

*The*  
*Concordia*  *Lutheran*

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

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


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“Even so,  
come,  
Lord Jesus!”

— Revelation 22:20

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**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 S. Torrence Avenue  
Sauk Village, IL 60411

**Lay Member:**

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

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Officers of the  
*Concordia Lutheran Conference*

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The Rev. Edward J. Worley  
5350 South Fountain Street  
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The Rev. Robert J. Lietz  
233 North Cuyler Avenue  
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The Rev. David T. Mensing  
17151 South Central Avenue  
Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

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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.**

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

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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.."*

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On the anniversary of his birth, November 10, 1483...

# Martin Luther

## *The Gratitude We Owe God for the Work of the Reformation through His Instrument*



The masthead on the front page of the old *Der Lutheraner* showed on the upper right side a drawing of an angel in the sky holding a copy of the Bible and on the left side a quotation from Revelation 14:6-7 with a verse at the top which read, “*Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr vergehet nun und nimmermehr*” which we might render in poetical English, “*God’s Word and Luther’s Doctrine Pure Shall to Eternity Endure.*” That old orthodox Lutheran German periodical edited by Dr. Walther, which first appeared in 1844, ceased publication over three decades ago. In spite of the many attacks against God’s Word and Luther’s teaching over the last 490 years that truth expressed on its masthead still remains and will remain until the Lord Jesus bursts forth in the clouds of heaven accompanied by all of His holy angels (Matthew 25:31). Why? Because Jesus, the almighty Son of God, declares, “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away*” (Matthew 24:35), and His apostle writes concerning His Word, ... “*the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever*” ... “*the Word of the Lord endureth for ever*” ... (I Peter 1:23, 25).

What was it that plagued Luther the most before the Lord led him from his spiritual darkness into the glorious sunlight of His Word? There

simply is no doubt about it. There was the matter of making the necessary satisfaction for his sins. Not that Luther was guilty of gross outward sins, such as living in open adultery as was the case with ever so many of the clergy. Luther often referred to some of the monasteries as “cesspools.” Had Luther been guilty of such manifest sins, his enemies would have had a field day in holding them up to public view. No, as a priest he very faithfully sought to perform the prescribed works as taught by the Roman hierarchy thereby thinking that he would be able to placate the righteous anger of God. But the thought kept gnawing away at him whether he had done sufficient works to make him acceptable to God. Such tormenting thoughts caused him to cry out, “*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!*”

And what was the balm that healed his sin-laden heart and conscience? The precious Gospel of the Savior, who comfortingly assured him, “*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee*” (Matthew 9:2). Listen to his own words as he expressed the joy which flooded his heart: “Then the whole Scripture was opened to me and also heaven itself. Immediately I felt as if born anew, as if I had found the open gate of paradise.” This was a comfort and joy which was not a self-induced emotion on his part; no, indeed, this was worked by God the Holy Spirit through that Word which was the foundation of Luther’s faith.

Now let us look at merely a few of those texts which so clearly and unmistakably teach what Luther believed, confessed and taught, until the Lord took him out of this life to Himself in the joys of heaven. “*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith*” (Romans 1:17). “*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work*” (Romans 11:6). “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law: for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified*” (Galatians 2:16). “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Those who teach otherwise, such as the Roman hierarchy, insist that we are saved by “grace;” but their understanding of the word “grace” is not what the Word of God teaches. They say that God gives to every soul *prima gratia* (initial grace) which enables him to exercise his “free will”

in obedience to God and thereby to earn *gratia infusa* (infused grace) so that, by a life of continuing obedience, he climbs the ladder of sanctification until he leaves this world in death. Then, however, he must first go through the purifying fires of purgatory for his venial sins for which he had not previously made satisfaction; and, when that has been completed, he is finally received into heaven. They hold that every soul in purgatory will eventually enter into heaven. It is their plain teaching that man is saved not by the unmerited grace of God through faith in Christ, but by his acceptance of the teachings of the church and his obedience to them by his works. Of this there can be no doubt. Remember what the Council of Trent (1545-1563) declared, "If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5) and is inherent in them; or even that grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God; let him be anathema...if any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema" (Session VI, Canons 11, 12, 20). The fact that Luther justifiably used the word "*sola*" with regard to grace and faith literally infuriated them. Thus Romans 3:28 was translated by Luther: "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified [alone (German: *allein*)] by faith without the deeds of the Law.*"

The Roman hierarchy has attempted to bolster their false position by citing Scripture. And they think that they have found such proof in the Epistle of James, chapter 2, verse 24: "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*" But what they fail to observe is the principle that *Scripture interprets Scripture*. There is no contradiction between the Apostle Paul and the Apostle James. Scripture does not contradict Scripture or, to put it in plain English, *the Holy Ghost is not double-tongued*. The Apostle Paul in the verses previously cited speaks about our justification *before God*, and the Apostle James speaks about our justification *before men*. No one but God can see the faith in our hearts, for "*the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:20-21). God alone is the searcher of our hearts, and men can not open our hearts to see our faith. Therefore they must judge on the basis of our works what they observe and see. So, indeed, we are justified *before men* on the basis of our works, but not *before God* (Romans 4:2). Such a proper Scriptural distinction is often relegated to the background even on the part of many within external Christendom.

This precious doctrine of being justified alone by the grace of God through faith in the Savior, which gave Luther such wonderful joy and comfort, was not spun out of his own head. On the contrary, it was the teaching of Holy Writ which Luther firmly believed and faithfully confessed to be the infallible and inerrant Word of the Lord. His faith had an immovable foundation. He declared: “*God’s Word must remain empress. You must follow straight after Scripture and receive it and utter not one syllable against it, for it is God’s mouth.*” And this was his conviction to the very end, as he stated in his last sermon preached in Wittenberg: “*I shall swerve not one finger’s breadth from the mouth of Him who said, ‘Hear ye Him.’*” (Cited from *Four Hundred Years*, edited by W. H. T. Dau, 1916, page 97ff.)

Through the Reformation, God through Luther restored His Word in all of its truth and purity as taught us by Christ and the Apostles. We should show our thankfulness by valiantly contending for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). We show our gratitude by insisting that the Word of God be taught in all of its truth and purity to our children and in our congregations without any mixture of human rationalism. We will then, by God’s grace, never substitute man’s word for the Word of God. We do not believe something simply because Luther or any other church father taught it! No, indeed, we must subject everything to the Word of God. If it does not agree with Scripture, then it must be rejected, no matter who said or wrote it! Only if we faithfully adhere to and trust in God’s Word shall we be able confidently to declare with Luther in his “Battle-hymn of the Reformation,”

*Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us,  
We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us.  
This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will;  
He can harm us none; he’s judged; the deed is done.  
One little word can fell him.*

TLH 262, 4

— M. L. N.





## Let Us Give Thanks unto the Lord!

*“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” —Ephesians 5:20*

If we were always truly **thankful** for what we have, truly **mindful** of the real Source of all our blessings, and truly **grateful** to **GOD** for His abiding gracious favor to us, would we indeed need to have a one-shot, special opportunity each year set aside *by law* to give thanks and to praise His holy Name?? Should “*Caesar*” need to remind us about what we should “*render unto God*” (Matthew 22:21)?? Certainly NOT, for every day of our lives should be a “Day of Thanksgiving,” and our churches should be filled to overflowing, not just on the fourth Thursday of November, not just on Sundays, but every day of every week!

Yes, **we too** have the old sinful, ungrateful flesh within us; and **we too** need to be reminded over and over again of how much our gracious God and Lord has done for us, and therefore how **thankful** **WE** should be to Him every day of our lives! And so, the Apostle Paul, as the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, comes to us in the title-text of our article with needed instruction about **thanksgiving**.

Paul says: “*Giving thanks always for all things!*” As we begin to recollect and to list, even mentally, the various things for which we ought to be grateful, often the **first ones** that come to mind are our various **temporal** blessings, as Luther so nicely enumerates them in his explanation of the First Article of the *Apostles’ Creed*: “Clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all [our] goods; [and the fact] that He richly and daily provides [us] with all that [we] need to support this body and life.” —These are things which even the unbelieving children of this world regard as “**good**” and sometimes refer to as “**blessings**,” even though they fail to recognize **God** as their benefactor and to glorify **Him** for His gracious providence. —Then **add**

to this list good health, a good job, good friends, and good times; and we have a fairly decent inventory of our *temporal* blessings.

What quickly betrays our IN gratitude, however, is not merely that we fail to thank the Lord every day for all these **good** things, but that, in our old sinful flesh, we so easily **whine** and **complain** like the Children of Israel in the wilderness when we don't receive **100%** of what we **think** we should **have**. Inflation, taxes, and unexpected expenses take a "big bite" out of our income; and we complain about how "poor" we are! We have a few aches or pains, a cold or the flu; and we murmur about that! Our car or home needs repairs, and bills are staring us in the face —we moan and groan! —Is THAT the attitude of truly *thankful* Christians, to whom the Apostle Paul writes in his first letter to Timothy: "*Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content*"?? No indeed! Rather, we should concentrate our thinking on what we have received of the Lord and count our many **blessings**, as the Psalmist exhorts us: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits!*" (103:2).

"*Giving thanks always for all things,*" Paul says in our text; and yet, in enumerating all the good things we have received at the Lord's hand, we all too often fail to thank Him for the **ONE good thing** for which there is neither *price* nor *value* here on earth: The gift of **forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, paid for** with our Savior's holy precious blood and granted to us purely by God's *grace*, with no credit whatsoever due to our own merits. —"Oh, yes, **that too,**" we may hear ourselves *add* to our list as an afterthought. —That **too**?? Why, if it weren't for our **salvation**, the other blessings wouldn't be worth having, would they?? For "*He knoweth our frame,*" writes the Psalmist, "*He remembereth that we are dust. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children!*" (103:14, 17). "*Forget not all His benefits...who forgiveth all thine iniquities...who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies!*" (vv. 2-4). — Yes, our **spiritual** blessings are the **CHIEF** blessings for which we should be thankful, not only on **Thanksgiving Day** but every day of the year!

And Paul also points out the **MOTIVE** for our thanksgiving, as we read on in our verse: "*Giving thanks...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" We are not to give thanks to God for His many blessings just because "it's the **right** thing to do," nor yet because this is the **command** of God's **LAW**, nor because **ingratitude** is a grievous **sin** which merits God's anger and displeasure. No, our **MOTIVATION** to grateful



thanksgiving is **not** the threats of the **Law**, but the inestimable **love of Jesus**, our **Savior**, for whose sake God is our “*Father*,” who loves us in Christ, cares for us, and provides for all our needs (Cf. Matthew 6:24ff.). “*For the love of Christ constraineth us*,” that is, forces us, Paul writes to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 5:14); so that, if the **love of Jesus** for us poor sinners will not move us to cheerful, grateful, yea, spontaneous thanksgiving, then **nothing will**; for we are then no longer God’s dear children, moved by His precious Gospel, but we are “moved” only by the Law, and we are “*fallen from grace!*” (Galatians 5:4). May God mercifully preserve us from **such** an end, but let us rather be motivated ever and alone by “*His will in Christ Jesus concerning [us]*” (I Thessalonians 5:18), who are His dear children by faith in His Son, that we who have been “*justified by His grace*”—forgiven and made right with Him as the free gift of His mercy to all mankind “*in Christ Jesus*”—should not only **ask Him** for things, but also **THANK Him** “as dear children [thank] their dear father” (Luther).

Indeed, **thanksgiving** for all of God’s good gifts to us day-by-day is a clear lesson for us here in St. Paul’s words to the Ephesians. But there is yet **another** lesson as well—a less obvious one to our *human* way of thinking, but a very important one for us as the children of our heavenly Father. Let us go back to the very first words of the apostle’s exhortation: “*Giving thanks always for ALL THINGS*,” for **EVERY thing** that comes our way in this life—both good **and BAD!**—Now, this cannot, of course, be understood by “*natural man*,” that is, by the unconverted person here in this world, who neither knows nor could care less about “*our Lord Jesus Christ*,” who is also **his** Savior; for “*the things of the Spirit of God*” are “**foolishness**” to the unbeliever, “*neither can he know them*,” the Bible tells us, “*because they are spiritually discerned*” (I Corinthians 2:14); they are understood and appreciated spiritually—in the regenerated **soul** of man—by faith in the Savior. To the worldling, therefore, giving thanks to God in the first place is completely **foreign**. He thanks himself as his own best friend, and credits his self-made success for all the “good” things of life that he enjoys. **BUT** the **very idea** of giving God “**thanks**” for the **BAD** times, for what he would call the “tough breaks,” “raw deals,” and “rip-offs” of life, is **ridiculous**, completely **insane**, and downright **laughable!!**

But what about for us **Christians??** Have we, during the year now soon drawing to its close, experienced some **want**, some **illness**, some **sorrow**, some **adversity** in our life? Have we been sick a lot, or

fallen victim to a serious disease? Have we experienced a disappointment or sadness of some kind in our family circle? Have we lost money on a major investment perhaps, or even lost our job? —Oh, my dear friends and brethren, if we haven't, we **may well** experience such things (or even worse) in the **future**! —But these things are not “bad” for us, as the world counts “badness.” These are, for true believers in the Lord Jesus, the *timely chastisements* of their dear heavenly Father and a sure sign of His *love* and *tender mercy* toward them. For the writer to the Hebrews reminds us: “*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth; ...for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth NOT??*” (12:6-7). For us, who are by faith in Christ Jesus the dear sons and daughters of God the Father, His chastenings, no matter how **severe** they seem, no matter how much **pain** they inflict, no matter how **catastrophic** are their immediate consequences, they are intended for our **GOOD**, “*for our PROFIT, that we might be partakers of His holiness*” (Hebrews 12:10). David writes in Psalm 119: “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes* (v. 71) ...*I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me*” (v. 75).

“*Giving thanks ALWAYS for ALL THINGS,*” writes the Apostle. And herein lies the **test** for every one of us as to our gratitude as Christians: Can **we**, like the Psalmist, **firmly rely** on God’s goodness and faithfulness in times of trial? —Can **we**, like Job of old, who lost everything he owned, as well as his children, his health, and even the faithfulness of his wife, can **we** see God’s **love** in His chastening hand and declare: “*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!*”?? (Job 1:21), OR will we “murmur and complain beneath the chastening rod” as if we somehow deserve better from His hand? —Nay, apart from the grace of God in our dear Savior we deserve much **worse**, don’t we? What we **need** to do is humbly to lean upon our God and confidently declare with the hymnwriter:

“What God ordains is always **good**; His will abideth **holy**.

As He directs my life for me, I **follow** meek and lowly.

I take **content** what He hath sent. His hand that sends me sadness  
will turn **my** tears to **gladness!**”

And what can give us the MOTIVATING POWER actually to “*give thanks*” for chastenings and troubles, and honestly, with our whole heart, to regard them as  **blessings**? Again, we find the answer in the apostle’s words: “*Giving thanks...in the name of our Lord Jesus*

*Christ.*” Our God warmly, genuinely desires **our salvation**, first and foremost, and He wants us to **know** and to **confide** in the love which He has for us poor sinners in “*our Lord Jesus Christ,*” in our Savior, in whom He reconciled the world of sinners unto Himself, “*not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). Then He wants us to **show forth our faith** in that dear Savior and in the justification He merited for all the world by our **thanksgiving**. Only the love of Jesus can incite us, move us, yea, enable us to glorify His holy Name for **ALL** He gives us day-by-day: Blessings **right before our eyes** and blessings **somewhat in disguise**. For the Apostle Paul tells us concerning even the most trying chastisements: “*In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us*” (Romans 8:37). How happy, yea, how eager we should be, therefore, to take them on, one by one, as many as His loving wisdom determines is best for us, and with our whole heart to **thank** “*God the Father*” that He has made and counted us His very own sons and daughters in “*our Lord Jesus Christ,*” and loves us so much!

Only **Christians** can truly wish one another a “**Happy Thanksgiving,**” for only *Christians* can be **truly HAPPY** in the first place, having by faith “*peace with God through [their] Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1) and the **CONTENTMENT** (I Timothy 6:6, 8) that only He can bring to their hearts in **good** times and in **bad**. Only *Christians* can be **truly thankful** because they, unlike the unbelieving children of this world, recognize their loving heavenly Father as the Benefactor “from whom all blessings flow.” And only we who are true *Christians* can be thankful for **EVERYTHING**, both **good** and **bad**, “*for we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). By His enabling grace, let us therefore “*give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” as those who have every good reason to do so!

—D. T. M.



## Rejoice Greatly in This Advent Season? Yes, Most Certainly!

*“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion; shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.”*

—Zechariah 9:9



Is this Advent season just another four-week “trip,” which we **painfully have to “endure,”** hearing the same “old things” which we have heard again and again in the past? **OR** is this Advent season the beginning of a **new** church year in which we will **have many priceless opportunities,** by God’s rich grace alone (I Corinthians 15:10), to “travel” in **His Word, from which we will be taught repeatedly not only** about our own complete wretchedness (Romans 7:24) by nature, **at** our conception

and birth (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3c), and our total unworthiness, **after** our conception and birth, to receive any of the “*mercies*” (Genesis 32:10) of God because of our many transgressions of His Holy Law (I John 3:4; Psalm 130:3), **but from which Word we will also be taught repeatedly** that “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19), that “*whosoever believeth in Him [the only- begotten Son of God] should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16b)? Which of these two is it for **us**?

The Prophet Zechariah points us in the right direction when he declares to us during this blessed Advent season: “*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion; shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.*” Let us **look carefully at the words** of this one verse, which the Holy Ghost “*moved*” (II Peter 1:21) Zechariah to write down “*for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4):

*“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion; shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem!”* The prophet calls out to the Daughter of Zion, the Daughter of Jerusalem, *“the Church”* (Colossians 1:18) of Christ, *“the sons [includes male and female] of God”* (I John 3:1-2), the *“brethren”* [both male and female] (Hebrews 2:11-12) of Jesus, the *“brethren”* (Matthew 23:8; Romans 8:12; 12:1; etc.; etc.), that is, the believers in the Savior, both male and female. These are some of the designations for those followers of the Savior who are members of His *“household of faith”* (Galatians 6:10). So, the *“Daughter of Zion”* and *“the Daughter of Jerusalem”* are names which the prophet gives to the *“one body”* (Ephesians 4:4) of *“the people of God”* (I Peter 2:10), both male and female believers. These believers, both male and female, are *“the Bride, the Lamb’s Wife”* (Revelation 21:9). These are **spiritual** designations, ways in which God Himself, through the prophets and apostles, expresses Himself concerning His *“saints”* (II Corinthians 1:1), His *“holy nation”* (I Peter 2:9).

**What is the Prophet Zechariah calling on his fellow believers, his brethren to do?**

He is urging them to **rejoice exceedingly**; he is calling on them to rejoice a lot, to thank and praise very much! Are they to rejoice in just “any old way,” as long as it makes them “feel good” and it brings them happiness? No! No! *“God forbid!”* (Romans 6:2). **Let us abhor** the “feel good” and the “prosperity gospel” religious movements in our day (Romans 12:9a)! In sharp contrast to such movements, let us rejoice exceedingly according to the instruction which the Holy Scriptures give to us: *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do [which surely would include rejoicing, thanking, and praising], do all to the glory of God; give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God”* (I Corinthians 10:31-32).

**And why is the prophet calling out to the believers in the virgin’s *“Son, ...Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14) to rejoice greatly?**

1. The **first** reason why the Lord God calls out to His dear children to rejoice exceedingly is because of what the Prophet Zechariah declared: *“Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.”* Surely, without any doubt, this **King of grace and mercy did indeed visibly come** to His people (exactly as the prophet had prophesied in Zechariah 9:9), coming to those who, like Simeon, were *“waiting for the Consolation of Israel”* (Luke 2:25c). This King, this one Seed of Abraham (Galatians

3:16), this one Descendant of Abraham did most certainly, as promised, bring blessing to “*all the nations of the earth*” (Genesis 22:18b). The fact is that when the one and only God (I Corinthians 8:4b), the Triune God (Matthew 28:19) declared in Genesis 3:15 the first promise of the Savior’s coming, that promise was not only absolutely reliable, but also absolutely trustworthy for Adam and Eve, as well as for all of their descendants. Since God “*cannot lie*” (Titus 1:2), all of His promises are as good as fulfilled, done, and finished for Him and for us, His “*dearly beloved*” (Philippians 4:1) “*little children*” (I John 2:1). We who are living in 2007 have the added reassurance that God’s promises **never** fail or are broken as we see again and again the exact fulfillment of the many promises (prophecies) of the Messiah’s **first** coming (advent) for the world of sinners. So, as we wait (I Corinthians 1:7) with much joyous anticipation for the **second** coming of our “*King*” (Matthew 25:34, 40) of grace and goodness, we know that our waiting for Him is not in vain, a worthless waste of time, but that He will most certainly come visibly for the second (and final) time to this world, according to His many promises in the Holy Scriptures (Acts 1:11; Matthew 25:31; 26:64; Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:27; 25:13; II Peter 3:10). Yes, we ought to “*rejoice greatly*” because of the perfect fulfillment of the divine promises pointing to the Savior’s first advent, as well as our anticipation of second coming of our one and only “*Way*” (John 14:6) to heaven, Christ Jesus.

2. The **second** reason why the Lord God calls out to His dear children to rejoice exceedingly is because of what the Prophet Zechariah further declared concerning our King of grace and mercy: “*He is just and having salvation.*” This gracious King is “*without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15b) and “*righteous*” (I John 2:1b); He has never sinned and will never sin; He is always just and righteous, and will always remain just and righteous. Therefore, His active obedience, His fulfillment of God’s Law as our Substitute and Savior, was flawless, complete, and total (Matthew 5:17); it satisfied the demand of God that His Commandments, without any exceptions, be kept perfectly by everyone in the world (Matthew 5:48). Furthermore, this King of mercy was righteous when He took on Himself, as our Substitute and Savior, the divine curse and condemnation on account of the sins of the whole world, suffering the total consequences for the inherited sinfulness and the actual sins of all sinners (Galatians 3:10, 13; Isaiah 53:6; II Corinthians 5:15, 21a; I John 2:2). The result of this redeeming work by Christ Jesus, our King of grace, is that we and all other sinners have been declared just, forgiven, and righteous (Romans 3:24; 5:18-19) before God, in His eyes. “*For*

*God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” from its mountain of sins (John 3:17). Now, *“he that believeth on Him [the Son of God] is not condemned [for his sins], but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”* (v. 18). Without Christ Jesus and His redeeming work, which resulted in God’s forgiveness and justification of the entire world (II Corinthians 5:19), there is no salvation, no heaven, no everlasting life, but the very opposite: condemnation, hell, and everlasting torments (Luke 16:23-26). The message of Peter in Acts 4 is absolutely true: *“Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved”* (v. 12). There is no other genuine, true Savior except the one and the only Savior, the King of grace and mercy, Christ Jesus (John 14:6)! All other “saviors,” no matter what name they are given, are lies, fakes, nothings, and everlastingly worthless! Let us continue to rejoice exceedingly in *“the victory [which we have, by faith] through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (I Corinthians 15:57), and show that joy by gratefully following and putting into practice, through this King of grace, the instruction of the Apostle Paul: *“Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord”* (v. 58).

**3. The third and final** reason (in Zechariah 9:9) why the Lord God calls out to His dear children to rejoice exceedingly is because of what is said of our King, that He is *“lowly, and riding upon an ass [a donkey], and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.”* These few words tell us so much about our Savior, the King of grace and truth. Though He was truly God, yet He was prophesied to be humble, and gave evidence of that humbleness, by riding on a young, male donkey. This was all a vital part of His substitutionary work and service as the Savior for the world. Philippians 2 confirms and expresses full accord with Zechariah 9:9 when it says of Christ, the King of grace, that He *“made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (vv. 7-8). The period of time in Christ’s earthly life from His conception to His burial is sometimes referred to as “The Savior in the State of Humiliation” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, 1943, p. 109). It is that period of time (about 33 years) during which, “according to His human nature, Christ did *not always and not fully use* the divine attributes *communicated* to His human name” (*Ibid.*). For example, though

Jesus, as the God-Man, also according to His human nature, had all power, yet He did not use that divine power to kill all of His enemies when they crucified Him. Christ so humbled Himself for us and all sinners to redeem us “from *all sins*, from *death*, and from the *power of the devil*” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, 1943, Question and Answer 141, p. 112). The apostle summarizes excellently the fact of and the purpose for the Savior’s State of Humiliation in II Corinthians 8, where he writes to us: “*Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich*” (v. 9).

During this Advent Season, may these prophetic and wonderfully fulfilled words of the Prophet Zechariah guide, comfort, and encourage us: “*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion; shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass*” (9:9).

—R. J. L.

*Rejoice, rejoice, believers,  
and let your lights appear!  
The evening is advancing,  
and darker night is near.  
The Bridegroom is arising,  
and soon He draweth nigh!  
Up, pray and watch and wrestle!  
At midnight comes the cry.*

*Our Hope and Expectation,  
O Jesus, now appear.  
Arise, Desire of nations,  
o’er this benighted sphere.  
With hearts and hands uplifted  
we plead, O Lord, to see  
the day of earth’s redemption  
that brings us unto Thee!*

TLH 72, 1 and 4



## “Conceived by the Holy Ghost”

# The Assumption of the Human Nature into the Son of God

During the joyous Christmas season, we remember and celebrate the glorious miracle of God’s grace in the birth of One who is both God and Man in one Person, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ. However, the great miracle of the incarnation—that the Second Person of the Holy



Trinity became a true human being—occurred *not* at the time of Jesus’ *birth*, but at His *conception* (Luke 1:35, 43). That the Son of God was “incarnate” simply means that He was “*made flesh*,” as the Scriptures plainly declare: “*The Word* [the eternal God, as He is described in verses 1–3] *was made flesh*” (John 1:14). This, of course, does *not* mean that the Son of God was *changed into* a man,

since the Bible clearly states that God (and therefore the Lord Jesus Christ according to His divine nature) *does not change* (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). Therefore, *from everlasting* and *to everlasting* (Psalm 90:2) the Second Person of the Trinity has always been and forever will remain *true God* with the Father and the Holy Ghost.

Now at the time of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, the eternal Son of God took into His divine Person a true human nature, so that He is now and will evermore be the God-Man. Obviously, the human nature is not unchangeable like the divine nature is; so the assumed human nature of Christ *did* undergo the natural bodily changes of a maturing human from the time of His conception. But just as His divine nature did not become any less divine through the incarnation, so also the fact that His assumed human nature is inseparably united with the divine nature does not in any way mean that He is not a true human being. The Scriptures plainly teach that Jesus is both true Man (1 Timothy 2:5) and true God (John 1:1; Isaiah 9:6). Accordingly, Jesus refers to Himself both as the “*Son of Man*” (Matthew 20:28) and the “*Son of God*” (John 5:25). It would be wrong, however, for us to think that the “Son of Man”

is one person and the “Son of God” is another Person. *Both of these titles* describe the *one Person* of our Savior Jesus Christ (though with special reference to one or the other nature). Again, since the time of His incarnation, *Christ has two natures united together in His one Person* (see Catechism question 128 and the passages there cited).

The miracle of the incarnation was brought about in the womb of the virgin Mary through the omnipotence of God the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:18). As 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). In this way, God fulfilled the Old Testament Gospel prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah as the great Descendant of King David (Jeremiah 23:5–6)—Jesus’ mother being from the lineage of David (Luke 3:23–31). “[*God*] had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:2–3). Christ was the promised “*Seed*” of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Galatians 3:16)—coming from the tribe of Judah as the foretold peace-bringer, “*Shiloh*” (Genesis 49:10). Being the son of a true virgin, Jesus was also, in the truest sense, *the Seed of a woman* (Genesis 3:15)—*not* the seed of a man and a woman.

The human nature that the Son of God received at the time of His incarnation is *not* simply *similar* to the nature possessed by every human being, but it is *identical* to ours, except without sin (Hebrews 2:11, 16; 4:15). He even possessed “*the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3) in so far as He experienced in His true human body and soul the consequences of sin, namely, all manner of pain and weakness (Matthew 4:2; Luke 22:42–44). However, as a result of the personal union of the two natures in Christ, His human nature also possesses all of the divine attributes. “*In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (Colossians 2:9). So *according to His divine nature*, the Lord Jesus possesses the divine attributes *essentially*; and *according to His human nature*, He possesses them *by communication*. This communication of divine attributes to His human nature is taught in every passage of Scripture in which something belonging exclusively to God is said to be “*given*” to Christ (Matthew 28:18; John 5:26–27)—since according to His divine nature, such things have been possessed by Him from all eternity.

It is certainly one of the most mind-boggling mysteries recorded in the Scriptures that the divine nature of God (of which there is only one) became joined with a true human nature *only in the Person of God the Son* (not in the Person of *God the Father* or of *God the Holy Ghost*), and, furthermore, that this second Person of the Trinity, since the time of His incarnation in Mary's womb, is both true God and true Man in one Person, so that it can be properly said of the Lord Jesus that *this Man is God* (Romans 1:3–4; 9:5)—though the human nature has not become divine, nor has the divine nature become human. We must all marvel with the Apostle Paul that “*without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifest in the flesh***” (I Timothy 3:16). Sadly, instead of standing in humble awe at this great miracle, the Reformed deny that it is even possible for the human nature of Christ to be indivisibly united with the divine nature in such a way that, from the time of His incarnation, wherever the Son of God *is* according to His divine nature, there He *is also* according to His human nature (being incapable of separation either by time or space). They say that it would not be possible for a true human nature to be so intimately and completely connected with the infinitely powerful, all-knowing, ever-present divine nature—exalting their man-made dictum, *finitum non est capax infiniti* (“the finite is not capable of the infinite”), above the teachings of Scripture. It is, of course, pure foolishness for humans to impose limits upon the power of God, who “*is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*” (Ephesians 3:20).

Now the miracle of Christ's incarnation is much more than a fascinating mystery to ponder. Far from being inconsequential, it was absolutely necessary for our salvation that the Son of God assume a true human nature, so that He might be able to satisfy God's justice as our perfect Substitute and thus secure for sinful mankind God's grace and mercy. If He had not become our Brother in the flesh (Hebrews 2:11), Christ could not have accomplished either His *active obedience* (that He perfectly fulfilled God's Law in our stead) or His *passive obedience* (that He took our place under the punishment we deserve by our many transgressions), which were both necessary for our redemption. He could not have taken our place under the requirements of God's Law if He did not possess a true human nature, since, according to His divine nature, Christ is *above* the Law—not under it. “*But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, **made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons***” (Galatians 4:4–5). He also could not have taken our place under the wrath of God that we have merited

by our sins—suffering and dying for us—if He did not possess a true human nature, since, according to His divine nature, Christ could not be hurt or killed. “*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of **flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death** He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Hebrews 2:14–15). It should also be noted that, even though the divine nature itself is incapable of being placed under the requirements or punishment of Law, yet since these things were not done by a person-less nature but by the *person of Christ* (who is both God and Man), *the divine nature participated in both the active and passive obedience (genus apotelesmaticum)*; and this is what gave His work redeeming value. So it was not simply the perfect life of a mere man, nor the suffering and death of an ordinary human being, for that would not have had sufficient value to atone for the sins of the world (Psalm 49:7–8). But, thankfully, “*we were reconciled to God by **the death of His Son***” (Romans 5:10), for “***the blood of Jesus Christ His [God’s] Son** cleanseth us from all sin*” (I John 1:7). For our salvation, God Himself shed His blood (Acts 20:28) in the person of Jesus Christ according to His human nature.

As was mentioned above, when the Son of God became True Man, His assumed human nature became partaker of all the divine attributes. In other words, from the time of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, He possessed also in His true human nature all of the honor, authority, and power of God. How, then, was He able in this human nature to be subject to the Law of God or suffer weaknesses, pain, and death? The Lord Jesus did this by withholding from Himself the full and constant use of the divine attributes that were communicated to His human nature. This is what we refer to as Christ’s *state of humiliation*. It should not be thought, however, that He did not *possess* the divine attributes in His human nature even in His *state of humiliation*. In His words to Nicodemus while in His *state of humiliation*, Jesus clearly stated that His human nature still possessed the communicated divine attribute of omnipresence. He told him: “*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of **Man** which is **in heaven***” (John 3:13). So then, *according to His human nature in His state of humiliation*, though He still possessed all of the communicated divine attributes, Jesus did not always and did not fully use His omniscience (Luke 2:52; Mark 13:32); He allowed Himself to experience weakness (Psalm 22:15) and pain in body and soul (Matthew 26:38; Luke 22:42–44); and He even laid down His life

(John 10:17–18; Luke 23:46) to save us. “[*Christ Jesus*], *being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Philippians 2:6–8).

This *state of humiliation* lasted from the point of His conception through His death and burial. With His return to life on the third day, Jesus entered into His *state of exaltation*, in which He now, *also according to His human nature*, always and fully uses the divine attributes that had been communicated to the assumed human nature at the time of His conception. When Christ entered into His *state of exaltation*, *He did not cease to be human*. It is for this reason that Christ’s *state of humiliation* cannot be defined as His assumption of the human nature—otherwise, His *state of exaltation* would have to be the discarding of His human nature. It is, of course, true that the assumption of the human nature was certainly a gracious condescension to us for our salvation; and the manner by which He became man involved some uncomfortable and even painful experiences for Him (the natural traumas of birth). It is also true that His *state of humiliation* began at the time of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary; *but the fact that He became Man was not His humiliation*. In His present *state of exaltation*, *Christ is still a Man* and will remain a true human being for all eternity. The difference now in His *state of exaltation* is that His human nature is not any longer subject to any kind of pain, want, or weakness; and since He is fully and constantly using the communicated divine attributes in His human nature, He rules and fills all things as true God and true Man (Matthew 28:18, 20; Ephesians 1:20–23; 4:10).

The fact that Jesus still shares our human nature should be of great comfort to us; because, as our Brother in the flesh, He intercedes for us before God. “*If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (I John 2:1). “*There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*” (I Timothy 2:5). He is, indeed, the ideal Mediator between God and men, because He is both true God and true Man in one Person. The Scriptures also assure us that, on account of His human nature, He who is our gracious High-Priest and King is fully able to sympathize with all of our wants and needs; and we have the promise that He will, for the sake of His redemptive work, graciously receive our prayers. “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,*

*but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16). So then this Christmas season, let us rejoice in the glorious fact that the Son of God became a true human being in order to redeem us from our sins; and let us not forget that He still lives and reigns to all eternity as the God-Man—governing all things according to His infinite love, wisdom, and power for the benefit of His beloved brethren.*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail the incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as Man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel!  
Hark! The herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”

(TLH 94; v. 2)

—P. E. B.



# The Significance of Christmas Giving

“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”

—II Corinthians 9:15

The tradition of giving gifts at Christmas time developed from various cultural and religious customs found in many nations. In modern times, the giving of Christmas presents is not necessarily connected to any



spiritual celebration or religious significance whatsoever. Sadly, the hype and hoopla connected with gift-giving may actually become a distracting influence even in Christian homes, so that the real meaning of Christmas becomes only a secondary consideration. In order that this does not happen in our midst, we should consider

the significance of Christmas giving in direct relation to the “*unspeakable gift*” that God the Father bestowed upon us at Christmas—the Savior, Christ our Lord.

The giving of gifts in general is spoken of throughout Holy Scripture. For example, the Bible speaks of parental gifts to children (II Chronicles 21:3). Joseph received a coat from his father (Genesis 37:3) and Samuel received a coat every year from his mother (I Samuel 2:19). Our Lord Himself remarks that parents “*know how to give good gifts unto [their] children*” (Matthew 7:11). Such gifts are expressions of parental love. Historically, gifts were also given due to obligation, as a form of tribute to the King to whom a nation was in servitude, as numerous nations gave gifts to various kings in the Old Testament (II Samuel 8:2, 6; II Chronicles 26:8; 32:23). Gifts given in obligation today include tips and gratuities given to service people, especially at Christmas, as a thank-you in appreciation for their service. Gifts such as these are often expected. A recent article in *Reader’s Digest* (December 2007) entitled “*Gratuitous Gratuities*,” by Mary Roach, mentions how some service workers go to great lengths to “remind” people to “gift” them at Christmas time such as leaving self-addressed Christmas cards and even warning notes that border on extortion! The Bible also mentions gifts given at feasts and memorial celebrations (Esther 2:18, 9:22) as forms of thanksgiving toward God. Gifts may also be given in an attempt to appease an offended

party (cf. Proverbs 6:35) as Jacob sent gifts to Esau to find grace in his sight (Genesis 32:4-5, 33:8ff). The Bible condemns the use of gifts for evil purposes. These include bribery (Proverbs 15:27, 19:6, 29:4; Isaiah 1:23; Ezekiel 22:12), heathen worship and idolatry (Ezekiel 20:26, 31, 39) and in the celebration of evil actions (cf. Revelation 11:10). Scripture gives us an example of a time not to receive gifts—that is, when a false impression would be given to others and an offense caused (cf. II Kings 5:16, 26). This overview shows that gifts may be given for various reasons: out of love, thankfulness or obligation, out of a desire to reconcile others, to influence others, or even to bribe others.

What is distinctive about *Christian* giving? A Christian, according to the New Man, is guided by the general rule of unselfishness and service to others given by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We are told in Holy Writ “*to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’*” (Acts 20:35). A Christian is empowered to give to others out of thankfulness for what God has already given to him in Christ Jesus. At Christmas time a believer should especially remember to thank God for His “*unspeakable gift*” of the Savior. “*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). He recognizes that “*the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23b) by the grace and power of God through Gospel-generated faith. The gift of salvation is entirely gracious, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8). With Jacob of old, a believer confesses: “*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). Scripture reminds us: “*Who hath first given to [the Lord], and it shall be recompensed to him again?*” (Romans 11:35), correcting any thoughts that the Lord is obligated to give us any of His gifts as if He owed them to us. We are also warned not to think that God is subject to bribery “*for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts*” (II Chronicles 19:7). No, every gift God gives is undeserved and flows from the ultimate gift, our Savior Jesus Christ. The Apostle declares: “*He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32). Every believer acknowledges that every good gift comes from God, who gives to all men liberally (James 1:17, 5) from the greatest gift of the Savior to all lesser gifts, as the Apostle reminds us: “*What hast thou that thou didst not receive?*” (I Corinthians 4:7).



The Father bestowed upon us His only-begotten Son, who came to seek and to save the lost world of sinners. His work of keeping God's Law inviolate in the place of all men and in paying the full price for all transgressions in His redemption of the entire world is the message of grace and salvation proclaimed and bestowed in the Gospel. The "*unspeakable gift*" of Christmas is Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men and specially of those who, by the grace of God in this Gospel, believe. As we love God because He first loved us in Christ (I John 4:19), so we love one another as Christ loved us (I John 3:16). To give gifts to others out of love and thankfulness to our gracious God, especially at Christmas time, is certainly a God-pleasing response. As Dr. Luther remarks: "A Christian should learn to...receive everything he is to have for his salvation from above and thereupon dispense good here below to his neighbor. For since we have received enough good things from God, both temporal and eternal, we are easily able to help our neighbor" (E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. II, #1855, p. 607).

At Christmas time we have a special opportunity to do good unto all men, "*especially unto them who are of the household of faith*" (Galatians 6:10) in giving gifts of love and thankfulness, saying with David in Psalm 16: "*O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, 'Thou art my Lord; my goodness extendeth not to Thee, but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight'*" (vv. 2-3). Moved and motivated by the grace of God and His "*unspeakable gift*," let us give to others out of the gifts God has graciously bestowed upon us in abundant supply. This gives truly Christian significance to our Christmas giving!

—E. J. W.





## “My Times Are in Thy Hand.”

— Psalm 31:15a

When we were children, a year seemed like an endless amount of time; when we grew up, the time passed faster. And if you ask an older person, he will say that time flies.

Winter and spring, summer and fall, come and go as swiftly as do the super-jets from airports. Empires rise and fall, cities prosper and decay; and we, too, are swept along by the never-ceasing rush of time. We are born, grow up, follow an occupation; and before we know it, with gray hair and stooped frame we stand before the gates of the grave, and our eyelids are pressed shut. Yes, time flies.

But what does not at all surprise us Christians is that the world is as sinful today as it ever was (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The results of sin were everywhere in evidence this past year. Greed and selfishness, lust and love of pleasure, injustice and cruelty, jealousy and envy filled the hearts of people in the past year as has always been the case. Robberies and murders, thefts and lies, adultery and filthy living, have shouted their presence to us from every medium.

Nevertheless, though sin has ruled in the unbelieving world during the past twelve months, our faithful and merciful God has been with us Christians and has strengthened and upheld us with His precious Word (Psalm 46). In all the changing scenes of life, in all hours of trial, His Word has sustained and comforted all true believers (Psalm 119:28, 50). Not a day passed when He was not with us. As He has been with us in the past, so will He be with us in the future (Matthew 28:20). And, unlike the things of this world, He does not change (Malachi 3:6). As we enter a new year, we need not fear. Though time passes us by, bringing us ever closer to the grave, yet we are safe in the hands of our Savior.

And thus every Christian should confidently confess with the Psalmist upon entering a new year, “*My times are in Thy hand*” (Psalm 31:15a). The unbelieving world will have a gloomy view of the new year. It may throw up its hands in despair. The Christian according to the New Man declares, “Let the times and situations be what they may, ‘*My times are in Thy hand,*’ O Lord.” This is an altogether different attitude from that of the fatalist and of the stoic who say: “Whatever is, is; and we might just as well take it without complaining.” The Christian is truly able to enter the new year with a smile. And his smile comes from the heart; for he looks beyond the battlefield of life; he sees more than this world and its disappointments. He has the assurance of God’s own Word that, in Christ Jesus, he has a loving heavenly Father, whose guiding hand will graciously sustain him through the new year and in the years to come, even to his goal of eternal life in heaven.

The Christian knows that he is a sinner and justly deserves the wrath and punishment of an offended God; but, by the operation of His Holy Spirit through the Gospel, he trusts in the *mercy* of God, who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Substitute of all sinners under divine justice, to earn true righteousness for every soul of man, and to pay the penalty of their guilt by His suffering and death on the cross. Trusting in this redemptive work of Christ, he knows that he has been forgiven of all his sins and declared righteous by God Himself; and, by faith in that blessed fact, he is now at peace with God (Romans 5:1) and God’s own dear child (Galatians 3:26). As such, he now lives in this world as an heir of everlasting life (Mark 16:15; Titus 3:7) and travels on the path of righteousness for his Savior’s sake (Psalm 23:3) toward his true home in heaven.

Thus the true believer enters the new year in confidence, for there is nothing in it that will separate him from his Savior and his heavenly inheritance (Romans 8:35-39), for our times are in *His* hand. If they were in *our* hands, we would quickly be cut off from Him and from the way that leads to life. Our short-sighted selfishness, not wanting to deny ourselves anything, and seeing only the moment, often leads us to focus upon our temporal needs and wants and distracts us from the priceless spiritual blessings that we have in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Such an attitude would soon lead us to destruction (I Timothy 6:9-10). But being “*the Lord’s*” (Romans 14:8) by faith in Jesus, our times are in the Lord’s hands. Though foul weather mark the new year, though social and political upheavals cause havoc in our nation, though our earthly goods are taken away, and though our bodies are besieged with

all kinds of illnesses, yet we will say by the grace of God, “*There shall no evil befall [me]*” (Psalm 91:10); and with the Apostle Paul let us joyfully exclaim, “*I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord*” (Romans 8:39). In that confident faith, let us enter the new year with the assurance of His Word and declare again with the Psalmist: “*My times are in Thy hand.*”

— D. G. R.

*Before the cross subdued we bow,  
to Thee our prayers addressing,  
recounting all Thy mercies now,  
and all our sins confessing;  
beseeching Thee this coming year  
to keep us in Thy faith and fear  
and crown us with Thy blessing.*

*We gather up in this brief hour  
the memory of Thy mercies:  
Thy wondrous goodness, love, and power  
our grateful song rehearses;  
for Thou hast been our Strength and Stay  
in many a dark and dreary day  
of sorrow and reverses.*

*Then, gracious God, in years to come,  
whatever may betide us,  
right onward through our journey home  
be Thou at hand to guide us;  
nor leave us till at close of life  
safe from all perils, toil, and strife,  
heaven shall enfold and hide us.*

*TCH 110; 2,4,6*



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When, yielding to His kind persuasion,  
Our hearts His truth and blessing prove,  
Then shall our life on earth be blest,  
The peace of God on us shall rest.

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Through Sacrament and living word  
Faith, love, and hope are now conferred.

Oh, may He soon to every nation  
Find entrance where He is unknown,  
With life and light and full salvation,  
That heathendom may be o'erthrown  
And healing to the hearts may come  
In heathen land and Christian home!

# Peace with God, His Good Will toward Men!

When the world speaks of “peace on earth” at Christmas time, it refers to peace that will never exist. Peace among the nations as the result of His coming is an elusive *pipe dream* that Jesus Himself exposes as a fraud when He says in Matthew 10:34, “*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace but a sword.*” And



peace among those who reject Jesus as their Savior and therefore walk in the works of the flesh is just as elusive; for St. Paul includes among such works “*hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, ...and such like*” (Galatians 5:20-21). No, the peace of which the angels sang was **peace with God** because of His forgiveness of the world in Christ, the Savior. For Paul also writes in II Corinthians chapter five, verse 19: “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing [or*

*charging] their trespasses unto them.*” Instead He charged them all to His holy Son, as our Substitute, so that He wouldn’t have to charge them anymore to US.

The Apostle now urges US to accept and believe this glorious message of God’s forgiveness of the **entire world** for Jesus’ sake, saying in verse 20: “*Be ye reconciled to God.*” When we by faith lay hold on His forgiveness, purchased and won for all mankind by Jesus our Savior, then we have **for ourselves** the “*peace*” of which the angels sang on the first Christmas night: “*Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1). May THAT peace be yours, both now at Christmas time and all through your life, as you confide in the Child of Bethlehem and His merits alone for the peace that only He can give! (John 14:27).

—D. T. M.

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

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## *Jesus, Thy Church with Longing Eyes*

*Jesus, Thy Church with longing eyes  
for Thine expected coming waits.  
When will the promised light arise  
and glory beam from Zion's gates?*

*E'en now, when tempests round us fall  
and wintry clouds o'er cast the sky,  
Thy words with pleasure we recall  
and deem that our redemption's nigh.*

*Come, gracious Lord, our hearts renew,  
our foes repel, our wrongs redress,  
man's rooted enmity subdue,  
and crown Thy Gospel with success.*

*Oh, come and reign o'er every land;  
let Satan from his throne be hurled,  
all nations bow to Thy command,  
and grace revive a dying world.*

*Teach us in watchfulness and prayer  
to wait for the appointed hour  
and fit us by Thy grace to share  
the triumphs of Thy conquering power.*