmas tree this month, the gift that keeps on giving did not come adorned with fancy paper and elegant bows. Although true God and King of kings, the Gift came as a baby, born in the humblest of circumstances, surrounded with hay and straw instead of velvet and silk. Perhaps this suggests to us that the “worldly” matters of wealth, honor, and power are ultimately of no lasting importance. **“Ah, Lord, who hast created all / How weak art Thou, how poor and small/ That Thou dost choose Thine infant bed/ Where humble cattle lately fed!”** (v. 9) **“For velvets soft and silken stuff / Thou hast but hay and straw so rough, / Whereon Thou, King, so rich and great, / As ‘twere Thy heaven, art throned in state. And thus, dear Lord, it pleaseth Thee / To make this truth quite plain to me, / That all the world’s wealth, honor, might, / Are naught and worthless in Thy sight.”** (vv. 11 & 12) The things of the world all pass away, but God’s gift of a Savior keeps on giving.

A gift of infinite value and eternal consequence, and one that keeps on giving. How then shall we, recipients of this gift, respond? Perhaps our best response would be that of the shepherds. **“Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen.”** (Luke 2:20) **“My heart for very joy doth leap, / My lips no more can silence keep; / I, too, must sing with joyful tongue / That sweetest ancient cradle-song.”** (v. 14)



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

From Red as Blood to White as Snow

“Come, now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.’ ”

(Isaiah 1:18)

What if someone came to your house and said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Woe unto you, sinner, loaded with iniquity, evildoer, corrupter! You have forsaken the Lord. He is fed up with your offerings, your hymn singing, and your worship. Your prayers are an abomination to Him; He will not hear them. Your hands are full of blood.’” What hope would there be for you? If the Judge of all mankind is also the Prosecutor, there can be only despair.

This is exactly what happened to Israel in the seventh century before Christ. God sent the prophet Isaiah to deliver a list of scathing accusations against His people (read Isaiah 1). The Prosecutor brought the charge; the Judge pronounced them guilty as charged. There awaited only the sentence.

Then, the Judge said this astounding thing: *“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD.* He graciously invites them into the courtroom, not to stand in silence as they are condemned, but to actually participate in the deliberation of the case—to hear and respond. *“Come, please, and let us debate your case together.”*

What follows is even more astonishing; the Lord lays before these spiritual criminals a verdict of acquittal. *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”* One can only imagine some Israelites standing with their mouths agape, totally unable to utter a word. Perhaps they were ready to offer a defense, but suddenly there is nothing to defend. It is not that the Judge makes light of their crimes. He calls them what they are. *“Your sins are like scarlet . . . they are red like crimson.”*

Scarlet is a brilliant color that stands out in the midst of other colors. The sins of Israel stood out with glaring intensity, like red, flashing lights on a dark night. God

compares the people to Sodom and Gomorrah. (1:9-10)

Scarlet is the color of fresh blood. The Lord had told them: *“When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood.”* (Isaiah 1:15)

“Scarlet” is a bright red dye extruded from the corpses of cochineal scale insects. It is virtually permanent.

And yet, there IS a cleansing, and it is one that leaves not the slightest shade of scarlet behind. There is a verdict of acquittal that does not violate justice. Man cannot accomplish this (see Psalm 49:7-8), but God can. The Old Testament Gospel promises and the symbolism of the Temple rituals revealed this to Israel.

The New Testament reveals it to us: *“God set forth [Christ] as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness . . . that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”* (Romans 3:25-26) Thus, the whole garment of the soul is made as white as snow. Blood washing away blood? Who would imagine such a thing? White as snow . . . pure and holy. *“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 7:14)

What if someone (for example, Jehovah’s Witnesses) came to your house and said, “Woe unto you, sinner”? Now, you can say, “I have been cleansed. I am white as snow. God says so. Jesus made it so. The Holy Spirit convinced me that it is so.” There is no despair. There is only a solid, certain hope. Yes, our sins are like scarlet and, yes, God has made them as white as snow through our Lord Jesus Christ. All glory, thanks, and praise be to God!



John Pfeiffer is retired from the pastoral and teaching ministry. He is a former president of Immanuel Lutheran College.

Count It All Joy!

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

(James 1:1-4, ESV)

“Count it all joy.”

What a strange way of addressing the recipients of this letter! James is writing this letter to Jewish Christians who have been driven from their homes and possessions. They were exploited by the rich, dragged into court, and slandered for believing in the name of Jesus (2:6-7). And James isn't telling them to consider their trials “a little joy” but “all joy.” Perhaps James is out of touch with what these people are going through.

James, however, was not unaware of the trials they were facing. James was in Jerusalem, and he himself had witnessed the death of Stephen, the persecution that followed, and the scattering of the Jerusalem church throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). And the fact that Christians would face persecution should not come as a surprise. Jesus Himself warned His disciples before His crucifixion, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” (John 15:18, ESV) But just because you know someone is going to punch you in the stomach at 3:00 P.M., that doesn't mean it's going to hurt any less. Knowing that persecution is coming doesn't necessarily make it any easier to deal with.

We would say that, under normal circumstances, trials and hardships are anything but “all joy.” However, James gives us the reason why we can rejoice in hardships: because they produce steadfastness—resilience and reliance on God and patient endurance.

In the midst of trial, we often think God has forgotten us, is punishing us, or even hates us. We may think that

He is unwilling or unable to help us. But we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God will, in fact, work good from hardship. It may be difficult to trust that in the midst of disaster, but it remains His firm and true promise. He demonstrates that most clearly when we look at the state we were in when we were born. We were born sinful, vengeful, rebellious creatures, warring against God. And what did God do? He sent His Son to pay for our sins, just as He promised. God has taken a situation that meant hell and changed it to mean eternal life in the perfection of heaven. If God is able to do that with our eternal problems, we know that He is able to do that with our temporary problems as well.

In good times and in bad times.

We might be tested with a flood of terrible things, but that testing only serves to bring blessing and remind us of what our Savior has done for us. When things are bad, we still have eternal life. When things are good, we still have eternal life. That is a promise and a gift that does not change, that no one can take away from us.

Therefore, we really can “count it all joy” when we go through trials. We know that they are for our good because that is God's promise. They will strengthen our faith as we look forward to the day when there will be no more trials in the joy of heaven.



Robert Sauers is pastor of Luther Memorial Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CLC

One aspect of the discussion surrounding the “Joint Statement,” which will again be before us at our 2020 convention, is how much importance to give to the events that took place around the period 1955-1961 that led to the formation of the CLC. In this seven-part series, Professor Emeritus David Lau provides a digest of these events, excerpted from his book, “Out of Necessity.” We urge all CLC members—and particularly convention delegates—to re-familiarize themselves with this important period in our fellowship’s history.

The 1955 Conventions of the WELS and ELS

From 1920 until 1963 the Synodical Conference had four member synods: the Wisconsin Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Norwegian Synod (later ELS), and the Slovak Synod.

The Common Confession

The differences between the synods came to a head at the 1952 meeting of the Synodical Conference. The debate centered on whether the Common Confession did in fact resolve the past doctrinal differences between the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Church. By a vote of 154 to 62 the delegates voted to postpone action until the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church could present Part II of the Common Confession. This postponement of action was unacceptable to the representatives of the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod. The Wisconsin Synod delegates met after the convention and solemnly stated: “We, therefore, declare, in order to guard our own faith and to remain true to our God, that, though we do not at this time disavow our fellowship with the Missouri Synod in the Synodical Conference, yet, because the confessional basis on which the synods of the Synodical Conference have jointly stood so far has been seriously impaired by the Common Confession, we continue to uphold our protest and to declare that the Missouri Synod by retaining the Common Confession and using it for further steps toward union with the ALC is disrupting the Synodical Conference. . . . Hence we find ourselves in a STATE OF CONFESSION.” (Armin Schuetze: *The Synodical Conference*, p. 302).



THE ORIGIN OF THE CLC

The Norwegian Synod’s 1955 convention resolution

In 1955 both the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod held conventions. The Norwegian Synod met first and passed the following resolution: “We hereby declare with deepest regret that fellowship

relations with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are suspended on the basis of Romans 16:17, and that the exercise of such relations cannot be resumed until the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner” (Armin Schuetze: *The Synodical Conference*, p. 321). In spite of this resolution, however, the Norwegian Synod continued its membership in the Synodical Conference, and through that relationship continued its fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

If the Wisconsin Synod had taken the same step as the Norwegian Synod in its 1955 convention, the Norwegian Synod would have been strengthened in its stand, and perhaps the two synods could have moved forward together in sound confessionalism. . . . The Wisconsin Synod’s Union Committee recommended the following resolution: “Resolved: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God’s injunction to avoid such, declare the fellowship which we have had with said synod to be terminated” (Armin Schuetze: *The Synodical Conference*, pp. 323-324).

The Standing Committee on Church Union, of which

“We . . . are of the conviction that the reasons stated for delay do not warrant postponement of action.”

Edmund Reim was the secretary, declared in its preliminary report to the convention: “We have . . . arrived at the firm conviction that, because of the divisions and offenses that have been caused, and which have until now not been removed, further postponement of a decision would be a violation of the apostolic injunction of Romans 16:17” (Reports and Memorials—Thirty-Third Convention, p. 79).

The Wisconsin Synod’s 1955 convention

The 1955 convention of the Wisconsin Synod, meeting in Saginaw, Michigan, made a good beginning by unanimously passing the following statement: “A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing” (Wisconsin Synod 1955 Convention Proceedings, p. 85).

At this point, however, the convention decided to postpone action until 1956 for two reasons: “1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences. 2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention” (Armin Schuetze: *The Synodical Conference*, p. 325).

The *Northwestern Lutheran* of September 4, 1955, reported that the preamble was “unanimously adopted” and that “all were firmly convinced and fully agreed that the charge of unionism against the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was valid and that the Romans passage is applicable.” The vote on postponement was 94 to 47, with 24 voting delegates and 19 advisory delegates recording their names in protest.



Edmund Reim



Winfred Schaller Jr.

Basic unity broken

Many Wisconsin Synod members who later joined the Church of the Lutheran Confession were convinced that the synod had made itself guilty of disobedience to the clear Word of God. . . . There were not many withdrawals from Synod yet, but the basic unity within the Wisconsin Synod was broken at this point.

The time had come for members of the Wisconsin Synod to take a stand, not only against the Missouri Synod, but against the majority in their own synod who had postponed action on separation until 1956. Pastor Winfred Schaller, Jr. of Cheyenne, Wyoming, later to become editor of *The Lutheran Spokesman*, had already submitted a protest to the 1955 convention against a Wisconsin Synod action taken in 1953 (Reports and Memorials—Thirty-Third Convention, p. 16). Several members of the floor committee at that convention that had proposed postponement stated: “We . . . are of the conviction that the reasons stated for

delay do not warrant postponement of action” (Reports and Memorials—Thirty-Third Convention, pp. 86-87). Among these committee members was Paul F. Nolting, later to become longtime secretary of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Among the other voting delegates and advisory delegates who registered their protest against postponement were Egbert Albrecht, Edwin Schmelzer, Ivan Zarling, J. B. Erhart, Gerhard Pieper, William Wiedenmeyer, Robert Dommer, Paul G. Albrecht, M. J. Witt, Egbert Schaller, Otto J. Eckert, Christian Albrecht, and Edmund Reim, all of whom later became involved in the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Arthur Voss of the Thiensville seminary also registered his protest, but died of a heart attack on October 19, 1955. His widow and sister later became members of the CLC congregation in Milwaukee.

David Lau is a retired pastor and professor. He lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

A SLICE OF LIFE IN THE CLC

Snapshots of congregations from around the Church of the Lutheran Confession

Gift of God Lutheran Church Fairfax, Virginia

“...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 6:23b)

Located just outside the bustling beltline of our nation’s capital, our Lord has placed Gift of God Lutheran Church—not only as a place for local members to worship and enjoy the fellowship of one faith, but also to be a blessing (a “Gift of God”) to CLC members temporarily stationed in the Washington D.C. metro area for work or military service.



The Lord in Action

In 1982, Pastor Stephen Kurtzahn of Living Word Lutheran Church (Hendersonville, North Carolina) was asked to visit a small group of confessional Lutherans living in the Washington D.C. area. Having moved to the area from California, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin, the people in this group had two things in common—they all had previously been members of CLC congregations and they were frustrated by the lack of confessional Lutheranism in the Washington D.C. area.

In December 1983, this small group of dedicated Christians organized as Gift of God Lutheran Church, and applied for membership with the CLC. Supported by the



Map shows the downtown area of Fairfax. The Old Town Hall is marked by the red star.

Far left: Pastor P. F. Nolting with the first confirmation class. Left: Everly Chapel, the congregation’s first church home. Above: Old Town Hall, the current worship location.



Some of the current members of Gift of God Lutheran Church.

CLC, Pastor Paul F. Nolting was called to be Gift of God's full-time pastor.

For the first ten years, Gift of God worshipped in the Everly Chapel in Fairfax, Virginia. In 1992 the congregation moved into their current worship facility at the Old Town Hall, a central landmark in Fairfax, Virginia.

In 1995, Gift of God of Fairfax and Living Word of Hendersonville formed a joint parish, with Pastors Terrel Kesterson, and then Timothy Holland conducting services two Sundays a month, with lay services the other Sundays.

In 1998, Living Word Lutheran Church disbanded, and Gift of God found itself unable to financially support a pastor by themselves. They called retired pastor Glenn Oster (West Columbia, South Carolina) to serve them on a monthly basis. The congregation would conduct lay services the other Sundays of the month. This arrangement has worked well for the last twenty-one years, with Pastor Oster flying once a month from his home in South Carolina to conduct worship services and visitations for members and transients in the Washington D.C. area.

We are thankful that the Lord has used us to be a "Gift of God" to those who are far from their church homes while working or stationed in Washington D.C.

Although Gift of God remains small membership-wise (twenty members), because of our location we have been able to bring the comfort and encouragement of God's holy Word to many dozens of confessional Lutherans who have temporarily lived and worked in the metro D.C. area. We are thankful that the Lord has used us to be a "Gift of God" to those who are far from their church homes while working or stationed in Washington D.C. One lady who was stationed here for several years described her appreciation for having a CLC congregation in the area: "Over

the years, the members of the congregation grew very dear to me. They did not realize the gifts they had given each time we gathered: the gift of strengthening our faith, the Bible Class, the singing of hymns to Bonnie Reedy's organ music, the gift of hearing the sermon read by one of the elders, the gift of praying together . . . The GIFT OF GOD" (You can read her full article at www.FairfaxLutheran.org)



Glenn Oster serves Gift of God Lutheran Church in Fairfax, Virginia. He is also the CLC webmaster. His home is in West Columbia, South Carolina.

BEST. JOB. EVER!

Are you a young person pondering a career? Have you considered becoming a pastor or a Christian day school teacher? This twelve-part series is meant to coincide with the work of the President's Committee on Partners in the Public Ministry (CPPM). Its aim is to help you think more deeply about the great importance—and many blessings—of the public teaching and preaching ministry.

Called by God—Not Recruited

Every school year I try to impress upon the students enrolled in my courses that I have the best job in the world.

I didn't always feel this way. In fact, my career choice was not the fulfillment of a childhood dream. I always preferred summer vacations to being at school. If the choice had been mine, as a freshman in high school I would not have attended Immanuel Lutheran High School. I began preparing for my degree in elementary education at Immanuel Lutheran College somewhat reluctantly, not at all convinced that this was the path for me. So what changed? Three decades later, I still can't recall an "AHA!" moment. What I did discover along the way is that I enjoyed working with young people, that through hard work I had the academic gifts necessary, and that as far as importance goes, the sharing of the Gospel can't be surpassed. When students ask me today when I knew that I wanted to be a teacher I usually reply, "About four or five years after I began."

Something that sustained me in my work until I realized that this was what I was meant to do was the doctrine of the "divine call." As Christ's followers, all of us have a call to spread the Gospel message to a sin-darkened world. To His disciples after His resurrection Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (John 20:21) Before He ascended, the Savior gave the great commission: "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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) It was to believers that Peter later wrote, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the



praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (I Peter 2:9) In this way God has called all believers to be His spokesmen.

In addition to this more general calling, God has blessed His church on earth with called public servants of the Word, pastors and teachers who are working on behalf of the congregations who have called them.

The Lord Himself established the public ministry in the church. "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." (Jeremiah 3:15 NIV84) Not everyone has been given the same gifts by God. Paul emphasizes this in Ephesians 4:11-12: "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 the ministry." The work of the public minister is the same as that of the universal priesthood. The difference is that public ministers perform their work on behalf of fellow believers who called them, in part, so that "all things be done decently and in order." (I Corinthians 14:40)

What a blessing to know that God has placed His workers in the callings they are in through the divine call issued to them by their fellow believers! How different that is than the typical application, interview, and contract process by which secular jobs are obtained! Over the years I have been asked by those unfamiliar with the call, why I have taught where I have. This has allowed me to explain the meaning of the call and one of the reasons why I consider my job to be the BEST JOB EVER.



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

Every other month our CLC Board of Missions updates us with recent news from various mission fields.

Myanmar Children's Assistance

Formerly the capital of Myanmar, Yangon is the most populous city in the country. In a nation of an estimated fifty-four million people, Yangon boasts a metro-area population of just over seven million. Sadly, many of these are practicing Buddhists, as Buddhism makes up 87% of the national population's professed religion. In the heart of this theological desert lies a glimmering oasis of Gospel proclamation.

For thirty-one years, the National Lutheran Church of Myanmar (NLCM) has been proclaiming Christ crucified among the lost souls of Yangon. A small synod of about two hundred individual members, the NLCM is led by Pastor Charles Edwards, who has been in the full-time ministry since 1990. Pastor Charles not only serves the main congregation in Yangon and several preaching

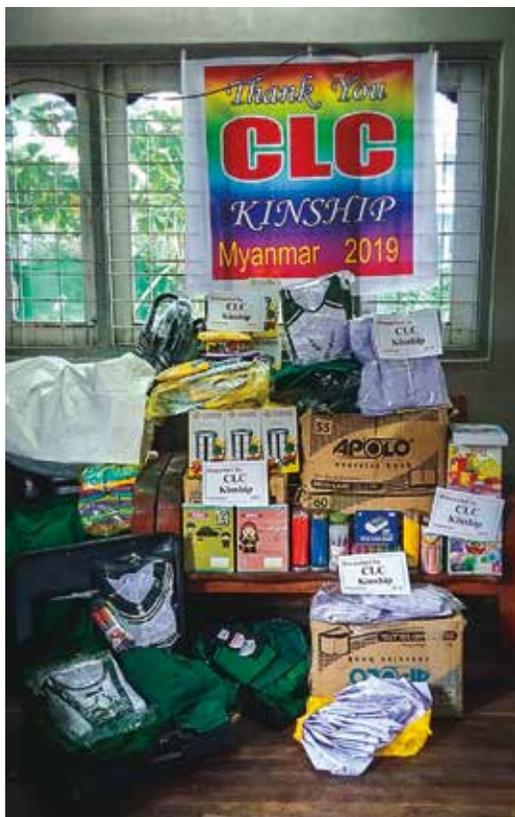
stations in the region, but has also been blessed with a rather large youth ministry among various orphanages.

Through catechism instruction and weekly devotions, the Lord has brought over three hundred orphans to regularly drink in the waters of life flowing from the Scriptures.

As part of this ministry, Pastor Charles has also provided financial support for school fees, uniforms, and books for the over three hundred orphans and other under-privileged children. The Lord seems to have used this humanitarian work to open more doors for the Gospel, as several of the men involved with these orphanages have requested that preaching stations or congregations be established in their areas.

Through the end of 2018, this charitable work had been subsidized by grants from a humanitarian organization from the US. That support dried up in January, as the notification was delivered that no more funds would be provided. To assist Pastor Charles and the NLCM in their continued ministry to the underprivileged youth of Yangon, the CLC Mission Board directed KINSHIP to begin a new group sponsorship called "Myanmar Children's Assistance." \$4000 will be sent annually to give aid to these children. We pray that the Lord would use the funds both to bless the children and to pave the way for more Gospel outreach.

Samuel Rodebaugh is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida, and a member of the CLC's Project KINSHIP Committee.



Yangon, formerly known as Rangoon, is the capital of the Yangon Region and the largest city of Myanmar. Yangon served as the capital of Myanmar until 2006, when the military government relocated the administrative functions to the purpose-built city of Naypyidaw in central Myanmar.

Yangon suffers from deeply inadequate infrastructure, especially compared to other major cities in Southeast Asia. Though many historic residential and commercial buildings have been renovated throughout central Yangon, most satellite towns that ring the city continue to be profoundly impoverished and lack basic infrastructure.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yangon

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS DECEMBER 2019

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
Dec 2	TLH 381 (LSB 587)	2 John	Remain in the teachings of Christ, both Law and Gospel, lest you become deceived and led away from the truth.
Dec 3	WS 729 (LSB 462)	Revelation 1:9-18	Though He is the almighty Son of God, Jesus Christ holds no fear for us—rather He holds the keys of death and the grave!
Dec 4	TLH 528 (LSB 724)	Joshua 10:1-14	We do not need to be afraid, because God is with us—our God Who can even make the sun stand still.
Dec 5	WS 731	Revelation 2:8-11	Do not fear any of the things which the devil and the world can throw at you, for in the end you have a crown of life.
Dec 6	TLH 406; (LSB 697)	3 John	In this “postcard” to Gaius, we are encouraged to continue to walk in the truth and love the brethren as he was doing.
Dec 7	TLH 409 (LSB 685)	Revelation 3:7-13	Stay faithful, holding on to the Word, because there is not much time left. The Lord is coming soon.
Dec 9	TLH 66 (LSB 349)	Joshua 23:1-14	Not one word of God’s promises ever fails.
Dec 10	WS 742 (LSB 793)	Revelation 4:2-11	Our God is holy and worthy to receive all glory and honor and power.
Dec 11	WS 799	Revelation 5:8-14	Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who sits on the throne, is worthy to receive all glory and honor and power.
Dec 12	TLH 656 (LSB 676)	Revelation 7:9-17	In John’s vision of the redeemed, we understand that we too are numbered with those whose sins have been washed away by the blood of the Lamb.
Dec 13	TLH 60 (LSB 345)	Revelation 9:13-21	In this vivid vision of destruction, we are reminded of the urgency of repentance and faith. Repent so you will not be caught unprepared for Judgment Day.
Dec 14	WS 732 (LSB 465)	Revelation 11:15-17	Our Lord Jesus Christ has defeated the devil and death, and He shall reign forever and ever!
Dec 16	TLH 254; (LSB 521)	Revelation 12:7-12	Our accuser, Satan, has been thrown down and defeated by the power of Christ.
Dec 17	WS 713	Revelation 14:1-5	You are numbered with the 144,000, for God’s name has been put on you (think of your Baptism) and you have been redeemed from your sins.
Dec 18	TLH 39 (LSB 790)	Revelation 15:1-8	The redeemed sing the mighty power of God. He is holy, and His glory fills all the earth.
Dec 19	TLH 55 (LSB 350)	Revelation 18:21-19:5	At the Judgment all that is evil will be utterly cast out and God will be reigning on His holy throne.
Dec 20	WS 712 (LSB 370)	Revelation 19:6-10	Let us be glad and rejoice in the Lord, for He has come to save His people and He reigns forever and ever!
Dec 21	TLH 102 (LSB 379)	Revelation 19:11-16	Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords—Hallelujah!
Dec 23	TLH 84	Revelation 21:1-21	Heaven will surely be beautiful and glorious, a place with no sin or sorrow. The old things will have been swept away.
Dec 24	WS 710 (LSB 376)	Revelation 21:22-22:11	The time is near when Jesus will appear again. He is coming quickly!
Dec 25	TLH 94; (LSB 393)	Revelation 22:12-21	Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!
Dec 26	TLH 90 (LSB 375)	Psalms 44	Jesus Christ has put our enemies to shame and will always rise to help us in times of distress.
Dec 27	TLH 87 (LSB 387)	Psalms 45	Jesus our King rules with a scepter of righteousness, and how blessed we are to be His bride, the Church!
Dec 28	TLH 262 (LSB 656)	Psalms 46	Jesus is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.
Dec 30	TLH 98 (LSB 384)	Psalms 47	Christ has triumphantly taken His place in heaven. Sing praises to Him!
Dec 31	TLH 96 (LSB 897)	Psalms 48	God will be with us forever and ever and will be our guide even unto death. What a fitting verse upon which to end the year!

Newborn Hope!

Who likes going to the hospital? It's a place for the seriously ill or injured. It's a place where invasive surgeries are performed and patients are closely monitored in intensive care units. Yet there is one place in the hospital where the atmosphere is entirely different. People like going there. There are balloons, bright colors, and often large windows through which family and friends can see the youngest patients. The birthing center and nursery are filled with joy over the arrival of each baby.



Parents cradle their newborn son or daughter and for a moment at least forget about the previous sleepless night, the pressures at work, political turmoil around the world, and all the other problems of life as they marvel over the gift God has provided. *"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward."* (Psalm 127:3 ESV) Mom and Dad pray their newborn will avoid the mistakes they have made. They dream of a bright future and imagine what their child may accomplish. They eagerly share the news of the new family member.

The Old Testament believer Lamech felt much the same way. *"When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.'"* (Genesis 5:28-29 ESV) This new father certainly rejoiced in his son's birth and looked forward to raising him and watching him grow into adulthood.

But perhaps he was also thinking of something much greater. The "painful toil" of life on earth was due to Adam's sin, but God had promised the Seed of the woman, Who would break the power of sin and give new life to a world born in Adam's image. Believers from Adam and Eve on found their greatest hope in the promise of the Savior. Every birth reminded them of the promise.

Lamech may well have hoped that Noah was the Comforter they had long been anticipating. And in a way he was. God used Noah as His agent to preserve life on the ark when He destroyed the wicked earth with the flood. Yet, Noah was not the One who would win eternal life for all people. Noah is called righteous, not because of his own holiness, but because of his faith in God's promise.

The births of our children and grandchildren are sources of joy, not just because of who they are and what they might do with their

futures, but especially because of the hope we have for them and ourselves in the birth of God's Son. The Baby born in Bethlehem is the greater "Noah," Who avoided all the failings of which we are guilty and lived a sinless life in our place. He has given us the most wonderful relief from our toil by taking on Himself the burden of our sins and paying the penalty in full on the cross. In Baptism He has rescued us from the destruction coming at the end of time. *"... In the days of Noah . . . eight persons were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 3:20-21 ESV)

Whether or not we ever set foot in a hospital, we are surrounded by pain and suffering brought into every life by sin. It wears us down. It is discouraging. It is terrifying to think of the condemnation which is rightfully ours. All the lights, parties, and nonstop activity of the world can do nothing to provide relief. But when you are tired, worried, and feel hopeless, there is a place to go. In Advent and

Christmas services, in family devotions, and in quality time with just you and the Lord, go to the nursery at Bethlehem and rejoice in your newborn Savior.



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

Lutheran Spokesman

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SEEN IN PASSING

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

Abortion Numbers, At An All-Time Low, Still Shocking.

"The number and rate of abortions across the United States have plunged to their lowest levels since the procedure became legal nationwide in 1973, according to new figures released Wednesday. The report from the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights, counted 862,000 abortions in the U.S. in 2017. That's down from 926,000 tallied in the group's previous report for 2014, and from just over 1 million counted for 2011." The reduction is significant. Bad news: that's still an average of nearly *two thousand, four hundred* infant deaths per day. Crary, David. "Number of abortions in US falls to lowest level since 1973." *Topics*. APNews.com, 18 Sept. 2019. Web. 22 Sept. 2019.

Re-Purposing Christian Churches – Into Mosques?

"Over the past few decades, vacant and underutilized churches have become a familiar sight in American cities. In some cases, a congregation or a religious governing body – say, a Catholic diocese – will sell the church to developers, who then turn them into apartments, offices, art galleries, museums, breweries or performance spaces. But what about churches in neighborhoods that aren't doing well, areas that are less attractive to developers looking to turn a profit? In Buffalo, New York, two empty Roman Catholic churches were recently converted – not into apartments or offices, but into other places of worship. One became an Islamic mosque, the other a Buddhist temple. . . . Several former Christian churches in Buffalo's East Side also now serve as sites of worship for other religions. Two mosques, Bait Ul Mamur Inc. Masjid,

and Masjid Zakariya, used to be Saint Joachim's Roman Catholic Church and Holy Mother of Rosary Polish National Catholic Church, respectively." Krishna, Ashima. "A new solution for America's empty churches: A change of faith." *Art and Culture*. TheConversation.com, 30 Aug. 2019. Web. 22 Sept. 2019.

British Court Rules Bible Beliefs Are "Incompatible With Human Dignity."

In July a U.K. court issued a decision against Dr. David Mackereth, a Christian who had worked as an emergency doctor for the National Health Service for 26 years. He said he was fired from his job because he refused to call a biological man a woman. The court's ruling stated, "Belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others, specifically here, transgender individuals." The court added. ". . . in so far as those beliefs form part of his wider faith, his wider faith also does not satisfy the requirement of being worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others." The Telegraph reported that Mackereth said he was removed from his job with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in late June 2018 after his boss "interrogated" him about his personal religious convictions. Mackereth told the court in July that his line manager had asked him, "If you have a man six foot tall with a beard who says he wants to be addressed as 'she' and

'Mrs' would you do that?" Mackereth said that because of his religious beliefs, he could not, and his job was subsequently terminated. Dr. Mackereth plans to appeal the court's decision. Berrien, Hank. "British Court In Transgender Case: Bible Belief Is 'Incompatible With Human Dignity.'" *News*. DailyWire.com, 2 Oct. 2019. Web. 31 Oct. 2019.

American Morals: Drinking And Birth Control are OK, Adultery And Suicide are Not.

Since 2001, the Gallup Organization has polled Americans to find out which practices they believe are morally acceptable or unacceptable. This year's results show that "at least 60% of Americans find the following behaviors to be morally acceptable: birth control (92%), alcohol use (79%), divorce (77%), sex between unmarried men and women (71%), gambling (68%), and smoking marijuana (65%) At the other end of the spectrum, there are seven behaviors that fewer than four in 10 Americans deem morally acceptable, including teenage sex (38%), pornography (37%), cloning animals (31%), polygamy (18%), suicide (17%), cloning humans (12%) and extramarital affairs (9%). The issues that divide Americans most closely are buying and wearing clothing made of animal fur, doctor-assisted suicide, medical testing on animals and abortion. On each, the gap between 'morally acceptable' and 'morally wrong' views is less than 10 percentage points." Brenan, Megan. "Birth Control Still Tops List of Morally Acceptable Issues." *Politics*. Gallup.com, 29 May 2019. Web. 31 Oct. 2019.