

The Concordia Lutheran



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"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105

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The Concordia Lutheran Editor.

The Rev. David T. Mensing
17151 South Central Avenue
Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

Book and Tract Editor

The Rev. Robert J. Lietz
233 North Cuyler Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302

Lay Member

Mr. Jason A. Mabe
6249 El Morro Lane
Oak Forest, IL 60452

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Officers of the
Concordia Lutheran Conference

PRESIDENT:

The Rev. Paul E. Bloedel
483 Tangent Street
Lebanon, OR 97355

VICE PRESIDENT:

The Rev. Robert J. Lietz
233 North Cuyler Avenue
Oak Park, IL 60302

SECRETARY:

The Rev. David T. Mensing
17151 South Central Avenue
Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

TREASURER:

Mr. Robert G. Bloedel
10017 – 61st Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98178

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.

O Give Thanks unto the Lord!

*“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,
because His mercy endureth forever!” —Psalm 118:1*

By the world's standards, this country of ours is one of the most affluent if not the richest land on the face of the earth. For, in spite of pockets of poverty here and there, aside from scattered underemployment, unemployment, and even homelessness which have beset so many people in our rapidly-changing economy, and despite the failure of many small businesses because of hyper-regulation and shut-downs during the present pandemic—the average American today **has** and **earns** more per capita than his counterpart anywhere else in the world. Undoubtedly rising inflation and the resulting fall in the value of the dollar, as well as foreseen increases in taxes during the so-called “recovery,” all combine to increase economic pressure on middle-class and even lower-class families. But all one has to do is watch the news on television, or some “special” about so-called “third world” countries, or an appeal from social relief agencies like “Feed the Children” to be struck with the **great bounty** that we enjoy as Americans compared with other people!

And yet, by-and-large, our countrymen are notoriously ungrateful people (and that's no judgment of hearts!). The very word “thanks” has almost disappeared from our everyday vocabulary, and many parents no longer teach their children to say “thank-you” to people who give them something or do them a favor! Indeed, many regard their standard of living with all its comforts, amenities, and luxuries a sort of “right” which is theirs as Americans, for which they owe no thanks to anyone but **themselves** for their hard work, diligence, and perseverance! And they don't hesitate to add concerning the less fortunate here in this world that “they have only themselves to blame.”

Even we Christians have nothing whereof to boast concerning the things we have and enjoy in our lives, knowing from the Holy Scriptures that the Lord is the source of all our blessings. And yet our old sinful flesh is just as ungrateful as that of the worldlings round about us, so that we need to be reminded over and over again by God Himself in His Word of how much *we owe Him* for His grace and mercy, benevolence and generosity, to us poor, undeserving sinners for ALL His benefits both temporal and spiritual! And that is precisely why the Lord's Psalmist exhorts us in this well-known Scripture text and table prayer: **“O give thanks unto the Lord!”**...not only for His **benevolent providence** of us and of all His creatures, but *especially* for His **enduring mercy** to us poor sinners in Christ Jesus, our Savior!

Indeed, as we look about us in the world and behold the wonders of creation brought forth in the beginning by God Himself using only the power of His almighty Word (Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3), we must confess with the Psalmist: *“O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all! The earth is full of Thy riches!”* (104:24). The “*heavens*” with their innumerable cosmic bodies keeping time like a finely-tuned watch “*declare the glory of God,*” and His unspeakable “*handiwork*” is evident in the beautiful spacious sky with its magnificent cloud formations and breathtaking sunsets, the Bible tells us (Psalm 19:1). Before man's fall into sin, that terrible act by which all of God's creation became blighted and ruined, “*God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good*” (Genesis 1:31), incapable of improvement; for it had been fashioned by Him, who is the epitome of goodness, God Himself.

Consequently, when we behold His wonders, which today bear the weaknesses, scars, and imperfections which sin brought upon them, they still appear marvelous in our eyes—far too complex to have come about by pure chance, as the evolutionists claim—far beyond the ability of man to produce even in cheap imitation of God's creation! And we “*stand in awe of Him*” (Psalm 33:8) as we peer into outer space with electron and satellite-mounted telescopes, as we stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon, as we fly at 600 miles per hour over and through towering cloud formations, and as we watch by means of microphotography the development of a tiny baby in the womb of its mother! Yes, the creation of our own body cries out and demands that we render due thanksgiving to God for His goodness, that we declare with David: “*I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made! Marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well!*” (Psalm 139:14). —**“O, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good!”**

But the evidence of God's goodness is not limited to His creation. For the world is not just "coasting along" *on its own*, re-creating itself, maintaining itself in its so-called "ecological balance," nor yet providing for itself as a self-sustaining entity. No, that too is the **Lord's** doing, who not only created all things but, the Bible says, preserves His creatures, "**upholding all things by the Word of His power**" (Hebrews 1:3). In His benevolent providence of us and of all His creatures God further demonstrates His **goodness** in the way He "*preserves man and beast*" (Psalm 36:6) by "*giving them their meat in due season*" (145:15), by satisfying their needs, and even clothing them and giving them shelter. And this He does **very especially** for **US**, brethren, who "*are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:26), for **US** whose "*heavenly Father,*" Jesus says, "*knoweth that [we] have need of all these things*" (Matthew 6:32). What things?? We confess with Luther "that He richly and daily provides [us] with all that we need to support this body and life."

Moreover, in His Kingdom of Power, our "*good*" Lord also rules and governs all things to His own glory, for the welfare and safety of His creatures great and small, and particularly in the interest of His believing children. Accordingly, "He defends [us] against all danger and guards and protects [us] from all evil" (Luther), so that we can and should confidently "*cast all [our] care upon Him,*" who careth for us, Peter reminds us (I Peter 5:7). And "all this" our Lord does for us "purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in [us]" (Luther).

This **benevolent providence** is then the FIRST reason for which the Lord's Psalmist exhorts us: "*O give **thanks** unto the Lord!*" Don't just take all these temporal blessings for granted, as if they are "coming to you" as some sort of natural right; —they're NOT! They are the **gifts** of the Lord's **goodness and mercy** to us and to all creatures, "for all which it is [our] DUTY [as grateful recipients of these gifts] to **thank** and **praise**, to **serve** and **obey** Him" (Luther). —**Ingratitude**, on the other hand, is a grievous sin and shame before God, born of selfishness, greed, and sinful pride which boasts, "*My power and the might of **mine** hand hath gotten me this wealth!*" (Deuteronomy 8:17). It is the boast of those who "*forget God,*" the Bible tells us, who "*walk after other gods and serve them and worship them*" (v. 19) —**idols** such as Mammon (materialism), the world (I John 2:15), and one's own Self, the love of which ends up drowning men in destruction and perdition (I Timothy 6:9)! "*O give **thanks** unto the **Lord**,*" your all-wise, almighty, and benevolent God, "*for HE [alone] is [truly] good!*"

But that is surely not the only reason for which we should render Him our thanks. The very **BEST** and **MOST IMPORTANT** reason is "*because His **mercy** endureth forever.*" The context of the entire 118th Psalm shows without a doubt that the "*mercy*" of which David speaks by inspiration of the Holy Ghost is not merely God's benevolence (or kindness) to all men, to all His creatures, in His divine providence; but this is a special *mercy*. God's spiritual gifts, above all other gifts, are the result of His **enduring mercy** and **grace** to us poor undeserving sinners **in Christ Jesus**, our Savior. **Justifying grace**, the **chief** gift from which all other spiritual gifts flow, is not an *absolute* gift out of God's *sovereign will*, as are His providential gifts in the Kingdom of Power, which all men, even the wicked, and all the animals receive from His hand (Psalm 145:15-16; Matthew 5:45); but His **grace** is bestowed upon the sinner only *for Christ's sake*—in view of the fact that Jesus, by His *vicarious atonement*, paid the price required by God's justice for the world's redemption. He kept God's Law in our place and bore the punishment that we deserve because of our sins, so that now God can be *merciful* to us, *kind* to us wretched, undeserving sinners, for Jesus' sake forgiving us all our iniquities! "*God was **in Christ** reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (II Corinthians 5:19), the God whose "*mercy endureth forever.*"

That is the foremost gift of all, to which the Apostle Paul refers in II Corinthians 9:15, where he says: "*Thanks be unto God for His **unspeakable Gift!***" It is the gift which we receive **by faith alone** —by faith in the merits of Christ, totally apart from any merit, work or worthiness of our own; and it is that gift from which all other spiritual gifts flow our way! Without that gift of the Lord's **enduring mercy** in Christ Jesus, all His other gifts would be of temporary value only, here in this life; "*for what is a man profited,*" Jesus asks us, "*if he shall gain the **whole world** [full of temporal benefits] and lose his own **soul**? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his **soul**??*" (Matthew 16:26).

We Christians have the **most** to be thankful for of all creatures on the face of the earth. For "*[we] know the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (II Corinthians 8:9); **we** have the **Means** of His Grace, the precious **Gospel** and the **Sacraments**, through which that grace is both announced and conveyed to us; **we** have the gift of His **Holy Spirit**, who works through those Means of Grace in our hearts, who called us to faith in Jesus, enlightened us with His

spiritual gifts, sanctified our lives to be conformed to His will and dedicated to His service, and still preserves us in the true and saving faith by Jesus' Word, in which we must continue with all diligence (John 8:31-32). —**We** have the **most** to be thankful for, "*because His **mercy** endureth **forever**,*" even to **us** who have often rewarded His mercy with ingratitude and indifference, with lukewarm affection for His Word and Sacraments, and with lives in which we have all too often served ourselves and failed to serve *Him*. It is indeed of **His enduring mercy** that we have not been consumed by His wrath, that His compassions have not failed us, and that He still extends to us His mercy and grace in the proclamation of His precious Word!

So what are we going to **do** about it? "*Shall we continue in sin,*" in **ingratitude**, in **disregard** of our spiritual blessings, "*that [His] grace may abound?? **God forbid!***" writes the Apostle Paul in Romans 6, verses 1 and 2. What shall we **do** then? "**O GIVE THANKS unto the Lord, for He is good; because His mercy endureth forever!**" And let us make sure, by God's grace, that our thanksgiving is not merely the expression of our mouth, but the heartfelt expression of our heart and soul, as we speak to ourselves (Ephesians 5:19) the exhortation of the Psalmist: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities*" (Psalm 103:2-3) as the foremost of His blessings! And let us then put our **actions** where our **mouths** are, and ever more gratefully, ever more diligently day-by-day, gladly *hear*, gladly *learn*, gladly *meditate upon*, and gladly *keep* His precious Word, the "delivery-wagon," Luther called it, in which He conveys all these unspeakable blessings to us; until by His grace we render Him at last the **perfect** thanksgiving that His mercy **deserves**, to the everlasting glory of His grace in Jesus Christ, our Savior!

*Then shall thanks and praise ascending
for Thy mercies without ending
rise to Thee, O Savior blest!
With Thy gracious aid defend us;
let Thy saving Word attend us;
bring us to Thy home of rest! Amen.*

(TLH 282, 4 adapted)

—D. T. M.





Why the Advent of God's Grace to Poor Sinners Is NOT of Comfort to ALL

*"Ye see your calling, brethren,
...that no flesh should glory in His presence."*

—I Corinthians 1:26 and 29

The holy season of Advent is indeed a *happy* time of **anticipation** for Christians—not only because Christmas is just around the corner when we commemorate Jesus' **first** visible coming to this sinful world—not only because we look forward with joyful expectation to His **second** visible advent on the Last Day, when the final scene of our redemption will be played out in the court of divine justice and we will be received into the mansions of heaven (Luke 21:28)—but because **Advent** is a constant **reminder** to us of how the **grace** of God in Christ Jesus has **COME to us** poor, undeserving sinners in His precious Gospel and continues its advent to us in and through the *Means* of Grace each and every day of our lives! "*Grace*" is God's **free gift** (Ephesians 2:8b) of forgiveness, life, and everlasting salvation offered earnestly and sincerely to all men in the Gospel by the God who is "*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (II Peter 3:9).

One would think that everyone who hears the precious "*good tidings*" (Luke 2:10) of salvation by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith in His merits alone, would literally "jump for joy" at the prospect of escaping the condemnation of God's fierce justice and of being spared everlasting punishment in the fires of hell! Yes, one would **think** so, considering the **alternative**! But, sad to say, such is **not** the case. And we have to wonder **why** the advent of God's grace to poor sinners is NOT of comfort to ALL.

Addressing the Corinthian Christians, Paul asks them to look at and examine their own situation, as those whom the Holy Spirit had called to the knowledge of the truth and into the "state of grace," to see what it is that apparently "turns some people off" to the Gospel. "*For ye see **your** calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.*" What was true for the Corinthian "*brethren*" can be said also of **us** who are "*brethren*"—brethren one of another because we are Christ's brethren by faith in Him, because we are members of **one family**—**God's** family, the "*household of faith*" (Galatians 6:10). As we look over our **outward** membership (which is all that we human beings are able to see), we see that there are "*not many wise men after the flesh*" among our number, that is, those of great intellectual status and superior education. There may indeed be *some*, but Paul says "*not many.*" It's not that God doesn't like people with brains, or that God frowns on a good secular education. It's not that the God-given gift of superior intelligence makes a person *ineligible* for the God-given gift of eternal salvation. For the Bible says that "*God will have **all men** to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (I Timothy 2:4).

Paul's point, however, is **twofold**: First of all, God does not call men with His gracious Gospel invitation into the fold of the Savior because of their **intellect** (the way recruiters on college campuses select the "cream of the crop" for entry-level positions in business and industry nowadays). **Human** wisdom is "*foolishness with God*" (I Corinthians 3:19)—it's so puny and insignificant in His holy sight—particularly wisdom "*after the flesh*," according to the norm or standard of the depraved, sinful, and self-serving world! Indeed, when anyone who is "*wise in his own conceit*" (Proverbs 26:12) is **drawn** and **won** by God's gracious call in the Gospel, his foolish pride is overcome and replaced by Christian humility in his New Man of faith, which then happily sings: "*Take my **intellect** and use every power as **Thou** shalt choose!*" (TLH 400, 4b).

Moreover, those who are “*wise men **after the flesh***” and **pride themselves** in their **intelligence**, in their **knowledge**, and in their **experience** here **in** this world, yea, concerning the things **of** this world, have by nature ***no interest at all*** in the Gospel of Christ, which the world considers foolishness. And so, when they hear the gracious invitation, “*Come, for all things are now ready*” (Luke 14:17), they thumb their stuck-up noses at it and go their way; “*for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish **foolishness***,” Paul writes earlier in this very chapter of our title-text (in verse 18) — it’s just **too simple** or **simpleminded**, too naive, too mythological, or too “unintellectual” to be credible! It’s just a “*cunningly devised fable*” (II Peter 1:16).

“*But God hath chosen the **foolish** things of the world to **confound** the wise*,” Paul tells us in verse 27 of our title-text. God deliberately made His plan of salvation “ridiculously simple” by the world’s standards to “**shame**” those who think they’re smart, to **confuse** them, to make them **look stupid** in the last analysis for passing up such a wonderful opportunity-of-a-lifetime! **Why??** Paul says: “*That no flesh should glory in His presence.*” God made salvation a **free gift** of “**grace**,” “*lest any man should **boast***” about being his **own** savior, one whose “smarts” got him some well-deserved consideration from God, one whom God valued enough to make him part of His heavenly “team.” — “**Not!!**” says Paul here in our title-text. “*Not many **wise men** after the **flesh**.*”

And “*not many **mighty***” either. We don’t see many “powerful” figures among our number, do we? Oh, there may be a **few** who are influential in the community, some politicians, power-brokers, “big-shots” who carry weight in this world, who “*are called.*” We can name in the history of God’s people, for instance, **Abraham** of old, who was rich and powerful; there was **Boaz** of Bethlehem; **King David** is still regarded by the Jews as Israel’s greatest ruler; there were **Jairus**, **Nicodemus**, and **Joseph of Arimathaea**, who were all “big wheels” among their people in Jesus’ day; the Roman Emperor **Constantine**, according to tradition at any rate, became a Christian. But “*not many **mighty***,” Paul says, and with good reason. The “*mighty*” of this world, the “**many**” of them to be sure, either got that way on the backs of their fellowmen, so to speak, or made use of the temporal advantages God gave them to **exalt themselves** to the station of “lords” and “masters” after their own lusts!

When we look at “the lifestyles of the rich and famous,” as these are often cameoed on television and in the movies, for example, what do we see? Any evidence of “**spirituality**”? Any confession of “**faith** in Jesus Christ”? Any acknowledgment that their riches and their fame are gifts of **God**?? Any “lifestyle” that sets an example of Christian **moderation**, of Christian **generosity** and **charity**, of Christian **chastity**, of a Christian “**walk**” in the “*paths of righteousness*” for Jesus’ sake (Psalm 23)?? — “*Not many;*” “not hardly” as people say today. No, their attitude, by and large, is the attitude of the wicked man quoted by the Lord in Deuteronomy chapter 8, who boasted: “*My power and the might of **mine** hand hath gotten me this wealth!*” “Why, there’s **nothing** that I **can’t** do, if I just set my mind to it!!” — Well, he can’t “muscle” or “buy” his way into HEAVEN, **that’s** for sure; for “*God hath chosen the **weak** things of the world to **confound** the things which are **mighty***,” Paul says in our title-text: A meek and mild Savior; salvation as a “*gift*,” not an “investment;” a mansion in heaven not to be purchased but to be received as an **inheritance** of God’s mercy and grace to the “*poor in spirit*,” to the humble of mind, to the brokenhearted, to the “**beggar**” who simply reaches out his hand-of-faith to *receive* what he has NOT earned, has NOT deserved, and has NOT extorted by means of “*might*” or “*money*.” Why?? Paul says “*that no flesh should glory in His presence.*” Salvation is **not for sale**! It’s not to be **ripped off** in a power-grab by the “*mighty*”! It’s “*not of works*” of **any kind**, “*lest any man should boast!*” (Ephesians 2:9). And **that** is why the blessed advent of God’s grace to poor sinners is **not attractive** nor of **any comfort** to the “*mighty*.”

God forbid that we ever so pride ourselves in the earthly **power** we wield, or the **riches** we field, that the grace of God means NOTHING to us anymore; for we would then be the poorest of men, destitute of the truth, and homeless forever!

No, “*brethren*,” we don’t have a lot of intellectuals, power-brokers, wealthy “wheeler-dealers” and slick politicians among us; but there **is** a class of people to which we often **think** we belong. Sadly, not many of **them** are “*called*” either, because their pride refuses to acknowledge their **unworthiness** in the sight of God! Paul calls them “**noble**” here in the intervening verses of our title-text, that is, “*well-born*,” born into families of special lineage and heritage.

There is hardly a personal arrogance or prideful attitude that goes quite as deep as pride in one’s “**family heritage**.” **WHO** we are is more often than not of greater concern to us than **what** we are or what we **have**! And that’s why Jesus warns us: “*He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or*

daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37). And yet we hear even many professing Christians say without the slightest hesitation: “My **family** is more important to me than **anything else** in the world! We stick together **no matter what!**” And we find that they mean it too! — They’ll sacrifice everything, including a fellowship of brethren who have been “*called*” to be partakers of God’s grace in Christ Jesus, rather than be despised by their **family**. **God’s** family, on the other hand, “*the household of faith*,” is despised by the children of this world; it just doesn’t “count” with them! And yet, God has chosen “*the base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not*” (“no-count” things) *to bring to naught the things that are*” (I Corinthians 1:28).

It is our “*fellowship in the Gospel*” (Philippians 1:5) —despised of men and a thing that “*is not*” —something not worth a “plug-nickel” by the world’s standards— that binds us closer than any other tie! Why?? Because “[*we*] *are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26); “*and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ... that we may be glorified together*” (Romans 8:17) in His heavenly home above when we die. What **made us** “*heirs of God*”? Our superior **intellect**? Our **might**? Our **money**? Our **family**?? —NO, none of those **temporal** things in which people put their confidence! Rather, it was the advent of **God’s grace** to us poor, undeserving sinners —the grace that we hold fast to by confidence in God’s merciful justification merited by Christ Jesus, the grace “*wherein we stand*” (Romans 5:2) by the faith bestowed upon us by Him who called us by the Gospel— it is His **GRACE** that **makes** us and **keeps** us happy, content, full of joyful anticipation, and secure for time and eternity in the certainty of salvation! That grace of God is “*foolishness*” to many, *weakness* to others, and *good-for-nothing* to still more; but God has chosen to save us **by grace** “*that no flesh should glory in His presence.*”

And so we sing with the hymnwriter concerning true Advent preparation for the reception and apprehension of God’s grace by faith:

*The humble heart and lowly
God lifteth up on high;
beneath His feet in anguish
the haughty soul shall lie!
The broken heart, contrite,
that [by the operation of the Holy Ghost] heeds God’s invitation
and makes true preparation,
THAT is the Lord’s delight! (TLH 75, 3, adapted)*

And then we pray, as we should make it our **constant prayer** not only during this holy Advent season but every day of our lives:

*Prepare MY heart, Lord Jesus,
turn not from me aside,
and grant that I receive Thee
this blessed the Adventide!
From stall and manger low,
come Thou to dwell within me;
loud praises will I sing Thee,
and forth Thy glory show!*

(TLH 75, 4)

—D. T. M.



God's Christmas Gift of Love



“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” —I John 4:9

Let us all with gladsome voice
praise the God of heaven,
who, to bid our hearts rejoice,
His own Son hath given! (TLH 97, 1)

Most people today wish one another a “merry” Christmas, and regard the use of the word “happy” rather old-fashioned and perhaps even somewhat odd. But many Christians very deliberately use “Happy Christmas” instead of the more popular “Merry Christmas” for what they consider to be a very important reason: For a **Christian**, Christmas Day serves as a special reminder each year of Jesus’ first visible advent into this world of sin and sadness, this “vale of tears” and troubles, to be our **Savior**. As such, He redeemed or bought us back from the slavery of sin and from bondage to the devil and paid the ransom-price that purchased “*peace with God*” (Romans 5:1) and our entrance someday into His heavenly home. Now **that’s** something to be really **HAPPY** about, deep down inside and over the “long haul”! **That’s** the source of “*joy, oh, joy beyond all gladness! —Christ hath done away with sadness!*” (TLH 96).

Mere “merriment,” on the other hand, is a kind of upbeat **mood**, which lasts only as long as the glitter of the season and the festive round of parties. For as soon as all the gifts have been unwrapped, evaluated, and perhaps even appreciated; as soon as the “party animals” go home to face the prospect of heading back to work on the first business day after Christmas; and as soon as the tree and other decorations come down and the house is restored to its humdrum old self, the “merriment” of the season fades as quickly as it came. And sometimes it even gives way to morose thoughts and reflections on “what **might** have been” or “what **should** have been” a much **merrier** Christmas! Many psychologists in our day and time actually call attention to the *depression* that accompanies the Christmas season and the spike in *suicides* that often occurs!

The contrast between a “merry” Christmas and a “**happy**” Christmas can perhaps best be seen in the **gifts** that are given and received on Christmas Day —“**merry**” represented by the *tangible* gifts covered with brightly-colored papers and foils, wrappings carefully applied but quickly torn away and discarded — and toys, appliances and articles of clothing which soon wear out, break, and lose their value — “**happy**” represented by the *INtangible* gifts which never lose their appeal, value and importance, no matter how much time goes by. The **one** gift that brings **us Christians LASTING Christmas “happiness,”** long after the others have been put away, exchanged, returned, or just plain forgotten, **is**, as the Apostle John describes it in our title-text,

God's Christmas Gift of LOVE.

The inestimable value of **this** gift and its ability to produce and sustain **LASTING happiness** in those who receive it becomes evident when we consider **what** this gift **IS** and **why** God **GAVE** it.

John writes: “*In this was manifested the **love** of God toward us.*” People give gifts at Christmas time for all sorts of reasons, among which **love** is only one. And even when **love** for the recipient of a gift is the reason for giving it, love is often tainted with self-serving purposes, ulterior motives, and “strings” attached, one of which is to receive something in return. **God’s** Gift of love, on the other hand, was **freely, universally, and unconditionally** given —the manifestation of His **perfect love** toward poor sinners, wretched sinners who did not love Him in return, who were at enmity with Him, and who are incapable of doing anything for Him with which He might be even remotely pleased, “[whose] righteousnesses are as filthy rags” in His holy sight! (Isaiah 64:6).

What was it about this Gift that made it so *special*?? John writes: “*In **this** was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent **His only-begotten Son***” to be man’s Redeemer from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. Why did this Savior **have to be** the Father’s “*only-begotten Son*,” **true God** from all eternity?? First of all, so that He, unlike any other, would be able **perfectly to KEEP God’s Law** and thus to **SATISFY the demands of His justice**: “*Ye shall be **holy**, for I the Lord your God am holy!*” (Leviticus 19:2). The fact of the matter is that, since “*there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not*” (Ecclesiastes 7:20), no one can satisfy God’s justice by “being a good person” —we can’t even come close to the perfection that God demands of us! It took someone from the “outside” whose nature from all eternity was and is **perfection**, namely, “*the only-begotten Son*” of God Himself. And for God to send His Son to take upon Him “*the form of a **servant***” (Philippians 2:7) for unworthy and undeserving deadbeats like us was a **manifestation of love** beyond comparison!

But our Savior **had to be true God**, “begotten of the Father from eternity” (Luther), also for another reason: The **ransom price** which God demanded for man’s redemption was extremely **high**, so high that the Bible says: “*None of them,*” that is, not one human being on the face of the whole earth, “*can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is **precious!***” (Psalm 49:7-8). St. Paul writes: “*The wages of sin is **death***” (Romans 6:23), not just temporal death at the end of this earthly existence, but **eternal** death and **everlasting** damnation! A human being dying for **his own** sins doesn’t achieve **peace** with God; for he spends *eternity* in **hell**, cut off from God forever! For a person to think that he can accomplish redemption for another is therefore a foolish and completely preposterous idea! And yet Jesus, **because He is the holy Son of God**, was able to do just that, not only for *one* sinner, but for *every single sinner* on the face of the whole earth!

But the Apostle John goes on to show that, not only was God’s Gift of love, our Savior, **true GOD**, “begotten of the Father from eternity;” but, as we confess with Luther in the *Second Article* of the Apostles’ Creed, He was “also **true MAN** born of the Virgin Mary.” God sent His Son “*into the **world**,*” John tells us; and in his Gospel account, the same writer testifies by inspiration of the Holy Ghost that “*the **Word** [that is, the eternal Son of God] was **made flesh** and dwelt among us*” (1:14). —Why did Jesus **have to be true MAN** (as well as **true God**) to be our Savior?? First of all, He had to be “*made under the Law*” (Galatians 4:4), subject to its demands as **we** are. God isn’t subject to His own Law, but **man IS**! God’s justice demands it. Moreover, Jesus **had to be true MAN** also so that He could **suffer and die** for the sins of the world, paying the *ultimate penalty* of our guilt, the penalty that God’s justice demands as “*the wages of sin*”— “*Death,*” eternal death in the damnation of hell! And that’s exactly what the dear Lord Jesus was sent into the world to bear for you and for me on the cross: The pains of **hell itself** in His own sinless soul and body! (Cf. Matthew 27:46).

Indeed, what a **Gift of Love** is God’s Christmas Gift to us! What a **selfless sacrifice** on His part, asking of **us** nothing in return, nothing to be done, no works, no penance to be performed, no conditions to be fulfilled! If only **we** could give gifts like that to **one another**, unselfishly and freely, in imitation of God’s Christmas Gift of love to us! Think of what “***happiness***,” what **lasting** happiness we could share with one another! Sadly, our old sinful flesh torpedoes our very best efforts and scuttles them, so that God’s Gift of Love remains a one-of-a-kind Christmas present, beyond price and without compare!

And **WHY** did God give us this priceless Gift?? John tells us that “*He sent His only-begotten Son into the world, **that we might live through Him.***” The Savior’s entire work of Redemption was intended from all eternity already to **reconcile us unto God** —to buy us back from the slavery of sin, from death, and from bondage to the devil into which **we** had wantonly **sold ourselves** by our disobedience of God’s Law —and to restore the peace with God that **we** had **destroyed** by our sins. Consequently, every facet of Jesus’ redemptive work was “***vicarious***” or substitutionary. **He** took **our** place under the Law to fulfill **for us** its demands **of us**. **He** suffered the excruciating tortures of the damned

in hell in **our** stead, bearing what **we** deserved to suffer. Why?? “*That we might live,*” that we might have everlasting life in heaven instead of eternal death in hell... “*through Him.*” Therefore, “*in Christ,*” because of what **He did** for us [His *active* obedience], and because of what **He suffered** for us [His *passive* obedience], God “*reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). So sufficient was Jesus’ redemptive work as the satisfaction of divine justice that God forgave the sins of **all mankind** (I John 2:2) and declared the **ungodly** to be righteous in His sight (Romans 4:5). Therefore, confiding in **Jesus’ merits alone** for salvation, we have “*peace with God*” **through Him**, as St. Paul writes in Romans 5:1.

What an unspeakably **great benefit** is ours because of God’s Christmas Gift of love to us and to all the world! And what year-round **HAPPINESS** should be ours because of it, **lasting** happiness into eternity itself; **peace** with God, trusting that all our sins have been forgiven because of what “*His only-begotten Son*” accomplished as our Substitute; the **sure hope** or **anticipation** of everlasting **LIFE** instead of eternal **death** **AND** the incomparable **joy** of knowing that we, by faith in Him, **have already** “*receive[d] the adoption of sons*” (Galatians 4:5) and are bonafide members of God’s family!

As we joyfully celebrate our dear Savior’s birth, the miraculous manifestation of God in the flesh for our salvation, let us **not only NOW** but **throughout the year** focus our grateful attention upon this **best-of-all Christmas gifts**, the Gift that truly keeps on giving, the Gift that insures to us not just a “*merry*” Christmas amid all the glitz of lights, music, parties and presents, but a truly “*happy*” and “*blessed*” Christmas every day of our lives as we cling in childlike confidence to His merits alone as having reconciled us unto God, **AND** an **eternal** “*happy* Christmas” in the mansions of God’s heavenly home, where there is “*fulness of joy*” and pleasures at God’s right hand forevermore (Psalm 16:11)! Yes, “*thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!*” (II Corinthians 9:15).

*Praise God the Lord, ye sons of men,
before His highest throne!
Today He opens heaven again
and gives us His own Son!*

*He opens us again the door
of Paradise today!
The angel bars the gate no more!
To GOD our thanks we pay!!*

(TLH 105, 1 & 8 adapted)

—D. T. M.



Christmas JOY!

Oh, rejoice, ye Christians, loudly,
for our joy hath now begun;
wondrous things our God hath done!
Tell abroad His goodness proudly
who our race hath honored thus
that He deigns to dwell with us.
Joy, O joy beyond all gladness!
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence all sorrow and repining
for the Sun of Grace is shining!

See, my soul, thy Savior chooses
weakness here and poverty;
in such love He comes to thee,
nor the hardest couch refuses.
All He suffers for thy good
to redeem thee by His blood.
Joy, O joy beyond all gladness!
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence all sorrow and repining
for the Sun of Grace is shining!

Lord, how shall I thank Thee rightly?
I acknowledge that by Thee
I am saved eternally.
Let me not forget it lightly
but to Thee at all times cleave
and my heart true peace receive.
Joy, O joy beyond all gladness!
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence all sorrow and repining
for the Sun of Grace is shining!

(TLH 96, 1-3)

Rationalism:

The Killer of Saving Faith

*“Beloved, ...beware lest ye also,
being led away with the error of the wicked,
fall from your own steadfastness.” —II Peter 3:17*

Coming, as these words do, after the Apostle Peter’s rather exhaustive discussion of the last times, the Day of Judgment, and the end of all things temporal as revealed in the Bible, as well as the coming of “*scoffers, walking after their own lusts*” (v. 3) and challenging both the record and revelation of Holy Scripture, “*the error of the wicked*” can rightly be identified by that context as “**rationalism**.” The suffix “-ism” signifies a doctrine, theory, system or principle to which people are devoted [Webster’s *New World Dictionary*], as we commonly use it in reference to a *false religion* (sectarianism, Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, Unitarianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Russellism, unionism, etc.). The adjective “rational” refers to the ability to think intellectually according to *reason* — one feature that distinguishes man from the animals, in that God created man with a *rational* mind. “**Rationalism**,” therefore, is defined by Webster as “**the doctrine that rejects revelation and the supernatural and makes human reason the sole source for religious truth**.” Eve embraced “rationalism” in the Garden of Eden when she rejected the Word of the Lord regarding the tree in the midst of the garden and heeded instead the argument of Satan that eating the delicious fruit of that attractive tree would have beneficial effects (Genesis 3:4-6) despite God’s warning that death would be the result (Genesis 2:17).

Rationalism, by definition, “**rejects revelation**.” It therefore rejects *Holy Scripture* as the Word of God and regards the books of the Bible as merely a collection of ancient scrolls, containing myths, legends and epics, with historical, liturgical, and doctrinal subject matter authored by men according to their own experiences, viewpoints, and agendas, and intended to establish control over those who accept them as divinely-inspired revelation and the authoritative word of Him who is the only true and living God. A **rationalist** is therefore an **unbeliever** who rejects **every Scripture doctrine** (which we need not enumerate here) as being an invention of men, unreliable concerning truth, based on subjective opinion, and devoid of authority.

Rationalism, by definition, “**rejects the supernatural**.” As such it rejects God as a spirit and as a personal being, together with all of His divine attributes. It rejects the deity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and His virgin birth. It rejects the creation of the world and universe in six normal twenty-four hour days, not with material substances but by the Word of God. It rejects the doctrines of angels and of Satan and his angels. It rejects the concepts of everlasting life and of eternal death, of the bliss of heaven and of the tortures of the damned in the everlasting fire of hell. It rejects miracles and in particular the bodily resurrection of the dead and of the Lord Jesus Himself. It rejects the second visible advent of Christ on the Last Day and the accountability of man in the Judgment. One might actually ask, “What indeed is left of Biblical truth unto salvation that rationalists do NOT reject??”

Rationalism, by definition, “**makes human reason the sole source for religious truth**.” Jesus says: *If ye continue in My Word, ...ye shall know the truth*” (John 8:31-32). Jesus says: “*I am ...the truth*” (John 14:6). Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father: “*Thy Word is truth*” (John 17:17). Pontius Pilate, as it were the *patron saint* of rationalists, said: “*What is truth??*” (John 18:38), insinuating that truth is not knowable. Rationalists claim to “search for” truth, but in their searching they rely not upon anything absolute or definitive, but upon their **human reason**, which is basically **subjective** — relying upon their personal experiences, personal opinions, personal values, personal ethics, etc. — and therefore “truth” is what the rationalist determines (or estimates) it to be: MY truth, YOUR truth, HIS truth, HER truth, rather than **THE truth**, which, they claim, is always open to dispute by the subjective human reason

of someone else. Therefore the rationalist rarely dares to declare something to be “the truth” and rather prefers to be satisfied with “approaching” the truth and therefore is satisfied with never being “sure” of the truth.

Since the fall into sin, the **human reason** of “*natural man*” is not exercised by his so-called “freedom of the will,” because man’s will is no longer truly “free” to choose between good and evil, between righteousness and unrighteousness, between truth and error. “*They that are in the flesh cannot please God,*” writes the Apostle Paul (Romans 8:8); “*in [the] flesh dwelleth no good thing*” (Romans 7:18); “*the carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7); and “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:6). The human reason of “*natural man receiveth not* [i.e. does not comprehend] *the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* [they can be understood only on the basis of spiritual enlightenment]” (I Corinthians 2:14). Thus the very Gospel of salvation by grace for Christ’s sake through faith is **rejected** by the **rationalist** and the preaching of “*Christ crucified*” as “*foolishness*” (I Corinthians 1:23).

18) *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.* 19) *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.* 20) *Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* 21) *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* 22) *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:* 23) *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;* 24) *But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

Our purpose in this brief article is not to explore the fact that **rationalism** is “natural” to the mind of “*natural man*,” but rather the **danger** that it poses to the mind, to the thinking, to the intellect of those who have been converted, enlightened and sanctified in the true faith, whose “*new man*,” created by the Holy Ghost by means of the Gospel, struggles constantly with the “*Old Adam*” or “*flesh*” for the mastery (Cf. Romans 7:4-25). Yielding to “*the error of the wicked*” causes a believer to “*fall from [his] own steadfastness,*” to **deny** ultimately every doctrine revealed by God in the Scriptures, including salvation by grace for Christ’s sake through faith, and thus to **become** an **unbeliever**.

In this “modern” age, in which political and social “correctness” exert pressure upon the Christian to deny “*the truth*” of Holy Scripture, to judge what is (or just might be) “*truth,*” **not** according to Scripture alone but by perverted **human reason**, to yield to “peer pressure”—not of *Christian* peers, “*the brethren,*” but of worldly peers in school, in college, in the workplace, and on social media—we Christians are in constant danger of being overwhelmed by **rationalism**! “The Bible says thus and so, **BUT** what do YOU think??” “As an intelligent and rational, educated person, YOU certainly don’t subscribe to the authority of ‘Scripture,’ DO YOU??” “There’s no empirical evidence for the so-called infallibility, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible. You KNOW that, DON’T YOU??” “Those ancient manuscripts, having no connection with the ‘real world’ TODAY, should not be permitted to control YOU!” “You have the RIGHT, you have the FREEDOM, to determine YOUR OWN truth on the basis of YOUR OWN investigation, YOUR OWN ethics, and YOUR OWN opinions; and you shouldn’t let anyone pressure you, control you, and force upon you a viewpoint or ‘worldview’ that is not ‘humanistic’ and ‘reasonable’ to YOU!” “YOU have to be YOUR OWN person!”

Such, and many other, similar “voices of reason” are flattering to our Old Adam and seek, as the messenger of Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh, to “deceive us and seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (Luther, *Sixth Petition*). We are assailed by them every day and especially our children as they are **secularly** educated in our public schools, colleges and universities, where they study the “western philosophy” of “*the Greeks*” (I Corinthians 1) like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and later on in the 17th Century of René Descartes, the so-called “father of rationalism.” The exaltation of the human mind above “*the wisdom of God*” (I Corinthians 1) revealed in the Scriptures makes man his own God, his own arbiter of truth, and his own source of knowledge. And yet, St. Paul calls it what it truly is, namely, in I Timothy 6:3ff, “*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such*

withdraw thyself.” Therefore we must **guard ourselves and our children** against those Godless influences by reminding them that **true wisdom and knowledge** requires “*casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*” (II Corinthians 10:5). That is “*the knowledge of the truth*” (I Timothy 2:4-7) unto salvation to which the Lord would have us come and apart from which no man can be saved.

The **solution** to maintaining “*steadfastness*” unto salvation without “*being led away with the error of the wicked*” (II Peter 3:17) and falling from saving faith, is that we, God’s “*beloved*” children by faith in His Son, “**grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ**” (v. 18), the grace and saving knowledge which is revealed and manifested to all men ONLY in the Scriptures — the Scriptures *rejected* by **rationalism**. St. Paul writes to Timothy — and also to all those who have been brought up “*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4): “*From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (II Timothy 3:15-17). This precious Word of truth is, of course, **rejected** by **rationalists**!

Sadly, and we have seen it all too often in our own congregations: Young Christians, shortly after their Confirmation, when they are (or should be) at the peak of their Christian knowledge, instead of continuing to “*grow in grace and in the knowledge of [their] Lord and Savior,*” begin to slack off in their knowledge by not attending Bible Classes and other opportunities for spiritual growth. They’re too busy with their “*social life,*” paying attention to what their “*friends*” have to say. And after high school they go off to distant colleges where they are under the constant influence of “*the wicked*” — worldly unbelievers — and their destructive “*error.*” For months at a time, they cannot assemble regularly for mutual exhortation and study with their brethren; they become lax in their personal study of God’s Word; and they begin to fall from their steadfastness. Why? Because the growing *gap* in their Christian knowledge begins to be filled with intensive education in “*the error of the wicked;*” and they are soon “*led away*” into doubts and misgivings by ever-present forces more powerful than their absent parents, more instructive than their absent pastors, and more influential than their absent brethren in the faith. They slip from their spiritual moorings and jettison their spiritual anchor (Hebrews 6:17ff.). Their *spiritual* lives become *secularized*, and they soon give evidence that their allegiance is no longer to the Father but to the world (I John 2:15-17). And then, when they complete their secular education and have their treasured diploma and degree in their hand, when they seek to establish themselves in a profession or occupation in the world, they often move AWAY from proximity to their church, their pastor, and their brethren, at a distance which makes regular assembly in the House of the Lord inconvenient at best, and their fall from spiritual steadfastness is complete.

Sadly, at this otherwise joyful season of the year, beginning with Thanksgiving, proceeding through the four weeks of Advent, and culminating in the feast of our Savior’s nativity, those who were “*led away with the error of the wicked*” and “*fell from their own steadfastness*” have absolutely nothing for which to be **thankful**, nothing about which to **rejoice**, nothing to which to **look forward**, nothing to **celebrate**, nothing in which to **take comfort**. Why? Because “*after hav[ing] received the knowledge of the truth,*” after having been convinced of the truth and reliability of God’s precious Word, after having learned to know and having embraced the Gospel of salvation, after having trusted, believed, rejoiced and taken comfort in Christ as their Savior by the operation of the Holy Ghost, they “*sin[ned] wilfully*” against their gracious and merciful God (Hebrews 10:26ff.) by deliberately rejecting **everything** they had known from the Holy Scriptures since childhood. They made shipwreck of their faith (I Timothy 1:19); they denied the God-revealed truths of the Bible (I Thessalonians 2:13); they rejected its sacred teachings (II Timothy 3:15-17); and they put themselves on the road to everlasting damnation in unbelief (II Peter 2:1-2). Moreover, since they counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing, rejected the *vicarious atonement*, despised the Means of Grace and persistently did “*despite unto the Spirit of Grace*” (Hebrews 10:29), it would be good for such people, as in the case of Judas, if they had not been born (Matthew 26:24). They made themselves into their own God, have nothing in which they can trust, and, although they deny its existence, have the “*judgment*” and “*fiery indignation*” of God to look forward to (Hebrews 10:27).

How unspeakably tragic, how unthinkable sad, how unimaginably abysmal for once-steadfast children of God and heirs of heaven to have *fallen* from the saving faith and from the sure anticipation of everlasting life in heaven by

virtue of their Savior's merits into the emptiness of skepticism, denial and unbelief of the truth, into the **hopelessness** of being "*without Christ*" [without a Savior from sin, death and the devil], "*being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*" [no longer members of the Communion of Saints], "*and strangers from the covenants of promise*" [no longer knowing, understanding, and trusting the saving Gospel], "*having no hope*" [no anticipation of salvation], "*and without God in the world*" [in this life already separated from God and headed for eternal damnation in hell] (Ephesians 2:12). And they did all of this **to themselves** by forsaking the truth of the Scriptures and choosing instead to be flattered by the children of this world into self-trust, pride, and arrogance — "*led away with the error of the wicked,*" estranged from God and the truth of His Word by the flesh-flattering sin of **rationalism** — **the killer of saving faith!**

May God graciously preserve us and our children from being entangled in that web of deception, that "*error of the wicked,*" into which we could easily be led if we carelessly, wantonly, and foolishly fail to "*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,*" which we have only in and through His precious, inerrant, infallible, pure and authoritative Word, "*to [whom] be glory both now and forever. Amen*" (II Peter 3:18).

— D. T. M.

“Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

— II Corinthians 10:3-5



*O God, how sin's dread works abound!
Throughout the earth no rest is found;
and falsehood's spirit wide has spread,
and error boldly rears its head.*

*Oh, grant that in Thy Holy Word
we here may live and die, dear Lord.
And when our journey endeth here,
receive us into glory there!*

—TLH 292, vv. 5 and 9



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

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(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



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The Rev. DAVID T. MENSING, Pastor

17151 South Central Avenue, Oak Forest, IL 60452-4913

E-mail: pastormensing@yahoo.com

On the Web at

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Office Telephone: (708) 532-4288

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The Rev. DAVID J. MENSING, Pastor

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

E-mail: d_rnensing@hotmail.com

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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

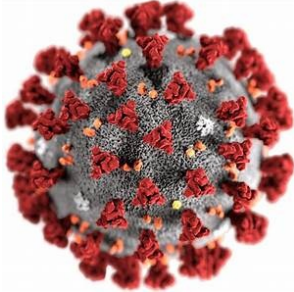
Telephone: (708) 948-7075

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 everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

—Philippians 4:6

Lord God, dear heavenly Father, we thank Thee that, according to Thy merciful providence, Thou hast regarded our beloved country in this time of peril and hast permitted our society to open up to a certain extent as we return to in-person learning in many schools and experience far fewer critical infections and deaths from the Coronavirus due to natural and acquired immunity and successful inoculations with effective vaccines. Yet, with the Omicron variant of the disease, cases tend to spread more easily, and there are more hospitalizations; and even fully vaccinated persons are experiencing “breakthrough” infections. Even as we still exercise prudent measures to contain this virus and to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our neighbors from contagion, keep us, we beseech Thee, 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. May it please Thee in Thine own best time and way to comfort us in this period of chastening and to protect us from harm and danger, granting us meanwhile patience under adversity 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.