

*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.

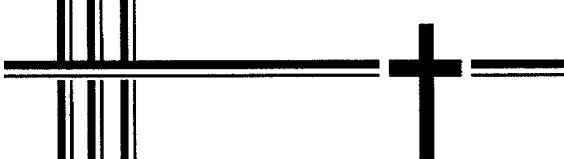
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God was  
manifested in  
the flesh

—1 Timothy 3:16





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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:**

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture**, what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

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

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

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

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

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

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

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*On the anniversary of Luther's birth, November 10, 1483...*

## Dur Thanksgiving for God's Gift of Martin Luther

*"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake; and be at peace among yourselves." — I Thessalonians 5:12–13*



When you read this, our Reformation celebrations for the year will be in the past. But, as our title plainly indicates, our gratitude in the Lord for Luther's monumental work continues as we mark the anniversary of his birth. Sadly, however, many who call themselves "Lutheran" celebrate the Reformation as a mere historical movement and Luther as a mere historical figure upon which they look back as markers along the road of time. The doctrinal issues of the Reformation are of no special importance to them *today*, and the sacrifices made by Luther and our orthodox Lutheran fathers to return us to and preserve us in the truth of God's Word are no different than the sacrifices made by so many others for "noble causes" here in this world. For this reason many do not pause to give the Reformation much thought at all, even on October 31<sup>st</sup>; and November 10<sup>th</sup> passes practically without notice. Such people have "moved on" in their lives and regard themselves to be "beyond" what they consider to be rather silly squabbles and trivial quarrels of the past and are ready to work together with all whose main desire is to make this world a better place in which to live. "Forget the past," they say, "and co-operate in works of love for one's fellowman." And many "Lutheran" clergy today are in the forefront of this anti-Scriptural thinking, having little or no concern for what God says in His Word; and their indifference to sound doctrine and practice actually sounds good and proper to the uninformed, to the "peace-at-any-price" crowd, and to those who regard the church as just one of so many social agencies in the world for the "betterment of mankind."

But those who, by God's grace, know and believe that the Word of God, Holy Scripture, is His very own verbally-inspired, complete, clear, and unchangeable revelation of Himself to mankind, the only source and standard of Christian faith and life, and the only means by which the Holy Ghost brings sinful men to the knowledge of the truth and faith in their Savior, also realize that God used Martin Luther to restore His Church to its foundation (Ephesians 2:20), so that the true visible church on earth continues to stand firm on Bible truth. And Martin Luther himself, though he was a sinner like all of us and unworthy of God's grace, should be remembered as a faithful pastor and teacher who stood firm on that foundation, battled against all contrary powers of his day in both the church and the government, and out of love to God, who rescued him from his sins and gave him in Christ Jesus an incorruptible crown in heaven, worked tirelessly so that we could have those vital blessings for ourselves.

Now, for this November-December issue, we submit Martin Luther on the anniversary of his birth as part of our *Thanksgiving* remembrance of all that God has done for us and for our *salvation*. While Thanksgiving Day is not strictly speaking a church festival but a nationally mandated opportunity to thank God chiefly for His *temporal* blessings — as people sit around tables loaded down with more food and drink than they can enjoy, we Christians thank God first and foremost for the *spiritual* blessings we enjoy as His children by faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26). We have a brief short-list of these blessings in the *General Prayers* that we commonly use in our worship services: We thank God His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for the means of grace in their truth and purity, and for the sure and certain hope (that is, anticipation) of glory everlasting by faith in His merits. Is there a connection between what we have said about Martin Luther and the *spiritual* blessings we enjoy? There certainly is, for it is through Luther as His instrument that the knowledge and enjoyment of these blessings were restored to us after having been systematically hidden for over a thousand years of “Dark Ages” under the papacy. It is indeed likely that many would not even be celebrating Christmas were it not for Luther's emphasis on what God has done for mankind in having His only-begotten Son be born on earth to suffer and die for the sins of the world and thus to make the payment necessary to satisfy God's justice and to secure all men's forgiveness and salvation. “*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).

- Therefore, we thank God that Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany on November 10<sup>th</sup> in 1483, nine years before Columbus discovered America.
- We thank God that Luther's father enrolled him in various schools so that he could gain knowledge that many others did not have, for not all children went to school at that time.
- We thank God that Luther did not become a lawyer to fulfill the desires of his father but was led to acquire the knowledge, the skill and the workmanlike ability eventually to be about his *heavenly* Father's business in the work of the church.
- We thank God that Luther was troubled by his sins, convicted by God's Law as being undeserving of His favor, even though in vain he prayed to the saints in a misdirected struggle to try to find peace for his tortured soul.
- We thank God that Luther learned from the Gospel in the Holy Scriptures to know his Savior and the grace of God to sinful men for Christ's sake, that he was brought to saving confidence in Christ's merits alone for reconciliation with God, and that he learned to embrace the justifying grace of God by faith without the works of the Law.
- We thank God that Luther was able, on the basis of Scripture alone, to recognize all the errors of Romanism which had led people by the millions into spiritual destruction and damnation, and to combat them fearlessly in the face of intimidation, jeopardy of his safety, and even the threat of death by confiding in His Savior's help and promised deliverance.
- We thank God that Luther recognized that the conquest of Mohammedanism and the unbridled power of the bishop of Rome had led to almost a total disappearance of the truth of the Gospel, and that he came to realize that a real reformation was needed to restore the Bible to its proper place and thus to bring back the truth about salvation by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, without the deeds of the Law.
- We thank God that on October 31, 1517 Luther took the bold initial step of posting his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, showing that the sale of indulgences, worthless pieces of paper that promised people release from the punishment

of their sins in purgatory in exchange for a payment of money, was contrary to Bible teaching.

- We thank God that Luther did not recant his writings based on God's Word, and that, in a confrontation with Roman Catholic leaders in the city of Worms, Germany in 1521, he declared that his conscience was bound by the Word of God and that he was standing firm in what he had said and written.

- We thank God that Luther was not taken captive and murdered by the Romanists following his ban by the emperor but was "kidnapped" by friends and taken to the Wartburg Castle, where he was able in safety to translate the New Testament into German so that all his countrymen could read the precious Word of God for themselves.

- Finally, we thank God that he permitted Luther to live for 63 years. During the years of His God-blessed, productive life he published a translation of both the Old and New Testaments; he wrote many hymns which we still sing regularly in our church services; he preached on a daily basis; he taught in the theological school of the University of Wittenberg; he supplied us with two catechisms or books of instruction in the principal doctrines of God's Word, the smaller of which we still use in the instruction of our children; he either wrote, helped to draft, or collaborated in the writing of several of the Lutheran Confessions; his collected writings fill fifty-five volumes in their English translation and twenty-three large volumes in the original language (the "St. Louis Edition" of Luther's *Sämmtliche Schriften*); he married and had six children, thereby also teaching us by his own example the importance of a truly Christian home life; and he died on February 18, 1546, also in Eisleben, Germany, where he had gone to resolve a dispute between two of his brethren.

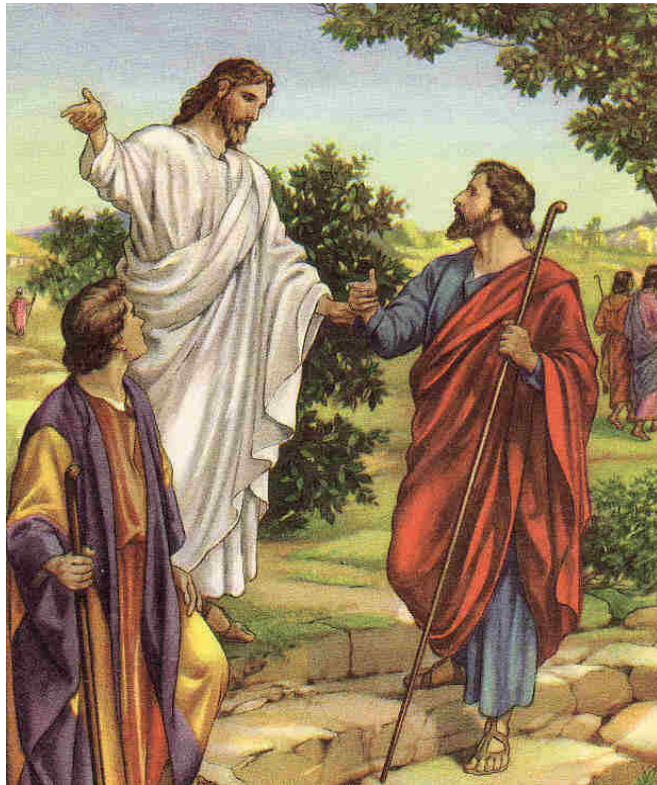
Now, the Scripture passage at the head of this article instructs us to know those who labor among us and are over us in the Lord and admonish us. The passage refers specifically to those in the pastoral office and ministry who are involved in the special work of proclaiming and teaching to us the precious Word of God, the Law in its sternness and the Gospel in its sweetness, for our souls' welfare. They are "*over [us] in the Lord,*" ruling us in the Kingdom of Grace with His Word as His ambassadors; and they "*admonish [us]*" as they "*reprove, rebuke [and] exhort with all longsuffering [great patience] and doctrine [the teachings of Holy Scripture]*" (II Timothy 4:2). We are not only to

“*know them,*” to “*esteem them very highly in love*” because of their work on our behalf, but also to cultivate with them not an adversarial relationship (that some people have with their pastors) but a relationship of love and respect — for the Lord’s sake and for our own sakes — that we may “*be at peace among [our]selves.*” This relationship should continue even after they are no longer personally “in the picture,” as, for example, those faithful pastors and teachers who have already gone before us to be with their Savior in heaven — like Luther himself. “*Remember them...who have spoken unto you the Word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation*” (Hebrews 13:7). And, “*be[ing] at peace among [our]selves*” is the evident fruit of fellowship in the Gospel as we “*endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit*” on the basis of God’s Word “*in the bond of peace*” which, to the world, certainly passes all human understanding!

The lack of such unity, the lack of love and respect for the Word of God and for the faithful heralds who proclaim it to men in its purity, invariably results in the kind of strife and discord that was evident already at Luther’s time, before, during, and after the Reformation, when men who were not joined in true unity were not “*at peace among [them] selves.*” but engaged in one controversy after another, as if all of Luther’s work had been for nothing. Happily, in the *Book of Concord* [Agreement] of 1580, thirty-four years after Luther’s death, the chief controversies had all been resolved on the basis of God’s Word; and by God’s grace, in spite of controversies that once raged also in our own Conference, we today stand in that same “*unity of the Spirit,*” in real **Concordia**, on the same basis, on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), and are “*at peace among [our]selves*” to the glory of God!

We thank our Lord for the peace that we have found, by God’s grace, through the work of Martin Luther and the many faithful preachers and confessors of the Word since his time. We “*esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (I Thessalonians 5:13). And with the Psalmist we gratefully proclaim, “*O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever!*” (Psalm 106:1).

— D. G. R.



## *Anticipating the Advent of Christ*

*“Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said unto Him, ‘Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?’ Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.’”*

— Matthew 11:2-5

Anticipation can be bad or good. When it is all about fear and dread, all about a negative future, it is *sinful* worry and anxiety. Such anticipation is forbidden by God (Matthew 6:34). However, when it is all about hope and looking forward to a positive future, based on God’s promises



in His Word, it is akin to faith, “*the substance of things hoped for*” (Hebrews 11:1a). Such anticipation is not only *commanded* by God as the correct moral response to His ever trustworthy promises, His faithful Word, but is *created* and *preserved* by God through His Word (Romans 5:2, 4; 8:24-25; 15:4, 13; Hebrews 6:18; I Peter 1:13).

Our theme points us to the pre-Christmas season of Advent. “Advent” means “coming” (from the Latin); it is a season to prepare for the coming of the Son of God. In general, the season calls for repentance of sin and joyful expectation of the Lord’s gracious advent by way of the Gospel. In history, God used John the Baptist to that end. Holy Scripture teaches us that John, the son of the priest Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth (Luke 1:40-45, 57 ff.), was sent by God to announce the coming of the long anticipated Messiah, the Christ of God, the One Anointed as Savior (Luke 1:13-17; compare Matthew 11:7-14; Luke 1:67-79). John had fulfilled his office as the forerunner of Christ, preparing the people for His manifestation to Israel by preaching the Law and the Gospel rightly divided, through a “*baptism of repentance*” (Acts 13:24) for the remission of sins (Matthew 3:1 ff.).

The clear and uncompromised preaching of the Law of God also made John many enemies, including the Jewish religious leaders and ungodly public governmental officials. John was put into jail as the result of the enmity certain people had toward the Word of God that John proclaimed. Unmoved by either the fear or favor of men, John had proclaimed only God’s truth; he had preached the Word “*out of season*” (II Timothy 4:2) and had suffered for it. In particular, King Herod, who had committed gross adultery with his brother’s wife, had placated his adulteress-wife, Herodias, by putting John in prison. We read Mark’s explanation in chapter 6: “*Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John and bound him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, ‘It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.’ Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him and would have killed him; but she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things and heard him gladly*” (vv. 17-20). Later, however, in order to fulfill a wicked oath to reward Salome, Herodias’ daughter, for a lustful dance in his presence, Herod executed John by beheading him (vv. 21-28).

While John was still alive, but in Herod’s jail, he heard ... “*the works of Christ.*” Yes, the works of **Christ**. The works Jesus performed, His

preaching and miracles, proved Him to be *“the very Christ”* (John 7:26). The Incarnate Prophet revealed His person by word and deed, confounding all those who would gainsay Him in His office, proving Himself to be *“very Christ”* (Acts 9:22), the real and true *Messiah*, the authentic and genuine one!

Why, then, did John send two of his disciples to Christ with this question regarding His identity: *“Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?”* (Matthew 11:3)? Did John do this for his own sake, or was it for the sake of *his disciples* who needed to “move on,” as it were, to follow Christ? In Luke’s Gospel we hear how the raising of the widow’s son at Nain (Luke 7:11-15) immediately preceded what occurs in our text. The reaction of the “general public” is telling: *“There came a fear on all; and they glorified God, saying that ‘a great prophet is risen up among us,’ and that ‘God hath visited His people.’ And this rumor of Him went forth throughout all Judaea and throughout all the region round about. And the disciples of John showed him of all these things”* (vv. 16-18). Clearly, the miracle pointed to His divine office and origin; for, as Nicodemus correctly stated: *“We know that Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him”* (John 3:2). Doing miracles by *His own power*, particularly His own resurrection, *“declared”* Jesus to be *God incarnate* (Romans 1:4)! Remember what the healed blind man said to the Pharisees about the genuineness of His origin? *“Why herein is a marvelous thing, that ye know not from whence He is, and yet He hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshiper of God and doeth His will, him He heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, He could do nothing”* (John 9:30-33). Remember what happened after he was cast out of the synagogue? *“Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and, when He had found him, He said unto him, ‘Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?’ And Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind.’ And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words [no comma] and said unto Him, ‘Are we blind also?’ Jesus said unto them, ‘If ye were blind, ye should have no sin. But now ye say, ‘We see;’ therefore your sin remaineth”* (John 9:35-41). To deny the evident and infallible proof is malicious and damning! Did *John* need further proof? Hardly! Dr. C. F. W. Walther remarks:

Without a doubt, John the Baptist was firmly convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. He *could* not doubt that, for God had said to him, “Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:33). And John saw this when he baptized Jesus and at the same time heard God’s voice from heaven: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). He, therefore, also preached, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord” (Matthew 3:3). “There standeth one among you, whom ye know not ... Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:26, 29). Not for his sake at all did he have Jesus asked this question, but for the sake of his weak disciples. (Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent, Matthew 11:2-10, *Year of Grace*, D. E. Heck publisher & translator).

When the two disciples of John ask Jesus this question, how does He respond? With a stern rebuke? With a thundering condemnation? Not at all! “*Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them’*” (vv. 4-5). When we approach Jesus weak in faith and with a desire to grow in faith on the basis of His Word, He readily answers our requests. God never refuses prayers such as “*Lord, increase our faith*” (Luke 17:5), or “*Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!*” (Mark 9:24). The Bible says: “*A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench*” (Isaiah 42:3). Jesus tenderly invites the weak: “*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ... for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls*” (Matthew 11:28-29). And He adds this promise: “*Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37).

Turn to Him in prayer for a stronger faith; and, by His Word, according to His promise, He will increase your faith! (Cf. Psalm 20:2; 27:14; 119:28; Isaiah 41:10). Behold how He instructs John’s disciples with the Word of God. He tells them to consider the audio-visual evidence, what they hear with their ears and see with their eyes, and compare that to what the Word of God says of the Messiah. Jesus proves to them that He is the Messiah, first of all, because He performs the *miracles* of the Messiah, literally fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies which predict that the Christ would perform great miracles of omnipotence and grace.

*“The blind receive their sight.”* Consider this example: *“And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, ‘Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.’ And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus saith unto them, ‘Believe ye that I am able to do this?’ They said unto Him, ‘Yea, Lord.’ Then touched He their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith be it unto you.’ And their eyes were opened”* (Matthew 9:27-30a). This certainly was a mighty proof of His deity and office.

Some refuse to accept such incontrovertible proof. We already referred to the Pharisees’ reaction to another healing of the blind. Their reaction revealed their *spiritual* blindness: *“Then again called they the man that was blind and said unto him, ‘Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner.’ He answered and said, ‘Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.’ Then said they to him again, ‘What did He to thee? How opened He thine eyes?’ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and ye did not hear. Wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be His disciples?’ Then they reviled him and said, ‘Thou art His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses. As for this fellow, we know not from whence He is”* (John 9:24-29). No wonder Jesus condemned them as *“blind guides”* (Matthew 23:16, 24) as *“fools and blind”* (Matthew 23:17, 19). The *“blind Pharisee”* (Matthew 23:26) whom the Lord Jesus condemned was, at heart, the same as the one in the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9ff.), the same as those to whom Jesus spoke the parable originally, namely, *“certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others”* (v. 9). The attitude of the Pharisee in the parable is the exact same attitude of gross spiritual blindness, of utter darkness, which dwells in all men by nature. All men are conceived and born into the world spiritually blind, dead and totally at enmity with God in their carnal mind: *“You...were dead in trespasses and sins”* (Ephesians 2:1). *“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be”* (Romans 8:7). *“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14). Hypocrites are those with an outward form of Godliness but without true spiritual power, no genuine saving faith. The Apostle Peter warns against falling into such hypocrisy when he tells true believers to live a life of Godly fruit (II Peter 1:5-8), a life of fruit which corresponds to true repentance, adding: *“He that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins”* (II Peter 1:9). Just as the Pharisees *remained* blind because

they refused to recognize their need to be enlightened concerning their sin and guilt and their need for rescue (Romans 2:19-20). Even so, former Christians *became* spiritually blind when they forgot their very same need; and the solution that God provided from eternity and continues to provide for all mankind (forgiveness, the purging of sin in Christ's blood – I John 1:7) no longer interested them (Revelation 3:17)!

May God *ever* deliver us from our innate blindness lest we become blind once again! May God *ever* perform His miraculous work of enlightenment through the Gospel: *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (II Corinthians 4:6).

What other works did the Savior perform and point out to John's disciples? *“The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear.”* The Scripture states: *“Great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and He healed them insomuch that the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified the God of Israel”* (Matthew 15:30-31). Yea, even *“the dead [were] raised up”* (Matthew 11:5). To Jairus' daughter Jesus said: *“Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise;”* and she was called back from the dead (Matthew 9:25; Mark 5:42). To the son of the widow of Nain Jesus said: *“Young man, I say unto thee, Arise”* (Luke 7:14); and he sat up alive and began to speak! To Lazarus of Bethany Jesus said, *“Lazarus, come forth”* (John 11:43); and he who had been dead for four days walked out of his tomb alive!

There can be no doubt that Jesus literally fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies which predicted that the Messiah would perform great miracles. Isaiah foretold, for example: *“Say to them that are of a fearful heart, ‘Be strong; fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart [as a deer], and the tongue of the dumb sing”* (35:4-6). *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them*

*beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified” (61:1-3).*

While miracles cannot produce faith, they do “confirm” the Word of God (Mark 16:20). In the case of Christ’s miracles, they prove that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament predictions regarding the power and compassion of the Messiah. Even the people were amazed: “*Many of the people believed on Him and said, ‘When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?’*” (John 7:31). Jesus said to them: “*But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me*” (John 5:36). “*If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him*” (John 10:37-38).

Now Christ Jesus not only fulfilled the Scripture regarding the *miracles* of the Messiah, He also preached the *doctrine* of the Messiah: “*The poor have the Gospel preached unto them.*” Who are the poor? They are those who are “*poor in spirit*” (Matthew 5:3). Regarding such the Lord says: “*To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word*” (Isaiah 66:2b). Indeed, “*The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit*” (Psalm 34:18). “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise*” (Psalm 51:17). The poor are those crushed and broken in heart by the Law, full of sorrow and contrition regarding their sins before God, those who humbly recognize their guilt and know that they deserve eternal punishment.

The Proverb says: “*There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches*” (13:7). Dr. P. E. Kretzmann notes: “The disciples of Christ are recruited mainly from the poor and weak and base in this world, I Corinthians 1:26-29. But their most indispensable quality is poverty of the soul, that they despair of all their own riches in spiritual matters and rely entirely upon the free grace and the unsearchable riches of Christ” (*Popular Commentary*, N.T., Vol. I, p. 62).

The Apostle Paul says: “*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but*

*loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:7-9).*

Yes, “*the poor have the Gospel preached to them*” that they may be rich in faith and heirs of God’s Kingdom (James 2:5; Revelation 3:18, 2:9; Ephesians 3:8). What, then, is the Gospel? The Gospel is the marvelous good news of our salvation in Christ Jesus. The Gospel declares that Christ fulfilled the Law for us perfectly; “*for Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth*” (Romans 10:4). The Gospel declares that Christ has paid for all our sins, appeasing God’s wrath for us forever; that He “*was delivered [because of] our offenses, and was raised again [because of] our justification*” (Romans 4:25). Dr. Luther says:

To the poor is proclaimed the divine promise of all grace and comfort, offered and brought forward in Christ and through Christ, that whosoever believes shall have all sins forgiven, the law fulfilled, his conscience delivered, and finally have eternal life donated to him. What happier news may a poor, wretched heart and afflicted conscience hear? To make the blind see and to raise the dead is rather a simple thing beside preaching the Gospel to the poor, therefore He places it last, as the greatest and best of all these works. (Cited by P. E. Kretzmann in his *Popular Commentary*, New Testament, Vol. I, p. 62).

By the Gospel God performs spiritual healing. Our divine Physician, Jesus Christ, gives us spiritual eyesight in the place of blindness (Ephesians 1:18-19; Acts 26:18), gives us the ability to hear God’s Word in faith (Romans 10:17; Luke 11:28), raises us from spiritual death to spiritual life (Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13), cleanses us from the guilt of our leprous sin (Acts 15:9, 11; I John 1:8-10), gives us spiritual strength to walk the narrow way in faith (Hebrews 12:12-13), and assures every true believer of life everlasting in heaven as his inheritance of grace (I Peter 1:3-9). In short, the Gospel gives us spiritual health; and if you have spiritual health, you do indeed have everything.

God grant it for Jesus’ sake, the Christ of God, our Savior!

— E. J. W.

*Initial Sermon preached by Seminarian David J. Mensing  
in Oak Forest, Illinois on Sunday, December 2, 2012*

## *First Sunday in Advent*

### **Matthew 21:1-9**

(Standard Gospel)

In the Name of Jesus Christ, the Savior and gracious King of His Church, dearly beloved hearers of His precious Word:

As we begin this year to celebrate the holy Advent season, let us briefly review just what the word “advent” means. The word “advent” comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming.” This term was appropriately given to the period of the church year in which we specially prepare for and meditate upon the coming, or advent, of Christ Jesus, our Savior. This liturgical season always includes the four Sundays immediately preceding Christmas, represented by the four candles on the Advent wreath which we display every year.

During each of these Sundays in Advent, we focus on one of the four of our Savior’s “comings” described by Scripture. These comings, or advents, include first of all, His coming into the world as a little baby, conceived by the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary at His incarnation; secondly, His coming to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in order to begin His great Passion as the Redeemer of the world; thirdly, His coming to us in His precious Word and Sacraments; and finally, His coming at the last day on which He will judge the world.

According to the selection and arrangement of the “standard” Gospel lessons, as found beginning on page 54 in our hymnal, our first Advent text is the account of our Savior’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, in which we see

#### **Christ, the Gracious King of Israel, Come to His People**

(I) visibly in the fullness of time; (II) as promised in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; and (III) as revealed also to us, in these latter times, in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

#### **I.**

In the very beginning of our text, we see that our Lord Jesus was traveling with His disciples to Jerusalem, and that they were drawing nigh to their destination, having arrived at a very near “suburb” of Jerusalem,



called Bethphage. This journey was very significant because not only was Jerusalem the “capital” city of the Jews, God’s chosen people, the location where the temple of God stood and where His visible church was principally recognized; but it was significant also because this journey marked the beginning of the transition from Jesus’ period of public ministry according to His prophetic office to His vicarious suffering and death according to His priestly office, and that what would transpire in Jerusalem would be the completion or accomplishment of that divine, vicarious, worldwide rescue mission by which He would make satisfaction for the sins of the world, the task to which He had been ordained before the foundation of the world as the Redeemer of all mankind.

The Lord Jesus revealed this in the simplest of terms to His disciples, as Matthew recorded this earlier in chapter 16 verse 21, where the substance of that instruction is plainly set forth. We read that “[Jesus] began to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” In addition, Peter, James, and John had been given the special privilege to witness Jesus’ transfiguration, during which they heard Him discuss, with Moses and Elijah, His impending suffering and death at Jerusalem, as this conversation is referred to by Luke in chapter 9 of his Gospel.

As evidenced by the initial reaction of Peter to that instruction (Matthew 16:22), the details regarding His imminent suffering and death were new to His disciples; and, according to their flesh, they resisted the thought of their dear Lord and friend being treated in such a spiteful manner. They did not yet fully understand (Luke 18:34) that the grief, the despal, the rejection of men, the bruising, wounding, affliction, and eventual death that He was to suffer at Jerusalem, as foretold in Isaiah’s prophecy chapter 53, was necessary as the PRICE of the world’s, and thereby also THEIR redemption, the ONLY PAYMENT sufficient enough to pay the penalty of the world’s, and thereby also THEIR guilt before God. What was not new, however, was His special instruction or revelation to them that He was the Son of God and the promised Savior of the world. They had enjoyed this benefit already from the beginning of His public ministry three years before. Because while, according to His prophetic office, the Lord Jesus openly showed Himself to be without doubt the promised Messiah by His preaching and His miracles, starting already with the recruitment of His disciples (John 1:36-51) and changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:11), He often took special time and gracious care with them to expound the meaning of the many parables by means of which He frequently instructed His hearers.

Along the way to Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus continued to show forth His Messiahship by preaching to the crowds that accompanied and followed Him, and by performing miracles in their presence. As they passed through Jericho, for instance, He healed two blind men, one of them named Bartimaeus, whom the children know from their Sunday School lesson. This healing of the blind, this opening of their eyes, was a sign prophesied in the Old Testament, specifically identifying the Messiah as the one who would perform these miracles, as we read in Isaiah 35:5, *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped”* (cp. 42:7).

And now at Bethphage, we read in our text that *“Jesus sent two disciples, saying unto them, ‘Go ye into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her. Loose them, and bring them unto Me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, ‘The Lord hath need of them;’ and straightway he will send them.”* We see here that the Lord Jesus once again manifested one of the divine attributes communicated to His human nature by demonstrating His omniscience in the assignment He gave to His disciples. We read in verse 2 that two disciples were sent into the nearby village in order to fetch for Him an ass, that is, a donkey, and a colt along with it, which Jesus said they would find right away upon their entering the village. They were also to say to anyone that questioned them that *“the Lord hath need of them;”* and Jesus said that this person would immediately comply with the request. As shown in verses 6 and 7 of our text, as well as in a parallel account of the same event in Luke chapter 19, everything happened as Jesus had foretold, even in the questioning and compliance of the animals’ owner.

In verses 6 and 7, we read: *“And the disciples went, and did as Jesus had commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set Him thereon.”* These words show also that the disciples gladly followed these instructions, even in their interaction with the owner of the ass and the colt. They placed their clothing onto the animals for Jesus to ride upon, and joined the multitude in their shouts of praise.

The crowds of people called Jesus the *“Son of David,”* a term used very specially for the promised Messiah, foretold to be from King David’s lineage, to inherit His throne, and to reign and prosper as a King (Jeremiah 23:5). And they prepared a special procession for Him, waving palm branches, and spreading them, as well as even their clothing in the way, as a sort of “red carpet” treatment, fit for a king.

## II.

But what was the basis of those shouts of praise? Indeed, the crowds and the disciples proclaimed that Jesus was the promised Messiah; but why was that such happy news to them? These Messianic followers, as also their ancestors back through the Old Testament, were no strangers to God's holy Law in all its fierceness. They were well acquainted, from the Holy Scriptures, with the account of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin in Genesis chapter three. They had learned from childhood already God's demand of sinful men that they be holy because He is holy, as it is written in Leviticus 19:2. They knew well and acknowledged the extent of sin, as found in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, where it is written, "*There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not*" (v. 20); and they knew also God's just pronouncements against sin and sinners, declaring through the prophet Ezekiel in his eighteenth chapter, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*" (v. 20). As a result of that Law working in their hearts, they had come to understand and acknowledge their natural sinful and condemned state, their filthy status in God's sight because of their sins, and the just punishment they deserved according to His justice.

Yet, by the working of the Holy Ghost through the pronouncement of the Gospel which the Lord had made known unto them throughout the whole Old Testament, they had also become acquainted with God's mercy and His promises toward fallen mankind, particularly those of forgiveness of sins for all mankind earned by the Messiah, comfort for sinners, and salvation from sin offered out of pure grace. Clinging to these promises by faith, Messianic believers counted God faithful that He would fulfill them all, that He would "*perform the mercy promised to [their] fathers*" (Luke 1:72), and they anxiously and confidently awaited the arrival of their Deliverer, their gracious King, as was prophesied.

We see the fulfillment of His foretold arrival here in our text in verses 4 and 5, where we are told that "*All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.'*" Matthew quotes here from the ninth chapter of Zechariah's prophecy, in which more detail is revealed about this King, as we read in verse 9, "*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.*" In this reference, the Holy Ghost, through Matthew, quotes Himself, pointing to the fact that this event was the fulfillment of that very prophecy and promise.

We learn from Zechariah that the King who was to arrive according to prophecy is the King of the daughter of Zion and the daughter of Jerusalem, specific references to God's church on earth. This arriving King was to be "*just*" and "*having salvation*," that is, He would be "as advertised," the eternal God Himself, fully capable of performing that which He was sent to do; and He was coming in order to execute that plan, to be the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2), to earn forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation for all people by His vicarious, that is, substitutionary obedience and atonement, rendering full compliance with God's Holy Law in the stead of and for the salvation of all mankind. This King's arrival was prophesied to occur in a lowly, or meek, manner, as the Messiah according to His state of humiliation was to ride on an ass and a colt, and not in a glorious and flashy way as a powerful political figure, which so many had mistakenly been looking for. This news, this Gospel news, as Zechariah says, was intended to result in *rejoicing* by His people, and did result in rejoicing in the hearts of those Messianic believers who trusted God, who saw afar off this fulfillment with their eyes of faith.

In verse 9 of our text, Matthew records that the crowds accompanying the Lord Jesus shouted: "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" This prayer for deliverance offered and expressed by the multitudes and the disciples is strikingly similar to the wording of Psalm 118:25-26. There, King David beseeches the Lord, saying, "*Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!*" The word "*hosanna*," exclaimed by the people in our text, a Hebrew word meaning "*Save now, we pray*," echoed the prayer of David. By this joyful prayer, the people professed that they recognized also with their physical eyes what David saw with his spiritual eyes only (Hebrews 11:13), namely that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, was "*He that cometh in the name of the Lord*," the Savior ordained and anointed before the foundation world. He was to be praised, and He would perform the rescue from sin, death, and the power of the devil, that they so earnestly desired of Him.

Our Savior's accomplishment of this rescue formed the basis of the comforting message spoken of by the prophet Isaiah in his 40<sup>th</sup> chapter. Messianic believers confided in this message, this assurance, this divine promise, specifically that their "*warfare*," their spiritual warfare with sin and the wrath of God pronounced in His Law, was "*accomplished*" and that their "*iniquity*" was "*pardoned*." They firmly trusted God's Word which assured them that this rescue was the basis for their pardon before Him, the

basis for what they had received from His hand, namely “*double for all [their] sins*” (vv. 1-2), forgiveness and righteousness in His sight.

### III.

Now, dear brethren, this advent of our Lord Jesus to His people in time according to God’s gracious promise was recorded by inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the words of the New Testament so that, as members of His gracious kingdom by faith, we take comfort in the fact that this Savior has come to us also. He comes to us, who, along with the Old Testament believers, acknowledge and are broken-hearted over our naturally depraved condition in God’s sight. He comes to us, who, because of our fleshly thoughts, desires, words, and deeds by which we daily sin against Him, deserve nothing but wrath, displeasure, and eternal damnation according to His Holy Law. He comes to us, who have by the Gospel been brought to faith in the fact that, in spite of all of this, in spite of our complete lack of ability to save ourselves, God does not desire our destruction, but earnestly desires our salvation, so much so that He graciously provided His only begotten Son, this very Savior who has come to us, that we should not perish, but have everlasting life through faith in Him (John 3:16).

In the record of the New Testament, we have written “*for our learning*” the exhortation of the Lord Jesus pointing back to the Old Testament regarding also our salvation, bidding us in John 5:39 to “*search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me.*” We also see how the Lord Jesus, on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, patiently and carefully pointed to and explained the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies concerning Himself and His Vicarious Atonement, as we find this admonition and exposition recorded for our learning and comfort in Luke 24:25-27. Moreover, in this New Testament record, His Apostle Paul declares that “*in Christ,*” that is, in this meek and lowly Savior and King, and in His Vicarious Atonement as the Propitiation for our sins and for the sins of all mankind, God reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. This unspeakably good news God has committed unto us in the Word of Reconciliation, the Gospel of God’s grace for Christ’s sake, assuring us of the forgiveness of sins (II Corinthians 5:19). He promises also us that His precious Word, these Scriptures “*written for our learning,*” will “*stand forever*” (Romans 15:4; Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35).

This durable, reliable, unchangeable record is used by the Holy Ghost as the means by which He engenders and preserves saving faith in our hearts (John 17:17; Romans 10:17). It is to be used by us for our con-

tinued edification and growth in grace (II Peter 3:18). It is the message that Christian pastors are to bring to their people (Ephesians 4:12; II Timothy 4:2); and it is the comforting Gospel message through which we have hope (Romans 15:4).

Dear brethren, to God's credit alone, because of the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost in His precious Word, we see with our eyes of faith the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Christ Jesus, our Savior and gracious King; we have personal assurance of the fact that the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus has, in fact, been accomplished for us and for all mankind, and that He, as the Lamb of God, has taken away the sins of the world (John 1:29), earning God's reconciliation of the world unto Himself in His completed work. Thus, with the Messianic believers of old, we take comfort in the fact that also **OUR** iniquity has been pardoned and that **WE ALSO** have received "*double for all [OUR] sins*" (Isaiah 40:1-2).

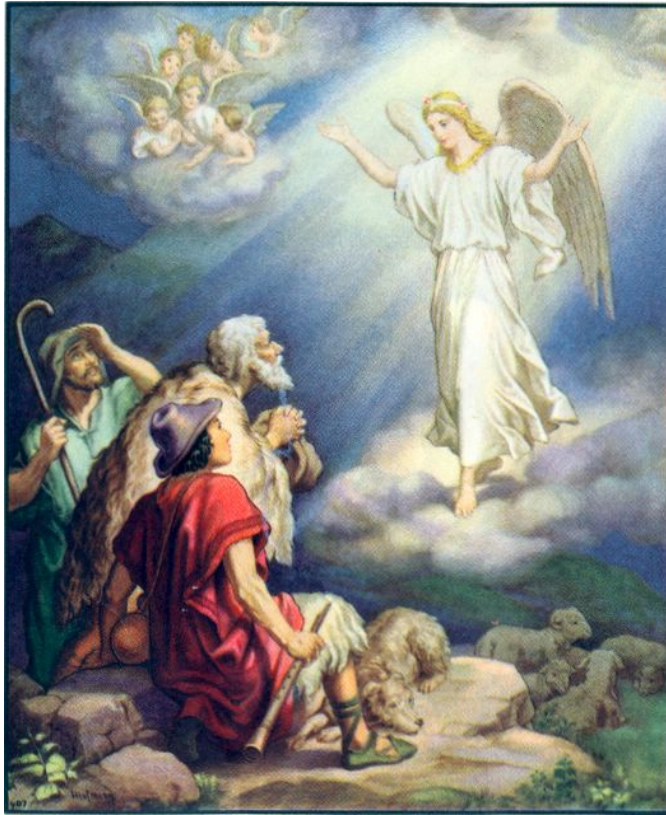
May the Lord continue to grant us abiding faith in our Savior and enduring comfort in the wonderful news of God's faithfulness to His promise, manifested here in the Advent of Christ, our gracious King, and comfort also in the forgiveness of our sins as the fruit of His redemptive work. May we, on that basis, joyfully cry out with the Messianic believers of the Old Testament as well as with the crowds proclaiming His advent at Jerusalem, "*Hosanna! Save now, we pray, O Thou Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" Amen.

And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through faith in Christ Jesus, OUR gracious King and Savior, unto life everlasting. Amen.

***Soli Deo gloria!***



## *The Glad Tidings of Christmas*



*And the angel said unto them, “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”*

—Luke 2:10–11

When Jesus, the Savior of all mankind, was born in Bethlehem, the greatest Christmas Gift ever was bestowed upon the whole world by our loving heavenly Father. But this momentous event went unnoticed by almost everyone in the world at that time. The shepherds to whom the angel spoke the words recorded in the above-quoted text did not know that night was special in any way prior to the herald angel’s appearance.

It was, of course, very important for them and everyone else, to hear about the Messiah's birth. Consequently, after the shepherds had seen the Baby Jesus, "*they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child*" (Luke 2:17), namely, that a "*Savior, which is Christ the Lord*" was "*born...in the city of David.*" Those who were familiar with the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament would have immediately understood that this was an important message (if they believed it to be true). But since so many of the Jews at that time were expecting the Messiah to be an *earthly* king and deliverer, it is uncertain how many of those who heard the news from the shepherds understood the full importance of it.

So also today, though the Gospel can be heard in so many different places during the month of December paraphrased in the religious Christmas carols that are sung, yet the true meaning and importance of the words are lost on most of the hearers. In order for the Christmas message to be recognized and truly appreciated as "*good tidings of great joy,*" it is crucial to understand the great blessings that Christ brings to all mankind. Thus the hearers of that Gospel first need to understand their corrupt spiritual state, their complete unworthiness and helplessness before the Lord, and the dreadful consequences of their sins. And that is the important spiritual instruction that comes from God's holy Law, "*for by the Law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20; see also 7:7).

Not a single person on earth can escape the Law's verdict that he is guilty of breaking God's Commandments and worthy of eternal condemnation! "*What things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*" (Romans 3:19). "*As many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them'*" (Galatians 3:10). That *curse of the Law* is eternal hell-fire (Mark 9:43–48), "*outer darkness*" with "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" for all eternity (Matthew 25:30, 46). Now if a person realizes from God's Law that this is the judgment he has merited on account of his innumerable sins in thoughts, desires, words, and deeds, he should also know from the same Law that no one is free from the corruption of sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20), that all people have, therefore, merited the "*wages*" (Romans 6:23) of eternal death in hell, and that it is impossible for man to save himself "*by the deeds of the Law*" (Romans 3:20; cf. Galatians 3:11a). "*Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and*



*yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10). Thus the holy Law of God shows sinful man no hope of salvation at all in the keeping of its precepts but only the *perpetual debt* he owes to God for his failure and inability to keep them! Thus the debtor, faced with wrath and punishment, *may*, as did the man in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 18:25-26), desperately seek “*patience,*” “*compassion,*” and “*pity*” from the Lord as his only hope of deliverance. But the Law does not show him such attributes in God, which only exist “in Christ” and are revealed only in the Gospel. The Law only brings man to the “dead end” of being unable to justify **himself**. In this way “*the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto [up to] Christ*” (Galatians 3:24), preparing our hearts to seek and to receive rescue on the part of someone other than ourselves, namely, from Christ revealed in the Gospel.

Now the shepherds knew the Law from the Old Testament Scriptures, and already recognized their sinful unworthiness, which is why they were “*sore afraid*” at the appearance of the holy angel (Luke 2:9). Accordingly, this messenger of the Lord did not first need to employ the Law as a mirror, but immediately soothed their trembling hearts, saying: “*Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*” The Baby Jesus, born in Bethlehem and laid in the manger, as announced by the angel, is here identified as “*a Savior,*” for His chief work is *saving* sinful mankind from sin, death, and the devil. Referring to Him as “*Christ,*” the angel directly told the shepherds that the *Messiah*, whom the prophets in the Scriptures had long foretold, had now been born. Though born as a *true human being*, the Baby Jesus was also identified by the angel as being *true God*—calling Him “*the Lord.*” That the Messiah was both God and man in one person was crucial to His work of redeeming the world (Hebrews 2:14–15) and was also clearly foretold in the Old Testament (“*a child...the mighty God,*” Isaiah 9:6). Even the fact that Jesus was born “*in the city of David,*” Bethlehem, was a fulfillment of messianic prophecy. “*Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2).

Because of the many messianic prophecies that the Lord had given His people, the shepherds presumably knew about the person and work of the Savior even prior to the announcement of Jesus’ birth by the angel. *But what joyous tidings these were that the Redeemer of the world had*

*finally come!* That the shepherds received those glad tidings with joy and excitement is evident by the way they went to find the newborn Savior “*with haste*” (Luke 2:16). How sad it is that the Gospel of Jesus’ birth does not always fill *us* with similar joy and excitement! Instead of always coming with great enthusiasm to the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services, we may be tempted, because of our sinful flesh, to regard such blessed opportunities to see the Christ Child with our eyes of faith as inconveniences during a hectic time of year. But we should never grow tired or bored of the Christmas narrative, even though most of us have heard it many, many times before. If we truly recognize our miserable, sinful condition, and acknowledge the punishment that we have deserved by our transgressions and iniquities; and if we appreciate the gift of God’s grace in Christ Jesus through which our souls are saved eternally, then we will certainly *rejoice* to hear again and again of the great love of God that sent His only-begotten Son into the world for our salvation (John 3:16; I John 4:9).

Indeed, as the glad tidings of the Christmas Gospel brought to the shepherds continue to comfort and rejoice the hearts of all those who, by the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost through that Gospel, have placed their trust in the Christ-Child, they experience “*great joy*” in that Savior, “*whom having not seen, [they] love; in whom, though now [they] see Him not, yet believing, [they] rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (I Peter 1:8). Moreover, if the glad tidings of Christmas have taken root in our heart, they will affect how we live our lives, including how we talk; “*for of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaketh*” (Luke 6:45). Accordingly, our zeal in spreading the Christmas Gospel to others should mirror that of the shepherds; for, after they had seen the Baby Jesus lying in the manger, “*they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child*” (Luke 2:17). This is exactly what God wanted those shepherds to do. Remember that the angel specifically told them that the “*good tidings of great joy...shall be to all people.*” Even though this Savior was the “*King of the Jews*” (Matthew 2:2), as the wise men (who were Gentiles) called Him on the basis of divine prophecy (Numbers 24:17-19; Jeremiah 23:5; etc.), He did not come to earth to redeem *only* the *Jews* but to save *all* lost and condemned mankind (Luke 19:10; I Timothy 1:15). Consequently, the news of Jesus’ birth is immensely important for every sinful human being on earth (whether or not most people acknowledge that fact to be true)!

We who have been brought to the saving knowledge of the Christmas Gospel have the great responsibility and privilege of bringing it also to

others. Jesus has given us the following commission: “*Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15). This, of course, does not mean preaching *only the Gospel* in the narrower sense without also preaching *the Law*; for the Law of God serves the important function of showing man his sinfulness and his need for a savior. Thus the Law, working as a mirror, prepares the hearer for the Gospel (Galatians 3:24), through which the Holy Ghost works saving faith in the heart (Romans 1:16; 10:17). It should be our fervent desire to bring the Christmas Gospel to those who are lost in spiritual darkness and walking down the path that leads to eternal destruction in hell, so that they might find in the Lord Jesus *their* dear Savior from sin (James 5:20). But conveying the glad tidings of the Savior’s birth is much more than merely saying, “Merry Christmas;” for those words have become as empty an expression as, “Have a nice day,” for most people. Rather, the joyous message of Christmas is the most comforting news for poor sinners, namely, that for the sake of the Christ-Child all of their sins are forgiven and they are the objects of God’s love; and all who confide in this Gospel are graciously received by the Lord as His beloved children and heirs of everlasting life in the joys of heaven.

It is only by the grace and power of the Holy Ghost that we have been brought to saving faith in that baby in Bethlehem’s manger—trusting in His merits for our forgiveness and salvation and truly rejoicing in the Christmas Gospel. This did not come about through our own works or worthiness, nor on account of any natural inclination on our part to the Christian religion, because *all people in their natural state reject the Gospel as foolishness. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14). Consequently, the glad tidings of Christmas are despised by the vast majority of people who are oblivious to their dire spiritual condition on account of their sins and do not appreciate the grace of God manifested in the Christ-Child—thinking of Christmas merely as a time to enjoy holiday decorations, seasonal songs, food, presents, and quality time with loved ones. And while there is a measure of joy that even true Christians can derive from such common Christmas-related activities, yet they cannot compare to the infinitely greater “*good tidings of great joy*” that we find in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—the true Christmas joy in the birth of our dear Savior from sin! No earthly Christmas present can compare to the “*unspeakable Gift*” (II Corinthians 9:15) of God’s grace that was manifested in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through the working of the Spirit in the precious Christmas Gospel, may we ever

grow in our appreciation of the “*good tidings of great joy*” that “*unto [us] is born...a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!*”

All my heart this night rejoices  
as I hear far and near  
sweetest angel voices.  
“Christ is born,” their choirs are singing,  
till the air everywhere  
now with joy is ringing.

Come, then, banish all your sadness,  
one and all, great and small;  
come with songs of gladness.  
Love Him who with love is glowing;  
hail the Star near and far  
light and joy bestowing!

(*TLH 77*, vv. 1, 8)

—**P. E. B.**



AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, AND DWELT AMONG US, (AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER,) FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH. —JOHN 1:14



### *Simeon in the Temple*

Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Thy people Israel." —Luke 2:28-32

## 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:** lutheran@r66.ru

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### **CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria

**Pastoral Vacancy at present**

### **ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria

**The Rev. Onesimus Ekele, Pastor**

### **HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Idama, Nigeria

**Pastoral Vacancy at present**

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

### **SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Abalama, Nigeria

**The Rev. Elison B. Agborubere, Pastor**

Thompson Compound Abalama

Abalama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

### **ST. CLEMENT'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria

**Pastoral Vacancy at present**

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

Abonnema, Akulga, Rivers State, NIGERIA

**E-Mail:** njohnfyeface@yahoo.co.uk



## Directory of Member Congregations

www.concordialutheranconf.com

### GOOD SHEPHERD EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH

4090 South Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730 Telephone (520) 721-7618

**Worship Service** ..... 9:30 a.m.

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

**The Rev. DAVID G. REDLIN, Pastor**

4050 South Melpomene Way, Tucson, AZ 85730 (520) 721-7618

**E-mail:** david.redlin@q.com

### PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Central Avenue at 171<sup>st</sup> Place, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913 Telephone: (708) 532-4288

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

**Worship Service** ..... 10:00 a.m.

**The Rev. DAVID T. MENSING, Pastor**

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

**E-mail:** pastormensing@yahoo.com

### ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355 Telephone: (541) 258-2941

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

**Worship Service** ..... 11:00 a.m.

**The Rev. M. L. NATTERER, Pastor**

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355 (541) 258-2941

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

### ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

5350 South Fountain Street, Seattle, WA 98178 Telephone: (206) 723-1078

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

**Worship Service** ..... 10:30 a.m.

**The Rev. EDWARD J. WORLEY, Pastor**

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118 (206) 723-7418

**E-mail:** revworley@comcast.net

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

**Worship Service** ..... 7:00 p.m.

**Adult Bible Class** ..... 4:30 p.m.

**Adult Catechism Class** ..... 8:30 p.m.

### ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411 Telephone: (708) 757-6859

**Sunday School & Bible Class** ..... 8:45 a.m.

**Worship Service** ..... 10:00 a.m.

**The Rev. PAUL E. BLOEDEL, Pastor**

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411 (708) 757-6859

**E-mail:** revbloedel@gmail.com

### TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

300 North Ridgeland Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302 Telephone: (708) 386-6773

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

**Worship Service** ..... 10:15 a.m.

**The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor**

233 North Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302 (708) 386-4145

**E-mail:** robertjlietz@yahoo.com



If the glad tidings of Christmas have taken root in our heart, they will affect how we live our lives, including how we talk; “*for of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaketh*” (Luke 6:45). Accordingly, our zeal in spreading the Christmas Gospel to others should mirror that of the shepherds; for, after they had seen the Baby Jesus lying in the manger, “*they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child*”...We who have been brought to the saving knowledge of the Christmas Gospel have the great responsibility and privilege of bringing it also to others. Jesus has given us the following commission: “*Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15).

Excerpt from *The Glad Tidings of Christmas*

