

The
Concordia  *Lutheran*

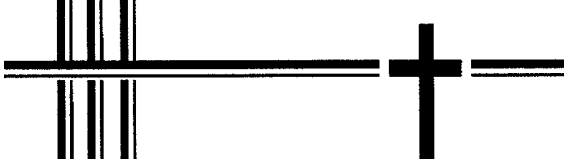
“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35.

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

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“...made manifest
by the appearing
of our Savior,
Jesus Christ”

2 Timothy 1:10



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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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Initial Sermon delivered by
Seminarian Daniel P. Mensing
in Oak Forest on

***The Sunday
After
Christmas***

on

Luke 2:25-35

In the Name of Jesus Christ, our newborn Savior, dearly beloved hearers of His precious Word:

This Sunday falls between two very special seasons of the Church year, namely, Advent and Epiphany. During the Advent season we focused on the several *modes* or ways in which Jesus our Lord comes to us, and in the Epiphany season we will see how Christ manifested Himself here on earth by word and deed as the long-promised Messiah and Savior of the world. But our text for today provides us with a simple transition from the one season to the other. Just five days *ago* we celebrated with joyful hearts the birth of our Lord Jesus, that is, His coming in the flesh in fulfillment of God's gracious promises (Is. 7:14). And *now* in our text for today we examine the encounter of the aged Simeon with the newborn Savior.

St. Luke tells us in verse 22 of our text that approximately forty days after the His birth, in accordance with the Ceremonial Law, Mary and Joseph "*brought [Jesus] to the temple to present Him to the Lord*" (c.f. Lev. 12:2-4). Even though the news of the Savior's birth had been proclaimed by the shepherds in the streets of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night, it did not spread very far. In fact, as we see from our text, Simeon had no idea that the Messiah had already come into the world. We see in verse 25 that he continued to wait in confident anticipation for Him. There is a word for this anticipation of Simeon, namely, "hope." Hope is that which confidently expects future blessings from God and deliverance from tribu-

lation on the basis of His gracious promises (*Apology*, Art. III, *Triglot*, p. 192). Now here in our text, in the encounter of Simeon with the baby Jesus we note this *specific result* of God's promises as it is manifested in Simeon's proclamation. Here we see that

God's Gracious Promises Give Us Hope

... (I) the hope that Old Testament believers had; (II) the hope that the aged Simeon had; and (III) the hope that we in the New Testament have.

I.

In the first part of our sermon we will examine how the gracious promises of the Lord gave hope to the Messianic believers of the Old Testament. In order properly to do this, we naturally must find out what the hope of the Old Testament believers was. In the first verse of our text (v. 25), Saint Luke introduces us to Simeon. "*And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.*" We read that Simeon, an example of the Old Testament Messianic believers, waited in confident anticipation for the "*consolation of Israel.*" But why were they in *need* of this consolation? One doesn't give consolation to those that are happy, but rather to those who are *grieving*. Peace is not spoken to the fearless, but to the *fearful*. Comfort isn't spoken to those who are secure, but to those who are in *torment* (Isaiah 61:1-3). So *why* was Israel in need of this consolation? Indeed Israel was *grieving* and was *fearful* and *tormented* by what they had come to know from God's Holy Law, and rightly so. From the Law of God they had come to recognize their sin and guilt before God. In the fourteenth Psalm, verses 2 and 3, King David writes, "*The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*" His son, Solomon, writes in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 20, "*There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.*" These Messianic believers acknowledged God's wrath, death and damnation as having been earned by them because of their sins. The prophet Ezekiel writes, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:20). It was this condemnation from God's holy Law that brought **terror** to their consciences, **broke** their hearts (Jeremiah 23:29), and worked in them sincere **contrition** for all of their sins. Yet God did not leave them to despair; for in His infinite mercy, God promised to them gracious consolation in the sweet news of His Gospel.

This is the situation in which Simeon and the other Old Testament believers found themselves, as we see from the beginning of our text. They were waiting for the fulfillment of God's merciful consolation. What was the *nature* of this consolation for which they hoped? In spite of the corruption of their human nature and the wretchedness of their sins, by which they deserved nothing but God's wrath and displeasure, God promised to all mankind *forgiveness* of their sins, *reconciliation* and *peace* with Him as the gift of His unmerited grace and mercy. On the slopes of Mt. Sinai, after Moses interceded on behalf of the children of Israel who sinned by worshiping the golden calf, the Lord passed by and proclaimed, "*The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*" (Exodus 34:6-7a). The psalmist David writes in Psalm 86:5, "*For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee.*" This comfort of the Gospel was *not* without a foundation, because the basis of this consolation was the Messiah's vicarious atonement that He would accomplish in the fullness of time.

All of this, God revealed to mankind throughout the Old Testament, "*by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began*" (Luke 1:70). Already in the Garden of Eden, the Lord had proclaimed this Gospel, namely, that the Seed of the woman, which is Christ, would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). And in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, the Lord described the substitutionary suffering and death of the Messiah in detail (Isaiah 53). The *punishment* which sinners deserve, the Messiah bore. The *death* that sinners deserve to die, He died. The *pangs of hell* that all transgressors are to suffer, Christ suffered. This was the necessary price of Israel's consolation. Isaiah speaks of this resulting consolation in his 51st chapter saying, "*For the Lord shall comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody*" (v. 3).

Understanding now *what* the Old Testament believers were waiting for and *how* this would come to pass, let us also consider how they were able to *have* this hope of consolation. As we noted before, hope is the confident anticipation of blessings promised. We do not create this hope in our own hearts and minds, but the Holy Ghost creates it *in* us by means of the Gospel (Psalms 119:49). The Old Testament believers were able

to have hope of God's consolation of peace and comfort by faith in God's sure, certain, and infallible promises. One of the most notable examples of this in the Old Testament is the patriarch Abraham. We read in Romans 4:20ff, that Abraham "*staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that, what [God] had promised, He was able also to perform.*" And 2,000 years later, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, expressed this same hope in chapter 1 of Luke's Gospel that the Lord would "*perform the mercy promised to our fathers ...and...remember His holy covenant*" (v. 72). This hope sustained all Old Testament believers as they waited patiently for God's fulfillment (Romans 8:25).

II.

It was this same hope that Simeon had as an Old Testament believer. We will now examine how the gracious promises of the Lord gave hope to *him*. As our text unfolds, we see that Simeon's hope was two-fold. First, as a Messianic believer, he waited for the universal promise of consolation as did all Old Testament believers (Luke 2:25); for we read that Simeon was "*just and devout,*" characteristics that are only spoken of true believers, for "*the just shall live by faith*" (Habakkuk 2:4; Hebrews 10:38). From this description we know that Simeon was righteous in God's sight by faith in the promised Messiah, and "*walked in the spirit*" in his life of sanctification (Galatians 5:25). In addition to the spiritual blessings that the Lord graciously bestows upon *all* His children, Simeon was granted a *special* gift of the immediate presence of the Holy Ghost, who revealed to him that "*he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ*" (Luke 2:26). It was to the fulfillment also of this *second, special* promise that Simeon looked forward in hope.

Just as Simeon's hope was two-fold, God's fulfillment was two-fold. We read in our text that Simeon "*came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him after the custom of the Law, then took he Him up in his arms and blessed God and said, '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 2:27-32).

In fulfillment of His *universal* Messianic prophecies, God had sent His long-promised Messiah into the world! Having been brought into the

temple by the Holy Spirit of God, Simeon was able to recognize *who* this baby was. He picked Him up in his arms and praised God for His unspeakable Gift. Simeon described this baby as “[*God’s*] *Salvation*.” This baby was the only Savior of the world (Acts 4:12). We read in the Old Testament that the Lord Himself was the Salvation of His people (Isaiah 12:2), and it was this Lord who was now incarnate, that is, in the flesh and present among them, as His name, Immanuel, shows, “*which being interpreted is ‘God with us’*” (Matthew 1:23). Simeon testified that this Salvation of God was not prepared in a *hidden* fashion, that is, in secret and darkness; but rather God prepared it openly, publicly demonstrating His plan of salvation for all mankind — “*prepared before the face of all people*.” The prophet Isaiah foretold this already in his 52nd chapter saying, “*The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the Salvation of our God*” (v. 10).

Simeon also described this Savior as “*a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of [*God’s*] people Israel*.” By this simple description, Simeon testified to one of the greatest elements of the Gospel, namely, God’s *universal grace*. This Savior was not only sent for the salvation of the Jewish people, but even for the *Gentiles* – for you, and for me! Concerning this Light, Isaiah prophesied saying, “*Arise, shine; for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy Light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising*” (Isaiah 60:1-3). Here we see that this Light was **both** for the enlightening of the Gentiles and the glory of God’s people. The blessings of the Savior were not to be limited to a certain race or class of people, but were intended for all mankind.

Here in the temple, in fulfillment of God’s *special* and personal promise to him, Simeon lifted the infant Savior up into his arms. The Lord had promised that Simeon “*would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ*” (Luke 2:26). Now Simeon blessed God and said, “*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation*” (vv. 29-30). Simeon’s hope was **fulfilled** (Proverbs 13:12)! There was no need to hope anymore for the Savior’s arrival, because He was now here (cf. Romans 8:24). Simeon could now depart in peace, having seen God’s Salvation with his very own eyes.

Having concluded his prayer of praise, Simeon foretold of the results of Christ's earthly mission. We read, "*And Simeon blessed them and said unto Mary, His mother, 'Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed'*" (Luke 2:34-35). As we learn from the Holy Scriptures, Christ and His teachings are offensive and a stumbling block of foolishness to all those who do not believe (cf. I Peter 2:8; I Corinthians 1:18). As a consequence of their **unbelief**, many in Israel, who were familiar with the Messianic prophecies, would stumble and fall at His teachings, not in such a way however that it would be impossible for them to be restored. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 11:11, "*I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid.*" According to the election of grace, many in Israel would be restored to faith in the Savior. Simeon also said that Christ was "*set for a sign which shall be spoken against*" (v. 34b). This Savior of the world and His work would be despised, rejected of many and contradicted (cf. Isaiah 53), not only in His Passion, but also in the preaching of His Apostles (Acts 13:45). All of this would happen, Simeon instructed Mary, so "*that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed,*" that both the faith and the unbelief of many would become evident by their reaction to Christ's Word and work.

It is on this note that Simeon's interaction with the little family is concluded according to our text. Simeon's hope of the coming Messiah having been fulfilled, he could now depart in peace, knowing that Christ **would accomplish** what He was sent to do, namely, to render in time what God had already in eternity accepted as the purchase price of reconciliation and peace with Him, namely, Christ's *vicarious atonement* (II Corinthians 5:19). To us now in the New Testament, we look back in the Scriptures to what He **did** accomplish for us.

III.

Having this assurance and all the blessings that come with it, we now look forward in anticipation to what God promises to **us**. Already having brought us to faith through the saving power of His Gospel, the Holy Ghost assures us that we already *have* the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God that Christ came to earn. Thus, *by faith*, we already have God's salvation and the sure inheritance of everlasting life in heaven, as the Apostle Peter writes in his first epistle, chapter one,

verse 4, “*an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.*” Therefore we also look forward in anticipation to the redemption of our bodies on the Last Day. The Apostle Paul describes in his letter to the Romans that we are waiting “*for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Romans 8:23). In the meantime, while we wait for that day when we shall “*meet the Lord in the air*” (I Thessalonians 4:17), we also anticipate all of the continued blessings that God promises to give to His dear children during this life — gifts both spiritual and temporal (Romans 8:28-32).

The primary blessings that we expect are the **spiritual** blessings. The Lord promises in Philippians 1:6, “*He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” Therefore we make it our first and foremost **priority** to be and remain members of the Invisible Church *by sincere faith* in our Redeemer. This is of the utmost importance because it is in *this* Church (the Communion of Saints) that we *have* forgiveness of sins, life and salvation (Luther’s Small Catechism). It is also important to be and remain in a true visible church that properly and regularly uses God’s ordained *Means of Grace*, namely, the Gospel and the Sacraments, whereby faith is strengthened and preserved in us.

In addition to our spiritual needs, we also hope for the continued temporal blessings for which we pray in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) and confess with Dr. Luther in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed, namely, “*daily bread*” and “*all that we need to support this body and life.*”

But on what *basis* do we hope for all of these things? On what does our hope *rest*? First of all, our hope rests on the immutability, or *changelessness*, and on the faithfulness of God’s gracious promises and assurances in His Word. The writer to the Hebrews teaches us that, “*God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast*” (Hebrews 6:17-19a). When **God** makes a promise, we should never doubt that He will be true to His word, “*for He is faithful that promised*” (Hebrews 10:23). We see this faithfulness demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promised redemption through the blood

of Christ (Hebrews 9:15, 28). God made good on His Word then, and we have every assurance that He will make good on His Word to us now. Where do we see this fulfillment carried out? In God's own revelation to us, namely, the Holy Scriptures that give us in inerrant (perfectly accurate and unmistakable) words the record of God's fulfillment and His assurance of our salvation.

Now, how do we *have* this hope? How are we *able* to look forward in anticipation of all of these things? By faith, we like Simeon of old confide in God's gracious promises, counting them as true and certain (Hebrews 10:23). Having this confidence, we look forward to what God has promised to us, namely, continued peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and everlasting life in heaven (Romans 5:1; John 3:16; Luke 2:29).

Therefore, let us take comfort in Simeon's words of praise, knowing that by faith, we too can exclaim the very same thing. "*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant[s] depart in peace according to Thy Word.*" By God's grace we have been enlightened by the Light of the world (v. 32). By faith, our eyes have seen the Lord's Salvation, which He prepared before the face of all people (vv. 30-31). As a result, we can all look forward to a peaceful departure when our time comes to leave this world (v. 29). Until that time, may "*the God of patience and consolation...the God of hope, fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*" (Romans 15:5, 13). Amen.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!



Christ Manifested as our DIVINE PROPHET in His Epiphany

“No man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” —John 1:18

The word “Epiphany” means “manifestation” or “appearing;” and although we date the holy Epiphany season as beginning with the Savior’s manifestation to the Wise Men, which we celebrate each year on January 6th, that glorious manifestation of our *Immanuel*, “*God with us*,” was not an isolated event, a “Christmas special” that is now only a memory for us. Rather, it is a continuous manifestation of our Savior, just beginning with His manifestation to the shepherds of Bethlehem, to the aged Simeon and Anna in the Temple, to the Wise Men from the east, and to the learned scribes and elders at the age of twelve years. For He manifested Himself to “*His own*,” to the Jews in His public ministry here on earth, to “*all the world*” in the preaching of the Gospel ever since, and to **us** very particularly when **we** were enlightened by His Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace and brought to “*the knowledge of the truth*” (I Timothy 2:4).

In our *Catechism* (Q/A 132A), we confess that Christ, in His office as our Divine Prophet “**revealed Himself** by word and deed...as the **Son of God** and the **Redeemer of the world**.” The expression, “by word and deed,” refers to **His PREACHING** and to **His MIRACLES**, as BOTH abound in His public ministry, in His personal and visible Epiphany to men.

Moses said to Israel in the wilderness: “*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a PROPHET from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken*” (Deuteronomy 18:15). This “*prophet*” or preacher would be sent by God Himself, says Moses; and that statement takes on special meaning when we know that Moses was speaking specifically about **Jesus**. For the Savior said to the scribes and Pharisees in John 5:46, “*Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me.*” And in Hebrews 12, this very prophecy of Moses, including its whole context, is discussed with specific reference to **Jesus**. So this preacher or “*prophet*” of whom Moses wrote was not only “*raised up*” and sent by God, but He Himself was (and **is**) “**TRUE GOD**, begotten of the Father from eternity” (Luther).

But this DIVINE PROPHET was also to be “TRUE MAN, born of the Virgin Mary...” (Luther). Moses said that He would be raised up “*from the midst of thee, of thy brethren,*” of the house of Israel, a “brother” according to the flesh, a physical descendant of Abraham, Judah and David — a Jew “*of the house and lineage of David,*” both *genetically* through Mary, His biological mother, and *legally* through Joseph, His father-of-record in the eyes of the Jews (Luke 3:23; 4:24). Surely that perfect combination of being God-sent and God Himself, and, at the same time, a son-of-Israel, should make this Prophet credible among the people!

Moreover, Moses said that this DIVINE PROPHET would be a **mediator** “*like unto me,*” a mediator between God and His people. But there was a significant difference between them in their mediation. “*The Law was given by Moses...*” (John 1:17). Moses was a mediator of the **OLD COVENANT**, having been the go-between God’s people and God Himself when He gave His written Law on Mt. Sinai. The Bible tells us that the Lord knew Moses “*face to face*” (Deuteronomy 34:10), for Moses communicated directly with God in the mountain and brought back to the people what God had said, commanded, and threatened; “*...but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17). The writer to the Hebrews points out that Christ was to be “*the Mediator of the NEW Testament*” (9:15), the messenger of a different covenant— a covenant of mercy, forgiveness, life and salvation, the “*Messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in*” (Malachi 3:1), making us right with God, not *symbolically* by the blood of animal sacrifices (as Moses did under the Old Covenant), but “*by His own blood He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” (v. 12).

Yet, when this DIVINE PROPHET “*came unto His own,*” arrived on the scene in the fullness of time to proclaim Himself, first to the Jews, as their long-promised Messiah and the Redeemer of the world, “*His own received Him not*” (John 1:11). “*The children of the kingdom*” (Matthew 8:12) rejected Him, “*would not*” permit Him to gather their children together into His Kingdom of Grace (Matthew 23:37), preferred that their children’s *Living Bread* (John 6:51) be cast unto the Gentile dogs (Matthew 15:26), and killed their own Messiah, “*the Prince of life*” (Acts 3:15)! Like their fathers, the Children of Israel in the wilderness, they loathed the Manna of His precious Word and eventually lost their appetite for its saving nourishment. May God mercifully preserve US from such indifference to the **PREACHING** of our DIVINE PROPHET in His continuing Epiphany to our hearts, lest we too lose the priceless blessings of His grace mediated to us in His precious Word!

But Jesus, our DIVINE PROPHET also manifested Himself to men in His **MIRACLES**. Isaiah described that function of His prophetic office, saying, over seven-hundred years in advance of His coming: “*Behold, your GOD will **come**...He will come and **save** you. ...Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing*” (Isaiah 35:4-6). Jesus Himself referred to this prophecy when He spoke with the disciples of John the Baptist, as we read in Matthew 11. John knew, of course, who Jesus was and had identified Him as “*the LAMB OF GOD which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). But some of John’s disciples were skeptical of Jesus, and so John sent them to Jesus directly to find out who He was, to permit Him to *manifest Himself* to them. Their question: “*Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?*” Jesus answered: “*Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me*” (Matthew 11:3-6).

Why did Jesus do all these things? Did Jesus have to “prove” anything by giving people “*a sign*” to impress them? Not at all! He did not do all these things for *His own sake* (as we sinful human beings do when our authority and pride are attacked and we are challenged to “put up or shut up”). He did it all **for US**. John tells us in his twentieth chapter, “*These are written*” [these few examples out of all the miracles that Jesus did] “*that ye might **believe** that Jesus is the **Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name***” (v. 31). The abiding comfort to which Jesus testifies as our DIVINE PROPHET by means of His **miracles** is **not** merely that Jesus is our Helper in every need here in this life, **not** merely that He is able to heal us of all our physical and mental diseases, **not** merely that He is our Provider in want and our Defender in every trouble here in this present world; “*for if in **this life only** we have hope in Christ, we are of all men **most miserable**,*” writes Paul to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 15:19). That is the “miserable” comfort that those “*false prophets*” proclaim who preach a “social gospel.”

Jesus as our DIVINE PROPHET performed countless miracles, including those recorded in the Scriptures, “*that [we] might **believe**,*” John says. This statement of the evangelist, given by inspiration of God, does not establish **miracles** as “means of grace” which, as a kind of *alternative* to the Gospel, the Holy Ghost uses to bring men to saving faith in

Christ as their Redeemer. Jesus Himself condemned the attitude so prevalent among the Jews that they were entitled to demand of Him “*a sign from heaven*” (Matthew 12:38; 16:1; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16; John 6:30). He said, “*An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign!*” (Matthew 12:39). On the contrary, in His narrative about the rich man and Lazarus Jesus cited “*Father Abraham*” as saying to the rich man concerning his unbelieving brothers: “*If they hear not Moses and the prophets,*” if they won’t hear and heed the written Scriptures — even the Scriptures of the Old Testament, “*neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead*” (Luke 16:31) — the greatest of all miracles which Jesus Himself performed on Easter morning. That miracle has been called everything from a fraud to a blatant lie, from a superstition to a legend or myth, but NOT the one miracle which causes all who hear of it to “*believe*.” The Gospel and the Sacraments are the *means of grace*. Christ’s miracles, like those wrought by the apostles in His Name after His resurrection, merely “*confirmed the Word,*” giving supplementary testimony to the truth which they peached and taught. The miracles to which John refers were “*written,*” were made a part of “*the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make [men] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (II Timothy 3:15), so that we “*through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4), so that, having been brought by His personal testimony, by the preaching of His apostles and evangelists, and by those messengers that followed them down through the centuries — by the testimony of the written Scriptures, to “*the knowledge of the truth*” (I Timothy 2:4), that we might confide in His merits alone for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation which He purchased for all mankind and which God proffered to the world as His free gift “*in Christ*” (II Corinthians 5:19). Through His **preaching**, punctuated as it were by His **miracles**, Jesus, our Divine Prophet, **revealed** Himself, **manifested** Himself, as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, “*that [we] might have life through His Name*” (John 20:31). “*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

*“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**”* (I John 4:9).

God grant that graciously to all of us for Jesus’ sake!

—D. T. M.

Looking Forward to the Savior's Suffering and Death



“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” —Matthew 16:21

As we focus our attention once again during the holy season of Lent upon the vicarious suffering and death of the Lord Jesus and gratefully ponder in our minds the **cost** to Him of our redemption, our eyes of faith are drawn to and become riveted upon the “Old Rugged Cross” on Calvary’s hill. For almost 2,000 years now, that cross has been the universally-recognized symbol of our Savior’s great passion and of His atonement for the sins of the world. Sad to say, some revere it only as a memento of martyrdom by a great man in the cause of brotherhood and peace and social justice here in this world; and thus they are **really** doing it **disservice** by their unbelief and rejection of Christ as the very Son of God and the only Savior of lost mankind. Nevertheless, there it

stands in simple grandeur, “towering o’er the wrecks of time” (TLH 354, 1); and, although some blasphemously set torches to it, and others invert it and attempt to pervert it into a Satanic symbol, you and I are persuaded by God’s grace, manifested in His glorious Gospel, that no power *on earth* or *in hell* will ever be able to tear it down or obliterate it from our grateful memory (Romans 8:38-39)!

It’s a **wonderful** symbol, the cross of the Lord Jesus; for like a priceless jewel it changes color, emits lights of different hues and intensities, and transfixes us with awe as we view it from different perspectives: In our Lenten hymns we love to sing of a “**rugged cross**,” a “**bitter cross**,” a “**cross of anguish and of sorrow**” — and, at the same time, tis a “**wondrous cross**,” a “**radiant cross**,” a “**reviving cross**” in which we “**glory**” with the Apostle Paul (Galatians 6:14), and a “**dear cross**” which “*dissolves our heart in thankfulness and melts our eyes to tears.*”

But, lest we become caught up in a merely **emotional** or **sentimental** fervor regarding the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and attribute special qualities and powers to **IT** rather than to **HIM** who **bore** it and who shed His holy precious **blood** and **died** upon it, the Savior brings to our attention in the title-text of our article a real down-to-earth consideration which sometimes escapes us and to which He would redirect us, namely, **the NECESSITY of the Cross**, —its necessity, first of all, **for CHRIST as our Redeemer**, and then, secondly, its necessity also **for US as His disciples**.

In the preceding context of this verse, Matthew tells us that Jesus’ disciples, and particularly **Peter**, had just made a bold confession concerning Him, saying: “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (v. 16). They had become convinced by Jesus’ preaching that He was truly the long-promised Messiah, the Anointed One of God; and His miracles confirmed to them His divine attributes as “[*they*] beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). But, while Jesus was pleased with their conviction, brought about in them by the gracious operation of God Himself (Matthew 16:17), He also knew of their **misconception**, common among the Jews of His day, that God’s Messiah would be an **earthly** savior and king who would soon manifest Himself as the heir to David’s throne —his *temporal* throne— who would establish Himself in the eyes and hearts of the people and win their support, and who would “*restore again the kingdom to Israel*” (Acts 1:6) as it was in the days of David and Solomon, a misconception that they would continue to hold “*until the day in which He was*

taken up” (Acts 1:2). And so, to debunk that earthbound idea, “*from that time forth,*” Matthew tells us, “*Jesus **began***” —gradually at first— “*to show unto His disciples how that He **must** go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*”

Although Jesus at this time did not go into the **details** of His great passion—as He did later on, shortly before His entry into Jerusalem on the first “Palm Sunday” (cf. Luke 18:31-33)— this *general* revelation was already quite a bit for the disciples to swallow; for He mentioned **enough** to show them that the future for Him was **not** the worldly pomp and glory and popularity that they had imagined. Quite to the contrary, there would be **agony** and **suffering** and even **death** —not an **accidental** death to be sure, but what we would call today a “lynching” or a “hit” on the part of “*the elders and chief priests and scribes*” to put the Savior out of the way for good. **Nevertheless**, Jesus says, in spite of knowing all this ahead of time, “*He **MUST** go unto Jerusalem*” —to the place of sacrifice at Passover-time— where “*He **MUST** suffer*” at the hands of the Jewish court, where “*He **MUST** be killed*” at the insistence of the Jews and carried out by the Romans, and where “*He **MUST** be raised again the third day.*” The cross was to be a **necessity** for Him, **in spite of** the agony that lay in store for Him.

Indeed, this was the very **purpose** for which He had come down to this world of sin, to “*humble Himself and to become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Philippians 2:8). This was the will of His heavenly Father (John 5:30), which He had come to do (John 6:38; Luke 22:42). He was delivered “*by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*” (Acts 2:23) according to the plan which, in eternity already, God had decreed and on the basis of which He reconciled “*the world*” of sinful mankind unto Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). And this had been prophesied of Him long ago, that He would **bear** *OUR* **griefs** and **carry** *OUR* **sorrows**, **be stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, wounded for OUR transgressions and bruised for OUR iniquities** (Isaiah 53), **that His hands and feet would be pierced** (Psalm 22:16). Why?? So that “*WE [might be] healed.*” (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus Himself said to His disciples in Luke 18:31 that “*all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished;*” and, throughout His “Great Passion,” these and other prophecies are referred to as having been “*fulfilled*” to the letter (Matthew 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35; Mark 14:49; 15:28; Luke 24:44; John 15:25; 17:12; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 28, 36; etc.).

Sadly and tragically, those reject the indictment of God's holy Law, who blind their eyes to their own helplessness and lost condition before Him, who refuse to recognize their unworthiness and the condemnation they deserve because of their sins, **cannot see the NECESSITY of the cross!** Even Peter, who had made such a bold confession of Him, immediately piped up with a **protest**, as we read of it in the verse just following our title-text! After all, Jesus was the Messiah of God! And Messiahs don't get treated that way!! "*Then Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him saying: 'Be it far from Thee, Lord! This shall not be unto Thee!'*" (v. 22; cf. also Mark 8:32-33). There's **no way** that anybody's going to do that to **YOU!** —In his blindness, poor Peter failed to see why it was **necessary** for Jesus to suffer and die.... Why?? Because he failed to see **his OWN need** for redemption, for reconciliation to God (Romans 5:10), for cleansing in the blood of the Lamb of God (I John 1:7).

This was the work of **Satan** in Peter, and Jesus didn't waste one second on "sweet talk" or even to ask Peter what he meant! He didn't give the poison any time to spread. Jesus spun around and rebuked Peter in the **sharpest** of terms, for it was the Old Evil Foe himself that He was challenging! In fact, it was the very expression He had used after His third temptation by the devil in the wilderness: "**Get thee hence, Satan!**" (Matthew 4:10). "*Get thee behind Me, Satan! [Get out of My way, you vicious adversary!] Thou art an offense unto me! [You are a stumbling-block to Me, a trigger on a trap to turn Me away from the cross I must bear!] Thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men!*" At Satan's instigation, Peter was not paying any attention to the **great, blessed, saving** purposes, plans and acts of God which He had, in eternity already, determined and effected for the salvation of sinful men! His mind was on the here-and-now, the temporary, the vain and selfish!

In "*the things that be of God,*" however, **we** see, by His grace, the **necessity of the cross** for **CHRIST**, our Savior. Naturally, the devil would have liked nothing better than to have **sidetracked** Jesus from this necessity, to have **spoiled** God's plan for our salvation, and to have **robbed** us of our only hope of heaven! And this our Savior was not about to tolerate! Neither did He want Peter (who from his **New Man** of faith had just made a bold confession of his Lord and Savior, v. 16, but now was speaking according to his sinful **flesh**) to become a tool of the devil! It was Jesus' **love** for Peter, not His hatred, that prompted this sharp rebuke, just as it should always be our love for a Christian brother or sister that prompts **our** admonition and rebuke of him or her!

But the cross was also a **necessity** for US, in view of the **ransom** that our Savior was going to have to pay *in time* in order to secure **our release** from Satan's bondage, in order to satisfy divine justice by paying the wages of **our sins**, in order to make possible God's reconciliation of the world, **of us**, unto Himself. Concerning man's ability to gain God's favor **for himself** by satisfying the requirements of His justice, God says in no uncertain terms in unmistakable Scripture: "*By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*" (Romans 3:20); "*None of them [sinful mortals] can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious*" (Psalm 49:7-8); "*Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot*" (I Peter 1:18-19); "*God was IN CHRIST reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (II Corinthians 5:19).

Yes, Jesus looked forward to His great passion, not as to a sacrifice that He was *forced* to offer, not as to an experience that He might *refuse* to endure, not as to a payment that He was *unwilling* to make, but as to the rescue mission that He "*must*" undertake and complete in order to satisfy God's justice as our Substitute, in order to *propitiate* Him, that is, to render Him a payment of sufficient value as to change the way in which He regards those who were His enemies but were "*reconciled to God*" (Romans 5:10), released from the guilt of their sins declared to be righteous, for Christ's sake. Christ never shrank back from the task of being the world's Redeemer but "*steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:51) as the place where His ultimate sacrifice would be made. And the **necessity** of the cross was ever before Him, the death of a **criminal**, "*made...to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*" (II Corinthians 5:21), capital punishment for a transgressor "*numbered with the transgressors*" (Isaiah 53) to serve as their Substitute and to receive and suffer "*the wages of sin*" (Romans 6:23) in their place. For He told Nicodemus: "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so MUST the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:15).

Now as we, during this holy Lenten season, consider the cost of our redemption and of our reconciliation to God by the death of His Son, the **cost TO HIM** of "*endur[ing] the cross, despising the shame*" (Hebrews 12:2) — the **cost FOR US** made on our behalf by Him who loved us unto death — how our hearts should be overflowing with thanks to our dear Savior for accomplishing the humanly impossible on

our behalf: Making poor, wretched, and completely undeserving sinners *right with God* (Romans 5:10a) by earning perfect righteousness in their stead and suffering God's just wrath and punishment in their place. May we therefore in humble, grateful and childlike faith, cling in confidence to His perfect merits alone as the price of our redemption, and to our reconciliation with God which in eternity already He wrought "*in Christ*" for the entire "*world*" of sinners (II Corinthians 5:19) — including you and me, singing with the hymnwriter:

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss
and pour contempt on all my pride*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the cross of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood*

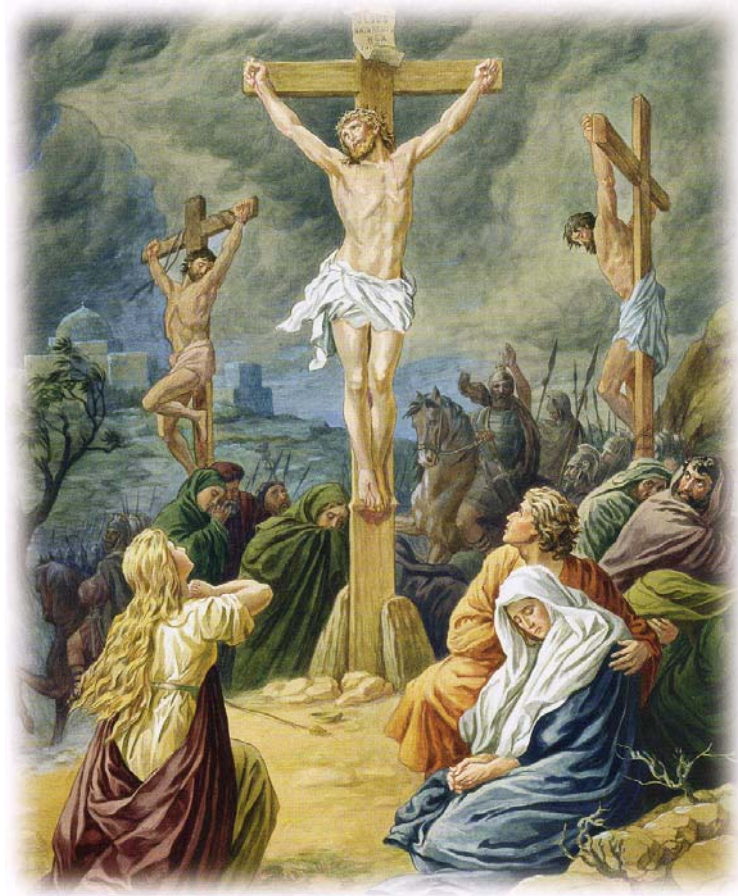
*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
sorrow and love come mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a tribute far too small!
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all!*

(TLH 175)

—D. T. M.





Propitiation

“...we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous; and He is the PROPITIATION for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” — I John 2:1-2

During the holy season of Lent each year, from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, we Christians take special time and opportunity to study in detail and to meditate upon the redemptive work of our Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ — in particular His *vicarious* or substitutionary atonement for the sins of the world. We follow Him in spirit from

Gethsemane to Golgotha, witnessing, with eyes of faith riveted upon His precious Word, the anguish, mockery, suffering and death which He endured for us poor sinners as “*the Lamb of God*” (John 1:29), “*slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8). And when, in the waning moments of His life in the *State of Humiliation*, we hear Him cry out from the cross those triumphant words, “*It is finished!*”, we ourselves yield a grateful sigh of relief, as it were — not merely because the Savior’s suffering had finally come to an end, but because of what His words, better translated, really mean for us and for all the world: “*It is accomplished!*” “[The work which My Father sent me to do has been completed, and the purpose which that work was intended to accomplish has been fully realized: The reconciliation of the world unto Himself by My heavenly Father in view of My all-sufficient work of redemption.]” (II Corinthians 5:19). And so we sing with the beloved hymnwriter:

“Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee!”

Had the suffering and death of Jesus Christ been what the so-called “modernists” claim that it was, namely, a historical event of purely social significance, the martyrdom of a “divine” activist in the cause of human justice, love and brotherhood among men of good will, then “*we are of all men most miserable*” (I Corinthians 15:19), having hope in Christ “*in this life only.*” But thanks be to God that He raised up Christ on the third day, glorifying Him and exalting Him to His own right hand in the heavenly places; for the Father thereby sealed to us the fact that Jesus Christ is His only-begotten Son, God from all eternity — that the Father was satisfied with Christ’s redemptive work for the reconciliation of the world — and that Jesus Christ, “*because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Christ’s redemptive work was indeed finished when He died on the accursed tree of the cross, but His work as our perfect High Priest continues as He intercedes or pleads for us with His Father in heaven. There He functions as our “*Advocate,*” our defense lawyer, at the bar of God’s justice, eminently qualified to represent us: “*Jesus*” (our Savior), “*Christ*” (the Anointed One, the *Messiah*, of God Himself), “*the Righteous*” (the only One who can stand before the Father’s throne clad in His own righteousness as the holy Son of God). Approaching God through

any other mediator is not only time lost and effort wasted; it is an affront or insult to the Son of God; “*for there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (I Timothy 2:5).

How effective is His advocacy with the Father? What is the plea that He enters on our behalf at the throne of God? Does He perhaps beg mercy for His clients on the grounds of “diminished capacity,” since we are incapable of saving ourselves? Does He plead us innocent by reason of “ignorance of the Law”? Does He claim “lesser guilt” for those who have tried their best to obey God’s Law and still “*come short of the glory of God*” or for those who only “passively resisted” the efforts of His Holy Spirit to convert them? — No, none of those pleas would avail before the throne of Him who demands absolute perfection of all His subjects (Leviticus 19:2, Matthew 5:48, etc.), and in whose sight the transgression of just one point in His holy Law makes the sinner guilty of ALL the Law (James 2:10). What plea then can our “*Advocate*” enter on our behalf to gain our acquittal from the sentence of death that we have brought upon ourselves (Romans 6:23)?

The Apostle John answers this question fully in verse 2 of the passage before us. Christ, our Divine “*Advocate*,” points not to US but to HIMSELF. He covers our disobedience with His perfect obedience; He drapes the filthiness of our transgressions with the spotless robe of His righteousness; He overlays the death warrant outstanding against us with a copy of His own death certificate, as it were, offering it as a substitute.

The word “*propitiation*,” as we have it in verse two, is often rendered “*payment*” in order to simplify the language for hearers not acquainted with the older and longer word. However well-intended such an effort may be, a simplification often becomes an over-simplification when the full meaning of the original word is sacrificed in the process; and that may indeed be the case here. “Propitiation” means a gift or payment of sufficient value as to win or regain the good will and favor of one who has been wronged. It is not a sort of “down-payment” or partial payment, to which subsequent payments must be added; neither is it a payment merely offered but not necessarily accepted as full compensation for a grievance. “*He is the propitiation for our sins*” — Christ Himself is the ransom-payment to God of sufficient value to win forgiveness for our sins, to gain for us God’s favor instead of His displeasure, to secure for us everlasting life in place of eternal death — and not just of sufficient value but of appropriate and actual value for the purpose, so that the desired result has in fact been fully achieved. “[*God*] hath

made Him who knew no sin [namely, Christ] to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (II Corinthians 5:21). “*Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, ...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, ... and with His stripes we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:4-5). “*Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood*” (Revelation 5:9). “*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:23-24).

“...and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Christ’s perfect keeping of the Law in the place of sinners satisfied God’s demands against every single sinner of all times and places, past, present and to come (His **active obedience**); and His suffering and death in the place of sinners, having been punished by God in their stead, satisfied God’s justice with the payment of sin’s wages in full (Christ’s **passive obedience**). What had Christ accomplished (John 19:30, □□□ ελεσται by His redemptive work, by His **vicarious atonement**? “*He is the PROPITIATION for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*” Christ was the payment in full, the sacrifice necessary, the righteousness required, to “propitiate” the Father — to satisfy Him completely, to gain back His favor toward those who had offended Him, to persuade Him in mercy to put all our sins behind His back and to remember them no more (Isaiah 43:25; Hebrews 8:12). And the RESULT of that “propitiation”? — “*God was IN CHRIST reconciling the WORLD unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). For Christ’s sake (that is, because of what Christ did and bore in the place of sinners to atone for their sins and regain for them God’s favor, without any merit, worthiness, or participation on their own part), God in heaven has already forgiven the sins of every human being in this world, declaring for each one a full and unconditional pardon and pronouncing the “*ungodly*” (Romans 4:5) righteous (**Objective Justification**). That is what Christ, our “*Propitiation,*” accomplished for us!! That is what Christ accomplished even for those who ultimately reject the gracious forgiveness He merited for them and perish everlastingly in unbelief.

This pardon, whereby God has now reconciled the whole world unto Himself, is announced to all men in the Gospel, which Paul calls “*the Word of Reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19b); and he begs us in Christ’s stead to avail ourselves of its precious benefits — not by works, penances, deeds of love to God and our neighbor, or any such

device — but simply by accepting God’s gift of forgiveness by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:1). Cling to Jesus’ merits alone for salvation and trust without any doubt that, for His sake as the “*Propitiation*” for your sins, you are already forgiven and stand righteous before God, and by faith in Him are an heir of everlasting life. Confess with boldness in the words of a beloved hymn:

“Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
which at the mercy-seat of God
forever doth for sinners plead,
for ME, e’en for MY SOUL was shed.”

(*TLH* 371, 4)

— D. T. M.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
my beauty are, my glorious dress,
wherein before my God I’ll stand
when I shall reach the heavenly land.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
for who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully through these absolved I am
from sin and fear, from guilt and shame!

Jesus, be endless praise to Thee,
whose boundless mercy hath for me,
for me and all Thy hands have made,
an everlasting ransom paid!

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Adult Catechism Class 8:30 p.m.

ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

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



For almost 2,000 years now, that cross has been the universally-recognized symbol of our Savior's great passion and of His atonement for the sins of the world. Sad to say, some revere it only as a memento of martyrdom by a great man in the cause of brotherhood and peace and social justice here in this world; and thus they are really doing it disservice by their unbelief and rejection of Christ as the very Son of God and the only Savior of lost mankind.

Excerpt from article: *Looking Forward to the Savior's Suffering and Death.*