

The
Concordia Lutheran



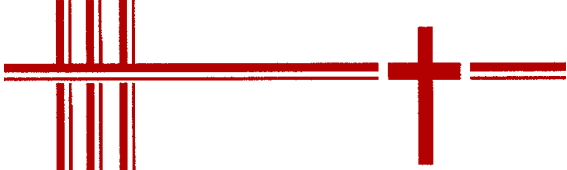
"The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35.

"Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path." Psalm 119:105.

Vol. LIV

November — December 2009

Nos. 11 – 12



“Unto you
is born
a Savior,
Christ the Lord!”

— Luke 2:11



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Vol. LIV Nov. - Dec. 2009 Nos. 11-12

OFFICIAL ORGAN
of the
Concordia Lutheran Conference

This publication appears in a bi-monthly issue at a subscription price of \$5.00 per year.

Editor

The Rev. David T. Mensing
17151 South Central Avenue
Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

Book and Tract Editor

The Rev. Robert J. Lietz
233 North Cuyler Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302

Lay Member:

Mr. Jason A. Mabe
2852 S. Western Avenue
Park Forest, IL 60466

Address subscriptions, renewals, and remittances to: **Scriptural Publications, 17151 S. Central Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913.** A special notice of expiration will be inserted in the issue which terminates your subscription.

Officers of the
Concordia Lutheran Conference

PRESIDENT:

The Rev. David T. Mensing
17151 South Central Avenue
Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

VICE PRESIDENT:

The Rev. Edward J. Worley
5350 South Fountain Street
Seattle, WA 98178

SECRETARY:

The Rev. Paul E. Bloedel
22012 Torrence Avenue
Sauk Village, IL 60411

TREASURER:

Mr. Robert G. Bloedel
10017 - 61st Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98178

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the *Book of Concord of 1580* and the *Brief Statement of 1932*.

To show, **on the basis of Scripture**, what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*"

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

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Remembering to Give Thanks unto the Lord

*“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord
and to sing praises unto Thy Name, O Most High;
to show forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning,
and Thy faithfulness every night.” — Psalm 92:1-2*

It is a sad fact of life and a reflection of the perverse times in which we are living that people by-and-large are, more than ever before, interested in **themselves**, in what **they want**, in what they can **get**, and in **how quickly** and with the **least effort possible** they can **satisfy** their own **selfish ends**. The “goals” they set for themselves and for their families are, for the most part, **economic** goals; for they are **determined** to have always **more** of “*the meat which perisheth*” (John 6:27) on their life’s plate and to be materially “better off” **next** year than they were **this** year. And, coupled with that Mammon-driven appetite is, particularly in our **prosperous country**, a deplorable **lack of gratitude** for just about **anything at all!** The word “thanks,” **common** in just about every other country in the world, is fast fading from everyday American English, not just as a polite form of **courtesy** and **etiquette**, but even as an expression of **genuine appreciation** for a service rendered, a favor done, a gift received, a kind word uttered, or a compliment offered. “Why **thank** a person for what you have **coming** or for what he **owes** you as part of the service you’re **paying for??**” That’s the prevailing attitude; and it’s sad indeed to see and hear even many **Christians** caught up in it, as if they didn’t know better!

And when people are so ungrateful to other **people**, think of what that means in terms of their gratitude to **God!** “God doesn’t draw my paycheck, pay on my mortgage, and make my investments! **I do!**” —“**My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth,**” they say with the wicked in Deuteronomy 8:17. —Further on in the psalm chosen as the title-text of our article, the Holy Writer calls such people “*brutish*”—no better than the **animals**, who at least lick the hand of their masters who feed them— and “*fools*” who don’t have the com-

mon sense to recognize the source of their daily bread! That's not surprising, however, given the rank ingratitude with which they treat their fellow men here in this world; for the Apostle John writes in his first epistle chapter 4: "*He that loveth not his **brother** whom he hath seen, how **can** he love **God**, whom he hath **not** seen??" (v. 20)*

Now, as we observe again our national **Day of Thanksgiving** here in the United States, a day on which precious little thanks is being rendered to anybody, much less to **God**, it behooves us to consider the admonition of the Lord's Psalmist just under the title of our article, as he points us in the very opposite direction from the ways of the world and shows us that it is GOOD for us Christians to show forth on a daily basis our gratitude to God — first of all, our "*thanksgiving*" for all His benefits, particularly His "*lovingkindness*" to us poor undeserving sinners; and likewise also our "*praises*" for His mercy and grace, His "*faithfulness*" to us in the covenant of His precious Gospel.

*"It is a **GOOD** thing to give thanks unto the Lord,"* the Psalmist writes. What makes it a "*good thing*" anyway?? What makes it more than just a perfunctory courtesy which we can exercise or not exercise as we choose? —**GOD** says so in His Holy Law, for starters! "*Thou **SHALT** love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind!*" (Matthew 22:37) Thus reads the summary of our duty to God; and in full accord with Holy Scripture in all those passages which require thanksgiving to Him, we confess with Luther concerning the use of God's Name: "We **should** fear and love God that we may ... call upon [His Name] in every trouble, pray, praise, and **give thanks**."

But a "good work in the sight of God" is much more than a mere act that appears to conform with the letter of the Law. For the Bible in Romans 3:12 says: "*There is none that doeth good, no, not one!*" (Also Psalm 14:3; 53:3). And so, a mere recitation of thanks to God as an **outward act** is not the "*good thing*" of which the Psalmist speaks in our title-text, as if an unbeliever, an unconverted sinner, could perform it! For "*they that are in the flesh cannot please God,*" Paul writes to the Romans chapter 8 verse 8; and in Hebrews 11:6 we read: "*Without faith, it is impossible to please Him.*" Even the "*righteousnesses*" of Christians are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) in God's sight because of their imperfection, and because **no good work** (even on the part of a **Christian**) counts before God to merit his favor (Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:11a; 20a).

What makes it "*a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord*" is the fact

that the thanksgiving redounds solely to the glory of God, and in not to any credit of our own. It is His work alone that we are **converted to faith** in Christ Jesus as our Savior. It is His work alone that we **humbly recognize our unworthiness** of all His blessings. It is His work alone that we **appreciate** with sincere gratitude all that He has done for us. And it is His work alone that we are **willing and able to express that gratitude** by “giving *thanks unto the Lord*,” thanks that is **due** Him for all His “lovingkindness” in bestowing upon us so richly from day to day His matchless benefits, which we never deserve at His hand (Genesis 32:10).

Moreover, brethren, (and let us mark this well in our title-text), “*it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord*” **not only** in our **hearts** (as some would like to imagine), but **openly** and **demonstrably** in clearly **tangible ways**. The Psalmist exhorts us to “*show forth (the Lord’s) lovingkindness*” —as a **testimony to others**, not of how grateful we are, but of how lovingkind He is. The prophet Isaiah writes in chapter 63 verse 7: “*I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord... according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.*” And the Lord Jesus says in Matthew chapter 12, verse 34: “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,*” so that, with the apostles, we must confess: “*We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:12). That’s one of the chief reasons we gather regularly in the House of God, that we may “*enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise!*” (Psalm 100:4). Even on our national Thanksgiving Day, we are a tiny minority among our countrymen and even among professing Christians who actually take the time to assemble together to thank and praise our God! “*Where are the nine??*” Jesus asked that leper in Luke 17:17, the Gospel Lesson traditionally read on Thanksgiving Day. The majority of those whom the Savior healed never bothered to return to say “thanks” for His “lovingkindness” to them!

But our **thanksgiving** should be even **more demonstrable** than mere **words!** Our thanksgiving should be a veritable “**thanksgiving**,” as we “*let [our] light shine before man that they may see [our] good works, and glorify —not us, but— [our] Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16). Do we “**show forth**” our gratitude to God by what we do from day to day, “*liv[ing]...unto Him which died for [us] and rose again?*” If **not**, then perhaps our **works** are belying our **lips**, and we need quickly and sincerely to repent of our ingratitude, lest, continuing in such contra-

dictory ways, we become those who call Him “*Lord, Lord*” but do not the things which He says from believing and grateful hearts! (Luke 6:46)

Now, all of what has been said thus far pertains to our gratitude for **both temporal and spiritual** blessings, **both of which** flow from the Lord’s “*lovingkindness*” to us and to all men for Jesus’ sake, and “for all which it is (our) duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him”... “*with hearts and hands and voices*” (TLH 36, 1).

But there is SPECIAL praise to be rendered particularly for the Lord’s **mercy** and **grace** toward our **souls** in all those things which He has done for our salvation! The Psalmist writes: “*It is a good thing...to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High,*”... “*to show forth... Thy faithfulness...*”

“*Singing praises*” is not an **optional mode of worship**, as some people in their ignorance would like to think, as if only good and talented musicians are expected to sing unto the Lord. For no such artificial limitation is placed on **singing** to Him, any more than on thanking Him! Not only here in our title-text, but in many other passages, the Lord exhorts His Christian people to “*sing*” unto Him, regardless of the musical quality of their voices. This is why the Lord’s church is a **singing** church, and why God’s people love to gather together in His house to “*sing praises unto [His] Name.*” Why is **singing** so special?? Oh, it is because, as so many of the passages clearly show, singing is a form of communication that comes from deep within the *spirit* of a person, “*from the heart*” so to speak. A person can mumble when he speaks; he can even be quite detached and uninvolved while in a conversation and still be heard; but “*singing praises*” is an emotional exercise involving “*joy*” and “*gladness*” and “*exultation*” and “*pleasantness*” and “*wholeheartedness*” and “*glory*” and a “*joyful noise!*”

And that is very particularly why the Lord refers to **singing** as the “*praise*” that **His Christian people** render unto Him for His mercy and grace to poor sinners, for the covenant of the Gospel of salvation, and for God’s faithfulness to that covenant in rescuing us from “*our enemies*” and from “*all that hate us*” (Luke 1:71)—the devil, the world and our flesh! And let’s face it, brethren, we have a lot to sing about in that regard. —By God’s grace, we Lutheran Christians in particular have such a **treasure-house of hymns** as our *heritage* which makes our singing easy —hymns, **all** of which are based upon passages of **Holy Scripture** and teach or confess some Biblical truth— unlike so many songs, even religious songs, that express subjective sentimentality and

“feelings” and nothing more. “*It is [indeed] a good thing to sing praises*” unto the Lord, “*to show forth [His] lovingkindness and [His] faithfulness*” to poor sinners in His plan of salvation:

*“He saw me ruined in the fall, yet loved me notwithstanding all! He saved me from my lost estate! His lovingkindness, oh, how great! ... When I was Satan’s easy prey, and deep in debt and bondage lay, He paid His life for my discharge! His lovingkindness, oh, how large! ... Awake, my soul, from sin’s malaise, and **sing** thy great Redeemer’s praise! He justly claims **a song** from thee: His lovingkindness, oh how free!”* (TLH 340, 2, 3, and 1 adapted).

As we ponder anew all the **blessings** we have received at the Lord’s gracious hand, all His **lovingkindness** to us poor undeserving creatures, and His **faithfulness** to His promises in the precious Gospel, which by His grace we still have in its truth and purity in the congregations of our precious fellowship, let each one of us ask his own heart with David: “*What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*” (Psalm 116:12). And let us then, one and all, **resolve**, with the help of His Holy Spirit, henceforth to render Him **due thanksgiving and praise** in accordance with His will—not because we **have to**, but because we eagerly **want to**—and not just on Thanksgiving Day, not just on Sundays in the worship services of His House, not just at hymns that we may arrange in our local congregations, but every day of our lives in our homes and along our way, as we work and as we play; for “*it is a GOOD THING to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High; to show forth Thy lovingkindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night!*”

Hallelujah! Let praises ring!
Unto our Triune God we sing!
Blest be His Name forever!
With angel hosts, let us adore
and sing His praises more and more
for all His grace and favor!
Singing, ringing:
“Holy, holy, God is holy; spread the story
of our God, the Lord of glory!”
(TLH 23, 4)

— D. T. M.

The Names Of Our Newborn Savior



“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” — Isaiah 9:6

“What’s in a name?” is a question that is often asked. Does a person’s name have any special significance? Parents of a child soon to be born often spend much time and effort in choosing a name for their child. Whole books are devoted to indexes of names and their meanings. Many fathers choose to name their firstborn sons after *themselves* (as the relatives of Zacharias and Elisabeth fully expected of their baby boy, the Savior’s forerunner, Luke 1:59-64). Some simply choose a name for its popularity, some for its sound in combination with the family surname, some for its ethnicity; some name their children after actors and even characters in movies, popular singers, celebrity icons, politicians, and sports figures. And some want the name to fit certain high expectations they have for their offspring.

Among *Christians* a Biblical name is often chosen with special reverence for the Holy Scriptures, for “heroes of the faith” (Hebrews chapter 11), for believers of both the Old and New Testament whose “*works do follow them*” (Revelation 14:13) in the annals of the Bible as examples of Godly piety, faithfulness, diligence, courage, and constancy, to whom they wish to point their children as role models as they grow up. Many of those Biblical names simply remind us of God’s people of old and their heritage of grace centered in the Old Testament promises of a

Savior from sin and their fulfillment in the coming of Christ in the New Testament era. Throughout the centuries, for example, the names of the Gospel-writers and of the Savior's apostles have been chosen as particularly meaningful to Christian parents, for they have called their sons Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; and also Paul, the name of the great apostle and missionary to the Gentiles, Peter and Jude, and then also Timothy and Titus. And some parents name their little ones after other faithful Christian men and women mentioned in the Bible, whose faith and whose fruits of faith were exemplary.

What is the special significance of a name? We will shortly consider in particular the five names for the new-born Savior that are listed in Isaiah 9:6, but there are more than three-hundred and forty names and titles of God's only-begotten Son listed in the Bible. We cannot list all of them here, but we will consider only examples of them and how meaningful they are because of how they describe some particular facet of the person and work of our Savior!

First we list some that may or may not be familiar, depending upon how well-versed one is in the Holy Scriptures. Particularly those from the Old Testament may not be readily recognized, although the names contained in specific **Messianic prophecies** well-known to informed Christians should surely "ring a bell." Among Old Testament names are: "*her Seed*" (Genesis 3:15); "*Thy Seed*" (Genesis 22:18; cf. Galatians 3:16); "*Shiloh*" (Genesis 49:10; cf. "*Prince of Peace*" in Isaiah 9:6); the "*Apple Tree*" (Song of Solomon 2:3); "*Branch*" (Jeremiah 23:5 and Zechariah 6:12); "*Builder*" (Zechariah 6:13); "*Bundle of Myrrh*" (Song of Solomon 1:13); "*Dew*" (Hosea 14:5); "*Holy One of Israel*" and "*Savior*" (Isaiah 43:3); "*Husband*" (Isaiah 54:5; cf. II Corinthians 11:2); "*Mighty to Save*" (Isaiah 63:1); "*Ointment*" (Song of Solomon 1:3); "*Refiner and Purifier*" (Malachi 3:3); "*Roe*" and "*young Hart*" (Song of Solomon 2:9); "*Rod*" and "*Branch*" (Isaiah 11:1); the "*Wall of Fire*" (Zechariah 2:5); "*the Desire of all Nations*" (Haggai 2:7); "*The Lord, our Righteousness*" (Jeremiah 23:6); and "*the Messiah*" (Daniel 9:25), the anointed Redeemer of mankind, the "*Christ*" of God.

Somewhat more familiar to us tend to be names and titles from the New Testament, such as "*The Word*" (John 1:1); "*the Apostle and High Priest of our Profession*" (Hebrews 3:1); "*the Author and Finisher of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:2); "*Only-begotten of the Father*" (John 1:14); "*the Beloved*" (Ephesians 1:6); "*Bread of Life*" (John 6:48); "*Chosen*"

of God” (I Peter 2:4); *“the Power of God and the Wisdom of God”* (I Corinthians 1:24); *“Chief Cornerstone”* (Ephesians 2:20); *“Day-Spring from on High”* (Luke 1:78); *“Door of the Sheep”* (John 10:7); *“the Good Shepherd”* (John 10:11); *“Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and Ending”* (Revelation 1:8); *“Beginning of Creation of God”* (Revelation 3:14); *“Firstborn of every creature”* (Colossians 1:15); *“Friend of Sinners”* (Matthew 11:19); *“Head of the Corner”* (Matthew 21:42); *“Holy One of God”* (Mark 1:24); *“I am”* (John 8:58); *“the Light”* (John 1:6-9); *“Lord of All”* (Acts 10:36); *“Son of Man”* (Matthew 8:20); and *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life”* (John 14:6).

Especially at Christmas time, when we review the **Messianic prophecies** of the Savior to come and the promises of redemption, justification and salvation through His Name (Acts 10:43), many of those **Old Testament names** in particular stand out to us (as they did to Old Testament believers) as “sign-posts” along the way — less clear earlier-on and explicitly clear toward the end of the prophecies — pointing to and giving marks of identification to Jesus of Nazareth as the true **Messiah**: The “Seed,” the “Branch,” “The Holy One of Israel,” “The Lord, our Righteousness,” the “Son of David,” the virgin-born “Immanuel,” to come out of “Bethlehem Ephratha,” the city of David, as God’s “Anointed One,” — “THE Christ, the Son of the Living God,” as Peter later confessed Him to be by the revelation of the Father (Matthew 16:16-17).

The beloved Messianic prophecy that stands out to us for its clarity and particularly for its series of *Messianic NAMES* is Isaiah 9:6, our title-text, which reads in its entirety: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” Besides the names themselves, the real cause of our Christian joy this Christmas season and all through our lives is expressed by the Prophet in two little words, “Unto us.” He said: “Unto US a Child is born, unto US a Son is given.” In the Savior’s birth God fulfilled all those precious promises which from the beginning of the world He had given concerning the coming of the Deliverer from sin and its consequences. In the Savior’s birth, God has come down to US from heaven and visited our fallen race (“Emmanuel” – “God with us,” Matthew 1:23). “The only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” “was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The greatest cause of our joy “unto US a Child is born and unto US a Son is given,” the “Savior, which is Christ, the Lord” (Luke 2:11), is God’s GIFT to us (John 3:16; II Corinthians

9:15), the manifestation of His *LOVE* (I John 4:9), sent to be the *PRO-PITIATION* (the fully-satisfactory ransom payment) for our sins (v. 10), so that, His justice having been completely satisfied by Christ, God *RECONCILED* the world of poor sinners unto Himself, “*not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). That’s what this “*Child*” is all about. He was “*born*” to be “*under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law*” (Galatians 4:4-5); that’s why this “*Son*” was “*given*” — “*unto US*”! Could God have shown greater love to us poor sinners? Could God have given us a greater gift than His own dear Son? “*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (I John 4:9-10).

Now we have before us in our title-text some very special names that He “*shall be called*” as indicative of who He really is in His person and work, in His *Messianic* office. “*In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,*” writes St. Paul in Colossians 2:9. When the eternal Son of the Father “*was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14), when He as “*a Child*” was “*born*” unto us of a human mother, He surrendered none of His Godhead which He had from all eternity. But, when He became incarnate in the virgin Mary, all of His divine attributes were communicated to (or shared with) His human nature, including His divine authority, power, might and dominion over all things in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, even as a child in His *state of humiliation*, Isaiah says: “*The government shall be upon His shoulder,*” to rule over all things for the particular benefit of His believers. Even as a child, having humbled Himself to be laid in a manger, this “*Son*” was the King of all kings and Lord of all lords for US!

“*His name shall be called Wonderful,*” literally, a *miracle*, not only because He was the only child ever to have been born of a *virgin* mother — the “*sign*” given to God’s people that He was the true Messiah (Isaiah 7:14) — but a *miracle* as to who He was from His conception, is, and ever shall be: “*True God begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the virgin Mary...[our] Lord*” (Luther), His divine and human natures together forming one undivided and indivisible person — the Personal Union (See: Cat. Q/A 128).

“*His name shall be called...Counselor,*” the all-wise, all-knowing God, whose purpose from all eternity to redeem fallen mankind from the curse of the Law was carried out in time (Galatians 4:4-5) and whose

primary will that all men be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4) has been published to all (Romans 10:18ff.). His *counsel* unto salvation is essential to be both heard and heeded (Revelation 3:17-20).

“He shall be called...the Mighty God” — the God-Man, identical with *Jehovah*, the *Lord of Hosts*, *“the Son of God”* (Luke 1:35), *“the only wise God, our Savior”* (Jude 1:25), *“the Word was God”* (John 1:1), *“Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever”* (Romans 9:5), whom all men should honor, *“even as they honor the Father”* (John 5:23). Christ had to be true God in order to be our *Savior* (See: Cat. Q/A 130).

“He shall be called...the Everlasting Father,” whose fatherly, loving care extends especially over His believing children (John 10:27, 28, 30; 14:8-11).

“He shall be called...the Prince of Peace,” — God’s own *“Shiloh”* (Genesis 49:10), the peace-maker, the peace-restorer between God and those who were His enemies since the Fall into sin, who were *“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12) until in Christ we were reconciled to God by His blood (v. 13); *“for He is our PEACE, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity...so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off and to them that were nigh”* (Ephesians 2:14-17).

What more, then, could we want as our perpetual Christmas Gift?? *“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift”* (II Corinthians 9:15)! *“For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given”* — *“to be the Propitiation for our sins”* (I John 4:10). *“Peace on earth and mercy mild: God and sinners reconciled!”* — the cause of a truly HAPPY and PEACE-FILLED CHRISTMAS to all people! Let us cling with grateful hearts to the Child of Bethlehem and receive Him personally by sincere faith as **our** *“Prince of Peace,”* so that *“being justified by faith, WE have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1) as the fruit of His redemptive work on our behalf!

—D. G. R.

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US, (AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER,) FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH. —JOHN 1:14



“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.” —Luke 2:29-32

The Rectilinear Prophecy of Our Savior in Micah 5:2



“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” —Micah 5:2

The prophet Micah was moved by the Holy Ghost to proclaim the wrath and punishment of the Lord against the Children of Israel—particularly against the southern kingdom of Judah—on account of their idolatrous practices (1:1–7), their unloving treatment of their fellow human beings (2:1–2; 7:2), the perversion of justice by those in authority (3:9–12; 7:3), and the lies of the false prophets among them who sought to make the people carnally secure in their wicked ways (3:5–8). By their sins and unbelief, God’s chosen nation had certainly violated His justice and provoked His wrath, and thereby were bringing upon themselves most dreadful consequences—both temporal and eternal. Accordingly, Micah proclaimed the Lord’s threats of punishment against the unbelievers (1:6; 6:13–16; etc.).

However, notice the beautiful expression of God’s gracious forgiveness and love with which the book of Micah concludes in the last three verses: *“Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old”* (7:18–20). But how is it possible for the holy and just Lord God to show such love, compassion, and forgiveness to those who deserve only the full fury of His righteous wrath according to His immutable Law? This was made possible only through the redemptive work of the Messiah, the Lord and Savior Jesus

Christ, whose advent in the flesh was still a little over 700 years away at the time of Micah's prophecy, but through whom God would perform that "truth" and "mercy" which He had sworn to His believing people "from the days of old."

The Savior's coming had been anticipated by the believers in the Old Testament going all the way back to Adam and Eve, after their fall into sin, when the promise was given about *the Seed of the woman* who would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). Gradually, over the next 4,000 years, the Lord revealed more and more specific details about the Messiah's advent, person, and work through various prophets. It was through the prophet Micah that God foretold exactly *where* Christ would be born—pinpointing the location to a small town in Judea, named Bethlehem. In the prophecy of Micah 5:2, the town is called "*Bethlehem Ephratah*" because it was originally called "Ephrath" ["the Fruitful"] at the time when Jacob buried his wife, Rachel, in that area (Genesis 35:19; 48:7). Thus the Bethlehem of Christ's birth, "*the city of David*" (Luke 2:4), was clearly distinguished by the Lord Himself through His prophet from another "Bethlehem," Bethlehem Zebulun, a town in Galilee just northwest of Nazareth.

Concerning this little town, which lies approximately five miles to the south of Jerusalem, Micah wrote by inspiration of God: "*Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*" Could this prophecy refer to anyone other than Christ? Absolutely not! From the hindsight of history, we know that there were no other rulers to come forth from Bethlehem after that time. But how could the people at the time of this prophecy, as well as the people of future generations, know that Micah was foretelling the birthplace of *the promised Messiah-Savior*, and not any ordinary "*ruler in Israel*"? Chapters four and five of Micah are clearly Messianic—picturing both the spiritual peace and the victory over the enemies that Christ would bring to His people. Furthermore, the phrase, "*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*" (not merely "from ancient times," as the NIV has it) can only refer to One who is *eternal*, namely God Himself. The Hebrew word translated as "*everlasting*" is "*oh • LAHM*"—the same word used in Psalm 90:2, "*even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.*" (Incidentally, the NIV *does* translate "*oh • LAHM*" as "everlasting" in Psalm 90:2.) So we see that both the *divine* and *human* natures of the Messiah are set forth in Micah 5:2. Christ according to His *human nature* is referred to when Bethlehem is stated to be the

place from which He would “*come forth*” (His human birth from the virgin Mary); whereas Christ according to His *divine nature* is referred to when His “*goings forth*” are declared to be “*from everlasting*” (His eternal generation from and existence with God the Father).

There was, indeed, a common understanding among the Jews, on the basis of Micah 5:2, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem Ephratah; and because of this, some people actually thought that Jesus could *not* be the Messiah, since He was generally thought to be a native Galilean (John 7:41–42). But even though Joseph and Mary had been residents of Galilee *prior* to Jesus’ birth, and even though Jesus spent most of His child and adult life in Nazareth, He was, indeed, born in Bethlehem of Judea, as this is recorded in Luke 2:1–7 and in Matthew 2:1. That Micah’s prophecy was understood by the Jews to be a clear foretelling of the Messiah’s coming and of the place of His birth can also be seen from the fact that “*the chief priests and scribes*” referred to it without hesitation in answer to Herod’s inquiry concerning “*where Christ should be born*” (Matthew 2:4–6). Now a comparison between the Old Testament prophecy of Micah 5:2 and the way that the chief priests and scribes paraphrased it (blending it together with II Samuel 5:2) in Matthew 2:6 shows an interesting difference, which might seem to be contradictory at first glance. Referring to Bethlehem, the prophet Micah wrote: “*Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah.*” But the chief priests and scribes paraphrased this as: “*Art not the least among the princes of Juda.*” (The first *emphasizes* its smallness; and the second *minimizes* its smallness.) Both statements set forth truths that are not mutually exclusive. Of course, it should be readily acknowledged that being little is not the same as being the least; so there is no contradiction here (simply a stressing of a different point). Especially in consideration of the fact that it was the birthplace of the Messiah, little Bethlehem was far from insignificant. The important point here is that the Jews correctly understood that Christ, the promised Savior, would be born in the town of Bethlehem Ephratah at the time of God’s appointing.

So “*when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman*” (Galatians 4:4)—being born as a true human being, and fulfilling all of the prophecies concerning His birth, including the prophesied *location* of this glorious event in “*the city of David, which is called Bethlehem*” (Luke 2:4–7). The accuracy of Micah’s prophecy (given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost over 700 years before the birth of Christ) bears witness to the divine authorship of this book of the Old

Testament, as well as of the Scriptures in general. The modernists, who deny the verbal inspiration of the Bible, rather than conceding that Micah accurately foretold the location of Jesus' birth, say that "*Bethlehem Ephratah*" does not refer to a *place* at all, but to a *person* (or a clan) named "Bethlehem Ephratah" from whom a great earthly ruler would arise. They cite I Chronicles 4:4 and claim that a man named Bethlehem, who was the son, or grandson, of a woman named Ephratah, would have been called "Bethlehem Ephratah" and is the person to whom Micah refers. However, the Hebrews would not use a mother or grandmother as part of a man's name. They would sometimes use a *father* or *grandfather* as part of a man's name; but even then, the usual construction would include a "Ben-" ("son of") prefix. Furthermore, as was stated before, the *Jews themselves* regarded the "*Bethlehem Ephratah*" of Micah 5:2 to be a specification of the town in which the Messiah would be born (Matthew 2:4–6; John 7:42).

Another objection put forth by critics is that the ruler mentioned in Micah 5:2–6 is described as being an *earthly ruler*, which Jesus was not, who would bring *earthly peace* and *deliverance from earthly enemies*, which Jesus did not do. And it is true that this section of Scripture does use descriptions of physical situations to make spiritual points—as Jesus Himself did when He said: "*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Christ was not talking about giving people *physical* rest from a *physical* burden, but granting them the *spiritual* relief of heart and mind that takes place by virtue of the forgiveness of their sins and the "*peace with God*" that every true believer enjoys when he is personally "*justified by faith*" (Romans 5:1). Other examples of how Jesus figuratively referred to physical things from the situation at hand in order to make spiritual points can be found in John 4:7–14, 31–34, and Matthew 16:5–12. In much the same way, through the pen of the prophet Micah (5:2–6), the Lord God used some physical things relating to the current situation to make deeper spiritual points. In the midst of great turmoil between the kings of Judah, Israel, and the other nations around them, the Lord foretold the coming of the greatest King ever to walk the earth—not an earthly king, but the King of all creation, *God Himself*, the spiritual Ruler of all true believers (compare Isaiah 9:6 and Jeremiah 23:5–6 with John 18:36–37). At a time when the Assyrians threatened to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord foretold the coming of Him who would grant His believing people (spiritual Jerusalem) deliverance from and victory over their most dangerous enemies—the spiritual enemies of Satan, the world, and the old man within (compare Luke 1:71–75). As the pros-

pects of war and fighting mounted, God pointed the people to the Messiah, who would bring a peace that is far greater than any kind of earthly peace—peace with God through the forgiveness of sins earned by the vicarious life, suffering, and death of the Messiah Himself (compare Isaiah 40:1-2, Luke 1:77–79; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14; etc.).

However, although the Jews of Jesus' day *rightly* understood the prophecy of Micah 5:2 as referring to the coming of the Messiah from the town of Bethlehem Ephratah, they *wrongly* believed that He would be an *earthly* ruler who would lead them to victory over their *earthly* enemies. But because this was completely contrary to the divinely ordained purpose of His mission, Christ resisted their attempt to make Him an earthly king (John 6:14–15) and steadfastly held that His kingdom was "*not of this world*" (John 18:36). Sadly, most of the Reformed hold to a variation of that old Jewish error in their expectation of a future millennial rule of Christ in an earthly kingdom centered in Jerusalem. This false belief was already starting to gain acceptance in Luther's day (see *Augsburg Confession*, Article XVII, §5). But why would anyone who knows and appreciates the *kingdom of grace* and the *spiritual* peace earned for him by Christ let hopes of *earthly* peace predominate in his thinking? Why would anyone who knows and appreciates the *kingdom of glory* that awaits him in *heaven* allow hopes of a future *earthly kingdom* to gain preeminence in his heart? This happens for the same reason that even those who know and appreciate the great Christmas Gift that God gave us in sending His Son to be our Savior from sin still often focus more of their time, energy, and thoughts on *earthly gifts* at Christmas time. It happens because of our old sinful flesh, which is constantly at work to draw our focus away from the priceless treasure of the Gospel and place it instead on the things of this world.

What then is the remedy for this innate worldliness that affects us all? In the first place, we must constantly be reminded by the mirror of God's *Law* of our innumerable transgressions, including our sins of worldliness, and of our wretched condition by nature on account of which we justly deserve God's righteous wrath and punishment; for only then will we understand our desperate need for a Savior to rescue us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10, 13). Then, having come to true contrition or Godly sorrow for our sins, we need to hear, heed, apprehend and be comforted by the sweet *Gospel* of God's grace in Christ Jesus which announces to us and to all men His perfect satisfaction of God's justice by both His active and passive obedience, so that

God, for His sake, has already forgiven the sins of the whole world — including our own. For it is by faith in that blessed fact that we have “*peace with God*” (Romans 5:1) and an ever greater appreciation for the *eternal* kingdom of *heaven* that Christ has purchased and secured for us with His own blood. May the Holy Ghost, through the power of His Word, “guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair and other great shame and vice” [Luther, Sixth Petition] by setting our affection upon this deceitful pleasures and fleeting treasures of this present life, including *earthly* peace and prosperity; “and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory” by steadfast faith in and humble appreciation for the invaluable *spiritual* and *eternal* blessings that are ours through the advent and work of the Lord Jesus and are laid up even now for us in the heavens (I Peter 1:3-5).

*Hark! A voice from yonder manger,
soft and sweet,
doth entreat:
“Flee from woe and danger.
Brethren, from all ills that grieve you
you are freed;
all you need
I will surely give you.”*

*Hither come, ye poor and wretched.
Know His will
is to fill
every hand outstretched.
Here are riches without measure;
here forget
all regret;
fill your hearts with treasure.*

(TLH 77, 7 and 11)

—P. E. B.





How about a Christmas Gift for the Lord Jesus?

*“What shall I render unto the Lord
for all His benefits toward me?”
—Psalm 116:12*

Did you finish all of your Christmas shopping in time? Did you buy everything on your list? Or did you still have a few items left to purchase? **Who** were the “important people” on your Christmas list? Your immediate family, your extended family, your in-laws? Your co-workers, your business contacts, your supervisor in your place of employment? Your friends, your acquaintances, your neighbors? Your Pastor, your Christian brethren, your children’s Sunday School teachers? Was your list categorized into people you “had” to buy for, people you “probably should have” bought for, and people you “would have liked” to buy for if you had the money? **What** special gift ideas were on your Christmas list? Automotive accessories, baked goods, beverages, techno-gadgets and tools “*for him*”? Flowers, fragrances, home décor accents, jewelry and personalized gifts “*for her*”? Gift certificates, board games, computers and electronics “*for teens*”? Clothing, craft kits and toys “*for kids*”? Diapers, sleepwear, picture frames and albums “*for babies*”? Chewable treats and even gift baskets “*for pets*”? What other items would have been “quick and easy” to buy so you could have checked off a few more of the *numerous* people on your Christmas list? Did you really have *everyone* “covered” this Christmas season? Was this our real attitude regarding the “gifting” of others around us who had given to us during the year? And then how about what **God** has done for us both *temporally* and *spiritually* and **still** does for us — particularly for our salvation? Was *He* on our Christmas list? *How about a Christmas Gift for the Lord Jesus?*

In focusing us upon our debt to God “*for all His benefits toward [us],*” the Psalmist doesn’t even begin to enumerate them all — not that he couldn’t, of course, writing by inspiration of the Holy Ghost (II Timothy 3:16a; II Peter 1:21). But He includes as “*benefits*” “**ALL**” that

the Lord bestows upon us for our welfare and blessing and then leaves it to US to meditate upon those “*benefits*,” both as to their quality and as to their quantity, so that we may **understand** and **appreciate** them. “*A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this!*” (Psalm 92:6). In fact, the unbelieving child of this world attributes NOTHING to God’s benevolent providence but claims credit for **himself** for even the *temporal* benefits which he enjoys at God’s hand, saying: “*My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth!*” (Deuteronomy 8:17).

For the purpose of humble meditation upon “*all His benefits toward us*,” let us briefly survey them under the common categories of **temporal** blessings — some of which He bestows equally upon believers and unbelievers alike (Matthew 5:45) — and **spiritual** blessings which He bestows through the precious Means of Grace and which He **abundantly** pours out especially upon His believing children (Romans 8:32).

God benevolently provides us and all His creatures with the **temporal** necessities of life, “*in that He [the Living God – Acts 14:15] did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*” (v. 17). We read in Psalm 145: “*The eyes of all wait upon Thee [O Lord – v. 10]; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing*” (vv. 15-16). God further graciously guards and protects us, His believing children, from all the “*evil[s]*” and from all the “*plague[s]*” that assault and hurt the soul (Psalm 91:10). We confess with Luther in The First Article of *The Apostles’ Creed* that the Lord does “all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”

With such *temporal* blessings of kindness and goodness from God, “*What shall [we] render [give back, return] unto the Lord for all His benefits toward [us]?*” How about **humbly acknowledging** that “[we are] not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto Thy servant[s]” (Genesis 32:10)? How about **praising** and **thanking** Him for our having been “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14) and for our being still today graciously preserved with all the necessities of life (Psalm 36:6)? How about “*commit [ting] [our] way unto the Lord, trust[ing] also in Him*” (Psalm 37:5), “*cast[ing] all [our] care upon Him*” (I Peter 5:7), **confidently believing** that He will provide for us and keep us also in the **future** (Matthew 6:25, 30-34)? However, in order for anyone to be able to give to the

Lord in a Godpleasing way, he must be a true believer in Jesus as his Savior; for “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:6). Are we able to do this of our own accord and power?

God teaches in His clear Word of truth (Psalm 119:105; 130; John 17:17) that every one of us, “*born of the flesh*” (John 3:6a), has by nature *the flesh*, in which “*dwelleth no good thing*” (Romans 7:18a), and this already from our conception (Psalm 51:5). By nature, “*natural man*” is spiritually blind to the “*things of the Spirit of God*” (I Corinthians 2:14), spiritually “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1) and in a state of “*enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7). As part of “*all*,” we, by nature, are guilty sinners under God’s just condemnation; for, according to God’s holy Law, “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), “*that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*” (v. 19), wholly deserving of **eternal death** in hell; for “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23a; also Ezekiel 18:20a). Even the works of believing Christians are totally without merit, for “*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*” in God’s holy sight (Isaiah 64:6). “*Therefore by the deeds of the Law, there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*” (Romans 3:20a). Consequently, we are in desperate need of a **Savior** to do for us what we could never do for ourselves: To keep God’s Law perfectly in our stead and to suffer in our place the punishment we deserve! The **name** of that Savior is **Jesus**; “*for He shall save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21) — “*Jesus Christ of Nazareth*” (Acts 4:10), the **only Savior** of all mankind; “*neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (v. 12). That Christ, the *Messiah*, was witnessed or testified to by ALL of God’s chosen prophets down through the whole Old Testament (Acts 10:43) as the “*Anointed [One]*” (v. 38), who would come “*to save that which was lost*” (Matthew 18:11).

Now what about His **CHOICEST** benefits, the *spiritual blessings* which our Lord and God graciously bestows upon us poor, wretched, undeserving sinners through the Means of His Grace, particularly through the Gospel? In spite of all our wretchedness and hatred for Him by nature, and for our *spiritual* necessity, God the Father manifested His love toward us in sending “*His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him*” (I John 4:9). “*When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons*” (Galatians 4:4-5). The mysterious union of true God

and true man in one undivided and indivisible Person, Jesus Christ, “**God...manifest in the flesh**” (I Timothy 3:16), was **for our salvation**; “for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). How faithfully God kept His promises concerning the Savior to come (Genesis 3:15; Jeremiah 23:5-6, Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; II Timothy 2:13) and graciously delivered to us, “when the fulness of the time was come” (Galatians 4:4) our greatest **Christmas Gift** ever! “Thanks be unto God for His **un-speakable GIFT!**”(II Corinthians 9:15)

For our **spiritual** necessity, Christ Jesus willingly became our Substitute under God’s Law to fulfill His requirements of us (Romans 5:18b; 19b) and to suffer the penalty of our guilt (Isaiah 53:4-6; II Corinthians 5:21); and thus **He** redeemed **us**, not “with corruptible things as silver and gold” (I Peter 1:18) — as **we** retire debts and as we purchase material gifts for one another in this world — “but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot” (v. 19). In view of Jesus’ perfect **vicarious atonement**, which satisfied His Divine justice (Romans 3:25; Galatians 3:13; I John 2:2), God forgave the sins of the whole world and declared all men righteous in His holy sight; for “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Corinthians 5:19), “[all] being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Through the Gospel (I Corinthians 4:15), “the Word of Reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19b), God the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the hearts of men, giving them “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 4:6), and thus making them “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26; see also I John 3:1). This wonderful **spiritual gift** He has given to **you** and to **me**, having “called [us] by the Gospel, enlightened [us] with His gifts, sanctified, and kept [us] in the true faith” (Luther: Third Article).

Having so many and such wondrous **spiritual** blessings of God’s mercy bestowed on us in Christ Jesus, “What shall [we] render [give back, return] unto the Lord for all His benefits toward [us]?” The Psalmist himself, writing by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, answers his own question, targeting first of all the **chief spiritual** benefit and responding to “the grace of God that bringeth salvation” (Titus 2:11): “I will **take the cup of salvation**” (Psalm 116:13a). To receive by faith that overflowing cup of the Lord’s spiritual blessings, notably, first of all, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for Christ’s sake, is essential to our

having them as our personal possessions (*subjective justification*, Romans 3:28; John 3:36a) and then *having* “*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1) as the **fruit** of that justification. Then we truly “**take heed to be and remain members** of the invisible Church by sincere faith in the Redeemer” (Cat. Q/A 186a; I Corinthians 10:12), **clinging with confidence** of the heart to the dear Christ-child of Bethlehem and always “*examin[ing] [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith*” (II Corinthians 13:5a).

Only then can we “*call upon the Name of the Lord*” (Psalm 116:13b) in acceptable prayers (Psalm 19:14) of grateful thanksgiving for His grace and mercy and “*pay [our] vows unto the Lord*” (Psalm 116:14) in offerings of cheerful giving as the evidence of saving faith in Him. Indeed, then, “*prov[ing] [our] own selves*” (II Corinthians 13:5b), by the power of the Holy Ghost (I Corinthians 12:3) bringing forth the **fruits** of faith and love in our lives of sanctification to **show** that our faith is alive (James 2:17-20), we have a whole host of Godpleasing works in which we should **abound** as fruitful branches in the vine of our Savior (John 15:1-5), as new creatures living unto Him which died for us and rose again (II Corinthians 5:15, 17).

Having in our possession the *spiritual* blessing of God’s clear, authoritative, true and all-sufficient Holy Scriptures, “*which are able to make [us] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (II Timothy 3:15), and knowing that “*it is God which worketh in [us]*” — by means of His precious Word — “*both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13), how about, **swearing unswerving allegiance** to Jesus Christ and to His precious Word of truth (John 8:31-32)? How about **professing unreserved acceptance** of this precious Word even unto death (Revelation 2:10)? How about **holding in highest regard** as sacred, holy and important the Word of God (I Thessalonians 2:13; Isaiah 66:2)? How about **regularly hearing and attentively listening** to the Word of God when it is preached and taught, the Word whereby faith is created and strengthened in the heart (Isaiah 55:10, 11; Psalm 122:1; Luke 11:28; Romans 10:17)? How about **gladly and regularly attending** at every opportunity not only public worship (Psalm 122:1; Psalm 26:8) but also other venues for assembling (Hebrews 10:25) to hear and learn God’s Word and to exhort one another with the Word, such as Sunday morning Bible classes, Sunday School and Midweek Bible studies, “*let[ting] the Word of Christ dwell in us richly*” (Colossians 3:16), making the most of every opportunity we have to “*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Sav-*

ior Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18)? How about **diligently** and **reverently reading** and **studying** the Bible, “*search[ing] the Scriptures*” (John 5:39) so we can nourish our souls on “*the sincere [pure] milk of the Word*” (I Peter 2:2)? How about **gladly learning** and **committing to memory** the Word of God (Psalm 119:16) so “*that [we] might not sin against [Him]*” (Psalm 119:11) and so that we can teach His eternal truths to our own children (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7)? How about **devoutly meditating** “*day and night*” upon the Word of God (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2)? How about **humbly accepting** the Word of God and **clinging** to it in childlike confidence (John 8:31-32; 20:31), “*receiv[ing] with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save [our] souls*” (James 1:21b)? How about **gladly following** and **continuing** in the Word of God, living according to His Word as the fruit of our faith (John 14:15, 23; James 1:22; John 8:31-32; Psalm 119:9)? How about **sincerely honoring** and **faithfully supporting** the preaching and teaching of the Word of God in the respective congregations of our precious fellowship (I Thessalonians 5:12, 13; I Timothy 5:17; I Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6, 7)? How about **diligently spreading** the Word of God to others (Mark 16:15; Acts 4:20), particularly “*to give light*” to those on our Christmas list who are still “*sit[ting] in [spiritual] darkness and in the shadow of death*” (Luke 1:79), bringing them the *spiritual* message of salvation in Christ, the newborn Savior, instead of merely sending them a secular holiday greeting devoid of spiritual substance?

Having among us the marvelous *spiritual* blessing of truly orthodox local **congregations** which, by the grace of God, have, teach, profess and practice the Word of God in all its purity (Acts 2:42; John 8:31-32; Hebrews 10:25), how about **staunchly adhering** to them (Cat. Q/A 186b), “*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3), all of us “*speak[ing] the same thing,*” with “*no divisions among [us],*” but being “*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (I Corinthians 1:10)? How about **doing all in our power** to maintain, promote, and extend our local congregations with our prayers, personal service, and financial support (Cat. Q/A 186c; I Corinthians 9:14; Malachi 3:10)? How about **being truly grateful** for the wealth of both temporal and spiritual blessings that our Lord has graciously bestowed upon us (Psalm 103:2-5; Psalm 145:1516; II Corinthians 9:8) and **praising God** for them together with our true Christian brethren in our joint prayers, “*in psalms and [in our] hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in [our] hearts to the Lord*” (Colossians 3:16)? How about **worshipping sacrificially** and **tangibly showing** our thankfulness (Psalm 100:4; Luke

17:15-18), “offer[ing] to [Him] the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalm 116:17) both with our words and with our cheerful, regular offerings of love (Psalm 66:1-2; Psalm 96:8)? Consider again on the *Feast of the Epiphany* how the wise men traveling “from the east to Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1) did this when they “fell down and worshiped [the young child, Jesus],” and, having opened their treasures, they “presented unto Him gifts” well-suited for the King of kings and Lord of all Lords, the gracious King of their hearts (v. 11)!

How could we, who “know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Corinthians 8:9) and have taken “the cup of salvation” (Psalm 116:13a) into our hearts by faith, how could we *not* render to our Savior anything of Godpleasing value for all His benefits to us unworthy sinners, for all the undeserved blessings of our priceless redemption in and through Him — forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, peace with God, and the assurance of His loving care, keeping and protection? Nay, let us rather “render unto the Lord” sincere praise and thanks, “call[ing] upon the Name of the Lord” (Psalm 116:13b)! “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation” (Psalm 68:19), who “hath dealt bountifully with [us]” (Psalm 116:7)! Let us “render unto the Lord” glad and joyous service to Him all our days, “paying [our] vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all His people” (Psalm 116:14)! With grateful hearts for “His unspeakable Gift” (II Corinthians 9:15), let us raise our voices to our Lord Jesus, ever remembering that it is “the love of Christ [that] constraineth us” (II Corinthians 5:14) to love Him who first loved us (I John 4:19), so that we henceforth live not unto ourselves but unto Him which died for us and rose again (II Corinthians 5:15), earnestly beseeching Him not only in this Christmas season but during the coming year of grace and throughout our lives:

*Ah, dearest Jesus, Holy Child,
make Thee a bed soft, undefiled
within my heart, that it may be
a quiet chamber kept for Thee.*

(TLH 85, 13)

— Jason A. Mabe, Seminarian
(Submitted through his Pastor)

Running Our Christian Race in the New Year

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”

—Hebrews 12:1-2

“For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (I Chronicles 29:15). Thus spoke David shortly before his death. And the writer to the Hebrews declares: *“For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come”* (13:14). Paul Gerhardt, the songbird of the Reformation, describes the experiences of us Christians so aptly:



A pilgrim and a stranger,
I journey here below;

Far distant is my country,
the home to which I go.

Here I must toil and travail,
oft weary and opprest;

But there my God shall lead me
to everlasting rest.

(*TLH* 586, 1)

Once again, we have arrived at another year of grace – 2010. As we look back over the past year which we have traveled, we are constrained to lift up our voices in hymns of praise and thanksgiving for the countless and undeserved blessings God has so richly bestowed upon us. But we have not reached the final goal. The path still lies before us with the enemies of our soul *“all eager to devour us”* (*TLH* 262, 3). Although beset by so many foes, we ought not yield to despair because that precious Word of our dear Lord tells us that His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light

unto our path (Psalm 119:105). So we Christians endeavor to continue throughout another year of grace to run the race that is set before us.

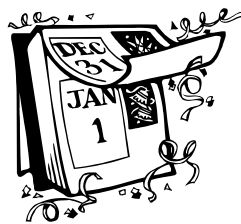
Note that the writer of these God-given words in our title-text connects his admonition with the glorious examples of faith which have just been enumerated and pictured in the preceding chapter. There the writer mentions Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses (11:4-29). And then, referring to the time of Joshua and later, he writes, “*By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms.... Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, (of whom the world was not worthy); they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth*” (11:30-38). Carefully considering the examples of such faithful witnesses should certainly encourage and incite us to run the race and not to grow weary.

Obviously an athlete cannot win a race if he is burdened with cumbersome clothing which keeps getting in his way. The greatest hindrance in the race for the crown of life is sin. It seeks to distract our attention from the goal; it loads us down with a heavy weight which becomes heavier and will finally crush us unless we are enabled to lay it aside. Just think of the example of David, who exclaimed: “*For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me*” (Psalm 38:4). But how can we lay it aside? We cannot do it by ourselves. When we examine ourselves, we must exclaim with the Apostle Paul: “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing...*” (Romans 7:18). While in the New Man of faith the intention is always there to do good, nevertheless Paul says: “*The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do*” (Romans 7:19). The accusing finger of the Law points at us and declares: “*You are a sinner!*” “*For by the Law is the knowledge of sin*” (Romans 3:20). Ah, but are we not Christians? Indeed! But because of our sinful flesh, the temptations of the devil, and the allurements of the sinful world, we, too, are tempted

to live in denial. And so the Apostle John earnestly warns us: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... “if we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us”* (1 John 1:8, 10). We are aware of the fact that people tend to belittle the nature of sin and to regard it as something which must not be taken too seriously. But God says: *“He that committeth sin is of the devil”* (1 John 3:8); *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). If God were to judge us according to His Law, every single one of us would be cast into everlasting destruction!

There is only one solution! *“Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.”* Remember, when the children of Israel murmured against God in the wilderness, God sent fiery serpents into their midst to punish them for their wickedness. And when they cried unto God in repentance, Moses was directed to erect a brass serpent. All who looked up to this brass serpent believing God’s gracious promise were healed and lived (Numbers 21). Now so also with all those who repent of their sins and believingly look to the Lord Jesus, *“that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:15). *“For He [God] hath made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”* (II Corinthians 5:21). Only if we cling to Jesus and His merit in true faith unto the end will we then receive the crown of everlasting life. We dare not trust in ourselves, as though by our own powers and strength we should obtain eternal life, but we look to Jesus, *“the Author and Finisher of our faith,”* who will preserve us from every evil and finally receive us into glory (II Timothy 4:18). The reward of grace which awaits us believers in the joys of heaven should certainly encourage us and keep us from bitter discouragement. The more that we meditate upon our final goal, the more we will declare with the apostle: *“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). As we bring the old year to a close and begin this new year of grace, we can then confidently declare: *“We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hebrews 10:39).

— M. L. N.



Churches in Fellowship with the Concordia Lutheran Conference

ORTHODOX LUTHERAN CHURCH OF EKATERINBURG

Ekaterinburg, Russia
The Rev. Roman G. Schurganoff, Pastor
P. O. Box 62
620088 Ekaterinburg, RUSSIA
E-mail: lutheran@r66.ru



CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria
The Rev. Onengiye C. Wariboko, Pastor
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria
The Rev. Onesimus Ekele, Pastor

HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Idama, Nigeria
(Pastorate vacant at present)
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abalama, Nigeria
The Rev. Elison B. Agborubere, Pastor
Thompson Compound Abalama
Abalama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. CLEMENT'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria
The Rev. Luckyn Kaladokubo, Pastor
St. Clement Lutheran Church,
Elem-Sangama Arch-Deaconry
Elem-Sangama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. MATTHEW'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

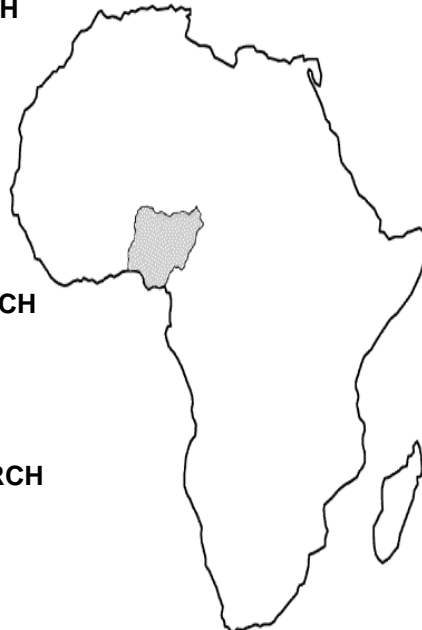
Port Harcourt, Nigeria
The Rev. Allenson Karibi Asawo, Pastor
76 Abba Street, Mile 1 Diobu
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Kula, Nigeria
The Rev. Onengiye C. Wariboko, Pastor
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Kula, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. PAUL'S NYEMONI LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL

Abonnema, Nigeria
The Rev. Nimi B. Fyeface and
The Rev. God'stime E. D. Douglas, Co-Pastors
P. O. Box 123
Abonnema, Akulga, Rivers State, NIGERIA





Directory of Member Congregations

www.concordialutheranconf.com

GOOD SHEPHERD EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH

4050 South Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730 Telephone (520) 721-7618

Worship Service 9:30 a.m.

Sunday School & Bible Class 10:45 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID G. REDLIN, Pastor

4050 South Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730 (520) 721-7618

E-mail: david.redlin@worldnet.att.net

PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Central Avenue at 171st Place, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913 Telephone: (708) 532-4288

Sunday School & Bible Class 8:30 a.m.

Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID T. MENSING, Pastor

17151 South Central Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913 (708) 532-9035

E-mail: pastormensing@yahoo.com

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355 Telephone: (541) 258-2941

Sunday School & Bible Class 10:00 a.m.

Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. M. L. NATTERER, Pastor

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355 (541) 258-2941

E-mail: m.l.natterer@comcast.net

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

5350 South Fountain Street, Seattle, WA 98178 Telephone: (206) 723-1078

Sunday School & Bible Class 9:00 a.m.

Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

The Rev. EDWARD J. WORLEY, Pastor

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118 (206) 723-7418

E-mail: revworley@comcast.net

NOTE: Services are also held in **Victoria, British Columbia** on the 1st and 3rd Sundays. Please call the Pastor for current location.

Worship Service 7:00 p.m.

Adult Bible Class 4:30 p.m.

Adult Catechism Class 8:30 p.m.

ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411 Telephone: (708) 758-6222

Sunday School & Bible Class 8:45 a.m.

Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

The Rev. PAUL E. BLOEDEL, Pastor

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411 (708) 757-6859

E-mail: revbloedel@gmail.com

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

300 North Ridgeland Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302 Telephone: (708) 386-6773

Sunday School & Bible Class 9:00 a.m.

Worship Service 10:15 a.m.

The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor

233 North Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302 (708) 386-4145

E-mail: robertjlietz@yahoo.com



And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

—Luke 2:8-11