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" Ps. 119:105.

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Unto Us
A Child is Born,
Unto Us
A Son is Given!

—Isaiah 9:6.

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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 a false church, 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 acknowledgement 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.

The President's Column

"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."
Luke 2:19

Dearly Beloved Brethren in the Christ Child:

Once again we have, by God's grace, entered into a new Church Year, and, even as I write this article, it is just days until we celebrate the most important event in history since the Creation itself, Christmas: That day on which we remember how God kept His promise to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, indeed a promise over 4,000 years old, namely, to send a Savior into the world to deliver mankind from sin, death and the devil.

The story of that first Christmas is so familiar to all of us that it hardly seems necessary to repeat it. And yet, because it is so magnificent an event, so important to our salvation, we once again read those familiar words of Scripture as recorded by St. Luke: **"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. 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. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," Luke 2:1-14. We have heard these words so often that they become like a warm blanket, a comforter in which we can wrap ourselves. And so they should be. Indeed, this comforter should be well-worn, well-used, for in these few sentences we have the message of our salvation.

There is a danger that we face, however. Because of our old sinful flesh, the message of Christmas may actually become tiresome to us. We may think we know it so well that there is nothing more for us to learn from it. But nothing could be further from the truth. For herein lies the mystery of godliness, that God was made flesh and dwelt among us, that we might have everlasting life. We should never cease to marvel at God's plan of salvation for us, how He sent His beloved Son into the world as a true man to keep the Law in our stead, to suffer and die for our sins. How beyond human understanding that God's Son lived and died for you, for me, and for all men, and, because He is the Son of God as well as true Man, the satisfaction He earned for us with God the Father is of infinite value. We can never exhaust His love or forgiveness. Knowing this, we should sing praises to God with our whole being, echoing the words of the angels on that first Christmas night, singing, **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,"** Luke 2:14

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew from the time the angel appeared unto her of the miracle which was to take place, namely, that she was to give birth to the Savior of the World, the Son of the Living God. And yet, she, too, marveled at the events of that first Christmas-tide; at the story of the shepherds who had come to worship Jesus, seeing in her mind's eye the angel choir singing its praises to God. She had nine months to contemplate the grace of

God manifested in the Child she was carrying, and, when that Child was born, she knew that she was gazing upon God Himself made flesh laying in a manger. She knew that this little Babe was to be her Savior from sin as well as the Savior of humankind. Nevertheless—indeed, because she knew all this, **"Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart,"** never fully understanding the miracle of which she was a part, but remembering, thinking about, meditating upon and trusting in, not just the events of that night, but most especially the words of promise spoken to her by God through the mouth of the arch-angel Gabriel, **"Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His Name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end,"** Luke 1:30-33.

Mary never did stop pondering that miracle—and neither should we. When you are sore oppressed by your sins, ponder the miracle of Jesus. When life seems to crowd around you and push in on you from every side, giving you no relief, take a moment to ponder the miracle of Jesus. When Satan casts his fiery darts at you, accusing you of all manner of wrong-doing, when the world with its lusts, the lusts of the eyes and the lusts of the flesh, press hard upon you, when your own sinful flesh betrays you and takes you down a path you would not follow, ponder the miracle of Jesus and make His victory your own. When your heavenly Father suffers you to carry a cross in this life, a cross of affliction or a cross of conviction, ponder the miracle of Jesus and cast your cares upon Him, for He careth for you. Yes, day in and day out, each day of your life, ponder the miracle of Jesus, that in this little Babe, whose birthday we celebrate each December, is God made flesh, the **"mystery of godliness: (that) God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory,"** I Timothy 3:16.

May God grant unto each of you, for the sake of our Savior, Jesus, a blessed Christmas and a new year filled with

joy in the knowledge and faith of Christ Jesus, and may the fruits of that faith manifest themselves more and more in each of you, day upon day, until the Lord Jesus comes again in glory to call all they that are His to their everlasting home. Amen.

Your Servant in Christ,
Rev. Mark W. Dierking, President

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The First Gospel Promise

There was a time when neither the Gospel, the Good News of our Salvation, nor the Holy Law of God was needed by mankind. That was before man fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. At that time, our first parents had been created, like the new man in the believer, in the image of God--"**after God in righteousness and true holiness,**" Eph. 4:24. They were perfect and sinless! Adam and Eve were created with a knowledge of the true God who had formed Adam's body from the dust of the earth and brought forth Eve's body from the rib of Adam. Both were given rational and immortal souls and they were happy in their knowledge of the Creator of this earth with all its creatures over which they were given dominion. This knowledge was also included in the image of God in which they were created, like the new man in the believer "**which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him,**" Col 3:10.

This sinless perfection in our first parents was soon blighted. Chapter three in Genesis relates how Adam and Eve lost that which had made them **like** God. The history of man's fall into sin, as God has made it known to us in His Word, is familiar to all of our readers. Certainly, the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil did not contain a poison which brought about man's downfall. **The mere outward act** of eating fruit would not be, obviously, something so abominable so as to bring about the total

corruption of the whole human race. This outward act, however, was connected with a prohibition from the mouth of God and thus eating of the fruit of that tree became more deadly than poison to all humanity. Doing that which the Lord God had plainly forbidden was a result of the fact that a corrupted attitude toward God and His Word had already been planted in the heart of Eve by the Old Evil Foe who **"sinneth from the beginning"** (I John 3:8), is a **"murderer from the beginning"** and the father of lies, John 8:44. The original sin therefore began in Eve's heart when she no longer looked upon the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil with great adoration and respect for the Lord and His Word as something good to eat and **"to be desired"** to make her wise, Gen. 3:6, as the serpent had said, v. 5. Having eaten of the forbidden fruit, Eve, now, in her "wisdom," entices her husband with some of the fruit and he, evidently being caught off-guard, is deceived by her enticement to do what God had forbidden. He, likewise, forsakes the Lord and disobeys His command concerning the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and proceeds to eat of the fruit offered to him by his wife. Adam certainly knew what he was doing when he ate of the fruit offered to him by Eve. He knew that the fruit which he was about to eat was from the tree of which the Lord God had said, **"Thou shalt not eat of it."** Thus, the man and his wife whom God had created to know Him, to live in this present world in perfect conformity with His will, to rule over all the other creatures as His representatives, and at last to enjoy eternal bliss in everlasting communion with Him, had **rebelled** against Him, their Maker and the almighty Creator of the entire universe, and had **disobeyed** His Word! The Original Sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which is often being joked about today, is the grievous sin of **rebellion** against God and His Word—a sin which must never be trifled with—without disastrous results.

Because of their disobedience, the Lord God pronounced a curse upon Adam and Eve, and also upon the devil who had tempted them and had brought sin into the world. Notice the words which the Lord God spoke to Adam in **Genesis3:17-18,** and to the serpent in **Genesis 3:14,15.** We find here that the first promise of a Savior was couched in the words of a curse which God had pronounced upon Satan. These words

to Satan carry "Good News" to Adam and Eve and to the whole human race. Words which pronounced defeat and destruction upon the Prince of Darkness speak of victory and salvation to all people. What was a curse for the devil was a glorious comforting promise for fallen mankind—the first Gospel proclamation known as the "protevangel."

God's Words to the devil are, **"I will put enmity between thee** (the devil, Satan) **and the woman** (Eve), **and between thy seed** (all those, plural, who obey the devil's rule) **and her Seed** (the Descendant, singular, of the woman)." Jesus identified the devil's seed when, speaking to the unbelieving religious leaders of the Jews, He stated, **"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."** To the scribes and Pharisees, whom He declared to be hypocrites, Jesus said, **"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"** The Apostle Paul writes, **"He that committeth sin is of the devil."**

So clear were these words of the First Gospel Promise to our first parents that Eve thought, when she had given birth to her first-born son, that she had already brought forth the promised Seed which would crush the serpent's head. She exclaimed, **"I have gotten a man, the Lord!"** (Gen. 4:1, *Luther's translation*). *The One Great Seed of the* woman, however, was not to be a descendant of man and woman after the natural order of procreation, for this wondrous Seed is spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote by inspiration of God, **"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel."** How eagerly the true believers of the Old Testament waited and watched for the coming Savior, and how longingly ever believing Hebrew woman hoped that she would be the privileged one to give birth to the Messiah! At last, **"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,"** Gal. 4:4,5. Of the **virgin** Mary, we read in Luke 2:7, **"She brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger."** And speaking of this incident the herald angel declared a message of peace and good will to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, **"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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord." The First Gospel Promise, Genesis 3:15, spoken in the Garden of Eden for the benefit of all mankind, had stated that the promised Savior would be a true man—the Seed of the woman.

To the serpent, the Lord God had said in the Garden of Eden, **"It,"** namely, the Seed of the woman, **"shall bruise** (crush) **thy head."** In order to do this, the Descendant of the woman would have to be more than a mere human being, for to overcome the devil and to crush his head is a task greater than any mere man is able to accomplish. Only God is able to do this. The First Gospel Promise, therefore, tells us that the Savior of Mankind would also be **true God** who would utterly destroy the power of Satan. In accord with this description of the woman's Seed, we read of Jesus in Romans 9:5, that He is **"God over all;"** in Colossians 2:9, that **"in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;"** in I John 5:20, that He is **"the true God and eternal life,"** and in I John 3:8, that He **"was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil!"** In the wilderness (Matthew 4:10), our Savior defeated the devil with the words, **"Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written;"** throughout His ministry, Jesus cast out devils from those who were possessed and, even in the hour of darkness, in the devil's hour in Gethsemane and on Golgatha, Christ was victorious—for on Easter morning the Lord Jesus triumphantly rose from the dead. It was therefore necessary for the Seed of the woman, spoken of in the First Gospel Promise, also to be the Son of God, true God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, for God only has the power to crush the serpent's head, to save man from the tyranny of Satan and deliver mankind from the bondage of sin and death which Satan had brought into the world.

In His last words in the First Gospel Promise, God tells Satan, **"And thou shalt bruise** (crush) **His heel."** The mighty God came into this world as a tiny human baby for a purpose, namely, that He might destroy the works of the devil **for man** and **in man's stead.** In doing so, however, His heel was crushed. He had to suffer death and the torments of hell which all people deserved by their sins—that all who believe in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. In this way, deliverance was won and salvation was gained

by the bitter suffering and death of Christ on the cross as the Representative of all mankind. In this manner, the First Gospel Promise, spoken by God in the Garden of Eden, was fulfilled: **"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel,"** Genesis 3:15.

Even though Adam and Eve were the first sinners, they were also the **first believers** in this wonderful Gospel Promise. They were the first members in the true Church of God, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints here on earth. As Christians, we should walk in the faith of our first parents, trusting in the Savior and receiving His Word, yes, every word in the entire Scriptures, with faithful and believing hearts, putting all our trust and confidence in Jesus as the One to whom the Lord God pointed in His First Gospel Promise, whose blessed coming we have once again celebrated during this Christmas season, and whose coming on the Last Day we await with patience, joy, watchfulness, and prayer. May God grant such saving faith to all who read these words.

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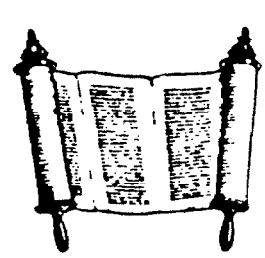
The Blessed Prophetic Names of our Savior



"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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

"Jesus" is the Name by which we know our Redeemer best, for it was the Name given to Him by the command of heaven itself through the mouth of God's holy angel, Gabriel, **"before He was conceived in the womb,"** Luke 2:21. Both Mary and Joseph were instructed to name Him "Jesus," and Joseph was told in so many words **why** that Name was particularly appropriate for Him, in view of the **work** which His

heavenly Father had sent Him to do: **"Thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins,"** Matt. 1:21. Sadly, the vast majority of people here in this world—both then and now—either ignorantly or deliberately miss those last three words of the angel and regard Jesus variously as a **political** savior (sent to rescue the Jews from domination by the Romans), as an **economic** savior (to whom they look for "daily bread"), as a **social** savior (to save the downtrodden from the ills and injustices of society), or even as a kind of **psychological** savior (to perk up the despairing, to rebuild their shattered self-images, and to restore their feeling of self-worth). But **ALL** of these humanly-concocted ideas and missions completely **miss the mark**, namely, that Jesus came down to this world of vice, violence, injustice and despair to save people from the very **ROOT** of all those ills, the spiritual malady with which **all** are afflicted but which **all** by nature **refuse to acknowledge**—and that is **SIN.** If Jesus had indeed come to be a mere **earthly** savior, a political activist far ahead of His time in the "ideals" He stood for, He certainly could have been a mere man, just as the modernists claim. But in the treasured Messianic Prophecy of Isaiah quoted above, the **other names** by which God's Messiah would be known show Him to be MUCH MORE than a mere man, MORE than just another prophet, MORE than a gifted itinerant preacher and healer and philosopher! They show Him to be none other than the **Son of God**, the Father's **Gift of Love** to all the world (John 3:16), and the **"King of kings and Lord of lords,"** Rev. 19:16.

The blessed prophetic names of our Savior, though distinctly different from one another and each one distinctive in and of itself, form **ONE** name, **ONE** clearly defined identity. Isaiah says: **"His NAME shall be called..."** and then he lists not one but five names, each of which identifies a **divine attribute** or a **divine function**—something that **only GOD** can be or do. That immediately gives us (and any intelligent, open-minded reader of this prophecy) good cause to regard the Messiah as **divine**, as well as the **human** "child" that was to be **"born unto us."** As we examine each of these remarkable names, we find that any other conclusion is simply illogical and completely unwarranted.

Isaiah says: **"His Name shall be called WONDERFUL"**

(or, more precisely translated, **"Wonder," "Miracle"**). Our Savior was not to be an ordinary child at all, the off-spring of a man and a woman, but a **"Miracle**-Child" (considering the so-called "laws of nature" in the science we know as "biology"). God's long-promised Messiah was to be the **"woman's** Seed" according to Genesis 3:15. A Miracle-Child? A remarkably special and unusual Child? Yes, indeed! So remarkable and unusual in fact that Isaiah points to Jesus' **virgin birth** as a **"sign,"** an identifying mark of the Messiah to come, when he writes, chapter 7, verse 14: **"The Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son..." ..."And His Name shall be called MIRACLE!"** Those who arrogantly and skeptically deny the virgin-birth of Christ dare to rob God Himself of the sure sign **He provided us** that Jesus is our Savior!

Moreover, **"His Name shall be called...COUNSELOR,"** one who gives wise advice. If the Messiah were to be only **a** counselor of the "generic" variety, He could scarcely be counted on for consistently wise and infallible counsel; for many if not most of the counselors we hear from today, even the so-called "pros" of our "enlightened" day and time, are notorious "quacks!" But Jesus, our newborn Savior, is the only **"Counselor"** worthy of the name because of His divine omniscience as the Son of God, as Peter testified: **"Lord, Thou knowest all things,"** John 21:17. Here was to be the Counselor of the finest and most reliable sort, the all-wise, all-knowing Son of God Himself.

"And His Name shall be called...THE MIGHTY GOD!" Considering the punishment prescribed for blasphemy in the Old Testament, no one who valued his life, temporally as well as spiritually, would have called a mere man "God," much less **"the Mighty God"** with whom all things are possible! No, Isaiah named Jesus our Savior **"THE MIGHTY GOD"** because that's exactly who He **is**! Gabriel said to Mary, Luke 1:32, **"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest;"** and in verse 35, **"That Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the SON OF GOD."** Truly, Jesus is **"THE MIGHTY GOD"** who said of Himself: **"All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth,"**— mighty indeed!

"The EVERLASTING FATHER," a remarkable name, combining the fact that Jesus is eternal (even though He was born like you and me) with the mysterious truth that Jesus Christ, **one** with His heavenly Father, is our **God** and therefore our **Father; "for (we) are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,"** Paul writes in Galatians 3; and Jesus Himself said: **"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."** Remarkable? Significant? Yes indeed! For only Jesus, God's only-begotten **Son** from all eternity, as well as the **Son "given unto us"** at His birth, can also rightly be called **"the EVERLASTING FATHER."**

And finally, **"His Name shall be called...the PRINCE OF PEACE."** Actually this name was given to the Messiah already by Jacob in Genesis 49:10, where he called Him **"Shiloh."** Jesus was not just a peacemaker in a generic or common sense, a fellow like Ghandi, Woodrow Wilson, and Gorbachev, who won praise among men for trying to effect peace in a peace-elusive, strife-torn world. No, Jesus **brought TRUE PEACE**—perfect, lasting peace of a completely different sort! **"MY peace,"** He says is **"not as the world giveth,"** John 14:27. It is peace of heart, peace of conscience, **"peace with God"** (Rom. 5:1), which only our Divine High Priest and perfect Mediator was able to secure for us poor sinners! How aptly named is our Jesus, the **"PRINCE OF PEACE!"**

But as **wonderful**, as **remarkable**, and as **appropriate** as those divine names are in a purely objective sense—describing both our Savior's person and work as God's chosen Messiah and Gift of Love to all the world, what is even MORE REMARKABLE is what they mean in a personal sense FOR **US**! Jesus, the virgin's Son, that MIRACLE-Child, was a "MIRACLE" **for US!** Paul writes to the Galatians (4:4-5), **"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman,...that we might receive the adoption of sons."** That was the whole purpose in making Jesus a **virgin**-born **miracle**-baby, so that by His vicarious atonement for our sins He could satisfy His Father's justice, and that by faith in that satisfaction and in God's justification of the whole world for Jesus' sake we too can become "miracle-babies" of sorts, **adopted** sons and daughters of God, who **"quickened us,"** made us alive when we **"were dead in tres-**

passes and sins." A MIRACLE, not surprisingly worked by Him whose very **Name** is **"MIRACLE,"** whose divine nature in one and the same person IS a miracle for **OUR** sakes!

Moreover, Jesus is called Divine **"COUNSELOR" for US,** our all-wise, all-knowing Advisor. For He has, by His precious Word, shown us Himself as the very Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, made us **"wise unto salvation through faith"** in Him (II Tim. 3:15), and continues by His Holy Spirit to increase in us that best of all wisdom, as we grow daily through His Word (II Peter 3:18). What better **counsel** could we have from our Savior in His **Prophetic Office** than the faithful ministration of His pure Word and Sacraments in the Pastoral Office of the local congregation, which He ordained and established for the care, feeding and oversight of His dear sheep and lambs? For, as we submit ourselves to the counsel and instruction of Christ's under-shepherd in our midst as he brings to us the Word of God, we hear the voice of our precious Savior Himself and receive His guidance as our very own Divine "COUNSELOR," Luke 10:16.

And Jesus, our newborn Savior, is **"the MIGHTY GOD" for US--"able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,"** Ephesians 3:20! If Jesus Christ were not true God, He could never have kept God's Law perfectly in our stead, nor would the sacrifice of His holy precious blood have been sufficient to purchase our release from sin, death and Satan. Only **"the MIGHTY GOD"** could have accomplished that truly remarkable feat **for US,** the **"Child born,"** the **"Son given unto US,"** to be our JESUS, our Savior from our sins!

And **our "EVERLASTING FATHER"** will never fail us nor forsake us, as do earthly parents betimes; for the Psalmist writes: **"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up,"** Psalm 27:10. His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy **"endureth forever,"** so that by His never-failing grace, increased and strengthened in us by His Word, we shall hold fast to the crown of life He purchased and won **for us,** and, in the end, sit down at His family table in the mansions of His heavenly home to receive our inheritance as His dear children.

And finally, as we this Christmas join the holy angels in singing **"Glory to God in the highest,"** let us remember with sincere and humble gratitude to our dear Savior the priceless boon He won for us as **"the PRINCE OF PEACE."** For the **"peace on earth"** and **"good will toward men"** that God declared for all the world was not without its cost! We were literally **at war** with God because of our sins; we were His **enemies**! **"We were by nature the children of wrath even as others!"** Ephesians 2:3. But Christ, **"the PRINCE OF PEACE"** was **"born unto US,"** so that **in our place** He could bear the enmity, the wrath, and the punishment we deserved, satisfying God's justice with payment-in-full of the debt we owed Him, **"not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death,"** (Luther: 2nd Article). Thus, the **PEACE** that Jesus came to bring was **not** outward peace in visible Christendom achieved by sacrificing the truth and destroying the **"unity of the Spirit,"** but rather **"PEACE WITH GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ,"** the **PRINCE OF PEACE!** That is the peace and joy of Christmas that no one can take away from you if you **cling to it, confide in it,** and **hold on to it by faith** as your most prized possession: "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!" **"Therefore being justified by faith, we have PEACE WITH GOD, through our Lord Jesus Christ,"** Romans 5:1.

Oh, may we keep and ponder in our mind
God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind!
Trace we the Babe, who hath retrieved our loss,
From His poor manger to His bitter cross!
Saved by His love, incessant we shall sing
Eternal praise to heaven's almighty King!

(L.H. 84, 5)

D.T.M.

The Significance of the CIRCUMCISION of JESUS

"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His Name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb." Luke 2:21

The above text constitutes the Gospel Lesson for New Year's Day because the circumcision of the Christ-Child took place eight days after His birth. A fleeting glance at this verse might prompt one to think that it does not contain very much material for edification. But a closer examination reveals the rich comfort it gives to us Christians as we enter another year of grace.

Jesus was circumcised? How can this be? Did we not hear during the Christmas Season that this Child who was born of the Virgin Mary is true God and true Man in one undivided Person? Do not the Holy Scriptures tell us that He **"is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens,"** Heb. 7:26? Why then did Mary decide to have the Child circumcised and why did the heavenly Father allow it? The Apostle Paul answers these questions with the words, **"But 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,"** Gal. 4:4,5. Thus it had already been decreed according to God's infinite wisdom that the Christ Child was to fulfill the law of circumcision which God had previously instituted with Abraham some 2,000 years before, as recorded in Genesis, chapter 17.

The establishment of this covenant with Abraham was to show that the Lord wanted to be the God of Abraham and his seed and they in turn were to be His people. Moreover, the promised Messiah was to come from the seed of Abraham and through Him all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. But let us not forget that Abraham and his seed did

not become the people of God simply through the external act of circumcision as a meritorious work! Listen to what the Apostle writes in his Epistle to the Romans: **"Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith,"** Rom. 4:9-13.

We must marvel at God's plan of salvation! We were not able to comply with God's Law and fulfill His demands. **"Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy,"** Lev. 19:2. **"There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not,"** Eccl. 7:20. **"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,"** Rom. 3:23. That's right! All of us, not one of us is exempt, have sinned and deserve the consequences, namely, **"the wages of sin is death"** (Rom. 6:23), temporal death and everlasting condemnation in hell. **"But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,"** Eph. 2:4-7. To accomplish this for us it was necessary for the Son of God to be true Man that He might take our place under the Law and at the same time be true God that His perfect fulfilling of the Law would be sufficient for all mankind. What we were unable to do because we were already lost and condemned sinners from our birth, our dear Savior has done for us. **"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us,..."** Gal. 3:13. **"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,"** Rom. 10:4. And He was able to do this because He is God and Man in one

undivided Person as the Apostle writes of Him, **"For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"** Col. 2:9.

Look at the Savior's Name: **JESUS.** It was not given to the Child by a man but from heaven through the angel, Gabriel (Luke 1:31). A perfect name for the perfect God-Man. The Name **JESUS** means Savior, **"for He shall save His people from their sins,"** Matt. 1:21. Is it any wonder, then, that the Name **JESUS** should ring like the sweetest music in the ears of those who believe and trust in Him as their Savior. For in Him **"we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins,"** Col. 1:14; in Him we have **"everlasting life,"** John 3:16.

That law of circumcision has now been abolished by Christ who fulfilled the Law. No wonder the Apostle Paul emphatically warns the Galatians not to allow themselves to be forced back under the law of circumcision. **"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing,"** Gal. 5:2. Circumcision is certainly not wrong in itself as long as we do not seek to make it a meritorious work or a matter of conscience since it now falls into the realm of our Christian liberty. We must **"stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage,"** Gal. 5:1. Our conscience can now be at peace because of Christ who has procured this liberty for us! Timothy was circumcised by the Apostle Paul not to fulfill the Law, but rather **"because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek,"** Acts 16:1-3. Titus, on the other hand, was not circumcised by the Apostle because certain false teachers sought to bring Paul and Titus back under the yoke of the Law (Gal. 2:1-5).

In the Old Testament the Lord had instituted circumcision. Now, in the New Testament He has instituted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The Apostle Paul reminds the Colossian Christians, **"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead,"** Col. 2:11,12. Through Baptism all true

believers truly have and possess in Christ all those blessings promised to Abraham and his seed through circumcision as **"a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being circumcised,"** Rom. 4:11. **"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise,"** Gal. 2:26,27,29. This **"circumcision made without hands"** is Holy Baptism, the visible means, through which the Holy Ghost bestows upon us the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and the free gift of eternal salvation. **"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,"** Mark 16:16; **"...be baptized and wash away thy sins...,"** Acts 22:16; **"...baptism doth also now save us...,"** I Pet. 3:21. Through this **"washing of regeneration"** (Titus 3:5) these unmerited blessings are received by faith which is then active in bringing forth fruit pleasing unto the Lord. **"We love Him, because He first loved us,"** I John 4:19. Yes, now **"ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light,"** I Peter 2:9.

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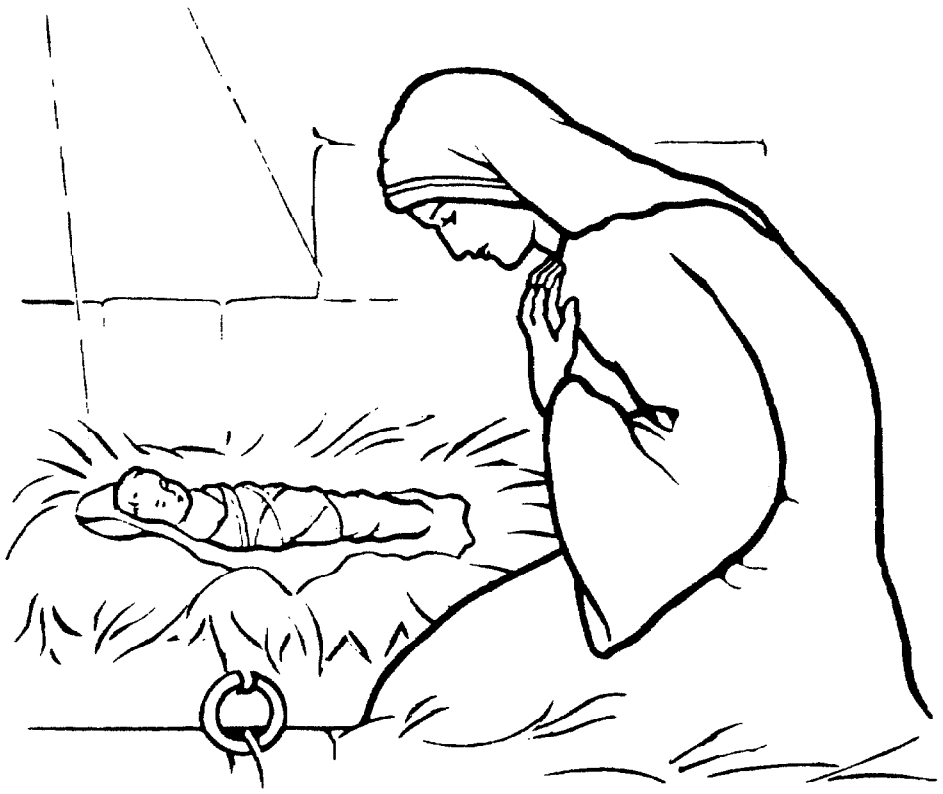

The Only Way to TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13,14

Each new year we hear much about "turning over a new leaf." For unbelievers this is nothing more than a human resolve based upon reason and human strength. When the unbeliever resolves to turn over a new leaf, he fails to comprehend what needs to be changed first and foremost. In the blindness of his unbelief, he does not see that his heart must be changed. He needs to be converted from unbelief to faith in Christ. To be sure, the unbeliever, on the basis of his conscience and the faint law in his heart, knows things are not right, yet he does not know how to silence his accusing conscience. The unbeliever living in open rebellion against God may actually see a wicked life has not brought him the happiness he thought it would. For example, a person may have cheated in making out his income tax reports; perhaps he cheated his way through school; or, if he is in business, he was involved in one unscrupulous business deal after another. They see overindulgence in alcohol or drugs, or promiscuous sexual relations outside of, or within, marriage are found to bring nothing but misery and suffering. Some may actually come to realize that a wicked lifestyle brings far more grief than joy. An unbeliever may even see and be convinced that there is a need for a change. So at the end of a year he may resolve to do better. Outwardly, there indeed may be a radical change in his behavior, he may even become a model citizen, but inwardly he is no better than he was before.

In the United States at the present time there has been an emphasis on physical fitness. And this is admirable, if there is a proper motivation. The Christian, for instance, might want to keep himself fit in order to be able to serve

His Lord better, or, perhaps even longer. But most people's motives for keeping fit (because most people are unbelievers) are far removed from that idea. Self-worship, or idolatry, keys many. They want to have a beautiful body to catch a mate, to garner a greater income, or even to use the body for purely lustful purposes. Hence, they may make resolutions on New Year's Eve to eat less and exercise more. But, because their motives are wrong and because they think they have the power within to change, their efforts in the Lord's sight are to no avail, they are vain and empty.

What is the only way for an unbeliever to turn over a new leaf? The only way an unbeliever can turn over a new leaf is to hear God's Law, be crushed by it, see that he is condemned before God and find mercy and forgiveness in Christ His Savior who died for his sins. While we have been speaking thus far of unbelievers, the same is, in effect, true for Christians. In fact, Christians need to have the earnest resolve in their hearts to turn over a new leaf every day—to be a better Christian today than they were yesterday and so on throughout their lives. The Apostle Paul understood this well when he wrote the words, **"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."** St. Paul was not making a New Year's resolution, but, like any true believer will do daily, he was expressing his resolve to lead a better life, to shake off the shackles of his sinfulness, and to become more like his Savior, the Son of Man.

The Apostle wanted to **"forget those things which are behind,"** his past life of sin, and **"reach forth unto those things which are before,"** a Christian life, with the final goal of reaching eternal life (heaven). And, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, Paul was taking the right steps to achieve his goal. He was mindful of his many daily sins, he repented of them, and he was seeking forgiveness in his Savior.

St. Paul spoke of his quest for a higher level of sanctification in terms of an athletic contest. **"I press toward the mark for the prize."** As a runner receives a prize for reaching the finish line first, so Paul anticipated

receiving the reward of heaven. However, unlike the athlete who earns and deserves the prize, Paul did not expect to **earn** heaven by his own good works and merit, but to receive it as an unmerited gift. It was purely God's grace and love that gave it to him. And Paul recognized that this was the case when he said, **"that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,"** Philippians 3:8,9. We do not earn heaven by our works. God grants it to us in view of our righteousness, which we have received by grace through faith in Jesus' suffering and death for our sins. Nevertheless, we are to **"press toward the mark for the prize,"** that is, daily grow in living a more Christ-like life.

How do we turn over a new leaf then? Not by a human resolve based on reason and human strength, but by acknowledging our sins, repenting of them, and finding forgiveness in our Savior, with the strength to change being given to us alone through God's grace.

A true Christian actually "turns over a new leaf" every day of his life. May the New Year find many others joining the race **"for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."**

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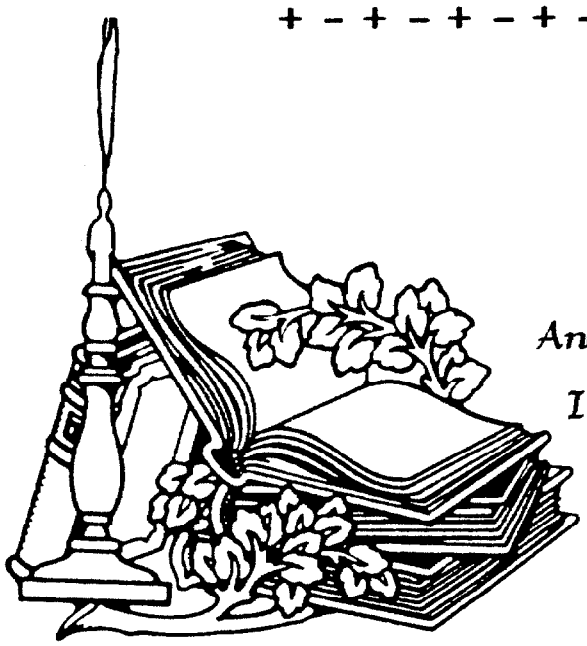

Renew me, O eternal Light,
And let my heart and soul be bright,
Illumined with the Light of Grace
That issues from Thy holy face.

(Lutheran Hymnal, 398, 1)

Three Snares of Satan

There are, as Luther points out, three special snares of Satan, by which the evil foe deceives and misleads especially those who wish to excel in piety, earnest men and women who desire to surpass others in holiness. The first snare is that he causes confusion in the Church as he did during Luther's time by the fanatics, who by their legalistic enactments and ways almost undid the whole work of the Reformation. Legalistic fanaticism, causing confusion, still threatens the Church today, and one of its manifestations is the zeal of the misguided Sabbatarians who desire to force upon Christians the Old Testament Sabbath.

Another snare of Satan is this, that he attempts, by all manner of doctrinal aberrations, to draw Christians, through erring teachings, from the fundamentals of the faith to the periphery of externals or nonessentials. The fundamentals are repentance and remission of sins, Law and Gospel, which Christ inculcates in Luke 24:47. Externals or nonessentials are just such things as emphasizing the day instead of the Word.

The last snare is that ultimately Satan tries to lead Christians away from the doctrine of justification by grace through faith to work-righteousness, and this also is the result of the Sabbatarians, who indeed stress the Sabbath, but not how the Sabbath is truly kept holy, namely, through the hearing and keeping of God's Word by faith in Christ Jesus. May God preserve us from these three, and many other, snares of Satan, by which he desires to rob us of eternal salvation.

We conclude with a prayer taken from one of the Lutheran Confessions: "May the Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus grant the grace of His Holy Ghost that we all may be one in Him, and constantly abide in this Christian unity, which is well pleasing to Him! Amen."

(Tract by John Theodore Mueller, published in 1947)

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