

# *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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Rejoice!

— Philippians 4:4



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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.

# Let Us Give Thanks unto the Lord!



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

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

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

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

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

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

And Paul also points out the MOTIVE for our thanksgiving, as we read on in our verse: *“Giving thanks...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* We are not to give thanks to God for His many blessings just because “it’s the right thing to do,” nor yet because this is the command of God’s LAW, nor because ingratitude is a grievous sin which merits God’s anger and displeasure. No, our MOTIVATION to grateful thanksgiving is not the threats of the Law, but the inestimable love of Jesus, our Savior, for whose sake God is our *“Father,”* who loves us in Christ, cares for us, and provides for all our needs (Cf. Matthew 6:24ff.). *“For the love of Christ constraineth us,”* that is, forces us, Paul writes to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 5:14); so that, if the love of Jesus for us poor sinners will not move us to cheerful, grateful, yea, spontaneous thanksgiving, then nothing will; for we are then no longer God’s dear children, moved by His precious Gospel, but we are “moved” only by the Law, and we are *“fallen from grace!”* (Galatians 5:4). May God mercifully preserve us from such an end, but let us rather be motivated ever and alone by *“His will in Christ Jesus concerning [us]”* (I Thessalonians 5:18), who are His dear children by faith in His Son, that we who have been *“justified freely by His grace”* (Romans 3:24) — forgiven and made right with Him as the free gift of His mercy to all mankind *“in Christ Jesus”* — should not only ask Him for things, but also THANK Him “as dear children [thank] their dear father” (Luther).

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

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

*“Giving thanks ALWAYS for ALL THINGS,”* writes the Apostle. And herein lies the test for every one of us as to our gratitude as Christians: Can we, like the Psalmist, firmly rely on God’s goodness and faithfulness in times of trial? — Can we, like Job of old, who lost everything he owned, as well as his children, his health, and even the faithfulness of his wife, can we see God’s love in His chastening hand and declare: *“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!”* (Job 1:21), OR will we “murmur and complain beneath the chastening rod” (TLH 396, 2), as if we somehow deserve better from His hand? — Nay, apart from the grace of God in our dear Savior we deserve much worse, don’t we? What we need to do is humbly to lean upon our God and confidently declare with the hymnwriter:

“What God ordains is always good; His will abideth holy.  
As He directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly.  
I take content what He hath sent. His hand that sends me sadness  
will turn my tears to gladness!”

(TLH 521, 1-2)

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

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

—D. T. M.

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## We Should Eagerly Look Forward to Jesus’ SECOND Visible Advent

*“Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him. And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.”* — Revelation 1:7 with the context of vv. 4-8

This year on the 29th of November, we began another “church year” of grace with the holy Advent Season, and during the four weeks before Christmas we look forward—as the word “advent” suggests—to the “coming” of the dear Lord Jesus, as each week we light another candle on the Advent Wreath, counting down the Sundays to the celebration of His birth. That’s what we might call the “obvious” coming—the gladsome coming that everybody is even now gearing up for with Christmas decorations and purely external preparations.

But our hearts and minds as Christians should be focused also on the other “comings” of the Lord Jesus which affect us just as much and should bring us just as much joy. We should not only think back to His first visible Advent long

ago in fulfillment of God's promises to His ancient people, who waited and longed over 4,000 years for the first Christmas; but there's also the spiritual Advent which only Christians can have and understand by faith —not by our own reason or strength, but by the faith created in us by God's Holy Spirit through the Gospel. In this blessed Advent picture, we see Christ "coming" into our hearts, to make His dwellingplace within us, to sanctify and cleanse us through the means of grace to be His mystical bride in the marriage feast of Heaven! And that Advent demands spiritual preparedness with genuine, heartfelt contrition (or sorrow) for our sins and humble confidence in Jesus' merits alone as the price-in-full paid for our forgiveness by God.

And then, there's the Advent that people generally don't want to think about —not now at any rate. It's that "future" Advent in which we view the Savior's second visible "coming" into the world for judgment. Most people would rather skip that aspect of Advent altogether because it's such a "wet blanket" on the upcoming festivities to think about the end of this glittering world, to think about having to leave it for a far-off destination where life as we know it will be a thing of the past. The everlasting torment to which all unbelievers will be subjected is hard enough to imagine; but, because of our sinful flesh, even we Christians sometimes find ourselves not all that eager "*to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better*" than remaining in this rotten, sinful world! (Philippians 1:23).

But in the title-text before us as the theme of our present article, the Apostle John casts an altogether *different light* on that future aspect of Advent, as he shows us that we should *eagerly* look forward to Jesus' second visible advent.

The *Revelation of St. John*, the last book of the New Testament, is a prophetic book. We commonly think of prophecy as belonging exclusively to the *Old Testament*. But this wonderful book is the God-inspired record of a special "*revelation*" given to the Apostle John by Jesus Himself, intended not to keep his private, personal business, but to share with the congregations of Asia Minor first of all, and then with all mankind in the Holy Scriptures. In the first three verses of this book (which we might call its "preface"), John entitles it "*the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John, who bare record of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand.*" This "preface" is extremely important for us Christians, because it points out that the things which John is about to report from his vision should not make us fearful, or anxious, or sad, or uncertain about the future, but rather "*blessed,*" that is, happy, reassured, hopeful and confident.

About what? We look first at verse seven of our title-text, cited above, where John says of Jesus: "*Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him. And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.*" Jesus is coming soon, in a manner which He Himself foretold in plain language many times to His disciples and to the unbelieving Jews during His public ministry here on earth. He said, for example, to Caiaphas and to the Jewish council which condemned Him to death: "*Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*" (Matthew 26:64). Not only the unbelieving Jews, not only "*they which pierced Him,*" but "*all kindreds of the earth*" who rejected Him in unbelief of the Gospel preached to them "*shall wail because of Him!*" They will have just cause to weep and to gnash their teeth (Matthew 8:12) in contempt and despair, because the hour of their judgment and condemnation will have come. Without faith in the mercy and grace of God to poor sinners, they will be judged by the merciless measure of God's Law: "*Ye shall be holy, for I am holy!*" (Leviticus 11:44). "*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment,*" Jesus says in Matthew 25:46.

But we, who by God-wrought faith confide in God's mercy for Christ's sake —vile, miserable, and wretched sinners though we are by nature— we will be declared "*blessed of My Father*" (Matthew 25:34) by the Lord Jesus, forgiven of all our sins and clad in His perfect righteousness, and thus should even now eagerly look forward to His second visible advent with joy, with hope, with peace of heart, with gratitude for having been saved by grace...

...because of who Jesus is! John writes "*to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come*" (speaking first of God the Father) "*and from the seven spirits which are before His throne*" (an expression designating the Holy Ghost in His completeness as our Sanctifier) "*and*

from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness” (our perfect Prophet), “and the first begotten of the dead” (our perfect Priest, who was raised from the dead after having sacrificed Himself for us on the cross), “and the Prince of the Kings of the earth” (our King who rules over the governments of this world in the interest of His church). “I am Alpha and Omega,” Jesus continues through John in verse 8, “the beginning and the ending,” saith the Lord, “which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”

...because Jesus is the eternal, omnipotent, unchangeable, holy, faithful... (practically all His divine attributes are either named or implied!) ... because Jesus is the very Son of God in whose three-fold office He still functions as the exalted Christ, which name means the Messiah, the “Anointed One,” the fully-accredited Redeemer of mankind, Jesus has the undisputed authority to pronounce us “blessed” for His own sake—to *own us* as His “sheep,” as His “friends,” as His “disciples,” as “heirs” with Him of glory everlasting! That is why we should *look forward eagerly* to His second visible advent! He has pronounced us “blessed” (Matthew 25:34)! And “God is not a man that He should lie!” (Numbers 23:19).

But that’s not the only reason! We Christians should also *eagerly look forward* to Jesus’ second coming because of what He did for us! John writes in the context of our title-text: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father: To Him be glory and dominion and forever and ever! Amen.” (vv. 5-6). Jesus loved us! “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,” Jesus told His disciples (John 15:13). And He did that for them and for us as well. “He died for all,” the Bible tells us (II Corinthians 5:15). —He “washed us from our sins!” “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin,” John writes in his first epistle chapter 1. He redeemed us to God “by His blood” (Revelation 5:9). “Ye know,” Peter says in no uncertain terms, “that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Peter 1:18-19). —And when, with His “one offering” (Hebrews 10:10, 14), He laid down the payment-in-full for our sins, fully acceptable to the Father for the reconciliation of the world, God, for Jesus’ sake, declared the whole world *forgiven and righteous* in His sight (II Corinthians 5:19). Jesus gained us entrance into His heavenly kingdom (“made us kings”) and gave us direct access to the throne of God’s grace (“made us priests”), able to plead our own case before Him because of the righteousness of Christ which covers our “filthy rags” righteousness in His sight. “To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever!” —“Wherefore,” that is, because of what Jesus did for us, Paul writes to the Philippians, “God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!” (2:9-11) —That’s why we should *eagerly look forward* to Jesus’ second visible advent: Because of what He did for us!

But it’s not as though Jesus did all of that rather theoretically for “mankind” in general, but not perhaps for you and me specifically! Indeed, such a “nagging doubt” would rob us of the confident hope of being able to “stand in the judgment” (Psalm 1), yea, of being able even now *eagerly to look forward* to Christ’s second advent! —The Calvinists will tell you: “Christ died only for the elect, not for all! So, unless you’re sure that you’re of the elect, you have no positive hope that you have been redeemed, much less justified in the sight of God!” Such a soul-destroying lie robs poor sinners of their hope at the very threshold of eternity!

But John says in our title-text that Jesus “made us kings and priests unto God.” We are therefore what we are, thanks to Jesus’ blood and righteousness, His vicarious atonement for our sins! And we make all the benefits of His redemptive work our very own by faith, that is, by God-wrought confidence in the assurance of His precious Gospel — not because our confidence is strong, but because His promises are stronger! “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,” Paul writes in Romans chapter 8:1; after all, he adds: “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (v. 34). And “He that believeth on Him is not condemned,” Jesus Himself told Nicodemus (John 3:18). “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

That’s why we Christians can *eagerly look forward* to Jesus second visible advent without fear of condemnation, without doubt of our salvation! We have Christ’s own Word on it, who is “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and



*the ending,” that we are the children of God by faith in Him; “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17). “Beloved,” writes John in his First Epistle, as the “clincher” of this glorious assurance, “now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (3:2).*

Therefore the prospect of seeing our Savior “*coming with clouds*” —the prospect that should strike dread into every unbeliever— that prospect should fill US with eager anticipation because of having been redeemed to God by His blood (Revelation 5:9); because of having been reconciled by God “*unto Himself*” (II Corinthians 5:19; see also v. 18); because of “*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:24); because of being at peace with Him by faith in His Son (Romans 5:1); so that when Jesus promises us, “*Surely, I come quickly,*” we can answer with the confident hope, the happy expectation, of the Apostle John in the last chapter of this glorious Revelation: “*Even so come, Lord Jesus!*” (v. 20).

— D. T. M.

## The Coming Savior in Old Testament Prophecy



*“The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in, behold, He shall come, ’ saith the Lord of hosts.”*

—Malachi 3:1

On Sunday, November 29th, we found ourselves once again in the holy season of **Advent** as we entered upon a new Church Year of grace. Ever since the fourth century A. D., the Sundays before Christmas (at first five and then four) were set aside as a time of **preparation** specifically for the *Feast of the Nativity of our Lord*, the feast celebrating His coming into the flesh to be our Redeemer. As such, the season was called **Advent** [from the Latin word for “coming”]. During the weeks of this *penitential season* (characterized traditionally by the color *purple* in vestments, paraments, and even Advent candles), we examine ourselves regarding our sins and our dire need for the “coming” Savior, express our sincere contrition and repentance for all of our transgressions, and thus prepare our hearts to receive Him in humble, childlike faith as God’s “*unspeakable Gift*” (II Corinthians 9:15) to us and to all the world. Moreover, thus prepared for His coming into our *hearts*, we also look forward in joyful anticipation (Luke 21:28) to His *second visible* advent on the Last Day (as we considered in our previous article) and to “the end of our faith,” even the salvation of our souls (I Peter 1:9) which He purchased and won for us and for all mankind (I John 2:2; II Corinthians 5:19).

But the yearning for the Savior’s **advent** or coming is not limited to the **Advent season**, even for us Christians in these latter days; neither did it have its beginning in the early New Testament church when the liturgical year was developed and established to focus the attention of God’s people on all that He had done (and continues to do) for their salvation. For already at the beginning of time (Genesis 3), when man fell into sin, lost God’s image, and brought upon himself God’s wrath and displeasure, temporal death and eternal damnation in hell as “*the wages of sin*” (Romans 6:23), God promised to send a **Redeemer** in the person of His only-begotten Son, who would come as the Seed of the woman to destroy the power of the devil (Genesis 3:15), to atone for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53, etc.), and to establish reconciliation and peace between Himself and His rebellious creatures (Exodus 34:6, Daniel 9:24, etc.). Since that day, sinful man was “*justified by faith*” (Romans 5:1), was forgiven and made right with God by confiding solely in the merits of that promised Redeemer and in the reconciliation which God, in view of Christ’s vicarious atonement, had already in eternity decreed for all the world (II Corinthians 5:19).



God had said to the serpent, in the presence and for the comfort of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her SEED. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel"* (Genesis 3:15). Adam and Eve confidently looked forward in faith to the advent of that promised Deliverer, hoping for the prompt appearance of that greatest of all possessions. In fact, when Eve gave birth to her very own first-born son, whom they named *Cain* (meaning *"possession"*), Eve declared: *"I have gotten a man, **the LORD**,"* as her words in Genesis 4:1, properly translated, read in English. But *"the fullness of the time"* (Galatians 4:4) had not yet come for the Savior to be born into the world; and Eve's son turned out to be the world's first murderer instead of its Redeemer.

Nevertheless, God in His great mercy continued to promise the advent of His **Messiah**, the Anointed One, the Holy One of Israel, the Savior, in one prophecy after another, as well as in types and pictures of the Christ to come (Colossians 2:17), to remind His people of the covenant of His peace which, in mercy, He would surely keep (Isaiah 54:10). To Abraham He said: *"In thy SEED shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"* (Genesis 22:18); and the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:16 makes it crystal clear that the SEED promised to Abraham *"is Christ."* Moreover, for OUR comfort and assurance as Gentiles, God's promise says that not only the physical descendants of Abraham would be the beneficiaries of the Messiah's redemptive work and its resulting justification, but *"all the nations of the earth,"* showing that the Gospel, *"the Word of Reconciliation"* (II Corinthians 5:19b) *"[should] be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations,"* as Jesus Himself, *"the Propitiation...for the sins of the whole world"* (I John 2:2), stated in Matthew 24:14. And St. Paul tells us in Romans 4:3 that *"Abraham believed God, and it [i.e., his faith, v. 5] was counted unto him for righteousness,"* that he was personally justified before God by faith in His promise.

God repeated that same promise to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and to Jacob (Genesis 28:14); and, when Jacob was old, he passed along the Messianic Promise to his son, Judah (Genesis 49:10), whose descendants as a nation, he said, would still be self-governing until the advent of God's *"SHILOH,"* a name which means *"Prince of Peace"* (Cf. Isaiah 9:6). Indeed, in spite of the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews, from which God delivered them after seventy years in exile, and in spite of other conquests of Palestine thereafter, during and because of which the Jews lost a great deal of their sovereignty as a nation, *"the scepter"* or self-rule did not completely and irretrievably *"depart from Judah"* until its colonization and occupation by the Romans shortly before the birth of the Savior. To be sure, the Jewish Sanhedrin still had considerable political power and influence—even over Rome's procurator, Pontius Pilate, whom it blackmailed into convicting Jesus (John 19:12ff.)—but the Jews were no longer completely autonomous in their own affairs, as is evident from the fact that they had no legal authority to put anyone to death (John 18:31-32). And the Christchild Himself, at the time of His birth, was subject under the law both to the Romans (Luke 2:1ff.) and to their political "hack," King Herod the Great, who ruled in Jerusalem at the time of the Wise Men's visit (Matthew 2).

But the prophecies of the coming Savior did not cease with the promise to Judah and his descendants. In fact, they became not only *more numerous* as time went along, but they became *more detailed* in what they revealed about the promised Redeemer. Witness, for example, Moses' words to the Children of Israel in Deuteronomy 18:15 concerning Christ in His office as our Divine Prophet. He said: *"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken."* And in Numbers 24:17, Balaam prophesied that *"there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel,"* a prophecy which may well have been uncovered by the Wise Men in their research to learn the meaning of the star which they saw in the east shortly after the Savior's birth.

The Psalms, too, are *full* of Messianic prophecies which reveal considerable detail about the promised Redeemer, both as to His person and as to His work, some of which Jesus Himself referred to as divine testimony concerning Himself (Cf. for example Psalm 110:1 with Matthew 22:42-46). Clear reference is made to Jesus' office as our Divine Priest (Psalm 110:4), His betrayal by Judas (Psalm 41:9), His being hated without a cause (Psalm 69:4 and 109:3-5) and falsely accused by His enemies (Psalm 27:12), His suffering and death (Psalms 22 and 69), His resurrection (Psalm 16:10), and His ascension into heaven (Psalm 68:18). Notable among all these, as perhaps the most outstanding example of such detail, is Psalm 22, in which the Savior Himself speaks concerning His Great Passion and utters, a thousand years in advance, the words which He cried out from His cross of agony, *"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"*

While in the space allotted for this article we cannot cite *every* Old Testament prophecy of the Savior's first visible *advent*, we don't want to neglect the *later* prophecies in particular, those penned by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and Malachi—*rectilinear* prophecies pointing directly to the promised Redeemer and the circumstances surrounding His coming into the world. Although Isaiah is remembered very especially for the fifty-third chapter of his prophecy, which describes in detail the *vicarious atonement* to be made by the Messiah, the sacrificial Lamb of God, for the transgressions of his people (vv. 5, 8, 11), he also wrote by inspiration of the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21) two prophecies concerning the *conception* and *birth* of the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the Savior (Isaiah 43:1-3a) at His *advent* into the world. The first reads: "*Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His Name IMMANUEL*" (Isaiah 7:14) —this rectilinear prophecy of Christ's *virgin birth* having been perfectly *fulfilled* to the letter in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4) and having been *cited* by God's angel as irrefutable evidence that the very Jesus, conceived by the Holy Ghost in His virgin mother (Luke 1:26ff), was the long-promised Messiah, *Emmanuel*, "*God with us*" (Matthew 1:22-23), who would "*save His people from their sins*" (v. 21).

Isaiah's second prophecy again speaks of the birth of the Christchild and identifies Him as "*the mighty God*" who would live among us and "*the Prince of Peace*," the "*Shiloh*" promised centuries before to Judah (Genesis 49:10). Isaiah wrote: "*Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called WONDERFUL [i.e. Miracle], COUNSELOR, the MIGHTY GOD, the EVERLASTING FATHER, the PRINCE OF PEACE. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this*" (Isaiah 9:6-7). Note that the promised Messiah's establishment of His kingdom, His kingdom of everlasting *government* and *peace*, of *judgment* and *justice* lasting into eternity, would fulfill the "type" or figure of King David's reign over the house of Israel. It would be a *gracious* Kingdom predicated on God's justification of poor sinners freely in view of the coming Messiah's vicarious atonement (II Corinthians 5:19; Romans 3:21ff.), the Kingdom that "*the zeal of the Lord of Hosts*" would surely establish according to His own eternally-decreed purpose and grace in His Son (Ephesians 1:3ff.; II Timothy 1:9).

Jeremiah, too, prophesied the *advent* of this Messiah and the establishment of His gracious Kingdom upon the "type" of David's reign, saying: "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous BRANCH [Cf. Zechariah 3:8b], and a KING shall reign and prosper, and shall exercise judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely. And this is His Name whereby He shall be called: THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" (Jeremiah 23:5-6; cf. Romans 3:21-22). Note very especially in this prophecy the promise that "*Judah*" and "*Israel*" will be saved when the "*King*," the Anointed One, establishes His rule, His Kingdom of Grace, in which His righteousness is imputed to His subjects as their righteousness. These words of the prophet do NOT foreshadow a general conversion of the Jews during the so-called "millennial reign of Christ on earth" before the end comes; for, as St. Paul clearly explains, it is not the *physical* Israel ("*the children of the flesh*") that shall be saved; "*but the children of the promise are counted for the seed*" (Romans 9:8). It is only the *spiritual* Israel, true believers in Jesus Christ as their Savior, who are "*the children of God*" (Galatians 3:26), to whom His righteousness is imputed *by faith* (Romans 1:17; 3:21-22), not those who reject Him and His vicarious satisfaction in their place, not those who despise the grace of God in Christ and desire to be justified by the Law (Galatians 5:4-5). Jesus Himself tells us who shall be saved: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*" (Mark 16:16).

The Prophet Micah prophesied that the eternal Ruler, God's Anointed One, would be born not just in *any* Bethlehem, not in Bethlehem in *Zebulun*, but in Bethlehem of *Judea*, in Bethlehem "*the fruitful*," as that little town was known among the Jews in ancient times, in the Bethlehem where King David had been born over a thousand years before the Savior's *advent*. Micah wrote: "*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, 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) —quoted by the scribes to Herod in Matthew 2 to establish the birthplace of the "*King of the Jews*." Of what significance can this prophecy be when so many in our day claim that matters of history, geography and science recorded in the Scriptures are *not* the inerrant Word of God? Not only does St. Matthew in the New Testament cite this verse as authoritative evidence (even to the Jewish scribes) of "*where Christ should be born*" (Matthew 2:4), but it confirms the earthly genealogy of the Savior as prophesied by other "*holy*

*men of God*” that He would be born “*of the house and lineage of David*” (Luke 2:4) —*legally* because Joseph was Jesus’ father-of-record (Luke 3:23), and *biologically* because Mary, His virgin mother, was also descended from the House of David. Thus the identification of Jesus as God’s Messiah, the “*Son of David*” (Matthew 21:9), is confirmed; thus the Scriptures of the prophets were fulfilled; thus the promises of God Himself, “*given by inspiration of God*” (II Timothy 3:16), were kept to the letter. Thus “*we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*” (John 4:42).

And now we come to the last prophecy recorded for our comfort and assurance in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Prophet Malachi penned God’s own first-person promise, who declared about four hundred years before the Savior’s birth: “*Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me*” (Malachi 3:1) —a clear reference to John the Baptist, the Savior’s forerunner, as the Lord Jesus Himself confirmed this to His disciples by quoting from Malachi’s prophecy in Matthew 11:10. But, for the purpose of our article, namely, to examine prophecies of the Savior’s *advent*, it is the second statement in Malachi 3:1 that demands our attention: “*And THE LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT, whom ye delight in. Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.*” When “*the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son*” (Galatians 4:4) just as He had promised. The “*Messenger of the Covenant*” had “*suddenly come to His temple,*” to His Church, to His “*Zion,*” to “*the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High*” (Psalm 46:4), “*the tabernacle that shall not be taken down*” (Isaiah 33:20) because He promises that “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:18).

Our Divine Prophet, the “*Messenger of the Covenant*” of God’s grace, “*who is in the bosom of the Father*” (John 1:18), declared His Father’s love for all the world (John 3:16) on the basis of the vicarious atonement that He Himself would render to divine justice for the sins of all mankind. During His public ministry, He manifested Himself by word and deed as the long-promised Redeemer of the world. He perfectly fulfilled every prophecy of the Scriptures concerning Himself; and then He laid down His life as “*the Lamb of God*” (John 1:29), as “*our Passover*” (I Corinthians 5:7b), whose precious blood was poured out as the incorruptible Sacrifice on the Mercy Seat of God (I Peter 1:18-19), the all-sufficient “*price*” (I Corinthians 6:20) that alone could propitiate God’s justice and purchase salvation for every man. Thus “*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). “*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). The covenant of God’s grace has literally been “text-messaged” to us in the Holy Scriptures, in the precious Word of the Gospel, proclaimed by “*the Angel* [Hebrew: “*the messenger*”] *of the Lord,*” Jesus Himself in His holy *Advent*. Anticipating, therefore, with great joy His coming to us again this holy Advent-tide through Word and Sacrament, we join with the hymnwriter in singing:

Come, Thou precious Ransom, come,  
only Hope for sinful mortals!  
Come, Thou Savior of the world!  
Open are to Thee all portals.  
Come, Thy beauty let us see;  
anxiously we wait for Thee!

Hail! Hosanna, David’s Son!  
Help, Lord, hear our supplication!  
Let Thy kingdom, scepter, crown  
bring us blessing and salvation,  
that forever we may sing:  
“Hail, hosanna!” to our King.

(TLH 55, 1 and 4)



—D. T. M.

# The Joyous Message of the Christmas Angels



*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid! 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. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men!” —Luke 2:8-14*

Imagine yourselves for just a moment sitting with those shepherds of Bethlehem on a grassy hillside tending a flock of sleepy sheep. It’s late at night, and the shepherds are weary from the day’s labor. The grass is wet with dew; the crisp night air, in spite of its stillness, pierces through their cloaks; and the shepherds move yet closer to the glowing coals of the watch fire, trying to keep warm. It is so quiet there on the meadow under that clear, star-speckled sky, that the slightest complaint from a sheep or lamb is a startling disturbance. Yet, barring the intrusion of a hungry wolf on the prowl, this night should be peaceful enough and should pass as easily as most.

Suddenly, without warning, the sky is ablaze with blinding light, with “*the glory of the Lord*,” the Christmas Gospel tells us, with a *holy* brightness that terrifies the shepherds! Could it be that the day of God’s judgment has come upon them?? They look up and see a figure standing in that light, a heavenly messenger who beckons for their attention to what he is about to say. “*Sore afraid*,” the shepherds brace themselves for the worst, as they anticipate the pronouncement of God’s just anger against them because of their sins.

The angel speaks with a clarity of a heavenly trumpet, but also with the sweetness of a shepherd’s pipe: “***Fear not!***” he says. “*Don’t keep cringing and shrinking back in terror at what my message might be; don’t hide your face from the light of God’s glory because of your sins and your unworthiness before Him.*” What could this holy messenger be about to say that would make them less fearful of God’s justice?? What could possibly change things that drastically for the shepherds, that instead of quaking at this sight, they should now put away their fear and hearken calmly to the rest of the message?

“*Behold, I bring you **GOOD** tidings of great **JOY**,*” the angel continued. **Good** news? Great **joy**? A **Gospel** message to US?? Those poor, humble shepherds needed some good news at that —not just good news about sheep prices, or about the political situation with the Roman occupation, or about the economy and heavy taxes— although most people, even in those days, would probably have welcomed *that* kind of news. No, this was to be a **far better** kind of news because this news was to soothe away the fear of God’s justice! These “*good tidings*” were to calm the guilt-ridden heart and to replace grave terror with “*great joy*”! Oh, how those shepherds, those Old Testament believers in the coming, promised Messiah, had been waiting, yea, longing for just this very news!

And what about **US**, my dear readers? Do **WE** *long* for the “*good tidings*” of the Gospel? When in the mirror of God’s holy Law we see ourselves as **He** sees us —vile, perverse, rebellious and vain by nature— and when that Law indicts us as His **enemies** and pronounces the sentence of **eternal death** upon us according to our *own deserts*, do we long for that promised Savior, as did the shepherds here in our text?? Oh, if **not**, then we must take yet another look into that perfect mirror and come to the inevitable realization that, on the basis of our works, no peace with God can ever be effected, no truce can be made, not even an approach to God is possible for us by nature, because even the best things we do reek like garbage in His holy nostrils! “[*We*] *are all gone aside; [we] are altogether become FILTHY; there is NONE that doeth good, no, not one!*” (Psalm 14:3). We too need some good news, all right, just like those humble shepherds on Bethlehem’s fields.

But, whatever that good news is, is it intended also for us poor **Gentiles**?? Or is it just for God's *chosen people*, the **Jews**? Listen to the angel's unmistakable words, dear convicted and contrite sinner: *"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE!"* Yes, that includes also **you** and **me**! —We, whose forefathers were not God's chosen people, whose barbaric, idolatrous ancestors did not have the sacred oracles of God, the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, to point them to the Savior, yes, **we too** are the intended recipients of these "*good tidings*," thanks be to God and His unmerited grace! How **our** hearts, **too**, burn with hopeful anticipation, as we perk up our ears with the shepherds of old to hear what that good news of great joy is all about.

*"For unto YOU is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord!"* In that one simple sentence, the Christmas angel brings not only the tidings themselves, but the sure and certain proof that this Babe is in fact the promised **Messiah**, the "*Anointed One*" of God, "**Christ**," He Himself "**the Lord**," **God**, manifested in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16). "*Born*"—The miracle of miracles that God should become man to take our place under the Law, and to give **His** life a ransom for **our** sins! "*This day*"—**now**, today, an accomplished **fact** and no longer just a promise to look forward to. The Messiah was actually here on this earth, just as the prophets had foretold! "*In the City of David*"—"Of what significance is *that*?" we might ask as Gentiles, as outsiders not versed in the Scriptures of prophecy. But those shepherds knew. Not only were they presumably from the City of David themselves, the town of Bethlehem, the ancestral home of King David, from whose line the Messiah was to come. But they well knew the prophecy of Micah, chapter 5, verse 2: "*But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, 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.*" The promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God Himself "*from everlasting*" was to come forth from that little, seemingly insignificant town of Bethlehem just to fulfill sacred prophecy! This was indeed the proof that the shepherds could readily see and understand!

*"A SAVIOR"*—not just an earthly Savior from the Romans, for that would not be good news to "*all people*," but only to the **Jews**. **This** Savior is the very **source** of "*good tidings of great joy*" to all people, of all times and of all places—sinners like you and me! He is the Savior of our sin-corrupted souls, as well as of our bodies, the ransom-price of our redemption, of whom the Prophet Isaiah wrote some 700 years before: "*He was wounded for OUR transgressions, He was bruised for OUR iniquities, and with His stripes WE are healed. ...The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of US ALL!*" (Isaiah 53:5-6). **That**, my dear fellow-sinners, is a **SAVIOR** worthy of the name; for **He** saves from sin, death and the devil—a feat that could never be accomplished by a mere man, for the Bible tells us: "*The redemption of their soul is precious!*" (Psalm 49:8a).

And this Babe of Bethlehem is not just **any** Savior, for the angel calls Him "**Christ**," that is, the **Messiah**, the One chosen of God to save His people from their sins, "*whom GOD hath set forth*," writes the Apostle Paul, "*to be a propitiation [that is, a **payment of satisfaction**] through faith in His blood*" (Romans 3:26). This was the "*Branch*" that God Himself had promised to raise up unto David, the King that was to "*reign and prosper*" (Jeremiah 23:5) over the hearts of men with His righteousness to cover their sins. —"*Good tidings*"?? "*Of great joy*"?? Oh, indeed, dear readers, of joy **unspeakable**, both to the leaping hearts of the shepherds and to ours as well!

And the crowning word in this brief sentence of joy now comes forth: "*Which is Christ, **the LORD!***" This too had been foretold, for the Prophet Jeremiah had written: "*This is His name whereby He shall be called: **THE LORD**, our Righteousness*" (Jeremiah 23:6). This was no mere man-Savior, no mere human being chosen for a special task, as was John the Baptist, the Savior's forerunner. But this was **the Lord, Jehovah** Himself, as we confess in the Nicene Creed: "*The only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*" —This was **Immanuel, God with us**.

And the mystery of Jesus' incarnation and humiliation is declared by the angel too, for the "*sign*" he gives to the shepherds, the signal by which they would be able to recognize "**God...manifest in the flesh**," was that they would find this Babe "*wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger*." Think of the immensity of this news: A Savior, **Christ**, the **Messiah**, the **Lord God** Himself, was to be found in the lowliest of poverty-stricken conditions, with nowhere to lay His precious head but upon rough hay, with nowhere to make His bed but in the feeding trough of common farm animals, with nowhere to call his home but a rude stable! What a miracle indeed, that "*though He was rich, yet for [our] sakes He BECAME poor, that [we] through His poverty might be RICH!*" (II Corinthians 8:9).



Is it any wonder then that the angels of God, sinless though they are and thus unable, in the truest sense, fully to appreciate the magnitude of this gracious gift of God— is that any wonder that these celestial beings burst forth with heavenly songs of praise— multitudes of them, filling the sky above the awe-struck shepherds? “*Glory to **God** in the highest,*” they sang, “*and on earth **peace, goodwill toward men!***” Yes, glory to **God**, whose love and mercy to sinful mankind in Christ Jesus made this gift and its glad tidings a **reality**! No credit for any of it is due to miserable mankind, wallowing in their sins, shame and utter helplessness. For the Bible tells us: “**God** was in Christ reconciling the world **unto Himself**, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (II Corinthians 5:19). This was **God’s doing alone**, and **all glory** was due to him alone!

And what was the **RESULT** of this glorious reconciliation in and through the precious Babe of Bethlehem? “*Peace on earth,*” the choirs of angels sang —not earthly peace which lasts only for the brief interval between wars and rumors of wars— but **real, lasting** peace on earth, peace **with God** through the forgiveness of sins; —and “*good will toward men*” God’s good will toward **us**, not ours to Him, lest we puff ourselves up to be our own Saviors! No, God’s good and gracious will toward us caused Him to reconcile us **unto Himself**, to send his only-begotten Son to be the price of our redemption, so that His perfect justice was also satisfied, and that, by faith in our Redeemer, Paul writes to the Romans, chapter 5, “*we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” **THAT** is the peace of which the angels sang on that first Christmas night: *Peace on earth and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled!*

Is all of this really “good news” to **YOU**, dear reader? Do you feel so weighed down with the guilt of sin that these words of the Christmas angels really mean something to **you personally** in your heart of hearts? Do you, by God’s grace, with those humble shepherds on Bethlehem’s fields, **long** to hear those “*good tidings of great joy*” again and again in the precious Gospel of salvation, realizing full well that the Babe of Bethlehem is your only way to God in heaven? Oh, then take these “*good tidings*” into **your** heart **by faith**, trust them as God’s own reliable message of peace, **His** peace and **His** goodwill, **His** everlasting mercy and grace to you, as well as to **all people**! And then hasten with those shepherds of old to the manger bed in Bethlehem’s stall—to the manger bed of the **sweet Gospel** where your Savior lies for you; then take Him up into your arms of faith and hold Him fast to your trembling breast, and pray:

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
make Thee a bed soft, undefiled  
within **my** heart, that it may be  
a quiet chamber kept for Thee.

(TLH 85, 13).

—D. T. M.



## Our Christian Resolve for the New Year

“...*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before...*” —Philippians 3:13-14

As we look back on the year 2020, each of us, according to the New Man within us, will humbly confess to God with Jacob of old: “*I am not worthy of the **least** of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant!*” (Genesis 32:10). For, in spite of our many sins and shortcomings by which we transgressed His holy Law and earned for ourselves His righteous wrath and displeasure, God in His mercy for Jesus’ our Savior’s sake never failed to open His gracious hand to us anew every morning with innumerable blessings both temporal and spiritual. And yet, because of our sinful flesh, even we, who are His adopted children by faith in His Son, returned Him evil

for good at every turn: Neglect for His faithfulness, indifference for His grace, and ingratitude for His bountiful goodness! As we review that miserable track record, we penitently thank God, that where our sin abounded, His grace to us much more abounded (Romans 5:20), so that, as we cling alone to Jesus' perfect merits as our Substitute under the Law, we have the Lord's own assurance that our sins have been forgiven and that all our filthiness is covered by our Savior's righteousness.

Moreover, as we look ahead to the new year before us, "*the love of Christ [constrains] us*" (II Corinthians 5:14a) with the help of His Holy Spirit to want to amend our sinful life and, out of gratitude for His grace, to live ever better "*unto Him which died for [us] and rose again*" (v. 15). This sincere desire on our part is NOT, however, what worldly people commonly refer to as a "New Year's resolution;" for the best-intentioned resolutions of unbelievers to "straighten out their lives," "get their act together," and "get right with God" are doomed to failure from the outset! Why?? Because "*they that are in the flesh cannot please God*," the Bible tells us (Romans 8:8), and "*without faith it is impossible to please Him*" (Hebrews 11:6). While they may see some outward and temporary success and prosperity in their lives (Psalm 73:3ff.), even their immediate future here in this world is often headed for disappointment, regret, and despair, and their real, long-term future after this present life is over will be one of everlasting shame, contempt and punishment in hell! (Psalm 73:17).

For us Christians, however, even short-term resolves have their proper place, PROVIDED they express our earnest intention, with the aid of God's Holy Spirit, to bring forth "*fruits meet for repentance*" (Matthew 3:8) in our lives as fruit and evidence of our faith to the glory of God's grace. For such short-term resolutions stem from our first and foremost concern—concern for our **eternal** welfare. And, in the title-text of our article, the Apostle Paul addresses that long-term concern and the resolve that flows from it, not only at the turn of the year, but every day of our lives, namely, our resolve as Christians to strive onward to our *heavenly* goal. We carry out that Godpleasing resolve or "resolution," Paul says, by "*forgetting those things which are behind*" and by "*reaching forth unto those things which are before*."

The Scriptures, both in these (cf. especially v. 14) and other God-inspired remarks of St. Paul (cf. I Corinthians 9:24-27) and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (12:1-3, 12-13), liken our lives as Christians to a marathon race, an endurance race, which we must finish in order to obtain the prize (cf. Matthew 24:13). Moreover, we recognize that **our sins** of the past and even of the present, the sins which so easily beset us (Hebrews 12:1b), have **held us back** like weighted shoes in our race for the heavenly prize that awaits us. Our sins of commission, whereby we have *done* that which in His holy Law our God *forbids*, and our sins of omission, whereby we have *neglected to do* those things which He *requires* of us—ALL these manifold transgressions are the product of our **old sinful flesh** which clings to us like an albatross and "*wars against*" our New Man of faith (I Peter 2:11), seeking to bring him down! Thus Paul says of himself in Romans chapter 7: "*The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. ... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!?*" (vv. 19, 24).

Furthermore, our progress in sanctification of life, our steady headway in "*the race that is set before us*" (Hebrews 12:1), has been severely hurt and hampered by **lack of spiritual growth**. Just as a marathon runner nourishes his body with proper food and then exercises it regularly to tone it up for the rigors of competition, so we Christians are to take care to nourish and exercise our **souls** for our *spiritual* race and for our ongoing battle against the devil, the world, and our flesh, all of whom in wicked consort seek constantly to trip us up along the way and to rob us of our prize! With Paul we freely admit that our spiritual conditioning is *far from perfect*, that we are far from being ideally fit-for-survival in this life-and-death struggle! For we have not permitted the Lord's Word to *dwell in us* as *richly* as we should have (Colossians 3:16a), having often relegated it to some secondary place on our list of life's priorities; and we have not *grown* as we could have *in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior*, as the Apostle Peter exhorts us to do (II Peter 3:18). And so our Christian life and conduct show weaknesses and gaps and scars which prevent us from *walking in the Spirit* as we should (Galatians 5:16), from *bringing forth abundantly the fruit* that we should (John 15:5, etc.), and from letting our light of faith *shine before men* as we should (Matthew 5:16), as a tribute and beacon to the glory of our gracious God.

"*Not as though I...were already perfect*," says Paul in verse 12 just before our title-text. There is almost nothing as dangerous in athletic competition as over-confidence, or, as in the case of our *Christian* race, self-confidence and



pride. And yet our flesh loves to vaunt itself and ascribe to itself strength of faith, unshakable steadfastness, superior knowledge, yea, even imagined perfection! And so we desperately need to hear the warning voice of our spiritual “Coach,” the Lord Himself, through His Apostle Paul, saying: “*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!*” (I Corinthians 10:12). And Paul writes to the Galatians, chapter six, stating what should be obvious: “*If a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself*” (v. 3).

Now all these things that in the past have hindered our growth in sanctification, have held us back like weighted shoes in our Christian race “*for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (v. 14) —our many sins and shortcomings first of all, then our lack of spiritual growth, and finally our fleshly over-confidence in our personal steadfastness— ALL these things we are to “*forget*,” Paul says in our title-text. Just how can we do that? How can we truly “*forget those things which are behind*”? Only because God in heaven, for Jesus’ sake, has Himself already **forgiven them** and has “*cast [them] into the depths of the sea*” (Micah 7:19). Yes, the Lord has put all our sins behind **His** back (Isaiah 38:17), having both **forgiven** and **forgotten them**; for He assures us through the Prophet Jeremiah: “*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*” (31:34; cf. Hebrews 8:12). And the Apostle Paul, as the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, urges **us** to do likewise, leaving us his own example; for he writes in our title-text: “*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended [that is, **laid hold** on the prize], but this one thing I do: *Forgetting those things which are behind...*” May God by His Holy Spirit, because of His perfect forgiveness of all our sins of the past, enable us to put them now behind us by SINCERE REPENTANCE, surely not just sweeping them “under the rug,” as if they had been “no big deal” in the first place, but throwing them off (Romans 13:12) as useless “dead weight” which we abhor and *want* to be rid of, so that we can continue our Christian race unhindered (cf. Hebrews 12:1)!*

But now St. Paul points out that merely “*forgetting*” the sins of the past is not sufficient for the attainment of the prize. We ought ever to be “*reaching forth unto those things which are before*,” he tells us. “*I follow after*,” he writes, “*if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus*” (v. 12). That word “apprehend” means simply to “grab hold of” something. As we run our Christian race, so that we may one day **lay our hands on** the prize of our **salvation** (for which purpose the Lord Jesus **laid His precious hands on us** and snatched us from the very jaws of Satan and from everlasting death), we are to “*follow after*,” that is, we are compelled by His great love, in true faith, to follow in Jesus’ steps on the road to heaven. Now, as we noted before, we can never achieve perfection in this endeavor, even though the Lord requires it of us, saying, “*Be ye therefore perfect!*” But that is certainly no excuse for falling short of the mark! On the contrary, we are to “*follow after*” as does a little child who tags along behind his father through drifts of snow. His little feet on his short legs cannot possibly match his father’s stride, and he often stumbles and falls; but, if he is not to be left behind, he must continue to strive on and on, after being set back on his feet by his dear daddy, to fit his little boots into the footprints ahead of him. “*For even hereunto were ye called*,” writes Peter in his first Epistle, “*because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps*” (2:21).

And that “following after” is no easy task. It takes fervent, zealous effort on the Christian’s part, by God’s enabling grace alone, to take up our crosses, whatever they may be, and to follow our Lord Jesus, to achieve real progress, real steps forward in sanctification. As we, therefore, “*reach forth*,” stretch forward as a runner does when nearing the finish line in a race, we dare never forget who it is that enables us so to run; for the Bible tells us: “*It is GOD which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). Let us, therefore, make it our constant prayer that the Lord grant us a rich measure of His grace to continue our race without faltering, “*reaching forth unto those things which are before*,” those promised blessings which still lie ahead for us as Christians, not becoming “*weary in well-doing*,” (Galatians 6:9a) but rather “*abounding more and more in all knowledge and in all judgment*” (Philippians 1:9) based on His precious Word alone, and abounding also in love and good works toward our Lord, His precious Church, and one another; “*for in due season*,” writes the Apostle, “*we shall reap, if we faint not*” (Galatians 6:9b).

“*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*,” Paul tells us. We must sprint onward, unrelenting, toward the finish-line that is even now before our very eyes; for the prize is already held out to us, having been purchased and won for us by our dear Savior, our Redeemer, our Champion, our Hero, and our faithful Coach. Earthly runners press on to obtain a “*corruptible crown*,” Paul writes to the Corinthians (I, 9:25), a mere wreath or garland of olive leaves (the customary reward in those days); and that victor’s wreath soon dried

up and crumbled away, leaving only memories of the prize. But **OUR prize**, laid up for us in the heavens, is **incorruptible**, “*a crown of glory that fadeth not away*” (I Peter 5:4). —And even though we must “*follow after,*” “*press toward the mark,*” and “*reach forth unto those things which are before*” with conscious effort and zealous work, nevertheless (unlike earthly prizes which are earned in competition), that “*crown of life*” is a reward of God’s **PURE GRACE in Christ Jesus**, which we merely “*apprehend*” or lay hold on **by faith** in our Savior. Boasting and pride are excluded when we “*finally overcome and obtain the victory*” (Luther, *Sixth Petition*); for our victory is really the victory of **Jesus**, “*who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” (Hebrews 12:2). And the Lord Jesus Himself, speaking through the Apostle John in the Book of the Revelation, adds concerning our own sharing of His glory as “*the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus:*” “*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne*” (Revelation 3:21).

Oh, what a **prize**, what a **goal**, beloved of the Lord! There can be no higher reward! This is the glorious future that awaits us by God’s wondrous grace in Christ Jesus —not a future of uncertainty and doubt, not a future of failure and despair (such as the children of this world have to face each and every day of their lives in spite of their “New Year’s resolutions”)! And as we now get a “fresh start,” as it were, in our **race** as Christians, spurred on by the exhortations of God’s Holy Word, let us remember our resolve, our Christian “resolution” for the New Year of 2021, namely, by His grace to **strive onward to our heavenly goal**, by “*forgetting those things which are behind,*” and by “*reaching forth unto those things which are before.*” Yea, “*let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith!*” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Thus the Lord, our gracious God, grants to each and every one of us the happy, yea, the unspeakably joyful anticipation of His **abiding blessings**, “*not by works of righteousness which WE have done, but according to His mercy*” (Titus 3:5) which “*endureth forever*” (Psalm 118:1) in and through His Son, so that, **by confidence in His merits alone**, we may “*apprehend*” or lay hold on the precious “*prize*” of **salvation by grace**, both in the New Year and in all eternity, for His blessed Name’s sake!

*O Lord Christ, our Savior dear,  
be Thou ever near us;  
Grant us now a glad new year.  
Amen, Jesus. Hear us.*

(TLH 97, 4)

— D. T. M.



# Churches in Fellowship

## **ORTHODOX LUTHERAN CHURCH OF EKATERINBURG**

Ekaterinburg, Russia

**The Rev. Roman G. Schurganoff, Pastor**

P. O. Box 27

620039 Ekaterinburg, RUSSIA

**E-mail:** Schurganoff@mail.ru

## **CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria

**(Pastoral Vacancy at present)**

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

Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria

**(Pastoral Vacancy at present)**

## **HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Idama, Nigeria

**The Rev. Innocent Karibo, Pastor**

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

**E-Mail:** kanboinnocent@yahoo.com

## **SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Abalama, Nigeria

**The Rev. Bateinm Bestman, Pastor**

Thompson Compound Abalama Abalama,

Rivers State, NIGERIA

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

Elem-Sangama, Nigeria

**The Rev. Timothy Biobele Aaron, Pastor**

St. Clement Lutheran Church,

Elem-Sangama Arch-Deaconry

Elem-Sangama, Rivers State, NIGERIA

**E-Mail:** tbaaron2@gmail.com

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

Port Harcourt, Nigeria

**The Rev. Onimim Frank, Pastor**

76 Abba Street, Mile 1 Diobu

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, NIGERIA

**E-Mail:** PH-djreal17joe@gmail.com

## **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, Pastor**

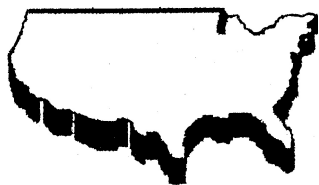
**The Rev. Faith N. J. Asembo, Co-Pastor**

P. O. Box 123

Abonnema, Akulga, Rivers State, NIGERIA

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

**E-Mail:** faithasembo1@gmail.com



# Directory of Member Congregations

[www.concordialutheranconf.com](http://www.concordialutheranconf.com)

## **PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

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

**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](mailto:pastormensing@yahoo.com)

On the Web at

*[PeaceEvLutheran.com](http://PeaceEvLutheran.com)*

Office Telephone: (708) 532-4288

Pastor: (708) 532-9035

Pastor's Cell: (708) 601-3943

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

Sixth and Tangent Streets, Lebanon, OR 97355

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

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

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

483 Tangent Street, Lebanon, OR 97355

**E-mail:** [revbloedel@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:d_rnensing@hotmail.com)

On the Web at

*[StMarksEvLutheran.com](http://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](mailto:robertjlietz@gmail.com)

On the Web at

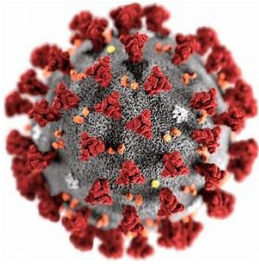
*[TrinityEvLutheran.com](http://TrinityEvLutheran.com)*

Telephone: (708) 386-6773

Pastor: (708) 386-4145

(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.

