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

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"They began to
speak... as the
Spirit gave
them utterance."

— Acts 2:4

The
Concordia Lutheran



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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.

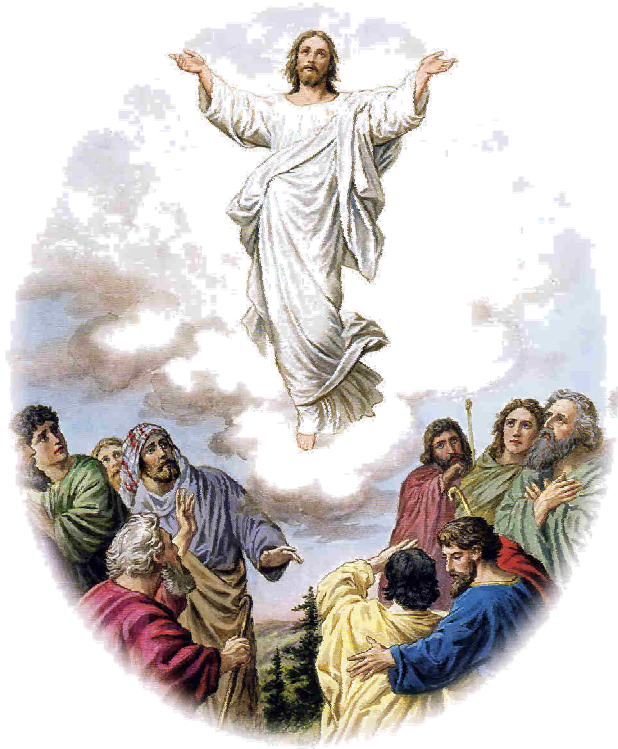
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To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

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“A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing”



This Latin hymn is attributed to the Venerable Bede (673-735). It was not found in any documents prior to the eleventh century. As part of his composition, Bede was very fond of bringing in the actual words of Scripture. We see evidence of this in stanzas 3 and 4 of “A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing,” where he brought in some of the contents of what the two angels in Acts 1 said to the followers of Jesus as they observed His ascension. What a great blessing for us and for many others that this wonderful hymn was finally translated from Latin into English by Benjamin Webb in 1854 and published in that same year in *The Hymnal Noted*. In the hymnal which we use in our congregations, *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), this hymn is #212 in the *Ascension* section. It is noteworthy that this always-timely hymn has been published in 50 other hymnals.

One of the unique features of this hymn is that there are seven “Alleluias” in each stanza. The word “*Alleluia*,” transliterated as such in New Testament Greek and in the English of our Bible from the Old Testament Hebrew “*Hallelujah*,” means “Praise ye the Lord!” or the shortened version: “Praise the Lord!” This expression was common among the Jews and was used in their liturgy on the basis, chiefly, of the Psalms, specifically, in Psalms 106 and 113, in Psalms 146-150 (at the beginning and at the end of these Psalms), and in Psalms 111 and 112 (at the beginning of these psalms). Moreover, the Jews regularly sang (and do so still today) their “*chief*” song of “*praise*,” called the “**Great Hallel**” [hah-LAYL], **Psalm 136**, at the conclusion of the Passover *seder* or service; and that Psalm may well have been the “*hymn*” that Jesus and His disciples sang together (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26) after *they* had concluded both the Passover and the *Lord’s* Supper before heading out to Gethsemane on “*the same night in which He was betrayed*” (I Corinthians 11:23). In Revelation 19, the Apostle John documents the words of the songs sung by those who are already in heaven. In their songs of gratitude, they include “*Alleluia*” in verses 1, 3-4, and 6. For those of us who are God’s “*saints*” by faith in His Son (I Corinthians 1:2; II Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2), who are still here on earth “*gazing up into heaven*” in awe at the Savior’s ascension, we gratefully sing our “*Alleluias*” in “*A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing*” to give evidence of our great thanks to our gracious God for all that He has mercifully done and completely “*finished*” (John 19:30) for us and all sinners when He “*justified* [us] *freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:24), gaining for us and giving to us “*the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (I Corinthians 15:57b), the everlasting victory of “*the Lamb of God*,” who took “*away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29) and who “*destroy[ed] the works of the devil*” (I John 3:8b; see also Genesis 3:15).

Now let us examine the seven stanzas/parts of this precious hymn. The first stanza is:

*A hymn of glory let us sing;
new songs throughout the world shall ring.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Christ, by a road before untrod,
ascendeth to the throne of God.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

One of the “*fruit[s] of the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:22a) produced in the believing hearts of “*the children of God*” (3:26) is “*joy*” (5:22b). Such believers, according to their “*new man*” (Ephesians 4:24), love to sing, with their hearts and/or with their lips, to their gracious God for all that He has done for them and given to them through the vicarious atonement of the ascended Christ Jesus. The Psalmist, in Psalm 98, calls out with this plea and exhortation: “*O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory*” (v. 1). God’s “*people*” (I Peter 2:10a) — wherever they are located in this world, and whether they are rich or poor, healthy or sick — His “*people*, with their faith anchored in Christ and in His sinless obedience and sacrifice in their stead before God, will “*show forth the praises of Him who hath called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (I Peter 2:9b). They will gladly give their assent, their “*Yes,*” to the confession of the Psalmist for himself and for all of his “*born again*” (John 3:3b) brethren: “*The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad*” (126:3). These “*great things*” include not only our Savior’s substitutionary suffering and death in our behalf, and His mighty resurrection as testimony that the justice of our holy and just God has been satisfied, but they also include His witnessed ascension, the glorious and triumphant end of His visible stay here on earth, and His visible entrance, as the God-man, according to His human nature, into His heavenly kingdom, at “*the right hand of God*” (Mark 16:19b), where He will always carry out His unchanging, sure, and certain promise to all of His dear sheep and lambs here on earth: “*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matthew 28:20b). *Alleluia! Alleluia!* Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

The second stanza of this marvelous hymn is:

*The holy apostolic band
upon the Mount of Olives stand.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
And with His followers they see
Jesus’ resplendent majesty.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

“*The mount called Olivet*” (Acts 1:12b) was the location where “*the apostles*” (v. 2b) actually saw Jesus “*parted from them and carried up into heaven*” (Luke 24:51b). They were actual eye-witnesses of Jesus, according to His human nature, in His own body, being “*taken up and a*

cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9b). Whether any others were there with the apostles as witnesses of His ascension cannot be established from any of the three ascension accounts (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-12). Nevertheless the ascension of Jesus was a real historical event which took place according to true facts revealed in the three Gospel records, written by chosen men of God “*as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:21b). *Alleluia! Alleluia!* Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

The appearance of two angels at the ascension of Jesus is taken note of in the third stanza of this hymn:

*To whom the angels drawing nigh:
“Why stand and gaze upon the sky?”
Alleluia! Alleluia!
“This is the Savior,” thus they say;
“This is His noble triumph-day.”
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

In this stanza, the hymn writer, the Venerable Bede, shows his acquaintance with and his love for the Holy Scriptures when he paraphrases the Evangelist Luke’s account in verses 10-11a of Acts 1: “*And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said: ‘Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?’*” These two holy angels, God’s messengers, “*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*” (Hebrews 1:14), appeared as “*men*,” as human beings who could be seen by the apostles, even though, by creation, by nature, they were and are “*spirits*,” which have no body. Here we see another of our God’s marvelous and miraculous works, temporarily causing these two angels to appear in human form. “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” (Genesis 18:14a) was the question which the Lord asked Sarah when she laughed after hearing that she would give birth to Isaac, even though she was well past child-bearing age. This question, “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” is a question which we can ask again and again when difficulties, problems, unexpected events, and seemingly impossible obstacles are allowed by our God to come into our lives. The answer to this question is an unhesitating “No,” as long as it is in accord with His divine “*will*” (Matthew 6:10b).

The ascension of Jesus was the ascension of the Savior for “*the world*” (John 3:16a), this event giving evidence and proof that His pur-

pose for coming into the world, namely, “*to save sinners*” (I Timothy 1:15b), was now completed, and that He had accomplished the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies, so that now, “*through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins*” (Acts 10:43b). *Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*

In the fourth stanza, the angels give us a wonderful promise for the future:

*“Again shall ye behold Him so,
as ye today have seen Him go,”
Alleluia! Alleluia!
“in glorious pomp ascending high,
up to the portals of the sky.”
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

The Venerable Bede, once again in this stanza, paraphrases from the Scriptures in Acts 1 the message which the angels conveyed to the apostles: “*This **same Jesus**, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come **in like manner** as ye have **seen Him** go into heaven*” (v. 11b). As Jesus visibly, bodily left this earth at His ascension, so He will visibly, bodily return to this earth on the Last Day. The Apostle John, in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation, gives this report concerning that return of Jesus on the Final Day of this world: “*Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him*” (v. 7a). Matthew, in the 25th chapter of his Gospel, provided us in verses 31 and 32 with further information concerning that future visible return of Jesus to this world: “*When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*” Is this future visible return of Jesus something for us to dread? Oh, no! As believers in the priceless truth that “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation. ...For He hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin [Christ was sinless], that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him [in Christ]*” (II Corinthians 5:19), we can be certain that the Savior, on that Last Day, will say to us and to all on His right hand: “*Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25: 34). *Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*

Stanza 5 is a prayer to our ascended Savior at the right hand of God:

*Oh, grant us thitherward to tend
and with unwearied hearts ascend –
Alleluia! Alleluia!
– unto Thy kingdom’s throne, where Thou,
as is our faith, art seated now.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

In this stanza, we petition our ascended Savior, “*whom having not seen, [we] love*” (I Peter 1:8a), to help us to come more “*boldly unto [His] throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16), “*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*” (v. 15). His genuine invitation and His words of encouragement are set forth for our benefit in Matthew 11: “*Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (vv. 28-30). *Alleluia! Alleluia!* Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

In stanza 6 we have another intercession to “*Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2a):

*Be Thou our Joy and Strong Defense,
who art our future Recompense.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
So shall the light that springs from Thee
be ours through all eternity.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

Oh, our dear ascended Savior, our true “Joy” now and forevermore in having Thee as the only “Way” to heaven, for “*no man cometh unto the Father but by [Thee]*” (John 14:6a and c), Thou, the only Giver of “*the Truth*” (v. 6b) that all sinners have been “*justified freely by [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:24), and Thou, the only Provider of “*eternal Life*” (Romans 6:23b), instead of eternal “*death*,” which is “*the wages of sin*” (Romans 6:23a): Inscribe more and more on our hearts and souls, as our “Strong Defense” and our everlasting “*Light*” (John 8:12), the changeless message from the Apostle John, closing out the third chapter of his Gospel: “*He that*

believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (v. 36).

Now, to close out this much-appreciated hymn with a prayer of gratitude, stanza 7:

*O risen Christ, ascended Lord,
all praise to Thee let earth accord,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
who art, while endless ages run,
with Father and with Spirit one.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

We owe our risen and ascended Savior unending thanks, praise, glory, and honor for willingly being the Triune God’s “*Servant*” (Isaiah 53:11b) in having the sins of all in the whole world “*laid on Him*” (Isaiah 53:6b) as the “*one Mediator* [the one Peacemaker] *between God and men* [all people]” (I Timothy 2:5). On account of this redemption by Christ Jesus “*for all*” (I Timothy 2:6a), God has forgiven the sins of “*the world*” (II Corinthians 5:19) and declared all sinners “*righteous*” (Romans 5:19b) in His sight. Now and until the end of this world, “*whosoever believeth in Him* [in Christ Jesus] *should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16b). *Alleluia! Alleluia!* Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

— R. J. L.



We thank Thee, Jesus, dearest Friend,
that Thou didst into heaven ascend.

○ blessed Savior, bid us live
and strength to soul and body give.

Hallelujah!

Ascended to His throne on high,
hid from our sight, yet always nigh,
He rules and reigns at God's right hand
and has all things at His command.

Hallelujah!

The man who trusts in Him is blest
and finds in Him eternal rest.

This world's allurements we despise
and fix on Christ alone our eyes.

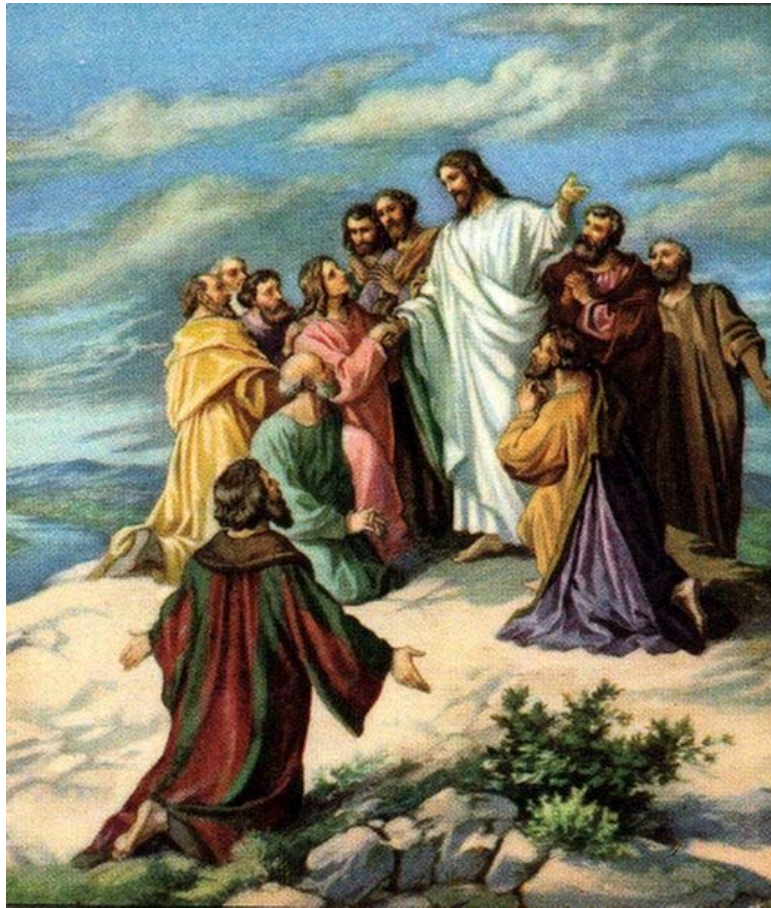
Hallelujah!

We therefore heartily rejoice
and sing His praise with cheerful voice.

He captive led captivity;
from bitter death He set us free.

Hallelujah!

(Author unknown; tr. by Mathias Loy, 1880)



The Ascended Savior's Promise Was Fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost

And, being assembled together with them, [He] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise of the Father, "which," saith He, "ye have heard of me." — Acts 1:4

On Ascension Day the risen Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles to remain in the city of Jerusalem to await the sure and certain promise, given by Him of the Father, which would shortly come to fulfillment. Every year the Christian Church commemorates that fulfillment fifty days after Easter on **Whitsunday**, the **Feast of Pentecost**.

The historic **Gospel Lesson** appointed for that day is the account of the **promise** given by Christ:

Jesus answered and said unto him, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings; and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, 'I go away and come again unto you.' If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice because I said, 'I go unto the Father;' for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment even so I do, arise; let us go hence" (John 14:23-31).

Here the Savior promises the gift of the Comforter (the *Paraclete* – from the Greek verb “to comfort”), the Holy Ghost, “*whom the Father will send in My Name,*” that is, for His sake.

The historic **Epistle Lesson** records the **fulfillment** of said promise:

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together and were confounded because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all

amazed and marveled, saying one to another, "Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." And they were all amazed and were in doubt, saying one to another, "What meaneth this?" Others mocking said, "These men are full of new wine." (Acts 2:1-13).

Examining the promise in detail, what can we learn? First and foremost, we mark how the Lord Jesus designates it as *"the promise of the Father"* (Acts 1:4), and the gift as He *"whom the Father will send"* (John 14:26). This gift from God the Father is also declared by the Savior to be in connection with His completed work, for the gift is sent *"in My name,"* the Lord says. This is the same as saying *"for My sake,"* as is especially obvious in the use of the phrases connected with the forgiveness of sins (the Gospel absolution) being declared in Christ's Name (Acts 2:38; Luke 24:47; Acts 10:43).

The Savior tells us that this gracious gift is His legacy to His disciples as He withdraws the visible manifestation of His presence. The Holy Ghost will be manifested to them as their Comforter: *"I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him. But ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you"* (John 14:16-17).

Besides fulfilling this general promise of *comfort*, the Holy Ghost will also do a vital service for the future of the Church as He gives the Apostles, infallibly and inerrantly, word-for-blessed-word, God's revealed will as His penmen in the production of the New Testament Scriptures and in recording perfectly the words of Christ Himself. Jesus says of this specific work of the Spirit: *"He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you"* (John 14:26b). Because of this unique transmission, known as *verbal inspiration*, we have the assurance that, in the words of the apostles and evangelists, we have in the New Testament the very Word of God with the same degree of accuracy as we have it in the words of the prophets in the Old Testament: *"God, who at sundry times*

and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2a). “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16-17). This enables the Church to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission: “Go ye, therefore, and teach [literally, make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20). The gift of the Holy Ghost is the direct, efficient cause of the writing of the New Testament Scriptures, “for [as] the prophecy [of the Old Testament] came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21), so also St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:13 that “we [the apostles and evangelists] speak not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”

The work of the Holy Ghost is, first and foremost, to provide us with the Word of God and, through that very Word, to work contrition and saving faith in the hearts of men. The Holy Ghost testifies of Christ, applying His saving work to us. In order to do so, He works to convict man of sin, guilt and punishment by the Law, and righteousness (justification) and remission of sins (blood-bought absolution) by the Gospel, enabling the Church to fulfill, as it were, Christ’s “marching orders” in Luke 24:47: *“That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* The Lord Jesus described in detail this vital work of the Holy Ghost in John 16:

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to

come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you” (vv. 7-14).

The promise of the Holy Ghost includes all His specific work in granting the apostles His Word, “*the foundation*” of the Church, (Ephesians 2:20) and the means whereby the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of men, granting to poor sinners, individually and collectively, all that they need for **conversion** and spiritual **enlightenment**, for **renewal of life** for the production of good works (**sanctification** in the narrower sense), and **preservation** in the true and saving faith unto salvation. The Father sent His Son to be the world’s Redeemer (John 3:16). The Son, by His vicarious active and passive obedience in satisfaction of divine justice, did the saving work (Romans 5:19). And the Spirit applies that work to mankind through the Word of God (Romans 3:28; 10:17; 5:1).

How was this promise fulfilled in history? Acts 2:1ff., the Standard Epistle for the Feast of Pentecost, cited above, gives us the historical record — the clear and infallible account of that event — as the Holy Ghost was poured out in extraordinary measure upon the disciples. Even as the incarnation of Christ was a once-in-time occurrence “*when the fulness of the time was come*” (Galatians 4:4), so the special outpouring of the Holy Ghost occurred “*when the day of Pentecost was fully come*” (Acts 2:1) and “*they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*” (Acts 2:4). The Apostle Peter declared that the ancient promise of God through the Prophet Joel was fulfilled that day (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32), and that the resurrected Christ had thus fulfilled His own special promise: “*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear*” (Acts 2:32-33). Yes, “**this is that** which was spoken” by the Prophet Joel and by Jesus, the Christ! On that day of fulfillment, Peter declared: “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call*” (Acts 2:38-39). The gift of the Holy Ghost comes to all through God’s Word, as the Holy Ghost works to convict men of their sins (see Acts 2:37), to convert penitent sinners to saving faith (see Acts 2:41), and to preserve true believers in the saving faith and in its practice (Acts 2:42). Many ancient and modern errors extant in the outward, visible church (heresies, heterodoxy and attendant false practice) are the result of refusing to recognize the historical

fulfillment of the promise of the Comforter and the direct, clear purpose of said fulfillment recorded for our learning in Holy Writ.

What does the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Ghost mean to believers today? Although an extensive examination of the work of the Holy Ghost as set forth in God's Word is beyond the scope of this present article, a summary is certainly in order. We cite the following questions, answers and supporting proof texts from *A Short Explanation of Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: CPH), 1943, as follows :

Q/A 163. What is the work of the Holy Ghost?

The Holy Ghost sanctifies me, that is, He *makes me holy*, by bringing me to faith in Christ and by imparting to me the blessings of redemption. (Sanctification in the wider sense includes everything that the Holy Ghost does in me.

419 But ye are washed, but ye are *sanctified*, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and *by the Spirit of our God*. *1 Corinthians 6:11*.

Q/A 166. What did the Holy Ghost work in you when He called you by the Gospel?

By the Gospel the Holy Ghost *enlightened me with His gifts*, that is, He *gave me the saving knowledge of Jesus*, my Savior, so that *I trust and believe, rejoice and take comfort*, in Him.

431 The God of hope fill you with all joy and *peace* in *believing*, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. *Romans 15:13*.

Q/A 169. What else has the Holy Ghost wrought in you by the Gospel?

The Holy Ghost has *sanctified me in the true faith*, that is, He has by faith in Christ *renewed my heart*, so that I can now overcome sin and *do good works*. (Sanctification in the narrower sense.)

442 We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. *Ephesians 2:10*.

Q/A 171. What has the Holy Ghost lastly wrought in you by the Gospel?

The Holy Ghost has, by the Gospel, *kept* me in the true faith.

450 He which hath begun a good work in you *will perform it* until the Day of Jesus Christ. *Philippians 1:6.*

In summary “The Holy Ghost calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (Luther). “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

We pray of this blessed work in thankful joy on the **Feast of Pentecost**:

Holy Spirit, hear us
on this sacred day.
Come to us with blessing;
come with us to stay.

Come, for once Thou camest
to the faithful few
patiently awaiting
Jesus’ promise true.

Up to heaven ascending
our dear Lord has gone;
yet His little children
leaves He not alone

To His blessed promise
now in faith we cling.
Comforter, most holy,
spread o’er us Thy wing.

(*TLH*, Hymn 229, vv. 1-4, adapted)

— **E. J. W.**

How the Holy Spirit Gives Us Utterance Today



*“We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth,
but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.”*

— I Corinthians 2:13

One of the great blessings given to man by his Creator is the ability to

speaking. It is true that, since the fall of man into sin, this gift is often used to work much wickedness (James 3:5–10); but to do so is an abuse of the gift that should be used to praise and glorify God at all times (Psalm 71:8). As the one who has given man the ability to communicate through speech, the Lord can be said to “give utterance” to every speaking human being. However, the Bible also tells us about a very *special* way that God has given utterance to certain people — controlling their words so completely that the words spoken are no longer the words of men, but the very words of God Himself (as this is described in the verse quoted above). At times, the words that the Lord prompted those people to say were in languages that they had never before learned, as was the case on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the disciples in rich measure and “*the Spirit gave them utterance*” (Acts 2:4). Following that occasion, the Lord continued to give the apostles utterance so that in all their teaching, preaching, and writing as the “*ambassadors for Christ*” (II Corinthians 5:20) God supplied them with the exact words that He wanted them to convey to the people without any corruption or error introduced from their own human reason (I Corinthians 2:13; I Thessalonians 2:13). The Lord had done this same thing also through the mouths and pens of the prophets in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 1:9; Ezekiel 3:27; II Peter 1:21; II Timothy 3:16). Since *the very words* of the prophets and apostles were given them by *inspiration* of the Holy Ghost, this process and the doctrine which sets it forth is called “*verbal inspiration*.”

Now a natural question to ask at this point is: Does God still do the same thing through people *today* — conveying His Word through them *apart* from the Scriptures (giving them *extra-biblical* revelations)? While it is certainly true that God *could* move people today to speak and write inspired words, as was done through the prophets and apostles of old, yet these three important facts need to be kept in mind: **1)** He has *not promised* to do so; **2)** We do *not need* Him to do so; and **3)** It is *dangerous* for us to *expect* Him to do so.

Jesus *did* promise the *apostles* that the Holy Ghost would give them the exact words they were to say and that they would not even need to pre-plan their remarks, since God would be speaking through them (Matthew 10:19–20). Christ also promised that the Holy Ghost would give them perfect recall of everything that He had ever told them (John 14:26). But such promises were *not* given to His believing followers *of all times*. Now sometimes Matthew 10:19–20 (as well as the parallel passages in Mark 13:11 and Luke 12:11–12) are cited in support of the

idea that God gives *all Christians* the words they are to say when they are beset by those that seek to harm them. While God may, indeed, grant us clarity of thought so that we can recall previously learned Bible verses in difficult situations (as many Christians have experienced), that is not what Christ here specifically promises. Notice what He says: *“When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”* (Matthew 10:19–20). This is a clear promise of divine inspiration that was given directly to the **apostles** — that without any thought being taken on their part, their mouths would deliver messages from the Lord. Such promises have **not** been given to *us Christians* of **today**.

And, really, we do not need God to give us the ability to speak and write Spirit-inspired words, as He did in the case of the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles and evangelists in the New Testament, because He has already given us the inspired words that they wrote as His penmen, as these have been recorded for our learning in the Bible (Romans 15:4). So then, rather than telling us to expect the Holy Ghost to give us immediate revelations (apart from the means of His written Word), God directs us Christians to the Scriptures through which the Holy Ghost works to put His Word into our hearts and on our lips. This was also true for the other believers at the time when the Old and New Testaments were written. Consider these passages: *“These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up”* (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). *“From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect [complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (II Timothy 3:15–17). Because God has already caused to be recorded in the Scriptures everything that we need to know pertaining to our saving faith and our life of sanctification, we Christians today are not to look for *direct* spiritual revelations such as the Lord graciously provided to some of His people of old before they had the complete revelation of His will and grace through the mouths and pens of the prophets and apostles. But *“whatsoever things were **written** aforetime were **written for our learning**, that we through patience and comfort of the **Scriptures** might have hope”* (Romans 15:4).

There is great danger in looking for God to speak through Christians today as He did through His messengers of old, because it draws people's focus away from what God actually has said in Holy Scripture, and it encourages them to look for divine guidance from those whom God clearly says that He is "*against*" (Jeremiah 23:31) and who worship Him "*in vain*" (Matthew 15:9). In Luther's day, Thomas Müntzer and the "Zwickau prophets" claimed to receive extra-biblical revelations from the Lord, and they deceived many. And, of course, the Pope (both then and now) claims to be the mouthpiece of God, even while blatantly contradicting the Bible. So then holding firmly to the principle of *sola Scriptura* (namely, that *Scripture alone* is the source and standard of true Christian doctrine), Luther wrote:

In those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may be protected against the enthusiasts, *i.e.*, spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare. For the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word (*The Smalcald Articles, Triglotta*, p. 495, §3–4).

But, now, a *brief word of caution* is in order concerning expressions that Christians sometimes use: Without necessarily meaning to claim divine inspiration for his own words, a Christian might say something like, "I was so nervous that I thought I would say everything wrong; but then God gave me just the right words to speak." While such a statement can be understood correctly as referring to God blessing a person's speech (meaning basically, "God helped focus my concentration so that I could speak better than I thought I'd be able to"), it could also wrongly be thought of as meaning that the exact words used (even though not quoting from the Scriptures) were given to the person through a kind of "verbal inspiration" in the same way God moved the holy men to write the Scriptures. Similarly, if a Christian is complimented concerning something that he said or wrote (assuming that he was not quoting the Bible), it is not wise for him to say things like,

“Those weren’t my words; those were from the Lord.” Now such a statement might be intended to be a humble acknowledgment of the fact that all good things come from God; but it basically exalts that person’s words to the level of Scripture by essentially referring to his own words as the words of the Lord. And if taken that way, then what would stop that person’s words and opinions from being cited and imposed upon other Christians as the inspired words of God? What then would stop the words of men from being regarded as having the same divine authority and infallibility as belongs rightly only to the Bible? Hence, the potential danger should be readily observed.

Similarly, care must be taken in rightly understanding certain poetic expressions that we find in some well-known hymns, which a person might misunderstand as asking God to grant us extra-biblical revelations. In *The Lutheran Hymnal* (©1941), Hymn 411, verse 7, we find these words: “Help me speak what’s right and good ...Help me pray, Lord, as I should.” This should be understood as God moving us, by means of His Word, to do good in our lives of sanctification (Philippians 2:13), particularly in connection with the words we say. In Hymn 428, verse 5, we sing to the Lord: “Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me must prevail.” If this is understood as God bringing to our remembrance previously learned Scripture passages, then there is no problem. Obviously, however, there would be a problem if one takes this as meaning that we expect the Lord to convey divinely inspired messages *through us* that are *not* found in the Bible.

Thus to avoid confusion and promote a correct understanding of the issues involved, a two-part answer should be given to the question, “Does the Holy Spirit give us utterance today?” **1)** No, not in the same way He did with the prophets and apostles; but **2)** Yes, through the instruction of the Scriptures, the Holy Ghost *does* move us to speak His Word faithfully. By means of the divinely-inspired text of the Bible, the Spirit of God puts His Word into Christians’ mouths and hearts so that they are able to know it for themselves (II Timothy 3:15; Psalm 119:11; etc.), to meditate upon it for their comfort and strengthening (Psalm 1:2; Romans 15:4), and to convey the vitally important messages of Law and Gospel to others (Matthew 28:20a). Indeed, we who have been blessed to receive the Word of the Lord in this manner have the privilege and obligation of confessing it with our mouths. God says: “*He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully*” (Jeremiah 23:28; see also Matthew 10:32 and Romans 10:9–10). The Lord tells us to be ready to give an answer to those that ask us con-

cerning our Christian faith (I Peter 3:15); and the kind of answer He wants us to give is *not* one that begins with, “I tend to think about it this way,” or, “Here’s my opinion on the matter.” On the contrary, we are to “*speak as the oracles of God*” (I Peter 4:11) by drawing the answer directly from the Bible. And rather than asking the Lord to increase our spiritual understanding *apart* from the means of His written Word (by *immediate revelation*), we should rather pray that He would grant us such knowledge directly *through* the study of His Word—“*Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law.*” “*Give me understanding according to Thy Word*” (Psalm 119:18, 169).

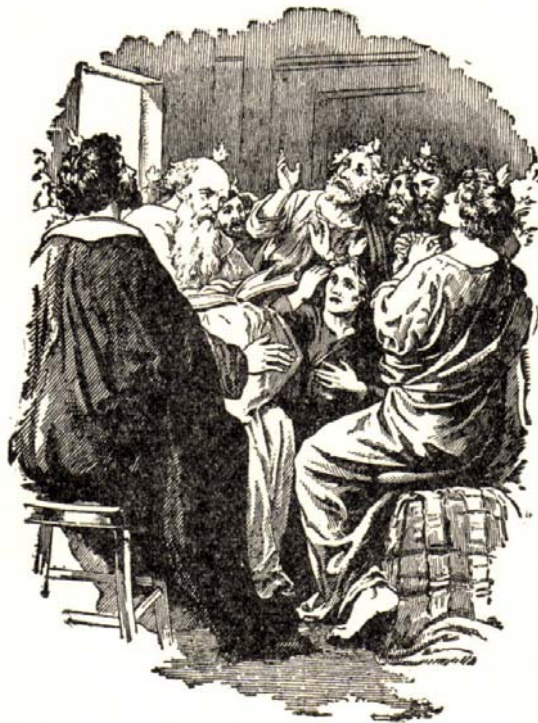
God will certainly answer such prayers for spiritual wisdom. “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him*” (James 1:5). The Lord says: “*I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (Jeremiah 31:33; see also Romans 10:8). Again, this putting of His Word into our hearts is *not* done through the process of divine inspiration that took place with the holy writers of the Bible; but it comes about through the learning of Holy Scripture. We do not bind *God* in this matter (we do not limit His ability to grant a person immediate revelations); rather it is *God* who has bound *us* to the Scriptures. Accordingly, He directs faithful pastors to study Holy Writ (II Timothy 2:15); and He says that the subject matter of their preaching is to be “*the Word*” (II Timothy 4:2). There is no allowance for teachings that go beyond what Scripture teaches (I Timothy 6:3–5). Furthermore, the correct understanding of the Bible is to be drawn only from the Bible itself for the very reason that it (in contrast to the musings of the human mind) was inspired by God. “*No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:20–21).

Since the words of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Ghost, since it is the Holy Ghost who through the Scriptures works the faith that receives His Word, and since the Holy Ghost also moves us as a fruit of saving faith to praise Him with our lips and to speak His Word to others, it is certainly true that the Spirit of God does give utterance to us Christians of today. “*O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise*” (Psalm 51:15). It is a fact that whenever we accurately quote the Scriptures and correctly apply the Law and the Gospel in speaking to others, the Lord God Himself is speaking to them through us (Luke 10:16). We should be very eager to be thus used by our Lord

and Savior in the work of His kingdom for the spiritual welfare of those that hear us and to the honor of God's holy name. May the Holy Ghost, therefore, continue this work in us through His powerful Word and fill us with a zeal to be His mouthpieces in conveying His life-giving Word to our fellow human beings — all to the praise of the glory of His grace in Christ Jesus!

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

— P. E. B.



Martin Luther *on the Word of God...*

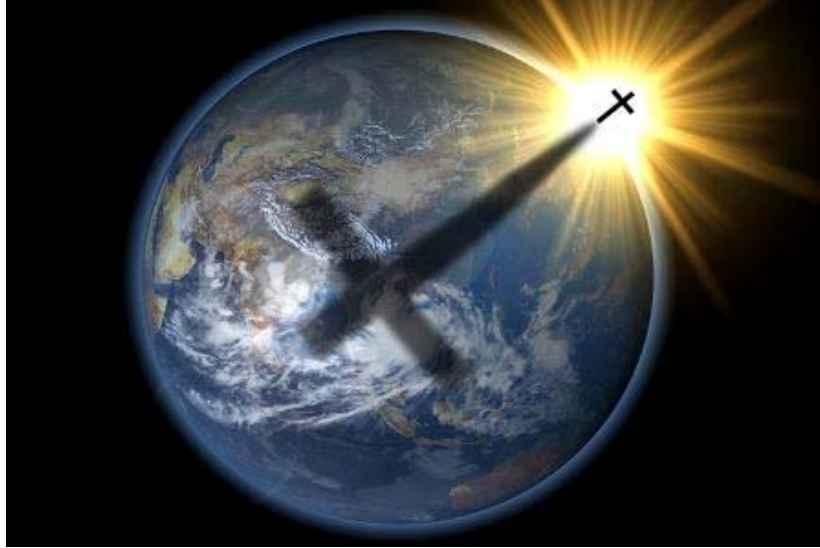
THE WORD OF GOD IS A MOST PRECIOUS TREASURE.

For the Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians know and have. For though we had the bones of all the saints or all holy and consecrated garments upon a heap, still that would help us nothing; for all that is a dead thing which can sanctify nobody. But God's Word is the treasure which sanctifies everything, and by which even all the saints themselves were sanctified. At whatever hour, then, God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, not because of the external work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all. Therefore I constantly say that all our life and work must be ordered according to God's Word, if it is to be God-pleasing or holy. Where this is done, this commandment is in force and being fulfilled. On the contrary, any observance or work that is practiced without God's Word is unholy before God, no matter how brilliantly it may shine, even though it be covered with relics, such as the fictitious spiritual orders, which know nothing of God's Word and seek holiness in their own works.

WE MUST NOT ONLY HEAR THE WORD, BUT ALSO KEEP IT.

Therefore not only those sin against this commandment who grossly misuse and desecrate the holy day, as those who on account of their greed or frivolity neglect to hear God's Word or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine; but also that other crowd, who listen to God's Word as to any other trifle, and only from custom come to preaching, and go away again, and at the end of the year know as little of it as at the beginning. For hitherto the opinion prevailed that you had properly hallowed Sunday when you had heard a mass or the Gospel read; but no one cared for God's Word, as also no one taught it. Now, while we have God's Word, we nevertheless do not correct the abuse; we suffer ourselves to be preached to and admonished, but we listen without seriousness and care. Know, therefore, that you must be concerned not only about hearing, but also about learning and retaining it in memory, and do not think that it is optional with you or of no great importance, but that it is God's commandment, who will require of you how you have heard, learned, and honored His Word.

Luther's Large Catechism, Third Commandment



CHRISTIANITY IS **UNIQUE** AMONG THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

There are, in fact, only TWO religions in the world when **all** religions — organized religions and personally-held “religious” philosophies — are categorized according to their simplest characteristics (according to their “least common denominator,” a math term well-known even to our children). There are those which are **religions of works** (which accounts for *all but one* of the thousands of religions in this world) and the **religion of grace**, the true Christian religion, which *stands alone* according to that characteristic. We could, of course, also use the characteristics of “**true**” and “**false**” to separate the various religions; but that would be argued against as a “*subjective* difference” by those, like Pontius Pilate, who claim that there is no such thing as **objective truth** (John 18:38), even though “*the truth*” is a resounding theme and a concept-in-reality throughout the Holy Scriptures. There are, however, three very unique characteristics of Christianity, among also others, that set it aside from all other religions of the world; and our article will treat these three in particular.

The **FIRST** is that the *true* Christian religion exclusively preaches, teaches, confesses and practices the existence of a **unique God**. No other religion has a god that remotely corresponds to or even approximates or imitates the God of Christianity. As we state in our *Catechism* (CPH, 1943 Ed.), “The only true God is the **Triune God**, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons in one divine being or essence.” The *Athanasian Creed* declares: “The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods but one God. ...And in this **Trinity** none is before or after other; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal, so that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped.” The **unity** of this Triune God, “*the Lord*,” the great “*I AM*,” “*Jehovah*,” was stated with perfect clarity by Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 6, when he said: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord*” (v. 7); and the **trinity** in this unity is clearly taught in such passages as Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19; John 14:26; II Corinthians 13:14; and I John 5:7 among also others.

The vast majority of the world’s *pagan* religions are *polytheistic*, that is, they teach and profess belief in *many* gods, deities which are “specialized” according to the needs and desires of the people. We can immediately cite as an example the religion of the ancient Greeks, against which the Apostle Paul in particular had to contend on his missionary journeys. Beside Zeus and Hera, the “father” and “mother” of the god-family which was said to live on Mt. Olympus, there were twelve other major gods and goddesses and a multiplicity of other deities, Titans, giants, and divine concepts in a hierarchy of “supreme beings” which the Greeks worshiped and invoked. They were gods who often quarreled with, plotted to undermine, and even battled against one another. Interestingly (but not surprisingly), Luke reports in Acts chapter 17 that, on Mars’ Hill in Athens, the Greeks there had an altar dedicated to “*The Unknown God*,” the God to which their conscience bore witness (Romans 1:19-20; 2:15) but the God concerning which they had little if any information and was virtually unknown to them, the God whom Paul identified as “*Lord of heaven and earth*” (v. 24), the one true and living God, the one God who never appeared in their mythology (vv. 15-32).

There are, of course, also *monotheistic* religions, religions which profess belief in **one** god, but a god which is *not* the Triune God. Among such religions we can mention as examples Islam, Deism (including the Masonic lodges), Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, the Bahá’í faith, and mod-

ern Judaism (which rejects Jesus Christ as God – cf. John 5:23). It must be clearly understood that, contrary to the claim made by “politically-correct” modernists that Allah and all monotheistic gods are really *the same deity* (“God”) as the *Christian* God, which differ from one another only in their *different names*, such monotheistic religions as Islam, Deism and Judaism will dispute that, particularly when we insist on Jesus’ declaration: “*He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him*” (John 5:23). Therefore, the “God of Our Fathers,” hailed in patriotic songs in the United States, is not really the *Christian* God at all, but the Deistic “Supreme Being” whose name appears on our coinage, the “Grand Architect of the Universe” of the Masons, and the “God” of the Scouting organizations, clearly **NOT** the **Triune God**, as all of those organizations freely admit.

Therefore, as noted above, the first characteristic that sets *true* Christianity apart as *unique* among the religions of the world is its confession of a **unique God**, the **Triune God**, the **only true and living God**. “*There is none other God but one*” (I Corinthians 8:4). “We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. ...He, therefore, that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity” (*Athanasian Creed*). Consequently, nominally “Christian” churches and denominations that deny the Trinity do not belong to *true Christianity*, including therefore all “modernists” in whatever denomination they may find themselves.

The **SECOND** characteristic of *true* Christianity that makes it *unique* among the world’s religions is its **unique source and norm of theology**. No other religion in the world professes that “**Holy Scripture alone** is the **only** source and norm [standard] of Christian faith and life” or “of Christian doctrine and practice.” The canonical Scriptures consist of the thirty-nine books of the **Old Testament**, “*given by inspiration of God*” (II Timothy 3:16) to the divine prophets, and the twenty-seven books of the **New Testament** “*in the words which the Holy Ghost [taught]*” (I Corinthians 2:13) to the evangelists and apostles. The true Christian Church, St. Paul writes, is “*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus Christ identifies the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments as **His Word** and declares: “*If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall*

know *the truth*, and the truth shall make you *free*” (John 8:31-32). That simple passage adequately describes the adherents of “*true Christianity*” and the source and norm of their faith.

Some of the world’s *pagan* religions too have so-called “holy books” — some quite ancient, some of rather recent origin — which they regard either as their *sole authority* or as *an authority* in addition to which they have *other* writings, legends, myths, traditions and folklore from which they draw their principles and teachings. Of *ancient* books we can cite as an example the *Holy Koran (Qur’an)* of **Islam**, dating from 609 - 632 A.D., the revelation of Allah to his prophet Mohammed, verbally committed to him by the angel Gabriel and, according to Muslims, preserved inviolate to the present day. — Of *recent* books we recognize the *Book of Mormon*, dating from 1830, as the chief “holy book” of the cult falsely called “**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints**,” the book which founder Joseph Smith called “the keystone of our religion.” Its text, say the Mormons, was handed down to Joseph Smith by an angel named Moroni on golden tablets written in an unknown, ancient Egyptian-like language. But Moroni gave Smith the key to its translation; and after the tablets were transcribed and translated, Moroni reclaimed them; and they were never seen again. That book, also known since 1982 as “*Another Testament of Jesus Christ*” (cf. Galatians 1:8), together with four other major “sacred texts” and contemporary revelations and statements of the church’s prophets and apostles, form the basis of its teachings. In spite of its outward trappings, which deceive the unwary into regarding it as a “Christian” religion, the Latter Day Saints movement is a **cult** that does not belong to Christianity.

Within the pale of *nominal* Christianity, there are denominations that, quite frankly and admittedly, teach that Holy Scripture *alone* is **NOT** the “*only* source and norm” of their doctrine and practice. **The Church of Rome**, for example, *includes* Scripture *among* its “traditions;” but it teaches that its doctrine and practice flow from “the Sacred Tradition of the Church” — including, beside Scripture, the canons and decrees of their church councils and popes, their encyclicals (or official letters), and traditions (including legends) that have been handed down through the ages. When they use Scripture, it’s not *sola Scriptura* but Scripture “as interpreted by Holy Mother Church.”

And some denominations, including the **Reformed** bodies, though they *claim* to rest their teachings exclusively on the Bible, rely upon rationalistic “*private interpretation[s]*” (II Peter 1:20) of Scripture to support

many of their unscriptural doctrinal positions; and the *enthusiasts* among them (Pentecostal groups and other such assemblies) rely also upon private, extra-scriptural revelations as contemporary messages from God.

There are also denominations which this author unashamedly labels “*so-called Lutheran*” bodies, church bodies that parade under Luther’s name and claim Luther’s doctrine and practice but, upon closer examination than “name-only” identification, bear little if any resemblance to orthodox Lutheranism because, either in doctrine or practice, they have veered off the *unique* source and standard of faith and life (*sola Scriptura*) and have accommodated themselves to whatever is popular, politically-correct, or practically convenient in these latter days of sore distress. Easiest to identify among these is the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** — now in fellowship with the *Presbyterians* and with the *Episcopal Church* — and practically indistinguishable anymore from generic “community,” non-denominational, politically correct and doctrinally-indifferent church bodies. A purely casual look at its website shocks the orthodox Christian with unscriptural and anti-scriptural positions on Holy Scripture itself, evolution, abortion, homosexuality and gay marriage, open communion, indiscriminate fellowship, whether faith in Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation, and on and on. It is so latitudinarian that just about “anything goes” in matters of doctrine and practice. That church body does NOT represent *true* Christianity!

Thus a characteristic of *true* Christianity that makes it *unique* among the world’s religions is its *unique source and norm of theology*. No other religion in the world professes that “**Holy Scripture alone** is the *only* source and norm [standard] of Christian faith and life” or “of Christian doctrine and practice.”

The **THIRD** characteristic of *true* Christianity that makes it *unique* among the world’s religions is its *unique doctrine of JUSTIFICATION*. The age-old question of how a mere mortal wins notice, gains acceptance, and earns favor with his “god” (or with “the gods”) is still today, after thousands of years, the “hot button topic” among the world’s religions. Since the fall of man into sin (Genesis 3), “*the carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7). There is and always has been a diametric disconnect between the will of God and the will of men. And how a mere mortal, who has angered or displeased his “god” or “gods,” can compensate the deity for his failure, for his neglect, for his disobe-

dience, for his rebellion, and re-gain the favor he once enjoyed is still today the question that all religions try to address. As they seek to be *the agency of reconciliation* between the **exalted deity** (who demands compliance, undivided loyalty, and uncompromising perfection from his creatures) and the **lowly creature** (who is incapable of perfection, resentful of authority, and indolent in his behavior), the religions of the world *again* fall into **two camps**. In the opening paragraph of our article, we observed that the two camps are, in their simplest terms, **religions of works** (which accounts for *all but one* of the thousands of religions in this world) and the **religion of grace**, the true Christian religion, which *stands alone* according to that characteristic.

With the single exception of the *true* Christian religion, ALL of the world's religions — from the polytheistic pagans to the monotheistic but non-Christian and anti-trinitarian religions — ALL teach (and practice) the principle that man, alienated from God (or “the gods”) by disobedience and unfaithfulness, must seek reconciliation and favor with him (them) by **performing works** acceptable to the deity and in service to it (him, them). It is **the religion of the Law**, the religion that the unconverted know “*by nature*” in their conscience, the **ONLY** religion that is recognizable according to man's **natural knowledge**. “*When the Gentiles, which have not the Law [the revealed Law of God], do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another*” (Romans 2:14-15).

The mercy and grace of God in Christ are **NOT known by nature** but art **made known** [*manifested*] in **the Gospel**, the “Good news” which is revealed in the Scriptures, as St. Paul also testifies, saying: “*But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets [the written Scriptures], even the righteousness of God which is by faith of [in] Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe*” (Romans 3:21-22).

Only the *true* Christian religion teaches the **unique truth** that a man is **JUSTIFIED** in the sight of God (made right with Him) and eternally saved **by grace through faith**... “*NOT of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Only the *true* Christian religion teaches the **unique truth** that salvation is the result of God's merciful **JUSTIFICATION** of sinful man *for Christ's sake*. Because Christ's perfect, all-sufficient *vicarious atonement* for the sins of “**ALL**” (II Corinthians

5:15) *satisfied* **God's immutable justice** with respect to the "**whole world**" (I John 2:2), both as to His **demands** (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48) and as to the **punishment** He threatens against sin and sinners (Galatians 3:10; Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20a), God was able unilaterally to "*reconcil[e] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (II Corinthians 5:19). He had already imputed them to Christ (v. 21), both to bear (Isaiah 53:4, 6b, 11b; I Peter 2:24) and to expiate or pay for (Galatians 3:13; I Peter 1:18-19); and He was able to impute the perfect righteousness of Christ to the "**ungodly**" (Romans 4:5) because, by His active obedience, Christ had earned that righteousness for **all mankind** (5:18-19). God's forgiveness and Christ's righteousness imputed to **all** is known as "objective" justification. Moreover, only the *true* Christian religion teaches the **unique truth** that a man accepts, receives, and has for himself personally God's justification *alone by faith* (Romans 5:1), not as a meritorious work but as the *receiving means* whereby God personally imputes His forgiveness and Christ's righteousness to sinful men (Romans 4:5; 9:30-32). This is known as "subjective" justification. God's gift of justification and the imputation of Christ's righteousness "*without the deeds of the Law*" (Romans 3:28) are rejected and thus forfeited by unbelief (Mark 16b; II Peter 2:1; Galatians 5:4-5; etc.)

ALL the *other religions* of the world teach justification and salvation *by works* — either solely by works (Pelagianism) — the *heathen religions*, as well as Deists, Unitarians, lodges and Scouts, all unchristian *cults*, and, in short, all who deny the *vicarious atonement* of Christ for the sins of the world (John 1:29b, etc.) — OR by grace coupled with works (Semi-pelagianism), such as the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholic churches, who make man's works a contributing factor to his salvation, who claim that man's works done according to his "free will" merit God's favor and gain His "infused" grace, which in turn enables man to earn his own salvation. Against BOTH of these fundamental errors, *true* Christianity confesses the **unique truth** that "*a man is justified by faith, without* [totally apart from] *the deeds of the Law*" (Romans 3:28), and that, as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "*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*" (3:8-9). Every teaching that attributes forgiveness and salvation to works of merit, to improvement in character, to man's effort (successful or unsuccessful), to lesser guilt in those ignorant of the Gospel, to a cooperative spirit, to lesser resistance to the Holy Spirit in conversion, and even to a sanctified life (justification by means of sanctification) — every such teach-

ing is **totally false** and sets its adherents **outside** of *true* Christianity and on the road to everlasting perdition (Matthew 7:13; Galatians 5:4)!

While there are also other teachings which set *true* Christianity apart from all the other religions of the world as a truly *unique* religion, these three stand out as being the most definitive, the most critical, and the most distinctive. All those who have, profess, teach and practice these and all the other doctrines of Holy Scripture in their purity and administer the holy Sacraments according to Christ's own institution comprise *the true visible Church on earth* (Ephesians 4:3-6; John 8:31-32; Jude 3b; etc.) and are, by God's grace, adherents of *true* Christianity, a religion clearly *unique* among the religions of the world. May God continue to "strengthen and preserve US steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end," for "this is His gracious and good will" (Luther, *Third Petition* of the Lord's Prayer)!

— D. T. M.

Regarding the Differences Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches

*In our day [1889!], people either do not make this distinction at all, or at least not in the right manner. They not only fail to declare it the Christian's duty to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox church bodies, but they even declare it to be a Christian virtue when people pay no attention to the doctrinal differences. Yes, they call it presumptuous when a church body maintains that in **all** articles of Christian faith it has the revealed truth of God's Word. We are ridiculed... because we make a strict distinction between orthodox and heterodox churches.*

Franz Pieper

Excerpt from *The Distinction Between Orthodox & Heterodox Churches*, Thesis III.

Churches in Fellowship

ORTHODOX LUTHERAN CHURCH OF EKATERINBURG

Ekaterinburg, Russia

The Rev. Roman G. Schurganoff, Pastor

P. O. Box 27

620039 Ekaterinburg, RUSSIA

E-mail: Schurganoff@mail.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

The Rev. Innocent Karibo, Pastor

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abalama, Nigeria

The Rev. Elison B. Agborubere, Balaiyi Thompson and Bateinm Bestman, Pastors

Thompson Compound Abalama

Abalama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. CLEMENT'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria

The Rev. Timothy Biobele Aaron, 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

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Kula, Nigeria

Pastoral Vacancy at present

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Kula, Rivers State, NIGERIA

ST. PAUL'S NYEMONI LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL

Abonnema, Nigeria

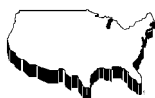
The Rev. Nimi B. Fyeface and

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

P. O. Box 123

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Directory of Member Congregations

www.concordialutheranconf.com

GOOD SHEPHERD EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the Web at:

4090 S. Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730 GoodShepherdLutheranChurchTucson.com

Worship Service 9:30 a.m.

Telephone (520) 721-7618

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

The Rev. DANIEL P. MENSING, Pastor

550 North Harrison Road, Apt. 11107, Tucson, AZ 85748 Pastor: (520) 448-8694

E-mail: goodshepherdlutherantucson@gmail.com

PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the Web at:

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

Sunday School & Bible Class 8:30 a.m.

Telephone: (708) 532-4288

Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID T. MENSING, Pastor

17151 South Central Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913 Pastor: (708) 532-9035

E-mail: pastormensing@yahoo.com

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355

Telephone: (541) 258-2941

Sunday School & Bible Class 10:00 a.m.

Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. PAUL E. BLOEDEL, Pastor

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355

Pastor: (541) 258-2941

E-mail: revbloedel@gmail.com

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the Web at:

5350 South Fountain Street, Seattle, WA 98178

StLukes-CLC.com

Sunday School & Bible Class 9:00 a.m.

Telephone: (206) 723-1078

Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

The Rev. EDWARD J. WORLEY, Pastor

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118

Pastor: (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

On the Web at:

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

StMarksEvLutheran.com

Adult Bible Class 3:00 p.m.

Telephone: (708) 757-6859

Worship Service 4:00 p.m.

The Rev. DAVID J. MENSING, Pastor

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

Pastor: (708) 655-7549

E-mail: d_mensing@hotmail.com

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the Web at:

300 North Ridgeland Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302

TrinityEvLutheran.com

Sunday School & Bible Class 9:00 a.m.

Telephone: (708) 386-6773

Worship Service 10:15 a.m.

The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor

233 North Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302

Pastor: (708) 386-4145

E-mail: robertjlietz@gmail.com

**The Sixty-Fourth
Annual Convention**
of the
Concordia Lutheran Conference
June 26th, 27th and 28th, 2015

at
Peace Ev. Lutheran Church
Oak Forest, Illinois
The Rev. David T. Mensing, Pastor

with the
Plenary Pastoral Conference
on June 23rd and 24th
and the
Board of Directors Meeting on June 25th

Convention Motto:
The Sufficiency of Scripture
Ephesians 2:20

The Friday Keynote Sermon is on **Ephesians 2:20**
The Sunday Convention Sermon is on **Luke 16:29**

The Convention Essay:
*"Holy Scripture — The Only Source and Norm
of Christian Faith and Life"*