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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"O SING unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marbellous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the bictory."

– Psalm 98:1

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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 acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

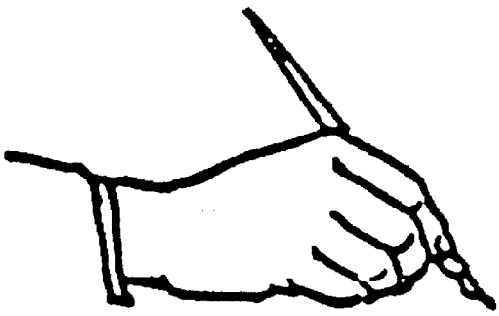
To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

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.



The President's Column

GOD'S RECIPE FOR CHURCH GROWTH

In our last issue of *The Concordia Lutheran*, this President's Column contained an article on Church Growth. It was noted how, throughout the church world, Church growth is a matter of **major** moment. It has actually become an obsession in the various denominations – Lutheran or otherwise – prompted chiefly by gross indebtedness due to numerous building programs and highly salaried church or denominational officers. Most so-called Christian denominations are, therefore, eager to grow numerically, and they boast of their growth in numbers (primarily to attract the people in the community to themselves) as a singular gift and blessing of the Lord – the converse attitude being that that denomination or local congregation which experiences little or no growth is not blessed by the Lord and, consequently, is not pleasing to Him. In this way, by instilling such an attitude with regard to church growth, Satan himself is served!

The Lord God has given us His recipe for church growth clearly in His Word. As far as what the Bible teaches us, we read in the Book of Acts (*Acts 2:47*) concerning the Christian Congregation in Jerusalem that *"the **Lord** added to the Church daily such as should be saved."* In the final analysis, therefore, even the holy Apostles of Christ did absolutely nothing to build Christ's Church on earth. This Word of God takes the church growth problem out of men's hands altogether and leaves it up to the Lord.

And HOW does the Lord add to the church daily such as should be saved? He does this **only** through His Word – not through the machinations of men (which we amply illustrated in the last issue of our periodical). He instituted *local congregations* to be established throughout the world by obligating Christians everywhere **1)** *not to forsake the assembling of* [themselves] *together* for the hearing and learning of God's Word and for public worship (*Hebrews 10:25*), **2)** to establish the pastoral office for the public preaching and teaching of the Word of God – properly *dividing* Law and Gospel (*Titus 1:5*; *II Timothy 2:15*), **3)** to celebrate the Lord's Supper *frequently* in their assemblies under the watchful eyes of their divinely called shepherd (*I Corinthians 11:25-29*), **4)** to exercise church discipline according to the Savior's words, *"tell it unto the church,"* in *Matthew 18:17,* **5)** to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (*Ephesians 4:3*) and **6)** to perform works of Christian charity and love especially among those who are of the *"household of faith"* (*Galatians 6:10*). (*Note*: The Wisconsin Synod frequently attempts to start Christian congregations by first opening a Christian Day School, or congregations are encouraged to establish Christian Day Schools as a catalyst for church growth. It must be noted, however, that, no matter how great a blessing Christian Day Schools may be, nevertheless they are not divinely ordained or instituted by God.)

Because Scripture teaches us that there is something *"wanting"* in a local congregation where the pastoral office has not been established, and because the duties of pastor and what hearers owe to their pastors are clearly specified in the Bible, Christians must also regard the pastoral office as being ordained of God – a divine institution. Through the regular and consistent preaching and teaching of God's Word in all its truth and purity, the Law and Gospel being properly divided – as it is done in a true local visible Christian congregation, the Lord causes His Word *"to accomplish"* what He pleases and *"to prosper"* in the thing whereto He sends it and thus to cause His Church to **grow** according to His Will (Isaiah 55:10,11). He, therefore, tells His **pastors** (who are men, **not** women, *I Timothy 2:12*; *I Corinthians 14:34*): "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine," *II Timothy 4:2*; "By sound doctrine ... exhort and convince the gainsayers," *Titus 1:9;* "Not that we are

sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," *II Corinthians 3:4-5*; "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee," *I Timothy 4:16*; "Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God** that giveth the increase," *I Corinthians 3:7,8*.

Pastors are often so busy today with so many social projects and organizations in their congregations (all designed to bring about church growth) that they, by and large, overlook the *"one thing needful,"* namely, **the Word of God** through which **alone** the Lord God produces the only real growth which He desires in Christian congregations. Can you imagine! They don't have time diligently to spend themselves and to be spent in the duties of their God-ordained pastoral office – to teach the Word of God **day in and day out** in their congregations – so that their congregations become well-versed in the Scriptures which alone are able to make them wise unto salvation, to cause them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to increase their faith and hope, and, after this life, to bring them into the joys of life everlasting. This is the growth about which every true pastor **should be concerned:** A spiritual growth by which their members become better Christians today, in knowledge, faith, and life, than they were yesterday, and better Christians tomorrow than they are today. Such growth can be accomplished **only** by God's grace through the power of **His Word** *which* Christian pastors are obligated to proclaim in its full truth and purity, for "it pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe," *I Corinthians 1:21*, and *with which* pastors are urged to "*feed* the flock of God which is among [them], taking the oversight thereof," *I Peter 5:2*. Christian congregations should therefore be taught to **desire** the pure Word of God "that [they] may **grow** thereby," *I Peter 2:2*. This is the secret of **true** Church Growth. This is how **the Lord** adds to the Church such as should be saved. If synods, denominations, and congregations would be more concerned about God's recipe for church growth as it is set forth in His Word, how much better things would be in the church world today!

– P.R.B.

Editor's Note: With the exception of the "The President's Column," the articles in this issue of *The Concordia Lutheran* are devoted to the Scriptural songs of Christmas. Included is a fine article by one of our laymen, an article setting forth Luther's contribution to Scriptural Christmas music and hymnody.

THE MAGNIFICAT OF MARY

Mary's *canticle* or song of praise was recorded for the posterity of the Church in the Holy Scriptures of our God so that we too might *"magnify the Lord"* and rejoice in the first visible advent of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to be this world's Redeemer from sin, death, and the devil. We find it flawlessly reproduced by verbal inspiration of the Holy Ghost in St. Luke's Gospel, chapter one, verses 46 through 55. Aside from the psalms of David and others in the Old Testament, few hymns have been preserved for us in God's Word. Therefore we specially treasure, particularly during this festive season, the *Benedictus* of Zacharias, Mary's *Magnificat*, and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon, all recorded by Luke and all found in our ***Lutheran Hymnal*** (pages 38 and 43 respectively). What makes the *Magnificat* an easy pick for our special attention this holy Advent and Christmas season is not its author but its **content**, as Mary praises the Lord for His grace and mercy to her as an individual and to all mankind in Jesus, the Redeemer of the world.

The blessed Virgin Mary was *herself* a recipient of the manifold grace of God to the undeserving, as she unhesitatingly testifies in this song of praise. And from her own words we can rightly conclude that Mary would have been the first to condemn her elevation by the Church of Rome to the rank of a virtual goddess! Catholics may deny that charge, as indeed they do, but the facts speak well enough for themselves: They pray to her, invoke her help, make her the *"mediator between God and men"* (instead of Christ Jesus, as the Bible teaches Him to be) and man's advocate at the throne of grace; and they regard her as a "co-redemptrix" with Jesus for the sins of the world! They call her "holy" in addition to "blessed," claiming that she (like Jesus) was

conceived and born without sin, and that all who seek God and His favor apart from her seek Him "in vain"! And finally, they claim since 1950 that Mary was taken to heaven bodily without having suffered temporal death! And for all of this, there exists *not one shred* of Scriptural evidence! To the *contrary*, "mariolatry" in all these facets and many more flies directly in the face of passage after passage of Holy Writ and elevates this blessed Christian woman to a level and to a role which **she herself** would **reject** as ***incompatible*** with God's Holy Word! Nevertheless we Christians honor Mary highly and regard her as having been specially blessed by God when He chose her to be the mother of the Savior (Luke 1:28-31).

*"And Mary said, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, **my Savior**.'"* We notice first of all what **motivates** Mary to sing this hymn of praise: It's the love of Christ, the Messiah, that constrains her, the motivation of the **Gospel** that actually impels her, to praise Him. Her heart simply overflows with gratitude, as she breaks forth into praise for *"[her] **Savior**."* And in that one word she debunks the anti-scriptural myth that she was born holy and without sin. She recognizes in deep humility that *"all* [including Mary of Nazareth] *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). She **needs** this Savior, just as you and I need Him; and she rejoices in the fact that she **has** such a Savior in her merciful and gracious God!

Does she in any way **deserve** this Savior? Not in the least! *"For He hath regarded the **low estate** of His **handmaiden**,"* she sings. God didn't pick Mary to be the mother of the Savior because she was an example of "perfect humility" by which she gained His attention. No, He chose her **in spite of** her *"low estate"* as His servant; and He bestowed this honor upon her *"without any merit or worthiness in her"* as the **blessing** of His **grace** to a poor undeserving sinner! And that blessing we recognize still today, according to Mary's own prophecy that *"behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me **blessed**,"* yea, the **blessed** Virgin Mary. *"For He that is mighty hath done to me **great things** –* [like making me, a **virgin**, into a **mother** by the miraculous working of the Holy Ghost, with whom *'nothing shall be impossible'*], *and holy is **His** Name...* [certainly not **mine!**]"

Focusing upon just the **truly miraculous** ***spiritual blessings***, *"the **best** gifts"* (I Cor. 12:31) which have been bestowed upon **us** graciously in love by *"God, **our** Savior,"* we too *"magnify the Lord"* for having mercifully *"regarded the low estate of His [servants];"* for, despite the fact that **we**, like Mary, were *"by nature the children of wrath, even as others,"* God *"sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that **we** might **live** through Him."* He "called [us] by the Gospel, enlightened [us] with His gifts, sanctified and kept [us] in the true faith" [Luther]. *"He hath done to [us] **great things**"* in making us His adopted sons and daughters and therefore brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus (Romans 8:29) and heirs of heaven! *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon **us**, that **we** should be called the sons of God!"* Truly each of us must find himself ***compelled*** to praise Him for His mercy and grace to us as individuals and to confess with Mary, *"**My** spirit hath rejoiced in God, **my** Savior... for He that is mighty hath done to **me** great things; and holy is **His** Name!"*

But those blessings were not just for Mary then and for us today; for Mary sings: *"His mercy is on them that fear Him **from generation to generation**."* *"His mercy endureth **forever**,"* declares the Psalmist (107:1), existing in God as His divine attribute from all eternity, intended for **all mankind** in the eternal decree of redemption, and, in view of Christ's all-sufficient vicarious atonement, objectively bestowed upon **all men** in God's reconciliation of the world unto Himself (II Cor. 5:19). God's merciful forgiveness of all men is no secret; He has published it **to all** in the precious Gospel (Romans 10:18), with His intent clearly expressed by Paul, namely, that *"**all men** be **saved** and come unto the knowledge of the truth"* (II Timothy 2:4), that His merciful forgiveness, life, and salvation be appropriated or received *"**by faith**,"* by confidence of the heart in His gracious promises.

On the other hand, to those who **reject** His mercy in unbelief, *"He hath showed **strength** with His arm,"* the arm of His power and might and just retribution; *"He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."* They *"would not,"* they wanted nothing of His mercy and

grace. They despised His plan of salvation. They imagined themselves to be above the need for a Redeemer, for a vicarious sacrificial Lamb, for a Savior! And so, from their lofty perches of sinful pride, the Lord *"put down the mighty from their seats,"* humbled them, and had them thrown out on their ear from the marriage feast of salvation – not because His mercy didn't endure, but because *"the proud in the imagination of their hearts"* insisted on being measured, weighed, judged, and rewarded according to God's **justice!** *"And the rich,"* those who were not *"poor in spirit,"* those who prided themselves in the riches of their good works, *"He hath sent empty away,"* saying, *"None of those men which were bidden shall taste of My supper!"* (Luke 14:24).

Nevertheless, His merciful hand was never shortened to those poor starving souls, those Lazaruses, who recognized their lost and hopeless situation as miserable sinners, men of *"low degree,"* who knew that their best righteousnesses stank as filthy rags in the nostrils of their holy God! *"He hath filled the hungry with* ***good things****"* – not just the crumbs of His mercy, but banquet-size portions of spiritual Manna in His precious Gospel to *"restore their souls,"* to *"quicken"* them *"who were dead in trespasses and sins,"* and to satisfy their craving for life-giving nourishment! *"He hath holpen* [that is, *helped*] *His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy"* – He made good on every word and prophecy of promise throughout the Old Testament concerning the Savior to come, *"in remembrance of His mercy,"* in fulfillment of the covenant of His grace which He made already in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, and confirmed to the patriarchs down through the ages, *"as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever!" "He that is mighty hath done to* ***us*** *great things,"* to **us** who are the seed of Abraham **by faith** in God's promises. In sending His only-begotten Son into this world of sin at His first visible Advent, God *"performed the oath which He sware to our Father Abraham"* and *"remembered His holy covenant"* to the praise and glory of His grace! What a wonderful climax to the holy Advent season to see all the prophecies of old fulfilled in the Christ-child of Bethlehem and, by faith in Him, to behold even now our redemption drawing nigh!

Let the earth now praise the Lord,
who hath truly kept His Word,
and the sinner's Help and Friend
now at last to us doth send!

Abram's promised *"Great Reward,"*
Zion's Helper, Jacob's Lord!
Him of twofold race, behold,
truly came as long foretold!

And when He shall come again
as the Judge of sinful men,
I with joy shall see His face,
freely ransomed by His grace!

– D.T.M.

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THE SONG OF THE ANGELS AT THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH

– Luke 2:14

"Glory to God in the highest." The angels gave glory to God for the things He had done that Christmas night. They gave glory to God for **His wisdom** and power, for the birth of Christ was without question a revelation of God's wisdom and power. It revealed God's wise and wonderful plan of saving the world. Sin had caused God to become justifiably angry and moved Him to condemn and to punish man. God's command to our first parents in the Garden had been plain. They were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Our Lutheran hymn expresses the truth of God's Word when we sing, "All mankind fell in Adam's fall, one common sin infects us all; From sire to son the bane descends, And over all the curse impends," (369). God could not simply overlook man's sin. His righteous indignation and wrath had to be appeased. The plan to accomplish this was decreed by God who in His immeasurable wisdom sent forth His only-begotten Son who would assume a true human nature within the womb of the Virgin Mary and who would then willingly place Himself under the Law, suffer and die. But the Son being true "God manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16) was able to fulfil the Law perfectly in our stead and as our Substitute His suffering and death was a sufficient ransom to satisfy the righteous wrath of the heavenly Father.

Do we not also observe **God's almighty power** at the birth of Christ? Just think! That Child which was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary was not a mere child, but the almighty Son of God who took a true human nature into His Person. Here we must take our reason and understanding captive and joyfully confess with Luther, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord." And to those who cry: How can this be? The angel of the Lord answers, "For with God NOTHING shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37) – God's power is limitless.

The birth of the Savior in Bethlehem reveals **God's mercy and love.** We deserved no favors from God. Without being unjust He could have allowed all of us to perish in our sins. But behold His boundless compassion and mercy! "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The heavenly Father's only-begotten Son becomes a little Baby born in a stable in great lowliness. In fact, the Savior's whole life was characterized by poverty, contempt and persecution. No wonder we observe the heavenly choirs coming down upon earth to sing of the incomprehensible love of God which filled the realms of heaven with wonder and delight.

"And on earth peace," the angels sang. Some 700 years before the Prophet Isaiah had foretold, "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 ... The Prince of Peace" (9:6). Because Christ brought peace on earth, the angels announced His birth by singing, **"and on earth peace."** What a joyful message! Sin had separated men from God and caused a gulf to be fixed between earth and heaven. Sin made peace between God and man impossible. And God could not do otherwise than punish sin, and man had to fear the punishment of God on account of sin. Jesus, however, brought about a change in the relation that existed between man and God. He was born the Prince of Peace, and through His substitutional suffering and death, He reconciled the entire world unto His heavenly Father. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ... we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:19,20).

Without Jesus we could have no peace of conscience. Our conscience would cause us to be filled with fear and anxiety. Without Jesus we would stand condemned because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). God's Law would condemn us. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). But thanks be to God that Jesus has made peace for us. By faith in Him we are the children of God, "for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). We know that God loves us for Jesus' sake and that He richly and daily forgives us all our sins. The Christ-child brings peace of conscience.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Many people do not refer these words of the angels to the peace which reigns in the heart of the believer, but rather they apply these words merely to an outward peace. But remember that the Lord Jesus had said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" ... (Matt. 10:34). As He tells us, the peace which the Savior gives is altogether different: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). It is a spiritual peace which the Lord gives us through the "Gospel of Peace" (Rom. 10:15). Just think! Through faith in Jesus we now have as our very own possession the forgiveness of all our sins, and heaven is now our Home!

"Good will toward men" – not for the benefit of the holy angels who were confirmed in their bliss, but for the benefit of man. The Savior's birth brought peace to the world, and therefore the inhabitants of the earth are now men on whom God's good will or God's pleasure rests. For the sake of the little Child Jesus, God is well-pleased with men. Jesus was born to be our Substitute and to stand in our place and because of Him God's "Good Will" rests upon us. "Now we can have a happy, joyful, defiant courage against all suffering which may happen to us, that we may say to the devil: you can not make it so evil that you spoil my joy, which I have through this Child. That is what good will means, a happy, quiet, joyful, courageous heart, that is not much concerned, no matter how things go, and says to the devil and the world: I cannot leave my joy for your sake, and I shall not feel concerned on account of your wrath; do as you please, Christ gives me more joy than you do sorrow. Such a heart the angels grant and wish us with their hymn" (Luther's Works, St. Louis Ed. Vol. 13:74). Let us then rejoice, my dear fellow-believers, and join in the song of the angels, and with them let our hallelujahs ascend to the throne of the heavenly Father for having sent Jesus to be our Savior from sin, death, and hell, thanking Him by "let[ting] your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

– M.L.N.

SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER AS A HYMN WRITER

For contemporary Lutherans, a divine service without hymns is almost inconceivable, but in Luther's day it was the norm. In a church where only the clergy were considered members of the holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints – in a church where the universal priesthood of all true believers was denied, the priest was the only active participant in a divine service which reached its climax in a corrupted celebration of the Lord's Supper. Advances in western music made it desirable for much of the mass to be sung in special polyphonic settings instead of being chanted entirely by the priest, but this did not change the essential facts that in the Roman service or Mass, there was one celebrant: the priest. The common people were treated primarily as observers and allowed to participate only in the words, "*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison*" during the majority of services throughout the church year. Only on special, high feast days such as Christmas and Easter were the common people permitted to sing a hymn or carol in the church.

In keeping with the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all true believers as presented in I Peter 2:9: "*But 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,*" and elsewhere in Scripture, Martin Luther earnestly believed that all Christians should be active participants in the divine service. As active participants, they would follow the example of Mary and listen attentively to the words of Jesus, their Savior, preached to them from the pulpit by their pastor, and they would speak to Him, and to one another, in song. In the first case Martin Luther placed the sermon in the central place in his liturgy and in the second, he encouraged the composition of German hymns for use in public worship. "*I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating? The bishops may have*

these [congregational] hymns sung either after the Latin chants, or use the Latin on one [Sun]day and the vernacular on the next, until the time comes that the whole mass is sung in the vernacular. But poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them [Col. 3:16], worthy to be used in the church of God." [1]

It is evident from history that Luther had the knowledge and facility of an expert in the music of his time. As a student, he undoubtedly sang in the Magdeburg cathedral school choir. Later, in Mansfeld and Eisenach, he, along with other scholars, sang in the streets for money and food. He learned medieval music theory at the university at Erfurt from the writings of Johannes de Muris and Johannes Tinctoris. As an adult, Martin Luther often improvised accompaniments to his own singing and transcribed polyphonic vocal compositions on the lute. He also chanted the liturgy at mass, sang part songs at the dinner table with family and friends, provided missing vocal lines for part-music, and wrote chants for the *Deutsche Messe* (his German order of service) in collaboration with Johann Walther. But the Lieder (as Luther called his hymns) are his most enduring musical contribution, especially for American Lutherans.

The phenomenal success of Luther's hymns, therefore, is every bit as much attributable to his musical talents as to his understanding of theology. Because he understood the appealing nature of the German lied, he was able to use his gifts to compose words and music of high quality which were enthusiastically learned by the common people. Luther believed that a hymn, by definition, was an audible form of human expression consisting of word, rhythm, and melody. Speaking of all forms of Christian vocal music in his Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae iucundae, he wrote: "*After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming the Word of God through music and by providing sweet melodies with words.*"[2] The association of word and music in the majority of Luther's hymns is so close that even after more than four hundred years no one would think of singing a different set of words to *All Praise to Thee, Eternal God* or *Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above* than they would consider singing the original text that was written for the melody we use

for our national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner.* It is important to note that melodies which Luther derived from other sources, namely, Latin Hymns, sequences, antiphons, secular and sacred folk songs, etc. were successfully recomposed by him to fit his texts and the spirit and style of the German lied.

In his introduction to the Wittenberg Hymnal of 1524, Luther declared that his hymns were written as "*an incentive to those who could do better.*" An objective comparison of the hymns of Martin Luther with the works of those who followed him leads to the inevitable conclusion that Luther not only provided an incentive, but he created a corpus of hymns that also served as a model for others to study and emulate. Friedrich Blume writes: "*Luther's lieder rapidly formed the basis of the central Lutheran song repertory. For the hymnbooks of the 16th and 17th centuries they were the indispensable core of an otherwise very changeable repertory, which was formed around them. They were regarded as stimuli, not necessarily as examples, for those who could do it better; the latter were not found, however, in the expected quality and number. ... To be sure, some of his contemporaries attained the level of Luther as a lied composer, but they could not surpass him. The songs flowed in a steady stream from his inspired heart, proclaiming [Lutheran] truth and making a breach for the doctrine as did no sermon or writing. From the Jesuitic point of view it has justly been said that Luther's lieder destroyed more souls than his writings and speeches.*"[3]

At this festive time of the year, when our hearts and minds are directed to the humble birth of our Lord and Savior as a baby in a rustic manger in the little town of Bethlehem, the splendid hymns of Martin Luther still form the core repertoire of the Christmas, Epiphany, and Presentation sections in our hymnal. We can list them as follows:

All Praise to Thee, Eternal God (TLH 80)
From Heaven Above to Earth I Come (TLH 85)
Savior of the Nations, Come (TLH 95)
To Shepherds as They Watched by Night (TLH 103)
Now Praise We Christ, the Holy One (TLH 104)
The Star Proclaims the King is Here (TLH 131)
In Peace and Joy I Now Depart (TLH 137)

Even if we accept that Luther did not compose a melody especially for *To Shepherds as They Watched by Night,* and *The Star Proclaims the King is Here,* the wide variety in the mood and the mode of the five remaining hymns is astounding. The reformer clearly had the meaning of his hymn texts in mind when he composed these melodies. The descending notes in the opening phrase of *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come,* for instance, clearly illustrate the text of the opening stanza in which God's holy angel speaks of descending from heaven above to bring the joyous news of the birth of the Savior of all mankind to the lowly shepherds who were watching their sheep in the fields near Bethlehem.

We are indeed richly blessed to have for our inheritance almost all of the hymns of Martin Luther in good idiomatic English translations, ready to be sung according to their original rhythmic melodies. Luther would approve of these translations because they faithfully render his hymn texts in English without slavishly following every word of the German.

Luther's hymns, whether in German or in English, never lose track of the chief purpose of the Bible, namely, to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (II Tim 3:15). They show us our sins and God's wrath, they remind us of what God has done, and is still doing for our salvation, and they show us our Savior and God's grace, as the following examples demonstrate.

Das helf' uns der Herr Jesus Christ.	Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, for we
Der unser Mittler worden ist;	A Mediator have in Thee;
Es ist mit unserm Tun verlor'n	Our works cannot salvation gain;
Verdienen doch eitel Zorn.	They merit but endless pain.
Kyrieleis!	Have mercy, Lord!
	(TLH 287:12)

Sein Lauf kam vom Vater her	From the Father forth He came
Und kehrt' wieder zum Vater,	And returneth to the same,
Fuhr hinunter zu der Höll'	Captive leading death and hell –
Und wieder zu Gottes Stuhl.	High the song of triumph swell!
	(TLH 95:4)

Merk auf, mein Herz, und sieh dorthin!	Give heed, my heart, lift up thine eyes!
Was liegt dort in dem Krippelein?	What is it in yon manger lies?
Wer ist das schöne Kindelein?	Who is this child, so young and fair?
Es ist das liebe Jesulein.	The blessed Christ-child lieth there.
	(TLH 85:7)

Er ist das Heil und selig Licht	He is the Hope and saving Light
Für all die Heiden,	Of lands benighted;
Zu 'rleuchten, die dich kennen nicht,	By Him are they who dwelt in night
Und zu weiden	Fed and lighted.
Er ist dein's Volks Israel	He is Israel's Praise and Bliss,
Der Preis, Ehr', Freud', und Wonne	Their Joy, Reward, and Glory.
	(TLH 137:4)

Within the Jordan's crystal flood
In meekness stands the Lamb of God
And, sinless, sanctifies the wave,
Mankind from sin to cleanse and save.
(TLH 131:5)

The Savior that Luther learned to know from the Roman Catholic Church was a stern, inaccessible judge whose holy life and death on the cross redeemed mankind only from original sin. As a monk, he began to hate God for demanding of him a level of perfection that he could never achieve in order to earn salvation for himself. From the Gospel, however, he learned to know the true Christ of the Bible who was *"made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"* (Hebrews 2:17). Luther, therefore, rejected the notion that Christ had to be approached through a go-between. In a day when the invocation of Mary and the saints was rampant, Luther stresses the doctrine of the personal union in his Christmas hymns to emphasize that there is no need for human mediators because there is ***"one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"*** (I Timothy 2:5).

Ach Herr, du Schöpfer aller Ding',	Ah, Lord, who hast created all,
Wie bist du worden so gering.	How weak art Thou, how poor and small,
Daß du da liegst auf dürrem Gras,	That Thou dost choose Thine infant bed
Davon ein Rind and Esel aß!	Where humble cattle lately fed!
	(TLH 85:9)

Des sollt ihr billig frölich sein,	Oh, then rejoice that through His Son
daß Gott mit euch is worden ein.	God is with sinners now at one;
Er ist gebor'n eu'r Fleisch und Blut	Made like yourselves of flesh and blood,
Eu'r Bruder ist das ew'ge Gut.	Your brother is the eternal God.
	(TLH 103:3)

Was kann euch tun die Sünd und Tod?	What harm can sin and death then do?
Ihr habt mit euch den wahren Gott.	The true God now abides with you.
Laßt zürnen Teufel und die Höll',	Let hell and Satan rage and chafe,
Gott's Sohn is worden eu'r Gesell.	Christ is your Brother ye are safe.
	(TLH 103:4)

He who Himself all things did make
A servant's form vouchsafed to take
That He as man, mankind might win
And save His creatures from their sin.
(TLH 104:2)

The lieder of Martin Luther set such a high standard for future hymn writers in the Lutheran church, that in retrospect, Dr. Richard R. Terry once remarked that "only the Lutheran Church has a mass of really magnificent hymns."[4]

Submitted by
Stephen P. Bloedel
Through his pastor

Footnotes:

1. *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg;* Martin Luther; (1523); in **Luther's Works, volume 53, Liturgy and Hymns**; page 36; edited by Ulrich S. Leupold; Fortress Press; Philadelphia; (1965)

2. *Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae iucundae;* Martin Luther; (1523); in **Luther's Works, volume 53, Liturgy and Hymns**; page 323; edited by Ulrich S. Leupold; Fortress Press; Philadelphia; (1965)

3. **Protestant Church Music**; Friedrich Blume; page 43; W.W. Norton & Company; London; 1975; Originally published in Germany as **Geschichte Der Evangelischen Kirchenmusik**; Bareneiter-Verlag; Karl Votterele KG; 1964

4. Quoted in *The Chorale in the Life of the Child*; O.C. Rupprecht; in **The Musical Heritage of the Church**; Ed. Theodore Hoelty-Nickle; Valparaiso, Indiana; (1946)

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Luther and the Composers of His Time; Charles Anders; in **The Musical Heritage of the Church**; Ed. Theodore Hoelty-Nickle; Valparaiso, Indiana; (1970)

Discography

In Natali Domini: Mediaeval Christmas Songs; Sony Classical; Vivarte; SK 45946

Comment: Luther was evidently acquainted with most of the music on this recording.

Lutheran Mass for Christmas Morning ***as it might have been celebrated around 1620***; Archiv Produktion; 439 250-2

Martin Luther – Deutsch Liedmesse; Cantate; C 57616

Praetorius – Polyhymnia Caduceatrix & Panegyrica – Music for Christmas; Hymns of Peace & Praise; Sony Classical; Vivarte; S2K 62929

Salve Regina: Gregorian Chant; Philips Silver Line Classics; 420 879-2

Comment: Contains a number of chants which form the basis for some of Luther's hymns.

Guide to the Instruments of the Renaissance; Ricercar; RIC 95001

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