

The Concordia Lutheran



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

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

Vol. LVI

November—December 2011

Nos. 11–12



**“God sent His
only -begotten
Son into the
World.”**

1 John 4:9



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Vol. LVI Nov - Dec 2011 Nos. 11 - 12

OFFICIAL ORGAN of the

Concordia Lutheran Conference

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

The Concordia Lutheran Editor

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

Book and Tract Editor

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

Lay Member:

Mr. Jason A. Mabe
6249 El Morro Lane
Oak Forest, IL 60452

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Officers of the

Concordia Lutheran Conference

PRESIDENT:

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

VICE PRESIDENT:

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

SECRETARY:

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

TREASURER:

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

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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 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.

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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.

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Reflecting upon the World into Which Martin Luther Was Born

This past October 31st, we celebrated the four hundred ninety-fourth anniversary of the Reformation, the date on which Dr. Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This historic event simply marks the beginning of a very long period of religious reform throughout Europe and thus has been celebrated among Lutherans as “Reformation Day.” As we look back almost five hundred years to the time of the Lutheran reformation, we see a world that is much different from that of our present time — a world which none of us would be able to recognize. From its forms of civil government, its social structure, and its economic standard of living to its Renaissance of intellectual inquiry and its impact upon religious and spiritual understanding, this was a completely different world. It is fitting then, as we celebrate his birth in 1483, to take a glance back through history and reflect upon the world into which Dr. Martin Luther was born and how the Lord, through His divine providence, ruled over this world and prepared it for the reformation of outward Christendom.

As history presents it, the secular world into which Dr. Martin Luther was born had been undergoing various political, economical and intellectual changes. As the world moved out of the Dark Ages into the Renaissance, one of the most notable changes in the political life of Europe was the rise of strong, centralized governments. In short, the feudal system of the Middle Ages had broken down. Much of the political and military power held by the feudal lords and nobles had been consolidated by the monarchy, and royal power tended to be more absolute. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, countries such as England, France and Spain had all developed strong, national governments. While monarchical power was being consolidated in western European countries, in central Europe it remained divided among the great nobles of the Holy Roman Empire. At this time, the geographical area we now identify as Germany had been divided into about three hundred virtually

independent states. These three hundred states formed a loose alliance under the Holy Roman Emperor. In comparison to our country today, the alliance of these three hundred states of the Holy Roman Empire was much looser than that which binds our 50 states together in a “federal” government. Germany stood out the most from the other great European nations because seven of its princes, known as *Electors*, had obtained the political authority to *elect* their emperor. Maximilian I (1493–1519) was one of the greatest and most influential medieval emperors in the Austrian House of Hapsburg. Through political alliances with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, he arranged for his grandson, Charles I of Spain, to be elected Emperor in 1519. After having ascended the throne, Charles I of Spain became known as Emperor Charles V, the man who played a large role in trying to suppress the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

The divine providence of God in the division of political power in the Holy Roman Empire with respect to the Reformation became evident after Martin Luther had been placed under the ban of the empire in 1521. By the time Luther made his stand at the Diet of Worms, some of the German nobles, such as Elector Frederick of Saxony, had been personally convinced of the teachings which Luther demonstrated from Holy Scripture and possessed the political and military power to protect him from his enemies. Here we see the providential preservation of God concerning His Word and Truth as He, in His kingdom of power, worked all things to the good of His Church, the true believers (I Peter 1:25a; Matthew 16:18b; Ephesians 1:22; Romans 8:28).

In addition to reflecting upon the political climate of 16th century Europe, it is worthy to note the developments in its social and economic conditions as a result of the Renaissance. From about the fifteenth century, there had been a revival of learning in Europe, marking the first notable break from the medieval world. This Renaissance or “new birth” resulted in intellectual curiosity and, with it, scientific investigation, inventions of all kinds, and the exploration of distant lands. It also quickly made its way into the economic system of Europe and advanced its methods of trade and technology. Up until that time, *land* was the basis of wealth and gave strength to the feudalistic system. But, with the revival of industry and commerce, the basis of wealth changed from land to *capital*. This new capitalistic system gave rise to a new social class, which historians call the *burghers* or citizens. Instead of remaining peasants or serfs —virtual servants to the lords who owned land— these burghers were able to pursue their various trades and crafts independently due to the revival of commerce. For instance, inventors were able to secure loans from banks in order to create new machinery for increasing the efficiency of trade. One of the most notable inventors of the Renaissance was Johannes Gutenberg, who invented the use of

moveable type in a simple printing press in the year 1450. This invention completely revolutionized the spread of ideas and literature when hundreds of pages of words, previously hand-written or hand-lettered, could be reproduced in a relatively short period of time. Sixty-seven years later, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, they were immediately copied down and taken to the local print shop and, though not by Luther's original intent, were mass produced for public consumption.

Moreover, as this burgher class continued to grow, it obtained certain privileges regarding education. While today public education is common-place and citizens have a "right" to public education, in sixteen-century Europe this idea was completely foreign. As these burghers eventually grew more affluent, they were able to purchase education for their children. It was at this time that *humanism* was embraced as the central philosophy of this new learning. Humanism embraced the value and dignity of the individual and focused on his intellectual and social development. This new learning was soon taught in the universities of Vienna, Heidelberg, Erfurt, Tübingen, and Leipzig. One aspect of learning that humanism fostered was the study of ancient history and classical literature, and from this emphasis focus was placed on the ancient Biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. By the end of the fifteenth century, northern leaders were turning to the original Greek and Hebrew texts for authority in *religious* matters. This element of learning would play an important role in the Reformation, especially since Martin Luther translated his German Bible from the original languages. Martin Luther once commented on the importance of the original languages saying, "As dear now as the Gospel is to us, so severely ought we to hold to the languages."

In comparison to the *secular* world into which Dr. Martin Luther was born, the *spiritual* world experienced its own types of changes leading up to the Reformation. The spiritual or religious world of Europe by the eve of the Renaissance was much different than that of today. In our country today, in any given neighborhood, one might find dozens of different denominational church bodies. In 15th century Europe, the one and only nominally *Christian* religion was Roman Catholicism. There was only one Church, and that was under the control of the pope and regulated by Church Law. One either consented to his rule and accepted these laws or was condemned as a heretic and most likely was executed in the name of God.

After the Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Church of Rome had reached the height of its power. From the thirteenth century up to the time of the Reformation, popes continued to take full advantage of their temporal and spiritual power without considering the

changing conditions in Europe. As the Renaissance swept through Italy and the rest of southern Europe, northern countries stayed fairly stable. The Renaissance of the south is often called by historians a “materialistic” Renaissance with its focus on this present life, while the Renaissance of the north has been called a “spiritual” Renaissance, focusing on the life to come. There was an increase in anxiety to gain favor with God by way of work-righteousness. People began to focus on the fate of their souls and their position before God because of their sins, and the Church continued emphasizing and advertising good deeds which people could perform in order that they might find themselves in God’s good graces. These mechanical performances ranged from simple acts such as Confession and Alms-giving to larger, more trying tasks such as Pilgrimages and the dedication of one’s life to Monasticism. While these meritorious acts were thought to gain *some* favor with their angry God, the people were kept aware that in spite of these acts they would still need to spend time in purgatory because of their sins. The spiritual world of the time was filled with doubt, fear, and despair; and the average person had almost no knowledge of salvation as found in the Gospel. The sad truth at the time was that the teaching of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, without the deeds of the Law (Romans 3:21-28) was practically unknown to the people of 15th century Europe and was deliberately hidden from them by a church system that relied upon their slavery to its legalistic tyranny.

As the ideals of the Renaissance made their way north, a new zeal for religious reform was kindled. Many people had become disillusioned and unsettled by the blatant abuse of Church power and rampant corruption within the clergy. Because of technological advancements such as the printing press, copies and translations of the Bible were gradually making their way into the hands of more people; and between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries several attempts were made at religious reformation. Many people think that Martin Luther was really the first man to stand up openly against the teachings of Rome. However, several “forerunners” of the Reformation predated Luther by almost three-hundred years. We do not refer to these men as “reformers” in the proper sense of the term because of errors to which they held in opposition to Scripture, but their efforts to unmask the Papacy and to return the Church to Scripture are worthy of note. Unfortunately, due to the religious climate of their time and the absolute power of the Church of Rome, their attempts at religious reform were quickly squelched. One of the earlier efforts was launched by a learned Englishman named William of Occam (1280–1349 A.D.). In his writings Occam stated that the pope was not infallible and urged the Church to hold strictly to the Holy Scriptures in matters of faith and conduct. Later on, many of Occam’s writings are said to have had a strong influence on Martin Luther.

John Wyclif (1320–1384 A.D.) was also a strong influence in England. He, too, stated that the pope was not infallible and that the bulls and decrees of the pope were only authoritative if they were based on clear Scripture. It was because of Wyclif's initiative that England received the first complete version of the Bible in English in the year 1380 A.D. — approximately 142 years before Luther's translation of the New Testament into German. In addition, Wyclif was also one of the first to identify the pope as the very Antichrist of II Thessalonians 2. But above all this, Wyclif and his colleagues began teaching the Scripture doctrine of justification by faith in the Redeemer of the world rather than by work-righteousness. In order to control these deviations from papal dogma, heresy was made a capital offense in England in 1401; and Wyclifism was suppressed by force. John Wyclif died on December 31, 1384. G. E. Hageman, a church historian, made special note concerning the fate of John Wyclif: "The Council of Constance took cognizance of Wyclif... decreed that his books be burned and his remains exhumed," twelve years later to be burned and his ashes scattered on the waters of the Swift (G. E. Hageman, *Sketches from the History of the Church*, St. Louis: CPH, ca. 1920, p. 115). A close follower of Wyclif, John Hus (1369–1415 A.D.), worked hard as the head of a reform movement in Bohemia. For his "radical heresies" Hus was excommunicated by the Church of Rome and quickly burned at the stake. In reaction to Hus' murder, his followers, the Hussites, met the armies of the pope in open warfare at the battle of Prague (1434 A.D.) and were defeated. Among the early reform movements in Europe, the Hussites stood out. The Church of Rome suppressed this effort with such force that no other attempts were made in northern Europe until the time of Luther. Even at the very beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, people began comparing Luther to John Hus, warning him that he would also meet a similar end. By the grace of God, however, that was not the case. The Lord preserved Luther and delivered him out of the hands of his enemies, both political and spiritual (Psalm 18:48). G. E. Hageman properly summed up the role that Martin Luther played during this time of Reformation: "It was God who through the instrumentality of His servant Luther brought about that change which every other human agent had failed to achieve" (*Ibid.*, p. 127).

By the providence of Almighty God, the world into which Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, had been prepared by gradual changes in both the secular and spiritual spheres of Western Europe. Hageman again states very pointedly: "Thus it was not Luther who made himself great by this Reformation, but the Lord who glorified Himself in Luther that the world might know and believe... 'That Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' Phil. 2:10.11" (*Ibid.*, pp. 127–128). As Europe slowly changed from the medieval world to the modern, the Lord had providentially set the stage for Luther, as His

humble servant, 1) to return to outward Christendom the Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of Christian doctrine, and 2) to restore again to the people the saving knowledge of the doctrine of justification by God's grace alone, merited by Christ's all-sufficient vicarious atonement, and received and apprehended by faith alone. On these two "pillars," or principles, Luther's entire work of Reformation was grounded and has been blessed to this present day to the glory of God.

—**Daniel P. Mensing**, Seminarian

(Submitted through his Pastor)



"Now Thank We All Our God!"



Without doubt one of the most popular and well-beloved thanksgiving hymns is that of Martin Rinckart entitled as above, "Now Thank We All Our God!" Not only is it found in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) as Hymn #36 in the *Worship and Praise* section, but it is included in practically every published hymnal of every Christian denomination, both here and abroad. It is sung not only at worship services and on special occasions of general thanksgiving, but its broad appeal makes it suitable for everything from weddings to funerals; and

many Christians know the three stanzas by heart and can sing them spontaneously from memory.

Much of the hymn's popularity stems from its having been taken by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) as the theme, melody and lyrical content of his Cantata No. 79 and of his great chorale organ prelude in G major, "*Nun danket alle Gott!*" (BWV 657). Then also, about a hundred years later, in the 1840 commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, out of gratitude to God especially for that invention's role in the mass production and distribution of the Scriptures, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847), the Jewish-Lutheran composer of the powerful "Reformation Symphony" (No. 5), used the hymn as the thematic material for his 2nd Symphony in B flat major, Opus 52, "*Lobgesang*" ("Hymn of Praise"). These monumental works still today belong to the repertoire of every major orchestra and choral society and are available as recordings on literally hundreds of labels.

It is interesting to note that this hymn and only one other in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (#581, "*All Ye Who on This Earth Do Dwell*," by Paul Gerhardt) are designated by the hymnal's editors as having been based on a passage from the Old Testament *Apocrypha*, namely, from Luther's translation of the Book of Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus), chapter 50, vv. 22-24. However similar the lyrics are to the text of that passage, the claim is doubtful at best. Very few of our hymns are actually *based on specific texts* of Scripture, according to research into their original form, any commentary available on the part of the author, and citations included in their publication; and the earlier German Lutheran hymnals do not indicate Bible

texts (in most cases) as the *source* of the authors' words. It appears that the editors of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) simply chose the texts they cited as being very close in content to the lyrics of the hymns, thus making it convenient, particularly for pastors, to select hymns appropriate to texts on which they were preaching.

In any case, Martin Rinckart, a Lutheran pastor in the walled city of Eilenberg in Saxony during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), wrote this wonderful hymn of praise and thanks to God during a time of great trial and tribulation. During the course of that war in which Catholic and Protestant forces practically reduced Germany to rubble, Eilenberg had become a city of safety for displaced fugitives and refugees; and crowded conditions with many sick and wounded, coupled with poor sanitation, polluted drinking water, and malnutrition due to a protracted famine, gave rise to waves of pestilence and heavy casualties. Death and destruction were everywhere; the population of Germany was reduced by as many as ten million people; and Eilenberg itself was hard hit. In the plague of 1637 alone, Pastor Rinckart conducted some 4,500 burial services, including that of his own wife and two fellow-pastors, sometimes as many as forty a day! This hymn was penned in those horrendous years for the encouragement of Rinckart's own children and for the edification of his flock. It might well have been inspired by Job's statement, made under very similar circumstances: "*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!*" (Job 1:21), or by St. Paul's exhortation: "*In everything give thanks!*" (I Thessalonians 5:18). We include this little bit of history to increase our appreciation of this precious hymn and, at the same time, gratefully to recognize, as we sing its time-worn words, how little we have suffered in comparison and how richly we have been blessed with both spiritual and temporal bounty for Jesus' sake!

Rinckart sings and exhorts us to join him:

"Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done
in whom His world rejoices!"

In I Chronicles 16:7ff. we read that, when King David returned the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem from its 70-year exile of sorts in Kirjathjearim (after it had been rescued from the heathen Philistines in the days of Samuel), "*David delivered first this psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and his brethren: 'Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the people.*

Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all His wondrous works...;” and he went on to recite many of the blessings that the Lord had bestowed upon His people. These words, as well as the many songs of praise included in the Book of Psalms by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, call to mind not only God’s abundant, gracious gifts to His people both temporal and spiritual but also their solemn obligation and great privilege, motivated by the Gospel, to render Him due thanks for the same. Luther, in his explanation of the *First Article*, enumerates many of those blessings to us as well and concludes: “For all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.” And Rinckart, in his hymn of thanksgiving, reminds us of God’s consistency in granting His gracious gifts to us, not in “hit-or-miss” fashion, but richly and daily throughout our entire life:

“Who from our mother’s arms
hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today!”

While this part of the stanza seems to paraphrase Ecclesiasticus 50:22, “...which exalteth our days from the womb, and dealeth with us according to His mercy...,” we do not have to assume that Rinckart’s words are based on this apocryphal text since the same truths are taught in many passages of God’s own Word (cf. Psalm 71:6; 139:13-14; Isaiah 44:2-4, 24; etc.).

And, following upon our grateful recognition of the Lord’s bounteous blessings, we now with Rinckart beseech His continuous, gracious blessings upon us throughout our lives, according to His promises to us, singing:

“Oh, may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us!”

In Isaiah 55:10 and 11, the Lord through His prophet promises fruit to the regular and consistent proclamation of His Word, saying: “*So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: It shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*” (v.11b). And then He adds: “*For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*” (v.

12). Indeed, the “*best gifts*” (I Corinthians 12:31) that believers, the members of Christ’s body, receive from their bounteous God are those which accrue to them by means of His precious Word, despite “*tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword,...[so that] in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!*” (Romans 8:35, 37). Thus, according to His promise, He will be with us and never forsake us (Hebrews 13:5b); “‘*for the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed,*’ saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee” (Isaiah 54:10). Through His everlasting Gospel, He will

“...keep us in His grace
and guide us when perplexed
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.”

“*Now 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,*” writes the Apostle Paul in Romans 15:13. And in confidence of that assurance, Rinckart breaks forth in a beautiful Trinitarian doxology, in a metrical paraphrase of the *Gloria Patri* (TLH, pp. 6, 16, 30, 32, 38, 41, 43 and 46; cf. Jude 25), as the sum of what has gone before, as the fitting praise to the entire Triune God for His abiding blessings and to each of the persons to whom specific works and benefits are respectively attributed and ascribed by the Scriptures, singing:

“All praise and thanks to God
the Father now be given,
the Son, and Him who reigns
with them in highest heaven,
the one eternal God,
whom earth and heaven adore!
For thus it was, is now,
and shall be evermore!”

It is said that, though it had been composed and published already a dozen years previously, this hymn was sung throughout Germany when the Peace of Westphalia was concluded in 1648, bringing to an end one of the most devastating wars in recorded history. Having

survived its grueling privations, sufferings, sorrows and tribulations, Martin Rinckart died at the age of 63, just one year after the Thirty Years' War ended. By His comforting and edifying Gospel, even in the worst of times, the Lord had indeed kept Rinckart in His grace, guided him when perplexed, and finally freed him from all ills by receiving him into the bliss of heaven. *"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, because His mercy endureth forever!"* (Psalm 118:1). Amen!

—D. T. M.





The Exemplary Advent Preaching of Christ's Forerunner

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord!' as said the prophet Esaias."

—John 1:23

John the Baptist, the Savior's forerunner or "advance-man," as we would call such a person today, had been "*preaching in the wilderness of Judea*" and in "*all the region round about Jordan*," St. Matthew tells us (chapter 3), and had gained a great following among the people. His message was one of urgency as he preached "*the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*." It wasn't an easy message to hear; it was not the smooth-talking "pitch" that so many people look for today in preachers; but the holy evangelists tell us that people went out unto him in droves "*and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins*" (Mark 1) — all, that is, except the leaders of the Jews, whose skepticism became evident in the investigation they launched against John. Some thought he just might be the *Messiah!* Others, realizing the potential political value of hanging onto John's "coattails," tried to curry favor with him and to flatter him. "*And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who art thou?'*" (John 1:19). The "big shots" didn't come themselves; they didn't want to identify themselves with John as of yet. Instead they sent "stooges" to "scope out" this popular prophet and to see what he was all about.

Here John the Baptist had the "ideal chance" to make a name for himself. But he forthrightly withstood any and all efforts to get him to accept personal acclaim and honor. "*And he confessed, and denied not, but confessed: 'I am not the Christ.'* And they asked him, '*What then? Art thou Elias [Elijah risen from the dead perhaps]??*' And he saith, '*I am not.*' '*Art thou that Prophet [like unto Moses, whom the Lord promised to raise up among His people]??*' And he answered, '*No.*' Then said they unto him, '*Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?'*" (John 1:20–22).

The Jews gave John plenty of opportunity to "toot his own horn." And "high profile" *belly-servers* today would have gotten plenty of mileage out of it too! For they want to be KNOWN; they look for NAME RECOGNITION;

they cultivate a PUBLIC IMAGE; they plaster their PICTURE everywhere —on every flier, poster, and advertisement for their church or “ministry,” as they like to call their program, so that people recognize their face when they see it. Unlike St. Paul, who said, “*We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus, the Lord*” (II Corinthians 4:5a), they preach THEMSELVES and hire booking agents to schedule “personal appearances.” Not so John, however; and not so any faithful Christian pastor who desires humbly to serve his Lord Jesus Christ and the cause of His precious truth!! “Christian” preachers in the proper sense of the term confess with the Psalmist: “*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto **Thy Name** give glory, for **Thy mercy**, and for **Thy truth**’s sake!*” (115:1).

And when John was pressed to say something about himself, he responded with the words of the Prophet Isaiah (40:3) concerning the Messiah’s forerunner: “*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said the Prophet Esaias*” (our title-text). Isaiah had prophesied of John that he would be a preacher of **repentance** —a forthright preacher of the **Law** in all its fierceness to convict impenitent sinners, to humble the arrogant, to clear “offenses” or stumblingblocks from the roadway of the heavenly King with the “bulldozer” of God’s truth, to bring the people to their knees in humble contrition (or sorrow) for their sins, and thus to prepare their hearts to receive the comfort of the Gospel. —Where indeed do we find such preaching today? It’s so RARE that it’s practically EXTINCT!! Belly-servers and the “church-growth” people who are interested in playing the “numbers game” on their growing databases will tell you straight out: “Such preaching drives people away from the church! It’s counter-productive! People don’t want a guilt-trip laid on them when they come to church; they want to feel good about themselves! That’s why even Jesus’ own steps of Christian admonition [Matthew 18:15–17] have such a **poor record** of ‘gaining’ people!! Can’t you see that??” —Apparently JOHN didn’t “see it” that way! Neither did JESUS! Neither did PAUL and the other apostles! And neither do **WE** “see it” that way, when God says to every Christian pastor, Ezekiel 33: “*...If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall DIE in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at THINE hand!*” (v. 8).

But John’s message (and the message of all faithful Christian preachers) dare not be confined to the threats of the **Law** and the proclamation of God’s **wrath** against all impenitent and ungodly men. For to those who are humbly and sincerely contrite — brokenhearted over their sins (Psalm 34:18), disavowing their own merits as having any value in the sight of God for salvation (Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:20), begging God for even the crumbs of His mercy (Matthew 15:27) — the **Gospel** in all of its sweetness must be preached for their comfort and assurance; yea,

it must **predominate**, lest penitent sinners be driven to despair, left in hopelessness, and plunged into hell by **unevangelical** preaching!

Thus, John the Baptist spoke not only of his mission to preach the Law to the impenitent, but his mission to preach the **Gospel** to brokenhearted and dejected, penitent sinners; for his citation of Isaiah's prophecy was well-known to the Jews —the 40th chapter which begins: "**Comfort** ye, **comfort** ye My people, saith your God. **Speak** ye **comfortably** to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is **accomplished**, that her iniquity is **pardoned**; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!' Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it!" (vv. 1–5). — That's the **CHRISTMAS GOSPEL** which the **angels** [in Hebrew and Greek = "messengers"] of God proclaimed: "**Fear not! For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people! For unto you is born...a Savior, Christ, the Lord! ... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!**" (Luke 2:10–11, 14).

That glorious "good news" of the Gospel has real value, of course, only to hearts **prepared** to **receive it** by the preaching of the Law — **thirsty** hearts longing for the Water of Life, **hungry** hearts yearning for the Bread of Life, **dying** hearts craving the Resurrection and the Life! To the impenitent, those who persist in wickedness and "*continue in sin that grace may abound*" (Romans 6:1b), the grace of God means nothing; and the proclamation of the Gospel falls on deaf ears! Therefore it is wrong to comfort the **impenitent** with its sweetness! But from a humble, contrite sinner, whose hardness of heart has been hammered to pieces by the Law (Jeremiah 23:29), the precious assurance of forgiveness, life and salvation dare never be withheld; for the Lord doesn't want to break off the "*bruised reed*," the plant whose stem has been bent and kinked —He wants to splint it, bind it up and heal it! He doesn't want to extinguish the spark on a still but barely glowing wick —He wants to restore its flame to new brightness with the Oil of the Gospel (Isaiah 42:3)! And so John the Baptist pointed his penitent hearers to Him "*who [was] preferred before [him], whose shoe's latchet [he was] not worthy to unloose*" (John 1:27), identifying **Jesus** the very next day and saying, "*Behold the **Lamb of God** which taketh away the sin of the world! **This is He** of whom I said, 'After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for He was before me.'*" (vv. 29–30).

But the exemplary confession of the Savior's forerunner is not only the **pro-**

totype of all **public Christian preaching**; it is also the **model** for all **personal Christian testimony**! Every true Christian confesses to the Lord with Jacob of old: *"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant!"* (Genesis 32:10). And that same humility of spirit characterizes the testimony he gives to others. When asked, as was John the Baptist, *"What sayest thou of thyself?"* how better to answer than with the **Apostle Paul**, who said that he was *"chief of sinners,"* with the **Centurion of Capernaum**, who said that he was not worthy that Jesus should come under his roof, with the **woman of Canaan**, who freely admitted that she was no better than a dog in Jesus' sight and yet hungry for the crumbs of mercy that fall from the master's table! For ourselves we are but dust and ashes (Genesis 18:27; Psalm 103:14) and totally unworthy of the Lord's grace and mercy toward us (Matthew 8:8; etc.). And even as regenerate children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26), we confess with Isaiah regarding even our best works of sanctification as Christians: *"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"* (64:6a), and in the words of the Lord Jesus regarding the best efforts of His disciples: *"Say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty to do'"* (Luke 17:10).

Moreover, as was John the Baptist in his public proclamation of God's Law for the conviction of sinners and for their contrition, we must be ready at all times to bring to the erring and to manifest, impenitent sinners the admonition of God's Law in all its **fierceness**, lest they imagine their sins to be of *no great consequence* and their result *no great matter*! For their very souls are **in imminent jeopardy of damnation**, the Bible tells us; and it's our job in our day-to-day relationships with people, just as it is your Pastor's in his public office, to warn the wicked of God's wrath against sin and to urge them to repent quickly before it is too late and their time of grace is past! (Cf. Jesus' mournful words over Jerusalem, Luke 19:42). This will not make us "popular" with those who brush off our admonition, who counter-accuse us, and who malign our good intentions toward them; but it is our **Christian duty**, according to our Savior's own specific instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 and in many other passages of God's Holy Word (cf. James 5:19-20), to endeavor to gain those who have erred and gone astray.

Then too, lest we convict a manifest sinner with the Law of God and see him brought to sincere and humble contrition, but then leave him to twist on the executioner's rope in despair, let us be well-versed in the comforting passages of the **Gospel**, whereby we can bring *needed* and *immediate* assurance of **forgiveness** to a penitent sinner, with, if nothing else, the soothing words of Jesus Himself to the man sick of the palsy: *"Son [Daughter], be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!"* (Matthew 9:2) or, according to the exemplary confession of John the Baptist six verses following our title-text: *"Behold the Lamb of*

God which taketh away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29), or with Martin Luther in the beloved verse of his Christmas hymn:

*This is the Christ, our God and Lord,
who in all need shall aid afford.
He will Himself **your** Savior be,
From all your sins to set **you** free!*

Christmas is indeed one of the happiest times of the year for us Christians, and for good reason! But let us not permit these precious days to go by —with all the opportunities we have in our visits with friends, relatives and co-workers— without following the **exemplary confession** of John the Baptist and putting it into bold and yet humble practice, telling others WHY Christmas is such a happy time, WHY we so desperately NEED a Savior, WHY we could never save ourselves, WHO Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, really IS, WHAT He accomplished in our place to satisfy God’s justice and redeem us, WHAT God for Jesus’ sake declared for all the world in view of Christ’s vicarious atonement, and HOW we and all penitent sinners receive the blessings of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by faith in this dear Savior of ours! Make up for the oft-times empty messages of off-the-shelf Christmas cards with an added message of your own! It may well be the **best Christmas gift** a friend or neighbor, even a relative, will ever receive! And may God grant for Jesus’ sake that they both **hear** and **heed** your confession to their own great Christmas joy, both now and in eternity!

— D. T. M.



Our Sinless Savior Born for Our Redemption

“And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God’”

— Luke 1:35

Jesus Christ the Savior, born of the Virgin Mary for our redemption, was sinless, did not sin, and could not sin! In this article we shall study the testimony of Holy Scripture regarding the fact of Christ’s sinlessness, how Christ was conceived and born without sin, how Christ could be sinless and yet a true human being, why His sinlessness was necessary for the redemption of sinful mankind, why Christ could not sin, and one of the chief consequences of Christ’s sinlessness: His immortality.

Consider the testimony of Holy Scripture regarding the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ is the single miraculous exception to the fact established by Holy Writ that all human beings are conceived and born in sin. David confesses this truth concerning himself when he states in Psalm 51: *“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me”* (v. 5). The Savior Himself explains to Nicodemus: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh”* (John 3:5a); and the Apostle Paul expounds on the sinful state of man in these words: *“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:7-8). The reason that all human beings, except Christ, are sinners is given in Romans 5: *“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”* (v. 12). *“Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation...”* (v. 18a), *“by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners...”* (v. 19a). As a direct consequence of Adam’s fall, human beings are conceived and born in sin with hereditary guilt and corruption.

All human beings are sinful and live sinful lives, Christ being the only exception (Cf. I Peter 2:22)!

Scripture defines sin as *“the transgression of the Law”* (I John 3:4b). The Law of God teaches us how we are to be (holy, sinless, and hating sin): *“Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy”* (Leviticus 19:2b). The Law of God teaches us what we are to do and not to do, condemning us for any failure in thoughts, desires, words and deeds: *“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”* (Matthew 5:48); *“Whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10). Scripture teaches that, with the exception of Christ, *“There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not”* (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Jesus Christ is the exception to the fact that all human beings are sinners. Although He was sent by His Father *“in the likeness of sinful flesh”* (Romans 8:3c), He did not *have* sinful flesh, but was in fact sinless. Scripture describes Christ as *“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners”* (Hebrews 7:26b), *“tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15b). The Bible states that Christ *“knew no sin”* (II Corinthians 5:21a) and *“did no sin”* (I Peter 2:22a). The testimony of Scripture is clear. God’s holy Word tells us that Christ *“is pure”* (I John 3:3b) and that He *“is righteous”* (I John 3:7b), for *“in Him is no sin”* (I John 3:5b). God the Father declared Him to be the one *“in whom [He is] well pleased”* (Matthew 3:17). Christ Himself confessed: *“I do always those things that please Him”* (John 8:29b). Because He is without sin He could challenge His enemies, *“Which of you convinceth [i.e. convicteth (Greek)] Me of sin?”* (John 8:46a). All other human beings must acknowledge their sinful nature and sinful actions (I John 1:8, 10); but Christ could neither admit to sin nor have a guilty conscience concerning sin, for He had no sin! Christ *“went about doing good”* (Acts 10:38b) and never did any evil. Therefore, the false accusations of His enemies could neither affect His conscience nor convict Him of any moral fault! The Old Testament foretells His innocence in Isaiah 53 where we read: *“He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth”* (v. 9); and the Apostle Peter declares the historical fulfillment of this prophecy, describing Christ’s sinless, perfect obedience under the greatest duress: *“[He] did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously”* (I Peter 2:22-23).

In addition to all the previously mentioned statements regarding Christ’s sinlessness, we also have the following acknowledgements, based upon their mere observation, that He was a righteous man who manifested a

righteous life here in this world: Pontius Pilate stated he found “*no fault in Him*” (John 19:4). Pilate’s wife called Him “*that just man*” (Matthew 27:19). Judas Iscariot called His blood “*innocent*” (Matthew 27:4). The penitent malefactor confessed: “*This man hath done nothing amiss*” (Luke 23:41); and the Roman centurion at the cross stated “*Certainly this was a righteous man*” (Luke 23:47b). Even the demons, speaking out of the mouth of their possessed victim, said: “*I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God*” (Mark 1:24c; cf. James 2:19).

How was Christ conceived and born without sin? Our title verse tells us that His human nature was conceived supernaturally by the power of the Holy Ghost. The angel Gabriel told Mary, “*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35). Sin does not belong to the *essence* of man; Adam and Eve were true human beings before they fell into sin; but after the Fall, those sinful human beings passed sin, depravity and death unto all of their descendants. All other human beings are sinful because they are begotten in the normal course of nature and inherit sin from their parents (John 3:6; Romans 5:12-21), as did David (Psalm 51:5). Jesus is a true *human being* because He was conceived in and born of a *human mother*. He was called “*holy*” because He was conceived without original sin by the miraculous working of God the Holy Ghost! (Matthew 1:18).

The fact of Christ’s sinlessness is clearly established on the basis of all the proof passages cited previously. Why was Christ’s sinlessness necessary for the redemption of the entire sinful human race, for the justification of all mankind, and for their ultimate salvation? In order to redeem us, Jesus Christ took our place under God’s Law to fulfill it perfectly (active obedience), to bear our full guilt and punishment (passive obedience), and thereby ransom us to God — “*the Just for the unjust*” (I Peter 3:18). Only a perfect, sinless man could fulfill the Law perfectly. As a holy person, Christ lived a holy life and so fulfilled the Law in the place of all mankind (Galatians 4:4-5). He came to “*fulfill all righteousness*” (Matthew 3:15), and His righteous fulfillment of the Law brings justification to mankind: “*By the righteousness of One [Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life...by the obedience of One [Christ] shall many be made righteous*” (Romans 5:18b-19b). This is why the Lord through the Prophet Jeremiah gives Christ the title: “*The Lord Our Righteousness*” (Jeremiah 23:6). In order to give a perfect, righteous ransom to pay for all sins, our High Priest had to be sinless. The writer to the Hebrews states: “*For such an High Priest became us [was necessary for us], who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;*

who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people's; for this He did once, when He offered up Himself. For the Law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the Law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore" (Hebrews 7:26-28). Peter also stresses the sinlessness of Christ in His ransom sacrifice: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:18-19). Scripture denies that any sinner could save even one other sinner: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever)" (Psalm 49:7-8). Christ could, and did, redeem all men because He was sinless. The fact that He was also God Incarnate made both His active and passive obedience sufficient for all mankind (Romans 5:19; I John 1:7). If Christ had been a sinner, He could not have been a Savior.

But Christ *could* not sin. This fact is clear when we consider that the human nature of Christ was assumed by the Son of God at the very moment of conception. As one undivided and indivisible person, the God-Man could not sin; for God cannot sin! James tells us, "*Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God;'* for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man" (James 1:13). Christ is God, and therefore this statement applies to Him also according to His human nature. We have this testimony of Christ from God the Father recorded in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "*Unto the Son He saith, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the Oil of Gladness above Thy fellows'*" (Hebrews 1:8-9). Since the human nature of Christ never existed apart from the Son of God, Christ could not sin! (Luke 1:35; John 1:14; Colossians 2:9).

As the sinless one, Christ was charged with the sins of every other human being and, under that imputed guilt, bore the full punishment necessary to make Himself the object of God's wrath instead of us: "*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*" (I John 2:2). Christ was a sinner by *imputation* only as Scripture clearly states: "*He [God the Father] hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin [Better according to the Greek: 'He hath made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us']; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Finally, it is important to note one of the chief consequences of the sinlessness of Christ's human nature: His immortality. Since death is sin's

wages (Genesis 2:17, 3:17-19; Romans 5:12, 6:23a), and Christ is without sin, His human nature is not subject to death; it is immortal. Christ died for us to fulfill the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3); Christ died because He *willed* to die, laying down His life as God's lamb to redeem us. In His own words He affirms: "*No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father*" (John 10:18). In his *Christian Dogmatics*, J. T. Mueller says, "The death of the Sinless One, who Himself was immortal, was the ransom (Matthew 20:28; I Timothy 2:6) by which He purchased life for sinful mankind" (J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 260). And, in his First Epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul testifies: "*There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time*" (2:5-6).

Our sinless Savior was conceived and born for our eternal salvation. As our sinless substitute, He did all that was required to redeem us to God. He is "*the end of the Law for righteousness*" (Romans 10:4a) and the "*one sacrifice for sins forever*" (Hebrews 10:12). "*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.*" (I Peter 3:18).

May our gracious God ever move us by the means of His precious Gospel to put all our trust in our sinless Redeemer and His perfect merits for our salvation! Amen.

—E. J. W.

The Assurance of Our Savior for a Happy New Year

*“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

—Matthew 6:33

For worldly minded individuals, happiness at Christmas time revolves primarily around the acquisition of new and greater earthly treasures. What kinds of gifts one is given or purchases for himself can make or break a joyous holiday season for the unbeliever. Likewise, increase in wealth and earthly treasures in the *new year* is a benchmark for determining if it can be called a “happy” or “successful” year as far as unbelievers are concerned. And while we Christians, because of our Old Adam, are not immune to such worldly thoughts, our evaluation of what makes for a *happy new year* should be completely different. The thing that constrains true Christians to be happy even in times of deep poverty, pain, sickness, and loss is the confidence that, being justified through Jesus’ blood and righteousness, they have a gracious heavenly Father, who takes care of them continuously here in this world and will bring them into eternal joy and glory when this earthly life is over.

Scripture in numerous places urges us to look past the sufferings of this life, the result of sin in the world, and to focus our attention on heaven (Romans 8:18; II Timothy 4:18)—which is a very profitable meditation at the changing of the years. And, as we sojourn here temporarily in this vale of tears, the theme verse selected for this article (Matthew 6:33) directs us to the promise of God’s loving care of His believing children from day to day in order to quell worldly anxiety on our part. This promise follows immediately upon His injunction to put that which pertains to our Christianity “*first*” before any earthly considerations. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*” The “*kingdom of God*” here spoken of is His “kingdom of grace”—the Lord’s gracious ruling in the hearts of believers through His Word, specifically by the means of His Gospel. We Christians, who are already members of this kingdom by faith (Galatians 3:26), are told to *continue seeking* (Greek present tense) it, that is, making His kingdom and the spiritual blessings He imparts to us through the Means of Grace our constant priority, desiring to be strengthened in the faith and to have Christ rule our hearts and lives more and more each day. Likewise, “*His righteousness*,” the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:21–24), which every believer already has by faith (Romans 4:5), is still to be desired and valued as our

most precious possession, confirmed to us continuously through the Gospel. These priceless blessings are in direct contrast to the purely temporal things which “*the Gentiles*,” the unbelievers, “seek after” as that which they most value, desire and strive for (vv. 31–32).

If we take this exhortation of the Lord to heart and make it our motto for each new day, then we will have the proper focus for our Christian lives as we go forward into the new year. Rather than approaching the year ahead like the children of this world who spend their time and energy seeking after wealth and earthly advancement, we who are the adopted children of God by faith in Christ Jesus are to be seeking first the Lord’s kingdom and His righteousness. Through the faith that the Holy Ghost has worked in us by the Gospel, we have been brought into the kingdom of Christ and have received His righteousness as our own. This has been accomplished in us and for us by God’s pure grace alone, without us meriting any of it by our works. However, good works flow from a living faith (James 2:17, 20, 26). The gracious love of God in the Savior Jesus Christ moves the heart of a Christian to love the Lord in turn (I John 4:19). According to the new man that the Holy Ghost has created within us, we desire to live every second of the new year in God’s service, following His Commandments (I John 5:3) and growing in our knowledge and understanding of His Word (I Peter 2:2–3; II Peter 3:18). Our time and energy will be put to good use this new year if they are spent in the study and meditation of God’s holy *Gospel*, whereby our faith is nurtured and preserved (I Peter 1:5; I Thessalonians 2:13) and our love for Him is increased, and the study and meditation of His holy *Law*, whereby our path is directed in ways that are pleasing to Him. “*I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart. Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments, for therein do I delight. My hands also will I lift up unto Thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in Thy statutes*” (Psalm 119:32, 35, 48).

But must we not *divide our focus* between God and the pursuit of wealth in order to provide for our earthly needs? Absolutely not! In the first place, no such division is possible; for Jesus plainly declares: “*Ye cannot serve God and mammon [worldly things]*” (Matthew 6:24). In the second place, serving God *includes* (it does not exclude) working diligently for the daily bread that He gives us (II Thessalonians 3:10–12). And, in the third place, *the Lord specifically promises* that those who are engaged first and foremost with the things pertaining to Christ’s Church and His imputed righteousness *will always have what they need in this earthly life* graciously provided for them by their heavenly Father. “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and **all these things shall be added unto you.***” From the context of this verse (Matthew 6:25–33), we learn that “*all these things*” is a direct reference to *the necessities of life, namely, food and clothing*. Jesus draws our attention to the Father’s merciful and thorough care of His creatures—specifically birds and

wild flowers—as He makes the point that our Father in heaven will certainly also care for *us*, who are much more valuable to Him than birds and flowers. *“Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ... Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”* (Matthew 6:26–30). Birds do not till the ground, sow seed, water plants, harvest grain, and store food in barns; and yet God still provides for their needs. Plants do not sew or buy clothes for themselves; and yet God dresses the wild flowers of the field in such a way that their beauty exceeds the royal apparel of Solomon, the richest king of Israel. Shall not the Lord, therefore, much more provide for *our* needs day by day? He certainly will, because by faith in Jesus Christ we have been made His adopted children whom He loves very much (Psalm 103:13). With the sure promise of the Lord’s gracious care, we have nothing to worry about in the new year that lies before us.

Of course, even with all the necessities of life being provided for us by our gracious heavenly Father, our old sinful flesh will still tempt us to be discontent and think that we need *more* earthly blessings in order to be truly happy in the new year. It is important, therefore, to remember the admonition and warning of Holy Scripture: *“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And, having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (I Timothy 6:6–10). If we have no more in this world than basic food and clothing, *“food and raiment,”* we should not be discontent with what we have. Consequently, we need to fight against sinful thoughts and feelings such as these: *“I can’t possibly live another year in this small house.” “This new year will be happy for me only if I can replace my ugly, broken-down car.” “My main goal is to finish this new year with more money in the bank than I had at the beginning.”* Rather than tying our happiness in the new year to the acquisition of earthly goods, we need to work at being truly happy and thankful with what God has already given us (far more than we need) and has also promised to give us in the new year (food and clothing)—*remembering that we sinful creatures deserve none of His blessings.* We can certainly *pray* that the Lord would allow us to attain specific goals in the new year (getting a larger house, a more reliable car, a higher savings account balance, and so on); but we are to pray that God would grant these things unto us only *if it is His will* and will redound to our spiritual and eter-

nal welfare. If the Lord then chooses *not* to grant those specific requests, it should not upset us (assuming that we were really serious about wanting *His will* to be done rather than ours). And, if we have the Godly contentment that we should have, we will not let the pursuit of earthly goals distract us from seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

To all those who seek first the things pertaining to their Christian faith and life, the Lord firmly promises that they will always have the necessities of this earthly life—they *will always have food and clothing*. So there is no need to worry about having what we need to live from day to day, even if our financial situation appears dire. If the gracious promise of the Lord in Matthew 6:33 does *not* give us comfort, then we are not taking God's Word seriously; and we need to repent for doubting His promise.

Since God is not two-faced (Numbers 23:19; II Timothy 2:13) or “*slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness*” (II Peter 3:9a), the exercise of His sovereign will in punishing the wicked by withholding from them daily bread (as in a famine, in widespread starvation, in disasters that result in deprivation of food and raiment even unto death) and the exercise of His good and gracious will for believers in giving them trials and tribulations according to His good pleasure for the purpose of purifying and strengthening them (e.g., Lazarus in Luke 16:20-21 and the “*brother or sister...naked and destitute of daily food*” in James 2:15) dare not be cited as violations of His promises! “*For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counselor?*” (Romans 11:34). Specifically with regard to believers who suffer want in this world, their chastisements should be regarded as the manifestations of God's love for them and their purpose as good and salutary (Hebrews 12:6-13; Romans 8:28; also I Corinthians 10:13; Isaiah 54:7-8).

We Christians should be *confident* that God's rich grace in Christ Jesus will attend us throughout the new year, because the Lord has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). *Oh how joyful, therefore, we should be throughout the year!* Does this mean that we can, or should, live the new year completely free of all sadness? No. Because we live in this world of sin—spiritually contending against the devil, our flesh, and our sinful fellow human beings—there will be times when we rightly feel sadness, pain, and disappointment. We Christians are not to rejoice in iniquity or in the destructive results of sin (I Corinthians 13:6); and yet we *can* and *should* still “*rejoice in the Lord always*” (Philippians 4:4). Consequently, joy and sorrow are often be mixed together (II Corinthians 6:10) in the Christian's life.

The knowledge that there will be suffering (perhaps very severe pain of body or spirit) in the new year should not cause us to *worry* about the

future (which would be both useless and sinful). Knowing that God is in control of all things (II Chronicles 20:6, 15–17), we should be completely comfortable leaving the future and all of our needs in the gracious and powerful hands of the Lord. Immediately after Jesus says, “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,*” He adds this important instruction: “*Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*” (Matthew 6:33–34). Because of sin in the world, there is enough evil around us just in the present day; there is no need for us to worry about the future or to try dealing with future evils today. Rather, we should simply pray for the protection and guidance that the Lord has promised us and be comforted knowing that He will keep His Word.

While it is not a sin to *plan for* and *pray about* the future, it *is* a sin to *worry* about it (Philippians 4:6). It is also a sin to think that we are in total control of our futures—forgetting about God’s overarching governance and direction of all things (Proverbs 16:9). Of course, we should always remember that whatever plans we make are subject to the will of God, and He may decide to direct our lives completely differently than we had planned. Accordingly, we ought to follow the inspired instruction recorded by the Apostle James in his epistle, where we are told: “*Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*” (4:14–15). We need not fear what unexpected events might befall us in the new year. Through faith in Christ Jesus our Savior, we need not fear even if *death* awaits us in the year ahead, because the never-failing promises of God in the Gospel assure us that eternal joy and glory in heaven are reserved for us. “*The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom*” (II Timothy 4:18; see also Romans 8:35–39).

We Christians are so richly blessed to have God as our loving heavenly Father, our constant Friend, Helper, Protector, and Guide; and He will be with us continuously throughout the new year! The unbelievers, even though they also receive a great deal of gracious blessings from the Lord during the year, despise God’s grace and love in Christ Jesus, and, therefore, forfeit the promises of His grace that apply specifically to Christians, such as: “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33); and “*All things work together for good to them that love God*” (Romans 8:28); and “*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life*” (John 3:36a). So the unbelievers have much reason to worry about the future, because they never know how much longer God will continue to give them breath (Psalm 104:29); they do not know when their time

of grace will be over (cf. Luke 19:42, 44b; Hebrews 3:7–8, 15) and when they will receive the punishment that they have brought upon themselves by their sins and unbelief (Romans 6:23a; II Peter 2:1b). *“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him”* (John 3:36b). Even atheists, who deny the existence of God and the coming judgment, can have no comfort when thinking about the future. In their self-deceived minds, the only thing that they have to look forward to is this earthly existence, which really has no guarantees of happiness for them but is full of pain and suffering and uncertainty. Consequently, it makes sense why unbelievers often become consumed with worries about earthly things and why they typically try to avoid thinking about their inevitable death. Oddly enough, they usually greet the new year with glee and joyous celebration, even though each passing year only brings them closer and closer to their final year of life here on earth and after that, the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

When we Christians celebrate the changing of the years, we should remember with gratitude how God has so graciously taken care of us in the past and look forward with Gospel-generated certainty to enjoying the Lord’s continued blessing in the future—all for the sake of Christ Jesus’ work of redemption. Knowing that by faith in Jesus our sins are forgiven and that the Gospel assures us of God’s loving care (Romans 8:32), let us joyfully enter upon the new year, confidently commit our lives to His safe keeping, and always seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness until He chooses to bring us to Himself in fullness of joy for all eternity in heaven (Psalm 16:11)!

—P. E. B.

Churches in Fellowship

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Ekaterinburg, Russia

The Rev. Roman G. Schurganoff, Pastor

P. O. Box 62

620088 Ekaterinburg, RUSSIA

E-mail: lutheran@r66.ru

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria

Pastoral Vacancy at present

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria

The Rev. Onesimus Ekele, Pastor

HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Idama, Nigeria

Pastoral Vacancy at present

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abalama, Nigeria

The Rev. Elison B. Agborubere, Pastor

Thompson Compound Abalama

Abalama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. CLEMENT'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria

The Rev. Luckyn Kaladokubo, Pastor

St. Clement Lutheran Church,

Elem-Sangama Arch-Deaconry

Elem-Sangama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. MATTHEW'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Port Harcourt, Nigeria

The Rev. Allenson Karibi Asawo, Pastor

76 Abba Street, Mile 1 Diobu

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, NIGERIA

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Kula, Nigeria

Pastoral Vacancy at present

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Kula, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. PAUL'S NYEMONI LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL

Abonnema, Nigeria

The Rev. Nimi B. Fyeface and

The Rev. God'stime E. D. Douglas, Co-Pastors

P. O. Box 123

Abonnema, Akulga, Rivers State, NIGERIA

E-Mail: njohnfyeface@yahoo.co.uk



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

The Rev. DAVID G. REDLIN, Pastor

4050 South Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730

(520) 721-7618

E-mail: david.redlin@q.com

PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Central Avenue at 171st Place, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

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Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID T. MENSING, Pastor

17151 South Central Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

(708) 532-9035

E-mail: pastormensing@yahoo.com

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355

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Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. M. L. NATTERER, Pastor

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355

(541) 258-2941

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

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5350 South Fountain Street, Seattle, WA 98178

Telephone: (206) 723-1078

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Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

The Rev. EDWARD J. WORLEY, Pastor

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118

(206) 723-7418

E-mail: revworley@comcast.net

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

Worship Service 7:00 p.m.

Adult Bible Class 4:30 p.m.

Adult Catechism Class 8:30 p.m.

ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

Telephone: (708) 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



*O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is
my paradise at which my soul reclineth.
For there, O Lord, doth lie the Word
made flesh for us!
Herein Thy grace forth shineth!*

— Paul Gerhardt, 1653