

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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**The Son of God
was manifested!**

— 1 John 3:8





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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*" (1 Corinthians 1:10)

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

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

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

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

The Manifestation of God's Grace Is the Glory of His Church

“Arise, shine; for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!” —Isaiah 60:1



The Christian Church traditionally marks the **Epiphany of our Lord** on January 6th, the day on which we celebrate His **manifestation** to the Wise Men from the East. For that reason, the Feast of our Savior's Epiphany has been called **“the GENTILES' Christmas”** as His light appeared to those eastern sages from a far-off heathen land and led them to worship at His feet. We, who, like them, are **Gentiles** (or non-Jews), specially treasure this festival of the church year because of its particular comfort to **us**, whose ancestors were *“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12). For the promised Messiah was intended from the beginning to be not only the Redeemer of **Israel** but *“a light to lighten the GENTILES”* (as the aged Simeon also sang of Him, Luke 2:32), the Savior of the **world**; and for God's unspeakable Christmas Gift of love to **us** poor **Gentiles** we, therefore, are and ought ever to be truly thankful!

Isaiah's Epiphany prophecy, the first six verses of his 60th chapter, as summarized in the title-text above, is much more than a divinely-inspired prediction of the Savior's manifestation to the Wise Men from the East, who came with their camels and dromedaries to worship the newborn King of the Jews and to present unto Him costly gifts, two of which Isaiah mentions specifically (v. 6). Indeed, Isaiah speaks to the believers of the Old Testament, the “true Israel” (Romans 9:6-8) which confided in the promises of God's Messiah to come, and reminds them that the glorious light of the Gospel, manifesting God's gracious forgiveness, was already theirs, and had already delivered them from the darkness of spiritual ignorance and despair as surely as if the Savior had already come. And, since those Old Testament Scriptures, Paul tells us, *“were written for OUR learning”* (Romans 15:4), Isaiah's prophecy declares for **us today**, for the Savior's **New Testament Church**, just as wonderfully as it did for the Lord's **Old Testament Zion**, that **the manifestation of God's grace in Christ Jesus is the GLORY of His Church**. Its glorious LIGHT has shined upon **us** in the Gospel; its glorious MESSAGE is **ours** to beam forth to others; and its glorious FRUIT is evident in **all** who have been brought to saving faith in its comfort.

Just as the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25 pictures His **New Testament Church** as ten sleeping virgins, waiting for the appearance of the Bridegroom but, in the meantime, succumbing to fleshly spiritual boredom when His second visible advent does not come quickly enough to suit their fancy, the Prophet Isaiah sees the very same imagery in the Church of the **Old Testament**. After all, it had been well over three thousand years since the Lord had promised His Messiah to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and some two thousand years since He had established His covenant of Grace with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on the basis of that same promise. No doubt many in Israel had scoffed at the Messianic prophecies, as the Apostle Peter in his Second Epistle quotes the scoffers in the **end times** as saying: *“Where is the promise of His coming? For, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation!”* (II Peter 3:4). They were not content to await with patience the coming of God's Messiah in *“the fulness of the time”* (Galatians 4:4).

But, as if shaking the drowsy virgins from their spiritual sleep, Isaiah cries out: *“Arise!”* Wake up! *“Thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!”* Indeed, while *“the darkness [of wickedness, of spiritual ignorance, and of unbelief] had cover[ed] the earth and gross darkness the people,”* the **glorious LIGHT** of the Gospel had already been manifested **to Israel** in *“the oracles of God”* (Romans 3:1-2), in the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, as a special advantage. He had committed unto His people of old, long before the promised Savior was to arrive, *“the word of reconciliation”* (II Corinthians 5:19b), the precious good news of the Gospel declared to Adam and Eve, to the

patriarchs, and to all His people through Moses and the prophets. Sadly, there were many who, because of their despal of God's grace, sat engulfed in the same "gross darkness" that covered the heathen round about them. And others, because "the fulness of the time" was so long in coming, got tired of the long wait and fell into spiritual indifference and complacency, taking the Messianic promises for granted. Thus their droopy eyelids had blocked out the "light" of the Gospel and kept them ignorant of the very salvation that was already theirs by promise.

But the prophet's wake-up call goes out to **US as well** in his Epiphany cry; for the glorious "**LIGHT**" of God's grace in Christ Jesus has also been shined upon **us**, His Church of the **New Testament**. And Isaiah bids **us likewise** to "arise" and take note of its brilliance, lest we, like Israel of old, miss "the glory of the Lord" which "is risen upon [us]" in the person of "the Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) and "the Day Star" (II Peter 1:19), Christ Jesus, our Savior! St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, reminds also **us** that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness [on the first day of creation], 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). God's **eternal decree of redemption**, in which He purposed to save lost mankind by the death of His Son, was, before the foundation of the world already, the expression of His unfathomable grace which has ever since redounded to **His glory**! For, in accordance with that plan, God, in eternity, seeing in His omniscience the completed active and passive obedience of His only-begotten Son in the place of sinners as satisfying His divine justice, "reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Corinthians 5:19).

And the precious NEWS of that reconciliation, the Gospel that gives all "**glory to God in the highest**" (Luke 2:14) has been "committed unto US" (II Corinthians 5:19b), His Church, as the repository of the light of salvation. "The glory of the Lord is risen upon **THEE**," Isaiah tells **you**. Do you **see** it?? Do you **recognize** it?? Do you **rejoice** in it and **confide** in it?? "Arise," he exhorts us who confidently cling to God's Messiah! Sit up and take notice with gratitude that our gracious God, for Jesus' sake, has "called US out of darkness into His marvelous LIGHT" (I Peter 2:9), so that **by faith** in His gracious Gift of Love to us poor, wretched, undeserving sinners, **we** may have comfort, peace, joy, and hope in Christ Jesus, our precious Savior and no longer "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79) because of our sins!

But that glorious "light" is not only for **US**, even though it has been shed upon Christ's Church in His Kingdom of Grace for the special comfort and assurance of His believing children. Isaiah says that "[God's] glory **shall be SEEN** upon thee." Christ's Church is a brightly illuminated "city that is set on an hill," Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:14, a city that "cannot be hid." Indeed, the glory of God's grace in Christ Jesus, manifested in His Church, is to function as a beacon of hope to **all** "that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." Therefore Isaiah not only tells the Church to "arise" out of its lethargy and spiritual sleep to bask in and appreciate the light bestowed upon it, but also to "shine" —to beam forth that precious light also to others.

Contrary to the devilish teaching of the Calvinists that the grace of God is NOT intended for **all** mankind, and that God does not "seriously" extend it to **all** in the Gospel, the Apostle Paul declares in his second letter to Timothy that "[God] will have **ALL MEN** to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (2:4). And Peter assures us that "the Lord is...not willing that **ANY** should perish, but that **ALL** should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). Therefore the Lord Jesus commands us to "preach the Gospel to EVERY CREATURE" (Mark 16:15). "Arise, **SHINE!** ...and the **GENTILES** shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:3).

All we have to do is to look about us in the world to see the teeming millions, here in our own country, as well as abroad, who are "sit[ting] in darkness and in the shadow of death," ignorant of the Gospel of salvation! But if we "shine," if we make it our **priority**, as a spiritual search-and-rescue team, to **beam forth** the GLORIOUS MESSAGE of God's grace in Christ Jesus to souls lost in the maze of error and unbelief, our "city," God's Zion, His precious Church, will "not be hid." Isaiah says in verse 4 of this prophecy: "Lift up thine eyes round about and see: All they gather themselves together; they come to thee. Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side." "Open your eyes! You'll see," says Isaiah. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). **That's** how the Church grows! **That's** how the Lord draws sinners unto Himself! **That's** how His family of believers is enlarged! **That's** how God's adopted "sons" and "daughters" are brought into His household of faith "from far," from

the least likely and far away places, to be “*nursed at thy side*,” to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord in the Church of the Lord Jesus, fed only wholesome spiritual food and given to drink of the pure water of life!

—It is noteworthy right here also to observe the fact that the Wise Men were not led to the Savior merely by a strange “*star*” that appeared “*in the east*,” but by the prophecy of **God’s Word** in Numbers chapter 24, apparently left by God’s people in the archives of Babylon when they returned from their captivity. The prophecy identified the star as “*His star*,” signaling the birth of “*the king of the Jews*” (Matthew 2:2). It was the **Word of God** whereby the Holy Spirit moved the Wise Men to seek their Savior, led them to Jerusalem to find *another* Word of God (Micah 5:2) pointing them to Bethlehem, and identified Him as their gracious King and the proper object of their worship.

And when we thus beam forth to others the glorious light of the Gospel, Isaiah says to the Church (v. 5): “*...Then shalt thou see, and flow together, and thine heart shalt fear, and be enlarged, because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.*” There is nothing as gratifying to a child of God than to “*see*” the joy and gladness, the peace and hope, that the precious Gospel of God’s grace in Christ Jesus works in those who had never heard it, in those who had been deprived of it, in those who had been led astray from it by “*wolves in sheep’s clothing*” (Matthew 7:15). Our own hearts as Christians leap with joy when we witness the glorious comfort that the Gospel works in hearts that heretofore were languishing in spiritual darkness, in terror of God, and in the expectation of His wrath!

And we note yet from Isaiah’s words the **GLORIOUS FRUIT** that is evident in all who have been brought to saving faith by the light of the Gospel. Not only does the Gospel, regularly and consistently proclaimed by the Church, specifically by Christ’s ambassador in every local church or congregation, bring forth the **spiritual** fruit promised in Isaiah 55, verses 10 and 11, namely, **true faith unto salvation**; but it also produces the **fruits OF faith**, visible evidence that men can **see**, “*good works*” (Matthew 5:16) that bear testimony to what is resident in the heart of every true believer, works that redound to the glory of God’s grace. Paul writes to the Ephesians: “*We are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*” (2:10). And the Lord Jesus says concerning such evidence of fruit to the glory of God: “*Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples*” (John 15:8). Fruit, not merely of quality but also in quantity is the evidence of discipleship. Isaiah speaks of this fruit in verse 6 of his Epiphany prophecy when he says: “*The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.*”

Because of the mention of “*camels and dromedaries*,” of “*gold and incense*,” these words are regarded as specifically prophetic of the Wise Men and their gifts. But they are certainly also more than that in their description of the **fruit** that the Gospel produces in the hearts of believers. Note that the “*camels and dromedaries*,” as modes of long-distance travel, and the “*coming*” of a “*multitude*” of them, indicate as a fruit of faith the **eagerness** of believers to come and hear God’s Word. Believers don’t have to be “dragged” kicking and screaming to church services, to Bible classes, and to other opportunities for hearing and learning the Word of God, for growing in grace and in the knowledge of their Savior. Their **desire** to grow is **EVIDENT** in their **observable** behavior. And their willingness to **sacrifice** for the Lord’s Kingdom is also **EVIDENT**, as they bring their “costliest treasures” (TLH 127, 3) and lay them down gladly at the feet of their heavenly King. Yea, what a powerful **motivator** is **the manifestation of God’s grace in Christ Jesus** also to “*show forth the praises of the Lord*,” not only in private, but in the services of His House where our gratitude for His grace is then **EVIDENT** to the glory of His Name! May He grant to all of **US**, for Jesus’ our Savior’s sake, such glorious and evident **FRUIT** of His abundant grace, as He continues to manifest Himself to us in His spiritual **Epiphany** into our hearts by means of His precious Word and Sacrament, regularly and consistently dispensed to us in our local congregations (Isaiah 55:10-11), unto life everlasting!

—D. T. M.

An Epiphany Lesson in Mission Work

“Behold the Lamb of God!...We have found the Messiah!...” —John 1:35-51

The holy season of Epiphany, in which we Christians celebrate the *manifestation* or *appearing* of the Lord Jesus as the Savior of all mankind, is a specially-appropriate time to consider, to study, and to embark upon **mission work** for His cause. Tying Christian mission work to the Epiphany of our Lord is quite natural actually when we, with John’s disciples, “*behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29), when we see Him already as a young child manifesting Himself to the Wise Men from the East, to Gentiles who were “*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise*” (Ephesians 2:12); when we see Him appearing to men at His Baptism, manifested as the Vicarious Redeemer of sinful men, *true God* as well as *true man*; when we observe His recruitment of twelve chosen disciples whom He would later send forth “*into all the world*” (Mark 16:15) to witness in His Name (Acts 1:8); and when we hear Jesus say to Peter after that miraculous draft of fishes: “*Fear not! From henceforth thou shalt catch men!*” (Luke 5:10b). —These and many other incidents in the early public ministry of our Savior point out the *need* for Christian mission work, the need for those who already know their Savior to share their knowledge with those who have never heard of Him, that He may be made “*manifest*” to “*all people*,” for “*God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4).

To many, however, the term “mission work” conjures up visions of strange far away places, of pagan tribes of uncivilized people, of having to learn and speak foreign languages, and of the need to be a good talker, debater, and preacher. To their way of thinking, those who don’t have the gifts for these kinds of activities aren’t really “qualified” to be *missionaries* and can participate in mission work only through their offerings and “moral support.” —But nothing could be further from the truth! Every Christian is (or certainly *ought to be*) a missionary for his Savior. For, in the true sense of the term, a “missionary” is simply one who is “sent out” on a “mission” to do a job, in this case, to get the word out about Jesus, the Savior. That’s **our** job as individual Christians, as His true disciples, to whom He says: “*Go YE into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature!*” (Mark 16:15). “*Go YE...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... [and] teaching them!*” (Matthew 28:19-20).

If we shrink from that task; if we don’t think we’re qualified; if we hesitate making the necessary commitment; or if we’re among those who are content to let others take the *risks* as well as the *heat*, oh, then we should learn an Epiphany lesson in mission work from the narrative in the first chapter of John’s Gospel. For we see in the recruitment of Jesus’ own disciples a kind of microcosm or reduced-scale model of how we Christians are to recruit prospects for His Kingdom of Grace here in this world. The lesson teaches us **two basic principles** about mission work: **First**, that we bring others to Jesus by our *TESTIMONY* of Him; but **secondly**, that Jesus makes them His disciples through *HIS WORD*.

My dear fellow missionaries, our testimony doesn’t have to be *extensive* in order to be *effective*. A few well-chosen words will do nicely if they come from the heart! Our testimony doesn’t have to be “flowery” to be attractive —sometimes the simpler the better! BUT our testimony DOES have to meet one criterion or standard: It has to be the **TRUTH**, grounded in God’s own precious Word. Otherwise we lead others astray, away from Jesus to some other savior!!

Let’s look briefly at the examples in our title-text, John 1:35ff. First, there’s John the Baptist, the gifted preacher who came “*in the spirit and power of Elias*” (Luke 1:17) as the Lord’s hand-picked messenger to prepare the way before God’s Messiah (Malachi 3:1). Yet, his longer, more extensive sermons were no more effective than his simple statement to the two disciples standing with him, watching Jesus “*as He walked*.” “*Behold the Lamb of God!*” (John 1:36). Those five words spelled out the boiled-down truth that Jesus was to be the all-atoning Sacrifice for the sins of the world, the Substitute for sinners, whose holy precious blood would appease God’s just wrath and purchase our redemption! Five little words of Gospel truth pointed to the Savior! —And their effect?? We read: “*And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus*” (v. 37). Their curiosity was piqued by these good tidings of great joy; and, like the shepherds of Bethlehem, they went to “*see this thing which [had] come to pass*” (Luke 2:15) led by the invitation of the simplest Gospel brought to them by the Christmas angel!

Take the second example in our title-text, namely, that of Andrew of Bethsaida in Galilee. He was one of those two disciples of John who had then “*followed Jesus*” and had *spent the day with Him*, learning firsthand who He was and why He had come into this world of sin. “*He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, ‘We have found the Messiah,’ which is, being interpreted, the Christ*” (v. 41). John’s simple testimony had pointed Andrew to Jesus. And what he learned at the feet of Jesus had so filled him with joy and hope and zeal, that he couldn’t keep it for himself!! — just the way we as Christians should feel about having learned of Jesus as **our** Savior, bubbling over with excitement, and itching to tell someone else about Him, so that another poor sinner can share our joy!!

Andrew didn’t go on a door-to-door canvass of the neighborhood, doing mission work on a grand and organized scale; but he merely sought out “*his own brother Simon*,” someone who hadn’t yet heard this great news; and again, in five simple words testified of this new-found knowledge of His Savior, saying: “*We have found the Messiah!*” — “*AND he brought him to Jesus*” (v. 42). He went one step further: He not only taught him; he brought him! —something that you and I are quite capable of doing with our mission targets: BRING them to Jesus! Bring them to *hear* the Word of God, “*which is able to save [their] souls!*” (James 1:21b; cf. Romans 10:17).

And the third example we find in Philip, also of Bethsaida in Galilee. JESUS had found him; and, not content to keep Jesus for himself alone, “*Philip findeth Nathanael and saith unto him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the prophets, did write: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!’*” (v. 45). And, when Nathanael at first took the whole thing rather lightly and even joked about how surprising it was that *anything good could come out of that town* (v. 46a), was Philip “turned off” and discouraged? Did he give up on Nathanael as a “lost cause” and write him off as a “typical worldly blasphemer”? No indeed! Instead, he challenged Nathanael to “*come and see*” (v. 46b). He invited him to **see for himself** the **evidence** that this Jesus was truly the promised Messiah prophesied by Moses and the prophets —even if His home town was Nazareth. —You and I can do the same, can’t we?? We can invite our skeptical friends and neighbors to “*come and see*” what the Scriptures, “*Moses and the prophets*,” have to say! We can bring them to Jesus! We can bring them to hear His Word proclaimed and taught by His ambassador from the pulpits of our congregations, so that they too can see “*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!*” (II Corinthians 4:6).

Given what we know, given what we have seen, given the truth we hear each and every Sunday preached and taught in its purity (as nowhere else to the best of our knowledge), given our advantages as Scripturally informed Christians, CAN we, DARE we just keep all that for ourselves?? CAN we, DARE we just keep quiet about it and not share it with dying souls starving for the knowledge of salvation?? —Do you, dear reader, have a friend or a relative who doesn’t know the true way to heaven?? TELL him! Better yet, BRING him! There are probably plenty of empty seats in your church where he can sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His precious Word! Don’t just give him the address of your church; give him a ride! Challenge him: “Come and see! Come and hear! Come and learn!” —These are short, small, and simple words of which we all are quite capable! We bring ourselves, don’t we? Why not bring him too? —Don’t be put off by some “cute” little comment designed to discourage your effort! CHALLENGE him: “‘Come and see’ what great things God hath done for ME!” That’s mission work! That’s Christian testimony! That’s confessing Christ before men! And that’s the least you and I can do, for whom our Savior did EVERYTHING to effect our reconciliation with God!

But now, and fortunately for our own peace of mind, our title-text shows us that we don’t have to be concerned or worried about the **results** of our mission work. The fact is that WE don’t convert anybody! WE don’t convince anybody! WE can’t create faith in the heart of anybody! All we can do is TELL people, BRING people, and CHALLENGE people to “*come and see*.” Our testimony —in word and also in deed as we “*let [our] light shine before men*” (Matthew 5:16)— is our mission tool, testimony of the truth of God’s own Word to His glory!

But it’s JESUS who makes people His disciples, who *works in them by His Holy Spirit through the Gospel* “*both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). That’s God’s work, not ours! We see it plainly in John’s narrative. When Andrew and his fellow disciple *followed Jesus home* and stayed with Him *the whole day* to learn at the feet of this heaven-sent “*Rabbi*,” it was JESUS who brought them *to the knowledge of the truth* (I Timothy 2:4), whose Word did not *return unto Him void* (Isaiah 55:11).

And when Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, it was the LORD JESUS who saw through Simon, referred to *his father Jona* (whom Jesus had never met here in this world), and changed his surname to “*Cephas*” or *Peter* because of the “*stone*”-solid faith He would create in his heart (v. 42). It was Peter’s contact with JESUS, not with Andrew, that made him the Savior’s disciple!

And, in the case of Nathanael, it was not Philip’s challenge, “*Come and see,*” that convinced him. It was JESUS HIMSELF who demonstrated His omniscience concerning Nathanael’s earlier whereabouts “*under the fig tree*” (v. 48) that persuaded him! It was that miracle of the LORD JESUS that completely drove out Nathanael’s skepticism and caused him to confess: “*Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel!*” (v. 49). — And it was JESUS who informed Nathanael about the “*greater things than these*” which he would witness as the Savior’s apostle, including His glory as the Mediator between God and men, typified by Jacob’s ladder in the Old Testament! “*And He saith unto him, ‘Verily, verily I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’*” (v. 51).

John the Baptist pointed two disciples to Jesus with only five words. — Andrew pointed his brother Simon to Jesus with only five words, AND “*he brought him to Jesus.*” — Philip was able to say a little more in *his* testimony to Nathanael, and he challenged him to “*come and see.*”

That’s **mission work**, brethren! That’s mission work that you and I can do equally as well by the grace and with the help of God! It’s our **job**! It’s our **mission not-at-all-impossible**! What’s more, it’s our great **privilege** as Christians to share with others what others once shared with us. Indeed, our hearts should be so overflowing with gratitude for our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9), for the truth that made us free (John 8:32), for the purity of the Word by which we are kept through faith unto the Day of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:5), that we should **shout out** with the apostles: “*We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard!*” (Acts 4:20).

But then, dear reader, don’t forget also to put your actions where your mouth is, and your efforts where your heart is, letting the Lord Jesus, your blessed Savior, grant the increase according to His promise! The fruit of your labors is not up to you, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning his own ministrations: “*I have planted, Apollos [my co-worker] watered, but GOD gave the increase.*” (I Corinthians 3:6). Nevertheless, as to your efforts and your motives as laborers in the vineyard of the Savior, **challenge yourself** according to the Epiphany lesson on mission work you learned from this precious passage of God’s Word, and ask your heart:

Can I, whose soul is lighted with wisdom from on high,
can I to men benighted the Lamp of Life *deny*??
To spread the news of Jesus, that joyful task I’ll claim,
til every friend and neighbor has learned his Savior’s Name!

(TLH 495, 3 adapted)

He paid for my transgressions and took away my guilt;
the fact of God’s forgiveness, on that my hope is built!
But others haven’t heard it, the news that joys my heart.
To share with them this Gospel: It’s time to do my part!

— D. T. M.

How *Antinomianism* Militates against the Gospel

*“Now we know that 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

In our *Small Catechism* [CPH, 1943] we define the Gospel, according to Scripture, as “that doctrine of the Bible in which God tells us the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ” (Q/A 16, p. 43). That Gospel or “good news” [Greek: εὐαγγέλιον; German: *Evangelium*, Old English: *Evangel*] was announced by the Christmas angels in their message to the terrified shepherds outside of Bethlehem: “*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... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!*” (Luke 2:10-11;14). It is the “good news” that “*the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men*” (Titus 2:11), that “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19), and that “*all*” are “*justified [forgiven and made right with God] freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:24). By means of His vicarious atonement (Isaiah 53; II Corinthians 5:21), wherein “*He died for all*” (II Corinthians 5:15) and laid down both His perfect righteousness (Romans 5:19) and His holy “*precious blood*” (I Peter 1:18-19) as the “*propitiation*” or payment in full (Romans 3:25; I John 2:2) for our redemption, Christ purchased and earned for all mankind God’s gracious forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7); and God, being completely just and fair, having had His justice completely satisfied by the merits of His only-begotten Son, graciously forgave the sins of all mankind and unilaterally reconciled the world unto Himself (II Corinthians 5:19a). He also made known to all men (Romans 10:18) “*the Word of reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19b), the “good news” of this reconciliation, the “*good tidings of great joy*” (Luke 2:10), “*the word which [lit. as good news] is preached unto you*” (I Peter 1:25).

What makes the Gospel so perfectly *wonderful*, so unspeakably *comforting*, and the enduring source of “*great joy*”... “*to all people*” (Luke 2:10) is the great contrast between its “*good tidings*” and the *horrible* news conveyed to sinful men by the **Law of God**, that doctrine of the Bible in which He “tells us how we are to be and what we are to do and not to do” (*Small Catechism*, Q/A 15, p. 42), and in which He proclaims His righteous wrath against sin and His condemnation of the sinner according to His divine justice. The Law declares the fact that “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). Since the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), all men are conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5), “*born of the flesh*” (John 3:6a), and “*are all gone aside; they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one*” (Psalm 14:3). “*They are all under sin,*” St. Paul writes in Romans 3:9; and in the following verses he goes into considerable detail to point out the terrible “downside” of men’s miserable condition by nature, including the fact that “*the way of peace have they not known*” (v. 17). Moreover, by nature, man is spiritually blind (I Corinthians 2:14), spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), and spiritually at enmity with God (Romans 8:7) and therefore unable to merit God’s favor, to reconcile himself to God, or to justify himself before God by the deeds of the Law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16a; 3:11a; etc.). And in Romans 6:23 Paul adds the “bottom line” for all sinners, namely, the pronouncement that “*the wages of sin is death,*” eternal death, everlasting separation from God, shame, contempt, and unspeakable torture in the damnation in hell.

Moreover, the Law and the Gospel are so completely and diametrically opposed to one another that any attempt on the part of sinful man to *reconcile* them or to *bridge* them is not only hopeless but is counterproductive as far as his ultimate salvation is concerned. St. Paul writes: “*By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*” (Romans 3:20); “*for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law; but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin*” (Galatians 3:21-22a). Man is simply incapable of gaining God’s favor by obedience to the Law, and even the *desire* to do so deprives man of the *grace* of God by which alone he can be saved: “*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the Law, ye are fallen from grace*” (Galatians 5:4). —*Grace*, God’s unmerited favor toward poor, wretched, and helpless sinners, is His *gift* (Ephesians 2:8-9) —earned by Christ and offered freely to all men in the Gospel. *Works*, man’s efforts to earn God’s favor by obedience to the Law, are hopelessly defective in their ability to satisfy God’s justice which requires *holiness* (Leviticus 19:2) and *perfection* (Matthew 5:48) of all mankind; and “*all our righteousnesses,*” even the good works

of believers, “*are as filthy rags*” in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6) as far as meriting anything from Him and are therefore completely ineffective in bringing about reconciliation with Him. Works and grace are therefore mutually exclusive as being causes or even factors in our salvation: “*If by grace, then is it no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace,*” Paul writes in Romans 11:6a. If salvation is truly a gift, then no one has to work for it. The nature of a gift is that it is freely given. What has to be earned is no gift. “*But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work*” (v. 6b). If one indeed has to work for it, it constitutes earned wages; it is not a gift or an unearned bonus.

When, however, the Law of God, with what it demands, forbids, and pronounces as punishment upon the sinner, is *compromised*; when its demands become mere *advisories*, its prohibitions mere *warnings*, and its threats *emptied of their terror*; then the importance of the Gospel is compromised as well. If the vast chasm between God and men, between His perfect justice and man’s total depravity, is reduced in any degree whatsoever, the need for the Gospel is reduced to the very same extent. Then indeed Christ’s vicarious atonement was not *absolutely necessary* to earn God’s favor, and God’s unilateral justification of the world for Christ’s sake, was not *unquestionably essential* for the salvation of sinful men. (Read and study, for example, Romans 5:12-21.) Then reconciliation between God and men is, in the last analysis, the “two-way street” that semi-pelagians and synergists have always claimed it to be in opposition to God’s explicit revelation, the cooperative effort between God’s free grace and man’s free will.

Antinomianism is that very enemy of the Gospel of Christ which nullifies or compromises the Law and thus makes the promise of the Gospel of none effect (Romans 4:14ff.). The word “antinomianism” means literally “against the Law” [Latin: *anti* = against; Greek: *νόμος* = law]. And we can group antinomians into four basic categories: **a)** Those who write off the Law of God *altogether* as the absolute standard of right and wrong, as the unbending measuringstick of righteousness, as the uncompromising requirement of God upon men for their justification, and as the expression of divine wrath upon all who transgress its precepts and prohibitions, upon all who are less than perfect in their *nature* and in their *works*. **b)** Those who, because of their false understanding of such passages as Romans 6:14b and I Timothy 1:9-10, claim that the Law of God is not for *believers* but only for the *unregenerate*, and that therefore Christians need not concern themselves with it at all as far as being curbed by it in their flesh, as far as being shown by it their sins and their need for a Savior, and even as far as being regulated by it in their lives of sanctification. **c)** Those who claim that the Law of God, as far as Christians are concerned, does not serve as a *curb* since their flesh has been effectively “*crucified*,” that it functions as a *mirror* only to remind them of their need for a Savior but not to make them feel any need for contrition and repentance for their sins, and that as a *rule* it is only advisory. It is these who are quick to accuse their pastors of preaching “too much Law,” as if the Law of God in its fierceness is not intended for believers and as if the preaching of the Law to Christians is an unnecessary “browbeating” to “make them feel guilty.” And finally **d)** those who insist upon the right to pick and choose *which* of God’s laws apply to them, and whether in fact the *application* of God’s Law *in principle* can be made to thoughts, words, and deeds which are not specifically named in Holy Scripture.

This latter type of antinomianism is particularly prevalent among those who attempt to insulate their behavior, their favorite pursuits, and their personal choices against the stigma of “sin.” The antinomians in this category commonly accuse of “legalism” anyone who applies the principles of God’s Word objectively, appropriately and evenhandedly to behavior, to words, and to situations which they insist upon judging subjectively, not according to the norm of Scripture but according to the norm of human reason. A “classic” case in point is that of the “Statementarians” (the signers and supporters of *A Statement* in 1945) who “deplored” the fact that Romans 16:17 had been applied by the *orthodox* theologians in the Missouri Synod to the practice of fellowship (joint prayer, etc.) between individual professing Christians not truly united in doctrine and practice. They sought to create an artificial difference between sinful religious unionism practiced *corporately* (that is, between churches and church bodies) and the *very same* indiscriminate practice between *individuals*. If the latter practice were to be condemned as “sinful,” they moaned, families would be divided, relationships could be destroyed, extended families would suffer unnecessary disruptions at baptisms, confirmations, and at weddings, not to mention at table on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas dinner, and other social occasions. Moreover, that application of Scripture would prohibit Christians from joining glee clubs and community choirs for the joint singing of religious music (cantatas, chorales, *The Messiah*, etc.), from Christmas caroling with friends and neighbors who belonged to heterodox churches, and from praying *with* a sick acquaintance at his bedside in the hospital. “How *COULD* you *condemn* such things?? That’s downright *legalistic*!!”

The very same rationalistic argument is made against condemning as “sinful” the joining of lodges and similar orders,

the Scouting organizations, the Gideons, and the Salvation Army. “Just because those organizations are based on certain principles, have certain features, and hold to certain positions that are contrary to Scripture, can’t we join them, identify ourselves with them, participate in their programs, recognizing the “dangers” posed by their errors without, however, having to “*avoid them*”?? Selective antinomians “deplore” the condemnation of abortion as murder and homosexuality as an abomination in the sight of God; and they label it “**legalistic**” to condemn as “**sinful**” the use of ouija boards, civil disobedience of unpopular and even unjust laws, wildcat strikes against employers, gambling in its many forms from gaming to the lottery, modern worldly social dancing, as well as the trafficking of illegal drugs, the use of prohibited fireworks, and even the violation of littering ordinances (Cf. Romans 13:1; I Peter 2:13ff.). And yet, ALL of those practices involve “*the transgression of the Law*” (I John 3:4), **God’s Law**, which tells us plainly what we are to do and not to do as our moral obligation; and identifies “*the transgression of the Law*” as “**sin**.”

Moreover, in their effort to nullify the Law and minimize sin, they create their own arbitrary distinctions between sins as to their *seriousness*. Some would advance the argument that “fine” idolatry is not as *serious* a sin as is “gross” idolatry, that a frivolous oath is not as *offensive* to God as is perjury, that a moving violation while driving is not as *egregious* a sin against the Fourth Commandment as is treason, that a romantic embrace between those not married to one another (Proverbs 5:20) is not the same violation of the Sixth Commandment as is fornication in the sight of God (but compare Matthew 5:28 for an even “lesser degree” of adultery), and that allegations of wrongdoing without proof are not “*false witness*” to the same extent as is outright slander. The possibilities of “splitting the difference” in such a manner are as endless as the fleshly heart is capable of, “ethical creativity” or self-serving rationalism.

And how consistently selective antinomians *couch* their rationalistic musings, their majesterial use of reason over God’s clear Word, and their subjective judgment of what is right and wrong in “*good words and fair speeches*” designed to “*deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Romans 16:18)! Not only do they brand the proper application of clear Scripture as “legalism,” so that naive Christians (Hebrews 5:12-13) throw up their hands with gasps of horror at the very prospect of being browbeaten by the Word of God; but they flatter their hearers (II Timothy 4:3) by proposing to leave it up to their “Christian conscience,” to their “sanctified opinion,” to their “Spirit-created judgment” to determine what is and what is not sinful. “We shouldn’t create lists of things to be avoided and things to be done!” they say. While this *sounds good* to those who don’t want to be told what to do and what not to do, the Bible is literally FULL of such lists from cover to cover! Compare, for example, St. Paul in Ephesians 5:3ff. and in Galatians 5:19-23; compare, for example, the entire Book of Proverbs! “Pastors shouldn’t treat their people like children who need someone to tell them how to live.” —That kind of talk *panders* to the arrogant fleshly heart of man that despises instruction (Proverbs 1:7, etc.), while the Word of God itself instructs us and speaks to us “*as unto children*” (Hebrews 12:5; I John 2:1; etc.), and has been given by God Himself for that very purpose (II Timothy 3:15-17; 4:2; etc.), inasmuch as we ARE, by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, His “*children*” (Galatians 3:26), and should *love* to be treated as such (Hebrews 12:5-8)!

But how does such **antinomianism militate against the GOSPEL**?? Let us remember that the Gospel is the “good news,” the unfathomably wondrous and most comforting news, to poor sinners “*that [their] warfare [with God] is accomplished, that [their] iniquity is pardoned, [that they have] received of the Lord’s hand double for all [their] sins*” (Isaiah 40:2). Therefore, any and every effort to depreciate the Law, to compromise it, to minimize it, to attack its perfect standard and to forbid its proper application ALSO deprecates, compromises, minimizes and attacks the Gospel since the **need** for it has been depreciated. A “truly sanctified” Christian, after all, so they claim, doesn’t commit truly “egregious” sins, doesn’t engage in “really sinful” behavior, and therefore has less to repent of in the last analysis than those whose “*flesh is weak*” (Matthew 26:41b). To the antinomian, “less to repent of” leaves a person feeling “less guilty,” and “less guilty” is a “good place to be.” Such an attitude, however, flies directly in the face of Isaiah 64:6, Romans 7:18, Romans 3:19-20, Galatians 5:4, and a host of other passages which clearly show that believers cannot claim “lesser guilt” on the basis of their works, though they can, should, and do claim “*no condemnation*” on the basis of the imputed righteousness of *Christ* (Romans 8:1), which is theirs by faith (Romans 4:2-8).

Since the Gospel is the good news of salvation as God’s free gift to poor sinners, “*not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:9); since it tells of Christ’s vicarious atonement and intercession “*for the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53:8-12); since it publishes to all sinners the glad tidings that Christ redeemed them “*from the curse of the Law*” (Galatians 3:13); since it proclaims God’s unilateral reconciliation of the world unto Himself in Christ, “*not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19); since it declares God’s justification of “*the ungodly*” for Christ’s

sake (Romans 4:5); and since it brings to poor sinners the “good cheer” of forgiveness (Matthew 9:2) and the “joy of...salvation” (Psalm 51:12) to every believer; what DAMAGE is done to the precious Gospel by those who compromise the demands of the Law, who depreciate the transgression of the Law, and who minimize the curse of the Law!! For without the Law, there is no sin (Romans 4:15). Without the Law, sin is nothing to be taken seriously (I Corinthians 15:56). Without the Law, eternal death is not “the wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). And without the Law, which reveals sin (Romans 7:7), there is no “curse” (Galatians 3:10), death has no “sting,” and sin has no “strength” or serious consequences (I Corinthians 15:56). Therefore, without the Law, there is no need for the GOSPEL! Indeed, without the Law, there is no desire for the GOSPEL! *Antinomianism*, therefore, militates against the Gospel by devaluing the goodness of its news, the gladness of its tidings, the magnitude of its power unto salvation, and the peace and joy it brings to troubled hearts!

May God, for Jesus’ sake, preserve us from the vicious trap of this false teaching and its cunning practice, lest we be deceived and seduced by it into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice! (Luther: 6th Petition). Let us instead, being led by the Spirit of God, confess boldly with the Apostle Paul from the New Man within us: “*I delight in the Law of God after the inward man*” (Romans 7:22), and with the Psalmist: “*O, how I love Thy Law! It is my meditation all the day. ...Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way*” (Psalm 119:97, 104). The Law is, after all, the curb whereby God checks to some extent the coarse outbursts of sin in the world, including the sins wrought by our old evil flesh (Romans 7:14-19); it is the mirror which shows us our sins and the wrath of God and thus reveals our desperate need for a Savior (Romans 3:19-20; 7:7; Galatians 3:22); and, for those who have already been regenerated by the saving power of the Gospel, God’s Law is the rule, that is, the norm and standard, which shows to true believers which works belong to a God-pleasing life, which works are truly “good” in the sight of God, though not meritorious of salvation, and which works, motivated solely by the grace of God, as the fruit and evidence of saving faith, “*show forth the praises of Him who hath called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (I Peter 2:9). God grant us ever to treasure His Holy Law as that which makes the honey of His Gospel taste ever that much sweeter in our mouths unto life everlasting! (I Peter 2:2-3).

—D. T. M.

News from our Committee on Missions

*“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” —Philippians 2:4-5*

Orthodox Lutheran Church of Ekaterinburg (Russia)

“Giving thanks always for ALL things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20). “All things” include Pastor Schurganoff’s recent January 4th report concerning his congregation: “No one was sick with Covid-19. Thank God!” We “rejoice” (Romans 12:15a) with them that God has protected them in His grace and mercy from this virus.

Concerning the Sunday “assembling” (Hebrews 10:25) of this far-away congregation in Ekaterinburg, Russia, Pastor Schurganoff recently wrote: “We continue our divine services in a country house. Hopefully this winter will not be too cold here, as there might be some difficulties for transportation.” On January 8th, he made this further comment: “Our transportation is going well. It is not very cold here yet.” This transportation, as you may recall, is **bus** transportation to and from this country home. Each month our Conference provides \$200.00 to help pay for this bus taking Pastor Schurganoff and his people from their homes to the location for their worship services (this country home, the home of one of their members).

Brother Schurganoff, every two months, continues faithfully to send to the undersigned a detailed report of his pastoral work as far as each Sunday’s sermon text, Scripture readings, Bible Class topic, and attendance. His

most recent reports, covering the last six months, show that Worship Service attendance is between 10 and 14. He also continues to teach a Midweek Bible Class in his family's apartment. As the Word of God is *"faithfully"* (Jeremiah 23:28b) and regularly preached and taught week-after-week in this Russian congregation, may the pastor and the members of his *"flock"* (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2-3) be greatly encouraged by the words and promises of the Lord God Himself in Isaiah 55: *"As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it"* (vv. 10-11).

To a question directed to him concerning his physical health, Pastor Schurgonoff gave this answer at the end of December: "I'm fine. My pains are completely gone and only remind of themselves in the off-season." We give *"thanks"* (Psalm 118:1) to our gracious God for His goodness and mercy in giving healing and recovery to Pastor Schurganoff following his severe mugging several years ago. *"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes"* (Psalm 118:23).

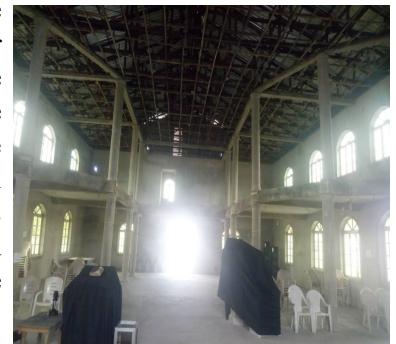
Let us keep on remembering these dear brethren in our prayers to our Triune, loving, and forgiving God in Christ Jesus, asking Him (I John 5:14) to help this pastor and his people to *"continue"* (II Timothy 3:14) in those teachings which they have learned and been assured of from God's Word, especially that priceless, sure, and certain teaching that *"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing [not charging] their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation"* (II Corinthians 5:19).

St. Clement's Lutheran Church, Elem-Sangama, Rivers State, Nigeria

The Fellowship of Lutheran Congregations in Nigeria (F.L.C.N.) is a church body in fellowship with our Conference, but not subsidized by our Conference. Periodically, in *The Concordia Lutheran*, we will focus on a member congregation of the F.L.C.N. to help our readers become better acquainted with these foreign congregations, since we are not able to visit them in person. In this issue, we will focus on **St. Clement's Lutheran Church**, Elem-Sangama, Rivers State.



St. Clement's has a membership of one hundred souls. To the left is a recent picture of this congregation, gathered in front of their unfinished church building, following one of their worship services. Work continues in the construction of their church as funds are available. The picture to the right shows the interior of their church building, what has been done so far, and what still needs to be done.



Pastor Timothy Aaron is the *"overseer"* of this *"flock"* (Acts 20:28). He is 46 years old, and has been the pastor of St. Clement's since 2014, when he graduated from the F.L.C.N. seminary. His training for the pastoral office was carried out by Pastor Nimi Fyneface.



He has been married to Esther, his wife, for eight years.

Our Conference provided computer tablets to all of the F.L.C.N. pastors in 2019. These tablets were "loaded" with many faithful theological books and other helpful theological materials. Pastor Aaron had this comment concerning his tablet: "The tablet given to us has been very helpful to me."

Pastor Aaron is one of the F.L.C.N. pastors who has to, for the time being, have a part-time job beside his pastoral work in order to support his family. While the F.L.C.N. and its congregations are in full agreement with us that the full financial support of the ministry is ordained by God (I Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6-7; Luke 10:7; etc.), Pastor Aaron says that he has to work at a part-time job (in addition to his pastoral work) “because the church [St. Clement’s] is not financially stable enough [at the present time] to take care of my needs.” The economic conditions there are a real trial for the congregation, under which the people are struggling for survival. God’s Word also teaches heads of households, as their personal responsibility: “*If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*” (I Timothy 5:8). Caught as it were between two pressing economic conditions, the pastor, as a believer, must see to the support of his family, as evidence of his faith. Let us fervently pray (James 5:16b) that, in the very near future, our God would provide the needed employment and income for His people at St. Clement’s, so that they, with God’s “*help*” (Psalm 121:2), will be able to relieve their pastor of his special burden by supporting him fully in accordance with God’s ordinance, as His Word teaches in I Corinthians 9: “*Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live [make their living] of the Gospel*” (v. 14).

As the Word of God is “*faithfully*” (Jeremiah 23:28b) and regularly preached and taught week-after-week in this Elem-Sangama congregation, may the pastor and the members of his “*flock*” (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2-3) be greatly encouraged by the words and promises of the Lord God Himself in Isaiah 55: “*As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it*” (vv. 10-11).

Let us keep on remembering these dear brethren in our prayers, coming “*boldly unto the throne of grace*” (Hebrews 4:16), asking our God (I John 5:14) to help this pastor and his people confidently to confess again and again: “*If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:31b-32), “*all things*” that we “*need*” (Philippians 4:19) according to His gracious and good “*will*” (Matthew 6:10b).

— R. J. L.



Let Us SEE Our Blessed Redeemer in His Holy Passion!

*“They understood none of these things;
and this saying was hid from them;
neither knew they the things which were spoken.”*

—Luke 18:34



On Wednesday, February 17th, we mark the beginning of another holy Lenten season—a period of six weeks during which we give special attention to the study of our Savior’s *Great Passion*, His suffering and death for the sins of the world, keeping before our mind’s eye the **REASON** for Jesus’ **supreme sacrifice**, namely, that, in the words of St. Paul to the Romans, “*He was delivered for [because of] our offenses*” (Romans 4:25).

In preparation for this holy Lenten season, we see in the verses just preceding our “title-text” the Lord Jesus lovingly taking aside His disciples to give them a *preview* of the events that lay ahead for Him, to *show* them what all would be done to Him in Jerusalem, and to explain **why** all these things **had to be** accomplished. And yet, in spite of Jesus’ clear words and explanation, the poor disciples

simply didn’t get the point; they didn’t *understand*; they didn’t *SEE*! They were suffering from *spiritual nearsightedness and dullness* which kept them from seeing the **true nature** of His redemptive work on their behalf, now soon coming to its full accomplishment in His suffering and death on the cross. As we now also find ourselves facing Jesus’ *Great Passion* in the Lenten season just before us, let us examine in this portion of St. Luke’s Gospel account, for our own warning and benefit, the reasons why the spiritually blind do not recognize their own Redeemer.

The disciples’ lack of spiritual understanding which Luke describes is not *total* blindness (or the absence of saving faith), but a *partial* spiritual blindness or *visual handicap*, as it were, because of which the full knowledge of the truth is *impaired*. For Jesus’ disciples were indeed *true believers* in Him, having been called, enlightened and sanctified by His Holy Spirit through the Gospel. And they clung to Him in simple childlike faith, though at times its weakness brought them to the point of real jeopardy and even to temporary loss of faith itself, as in Peter’s case, who not only *rebuked* Jesus concerning His suffering and death (Matthew 16:22ff.) but later also *denied* Him before men (26:70ff.; cf. 10:33).

All of us, because of the weakness of our flesh, suffer from spiritual blindness to *some degree or other*, inasmuch as we do not perfectly know, rightly understand, and fully appreciate every single truth of God’s Holy Word; and, because of that very weakness in our spiritual sight, we often find ourselves not all that “interested” in *becoming* enlightened, in *learning* more, in *searching* the Scriptures, and *growing* in grace. Consequently, some of that blindness remains and handicaps our faith, actually endangering it and making us an easy prey for Satan! That’s precisely **why** we must apply to our blindness the precious “*eyesalve*” of the Gospel to heal and strengthen our eyes of faith (Revelation 3:18) and pray in humble faith with the Psalmist: “*Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law!*” (119:18), lest we remain blind to certain precious truths and at length, God forbid, fail even to **see** and **recognize** our precious Redeemer! For this was the terrible jeopardy into which the disciples placed themselves when they **blindly** resisted the fulfillment of divine prophecy in Jesus, the Messiah, in spite of His longsuffering and painstaking efforts to help them **see**!

Luke records the incident as follows: “*Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, ‘Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished’*” (18:31). Jesus had taught these dear disciples of His for about three years; and, in the process of patiently instructing them concerning His person and work, He had shown them in detail how the prophecies of the Old

Testament about the promised Messiah to come actually *pointed to Him*. He had talked about Moses and said, “*He wrote of Me*” (John 5:46). He had spoken of Isaiah, David, Jonah, and the other prophets who had served as the mouthpieces of God Himself to foretell the coming of His *Anointed One*, the Redeemer of Israel. And yet, as they now set out on their last journey together, headed for the city of Jerusalem and the fulfillment of all these prophecies in Jesus’ impending passion, Luke tells us: “*They understood none of these things.*” Although they had learned most of these wonderful prophecies from their youth up, as had Timothy (II Timothy 3:15), as have also most of US, and had heard them clearly applied to JESUS in His very own words; and, although they had confessed Him to be “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16), they suddenly **WENT BLIND**, as it were, to the **real significance** of all these prophecies; and they **failed to see** Jesus, their Redeemer, revealed in these words of Holy Scripture!

The Jews of our day and time still do not recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the true Messiah of God, because they do not **see** Him in the Old Testament prophecies. They are, of course, **TOTALLY BLIND**, inasmuch as they reject Him outright in unbelief, and continue to close eyes, ears, and heart to His precious Word, which is able to save their souls (James 1:21)! They regard Isaiah chapter 53, for example, as referring to the suffering of the *Jewish people* at the hands of their enemies, rather than as what it *in fact is*, namely, a prophecy of the Messiah’s **vicarious atonement** for the sins of the world. —Now we might expect that kind of perversion of Scripture from the unbelieving Jews, but *from Jesus’ own disciples??* —Oh how *even the slightest degree* of spiritual blindness can endanger our faith if left to grow like spreading cataracts to close out the precious light of God’s pure Word!! Let us, therefore, vigorously fight against any inclination on our own part to be *complacent* and *indifferent* about our growth in grace and Christian knowledge, lest by such despisal of the Means of Grace we too fall prey to even greater blindness and lose sight of our Redeemer altogether in the glorious prophecies of His Word, and have it one day written of **us**: “*They understood none of these things, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*”

But there is another reason why the spiritually blind do not recognize their own Redeemer, and that is that they find His entire suffering and death *repugnant* and *disgusting*, so that they look away from His cross and thus lose sight of the price He paid to reconcile us vile, unworthy and wretched sinners to His heavenly Father!

The unregenerate children of this world, who suffer from **TOTAL** spiritual blindness in their unbelief, refuse to admit even their **need** for a Savior, a Redeemer; for they rely upon their own goodness, merit, and worthiness for favor with God. They are so utterly oblivious to their wretched spiritual condition in His holy sight that, even when staring into the flawless mirror of God’s indicting Law, they see no sin, no shame, no iniquity in themselves whatsoever.

Now if even the fierceness of God’s Law will not crush their pride and soften their hardness of heart and bring them to their knees in terror of His punishment, what effect indeed will the **Gospel** have on such people?? The Bible tells us that the precious good news of Christ’s *vicarious atonement* for the sins of the world is “*foolishness*” to the Greeks and a “*stumblingblock*” to the Jews (I Corinthians 1:23). They feel **no need** for it; and they utterly reject it in unbelief as silly, ridiculous, completely unnecessary, and even disgusting! Thus they blind themselves “*lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them,*” St. Paul writes in II Corinthians chapter 4. Is it any wonder, then, that the writer to the Hebrews exhorts **US**, saying, “*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin! For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end!*” (Hebrews 3:12-14). May God grant that to us for Jesus’ sake, as we continue in His Word to grow in grace and strength of faith by the power of the Holy Ghost unto life everlasting!

But we note yet in Luke’s verbally-inspired words that, although the disciples’ blindness and dullness had not yet **destroyed** their faith, it had **weakened them severely**, so that “*they understood none of these things.*” They were literally teetering on the very brink of disaster, so that even as Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*all the disciples,*” the Bible tells us, “*forsook Him and fled*” (Matthew 26:56; Mark 14:50). In their weakness they could not bear to see their Champion so mistreated, abused, and tortured, even though Jesus had tried to prepare them and to strengthen them well ahead of time. In their blindness, they blocked out from their understanding, so that they could not see it in their mind’s eye, what Jesus was so clearly describing, speaking about **Himself**: “*He shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and spitefully entreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again*” (Luke 18:32-33). Not only had the disciples failed to see Jesus as their suffering Redeemer and Savior in the prophecies of the **Old Testament**; they even looked away with revulsion from **Jesus’ own prophecy** of the *very same*

things! For a scourged, mocked, crucified *Substitute-for-sinners* (as Isaiah had so clearly described Him in his 53rd chapter) was **inconsistent** in their blind thinking with the glorious **earthly** Messiah they had *envisioned*, their Savior from the Romans, their Meal-ticket through life, and the ready Healer of their bodies —even more valuable than a Physician of their souls!

No wonder the Savior had spoken so sharply to Peter in rebuke of this very thinking —just after that bold disciple had confessed Jesus to be “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16). For when Jesus began to show the disciples then already how He would have to go up to Jerusalem to suffer and die and be raised again the third day (just as He repeated the same thing here, as Luke records His words), “*Peter took Him,*” Matthew tells us, “*and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Be it far from Thee, Lord! This shall not be unto Thee!’ But [Jesus] turned and said unto Peter, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou art an offense unto Me! For thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men!’*” (16:22-23). And yet, even after that sharp rebuke, in which the Lord warned that this blind, worldly kind of thinking was the **devil’s** work, yet **now**, just before Jesus’ great passion, these disciples STILL “*understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them; neither knew they the things which were spoken.*” —And that blindness stuck with them even after Jesus’ mighty **resurrection from the dead**, when He called them “*fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*” (Luke 24:25) —yea, to the very day of His **ascension into heaven** forty days later when they supposed He would at that time “*restore again the kingdom to Israel*” as some kind of **temporal** Messiah (Acts 1:6)! Not until the Holy Spirit powerfully removed the stubborn spiritual cataracts from their eyes on the Day of Pentecost did they truly understand the “plan of salvation” and its **necessary cost** to their Redeemer!

Now, my dear brethren in the Lord, *we too* in all honesty and humility must confess ourselves as well to be “fools” and often “*slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.*” For, due to the weakness of our old sinful flesh, we frequently find ourselves groping about in spiritual nearsightedness to understand things concerning our salvation, looking often in all the wrong places to find the sayings that seem hidden from our eyes, and, at the same time, reluctant to study, to search, to grow, and to abound in the priceless wisdom of God’s Word! Like so many who are spiritually blind to divine truths, we often imagine ourselves in our foolishness to be *fully sighted* in spiritual matters, *adequately knowledgeable* concerning the doctrines of Holy Scripture, and *keen* in our *spiritual insight* —so much so that we don’t NEED to grow! We can be our own authority, our own guide, our own teacher. Yes, sinful pride is **Satan’s tool**, whereby he nurtures just such attitudes in the heart of many a Christian! And the really tragic thing about the blindness he creates is that it is so DECEPTIVE! “*Wherefore,*” writes Paul to the Corinthians (and also to us), “*let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall!*” (I Corinthians 10:12). The nearsighted person who rejects diagnosis and refuses to wear glasses **thinks** he can see just fine! Not until he falls on his face does he recognize just how blind he has been! And for **some**, *spiritual* knowledge, *spiritual* sight, comes **too late**; for Satan has already devoured them; and they are lost eternally!

And so, as the Savior comes to us this Lenten season and invites us: “*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem*” —to witness once again in the pages of His Holy Word *what great things He has done for us and for our salvation*— instead of despising the age-old *Passion History*, read again in our churches during the coming weeks for our learning, as something “we know already” (having heard it from our youth); instead of passing off special Lenten meditations, sermons, and services as so much “re-hash” of “old material,” let us learn from our consideration of Luke’s inspired words before us to **relish** the Savior’s precious instruction, and to **pray** as we hear and study and learn and grow in His grace: “*Open Thou [our] eyes!*” (Psalm 119:18); “*Lord, increase our faith!*” (Luke 17:5); yea,

Lord, in loving contemplation
fix our hearts and eyes on Thee
till we taste Thy full salvation
and Thine unveiled glory see!

(TLH 155, 5)

— D. T. M.

Churches in Fellowship

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CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Idama, Nigeria

The Rev. Innocent Karibo, Pastor

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SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Rev. Bateinm Bestman, Pastor

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ST. CLEMENT'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria

The Rev. Timothy Biobele Aaron, Pastor

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Elem-Sangama Arch-Deaconry

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ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

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(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, Pastor

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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

E-mail: pastormensing@yahoo.com

On the Web at

PeaceEvLutheran.com

Office Telephone: (708) 532-4288

Parsonage: (708) 532-9035

Pastor's Cell: (708) 601-3943

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Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355

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Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. PAUL E. BLOEDEL, Pastor

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355

E-mail: revbloedel@gmail.com

Telephone: (541) 258-2941

Pastor: (541) 258-2941

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

5350 South Fountain Street, Seattle, WA 98178

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

Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

On the Web at

StLukes-CLC.com

Telephone: (206) 723-1078

(Pastoral Vacancy at present)

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

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

Worship Service 11:00 a.m.

The Rev. DAVID J. MENSING, Pastor

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

E-mail: d_rnensing@hotmail.com

On the Web at

StMarksEvLutheran.com

Telephone: (708) 757-6859

Pastor: (708) 655-7549

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

300 North Ridgeland Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302

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

E-mail: robertjlietz@gmail.com

On the Web at

TrinityEvLutheran.com

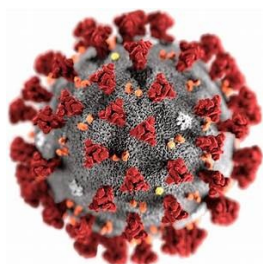
Telephone: (708) 386-6773

Parsonage: (708) 386-4145

Pastor's Cell: (708) 556-1892

(During the current pandemic, please call the respective pastors regarding **assembled** or alternative "virtual" services.)

Help us, Good Lord!



“Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

—Philippians 4:6

Lord God, dear heavenly Father, may it please Thee according to Thy merciful providence to regard our beloved country in this time of peril as we experience a virtual pandemic of the virulent Coronavirus even now threatening each and every one of us with exposure and infection. Even as we exercise prudent measures to contain this virus and to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our neighbors from contagion, keep us from anxiety, depression and despair, and cause us rather, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to let our requests come before Thy throne of grace, commending ourselves to Thy special fatherly goodness for Jesus' our Savior's sake, that it may please Thee in Thine own best time and way to comfort us in this time of chastening and to relieve us from our various necessities, granting us meanwhile patience under our sufferings and a happy issue out of all our afflictions according to Thy promise that all things work together for good to them that love Thee, to them who are the called according to Thy gracious purpose. We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ, our precious Redeemer, our only Mediator and Advocate at Thy throne. Amen.

