

*The*  
*Concordia Lutheran*



“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35.

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

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“God sent  
forth His  
Son.”

—Galatians 4:4





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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.

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

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

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

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

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# Commemorating Luther's Birth in 1483



## Did His Mother Have a “Choice”??

*“Lo, children are a heritage  
of the Lord;  
and the fruit of the womb  
is His reward.”*

Psalm 127:3

In the year **1483**, Europe was just beginning to claw its way out from under the rubble, chaos, and ignorance which had resulted from the destruction of the Roman Empire a thousand years earlier and had ushered in the so-called “dark ages.” For when the Visigoths and other barbaric tribes from the north invaded Italy in 476 and attacked and all but destroyed the capital of the empire, western culture itself took a severe hit! Priceless art and splendid architecture were destroyed, centers of learning were wiped out, libraries were burned to the ground, Rome’s thriving economy lay in shambles, and the education of the people ground to a halt. There was no longer a centralized government to preserve law and order and to protect the people with its police powers; the court system had all but disappeared; and the “glory” that once characterized the seemingly invincible Roman Empire had vanished. And, even though the once heathen empire had become officially “Christianized” through the efforts of the Emperor Constantine the Great in about the year 300 A. D., and Christianity had begun to flourish once the organized persecutions finally ceased — persecutions which began under Nero (who executed Paul and Peter, as well as hundreds of others in the ‘60s) and continued for another two hundred years under even more cruel emperors — the Roman Empire was scarcely what could be called a “Christian nation.”

Nevertheless the only power and stability left in the empire was manifested by the visible Christian “*church*,” which by 476 had already begun to consolidate itself under the leadership of a head *other* than Christ, namely, under the bishop of Rome, who had his own private army, who had dared to engage the Goths in battle and to chase them out of Rome, and who eventually succeeded in brokering an uneasy peace with them at the conference table. Thus, what had been the *Roman* Empire now soon became the *Holy Roman Empire* with “*the church*” as its administrator, legislator, judge, and ultimate authority. The “*church*” flourished, consolidated power, amassed wealth, and expanded its influence even over the kings and princes within its borders; and in the process it developed its hierarchical system into a *political machine* without equal in the annals of history, a system which soon became the Roman *Papacy*.

During those “dark ages” in Europe, the laity became poorer while the clergy became richer; the secular leaders ceded much of their control to “the church,” and the Papacy sought to seize ultimate power for itself. The ordinary lay people, trapped in a feudal system of domination by “lords” (who were, in many cases, also bishops and archbishops of “the church”) — a system in which most were no better off than slaves, received no education and were basically illiterate, while the clergy preserved within the walls of their monasteries all the learning of western civilization. The civilization was not only *socially*, *economically*, and *intellectually* “dark” from 500 to approximately 1,500 A. D., but it was *spiritually* “dark” as well, with the church systematically and deliberately keeping its people “*sit[ting] in darkness and in the shadow of death*” (Luke 1:79). They were bound, as with a chain, to an increasing burden of “*the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9), struggling to justify themselves by the Law (Galatians 2:16; 3:11) in the performance of satisfactions, penances, pilgrimages and crusades, and were completely isolated from the sweet Gospel of justification by grace alone, for Christ’s sake alone, through faith alone. Thus they were not only *victims* of the church establishment, but they were victims “*having no hope*” (Ephesians 2:12), having nothing better ever to expect, barring the intervention of God Himself!

It was into *this* world that **MARTIN LUTHER** was born in the year **1483**. Light was just beginning to dawn in the *secular* world with the invention of moveable type and the mass produced printing of words (Johann Gutenberg, 1450), with voyages of exploration to new and strange “worlds” (Columbus and others, 1492), with the onset of scientific in-

vestigation and cunning inventions (Da Vinci and many more), and with a *renaissance* or “new birth” of learning, including the widespread education of the young. **And**, by God’s grace, light was also beginning to dawn upon the *ecclesiastical* world, as the dark and dank spiritual dungeon of the Papacy was forced to open its doors to the freedom (Galatians 5:1) enjoyed by Christians called by the Lord of *His* Church “*out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (I Peter 2:9).

Yes, it was into this more *hopeful* world that the Lord caused **Martin Luther** to be born to his parents, Hans and Margarethe, on **November 10, 1483**, in the little Saxon village of **Eisleben**, destined by God’s grace to become a torchbearer of the light of the Gospel and a trumpeting Gideon for his people in the face of the Midianite scourge of Rome! Baptized on the day after his birth — on November 11th, celebrated as **St. Martin’s Day** — the baby was named after that famous missionary; and when the family moved to the town of **Mansfeld** when he was still a baby, little Martin actually had the advantage of going to school there beginning at the age of five.

Not all children received an education in those days; but his father, Hans, was very concerned about his children and even carried little Martin to school. School was not fun in those days but was very rigorous and austere; and children were often whipped when they did not know their lessons. But little Martin worked hard, even learned Latin (in preparation for other academic studies later on), and became a good student. When he was fourteen, he was sent to a boarding school in **Magdeburg** some sixty miles from home where poorer children had to work to earn their keep. When he became sick, his father brought him home, but then sent him the next year to continue his studies at a high school in **Eisenach**, where Luther had some relatives who, it was hoped, would take him in and care for him. But when this did not occur, a kind lady named Ursula Cotta took Martin into her home and provided for him as though he were her own son.

After another three years, Martin was ready to attend college and began to study law at the university in **Erfurt**; and it was while a student there that, plagued by his sin and guilt before God and terrified of God’s justice, he sought to find comfort for his soul in his study of the Bible. But its teachings had been so *perverted* by the Church of Rome that God’s grace in Christ Jesus was *hidden* from him. One day, after having almost been killed by a lightning strike, he vowed to become a monk and to sacrifice his life to the “the church” if St. Anna would only spare his

life; and it was during the ensuing years in the **Augustinian monastery** that, in his study of the Scriptures, he learned to know of God's gracious forgiveness for the sake of Christ's merits and that salvation by grace was his very own property, and peace with God was its fruit and result, by faith alone in God's mercy — totally apart from the works of the Law (Romans 3:28; 5:1). Thus, by the operation of the Holy Ghost through the precious Gospel, Luther's *real life* began when he was restored to the saving faith that had been worked in him so many years earlier by the washing of Holy Baptism (Galatians 3:26-27).

As we commemorate Luther's birth, let us give thanks to the God of all grace for giving us this champion of His truth to restore to souls benighted under the shroud of the Papacy "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (II Corinthians 4:6). **To God alone the glory!!**

Five-hundred thirty-six years *after* Luther's birth, as we celebrate our *spiritual* enlightenment by means of the Gospel returned to us in its purity in the Reformation, and as we, at the same time, recognize with praise to God in His *Kingdom of Power* the *secular* enlightenment of the world in universal education, in the encouragement of curiosity, in exploration of the heretofore unknown, in the development of technology, in the advance of true science, and in the freedoms we enjoy, it strikes us as **odd**, as very **strange**, as **paradoxical** and truly **ironic** that the world actually **regressed** in the last fifty years into "**dark ages**" that blatantly fly in the face of the *social progress* achieved since the days of Luther!! The title of our article gives us a hint as to how this **regression** relates to Luther's birth.

Having, as Americans, secured "the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity," we have, as the result of a Supreme Court decision in 1973 (Roe v. Wade), witnessed a "**legal right**," supposedly protected by our Constitution and specifically granted by the high court, GROW and exponentially EXPAND according to "politically correctness" into a "**basic human right**" in society world-wide — the "**right**" to DESTROY our own posterity!! According to this godless and wicked philosophy, Margarethe Luther had the "**basic human right**," a "fundamental" right given to her by her Creator and inalienable by men, to **destroy** little Martin **in the womb!!** — in which case he would never have been born. The 7–2 decision of nine human beings never affected the life of Roe's (Norma McCorvey's) own child, to whom she ultimately gave birth, but it has resulted in the legal murder of **61,749,363**

**children** in the United States alone [Guttmacher Institute; cf. also USAAbortionClock.org] since Roe v. Wade was decided! That’s approximately 1,200 children per day! We cringe in terror at the numbers of children killed in school shootings and other “mass killings,” but somehow 1,200 surgical or chemical killings *per day* get little attention, virtually no press, and only occasional protests, chiefly in election years! Those who oppose abortion are called “pro-life” activists; those who champion it call themselves “pro-choice.” “Choice” of *what??*



Luther at 12 weeks??

The so-called “choice” is between letting a **human being** —scientifically an “**individual**” with distinctive DNA, a distinctive blood type, a distinctive and closed circulatory system and nervous system all its own, every characteristic that distinguishes it from its mother (unlike a mother’s tonsils, appendix, ovaries and breast tissue) — letting the child *live*, or consciously **deciding** deliberately to *kill* it by means of a surgical or chemical procedure which, if performed upon a “born” person, would be chargeable as cold-blooded *murder!* Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D–NY) stated on “*Face the Nation*” (CBS, May 19, 2019) that women have “the right to make the most intimate, personal, life and death decisions.” The word “choice” is a sterilized synonym for making the “**decision**” that someone should “die,” that “death” is the result of someone’s “**decision**.” At least in her statement we have the TRUTH of what “pro-choice” *really means* to those who support it. In a nominal pregnancy, the mother does not **decide** that the child should “live.” It lives as a matter of *natural course* until, after approximately nine months of development *in utero*, it is **born** —unless the **decision** of the mother goes as described by Virginia’s governor Ralph Northam in a radio interview on January 30, 2019 concerning his state’s late-term abortion bill: “If a mother is in labor...the infant would be delivered. The infant would be kept comfortable. The infant would be resuscitated if that’s what the mother and the family desired, and then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and mother.” She then **still** has the “right” to “**decide**” to let the newborn infant *die??*

Did Martin Luther’s mother have “a choice,” the “fundamental right” to kill her own baby?? Of course not! There is no “fundamental right” to commit murder! Murder is a sin against God’s holy Fifth Commandment, and “*no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him,*” the Bible states so clearly (I John 3:15). Children *in utero* are not disposable

“tissue” nor appendages subject to surgical removal. On the contrary, “*children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward*” (Psalm 127:3). Sarah, Abraham’s wife, had been barren (Genesis 16), Rebekah, Isaac’s wife, as well (Genesis 25), also Hannah, the wife of Elkanah (I Samuel 1), and Elisabeth, the wife of Zacharias (Luke 1); and they earnestly prayed God for a child. And the Lord heard their prayers, granted them fertility, and gave them sons, having “*made*” them and “*formed*” them “*from the womb*” (cf. Isaiah 44:2, 24; 49:5; Jeremiah 1:5; etc.). The conception of a child is God’s blessing according to the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, as Luther explains it, belonging to one’s “*daily bread*” that God gives “also to all the wicked” (cf. Matthew 5:45) in His kingdom of power (Psalm 145:9). He created fertility in man and woman and ordained the procreation of children in the beginning as His blessing (Genesis 1:28). Thus a true believer *treasures* God’s gift of children (Psalm 127:4-5); and even the unconverted by nature recognize the blessing of children and their obligation to care for them and protect them, and they mourn over a spontaneous miscarriage as a great loss, as the loss of a *child*. It is the *unthinkable* in the *extreme* when parents forsake their children (Psalm 27:10).

Space does not permit here an exhaustive study of abortion as a sin against God’s holy Fifth Commandment; and, by treating it only briefly in our article on the *birth* of Martin Luther, we are, as it were, “preaching to the choir.” Suffice it to say that, although the Supreme Court granted women the *legal* right to destroy their children *in utero* as a matter of “privacy,” there is no *fundamental* or *basic human* right to do so — or for that matter to commit any other acts of violence against the helpless and defenseless, so-called “crying sins” in which the victim has only God as his defender and avenger (cf. Genesis 4:10; 18:20, 21; 19:13; Exodus 2:23; 3:7; 22:27; Psalm 72:12; etc.). Nevertheless abortion is so common *every day* that we can easily be lulled into a certain degree of complacency about it — which may God graciously forbid!

We thank God for Hans and Margarethe Luther, pious Godfearing parents, who treasured His gift of a son, and who brought him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4) to the extent that they knew and understood at the time the doctrines of His precious Word. May **we** by His grace do likewise with the children God has given to **us**, that we and they together “*inherit the kingdom prepared for [us] from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34).

— D. T. M.



# The Exemplary Advent Preaching of Christ's Forerunner

*"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,  
'Make straight the way of the Lord!'  
as said the prophet Esaias." —John 1:23*



John the Baptist, the Savior's forerunner or "advance-man," as we would call such a person today, had been "preaching in the wilderness of Judea" and in "all the region round about Jordan," St. Matthew tells us (chapter 3), and had gained a great following among the people. His message was one of urgency as he preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." It wasn't an easy message to hear; it was not the smooth-talking "pitch" that so many people look for today in preachers; but the holy evangelists tell us that people went out unto him in droves "and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1) — all, that is, except the leaders of the Jews, whose skepticism became evident in the investigation they launched against John. Some thought he just might be the *Messiah!* Others, realizing the potential political value of hanging onto John's "coattails," tried to curry favor with him and to flatter him. "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who art thou?'" (John 1:19). The "big shots" didn't come themselves; they didn't want to identify themselves with John as of yet. Instead they sent "stooges" to "scope out" this popular prophet and to see what he was all about.

Here John the Baptist had the "ideal chance" to make a name for himself. But he forthrightly withstood any and all efforts to get him to accept personal acclaim and honor. "And he confessed, and denied not, but confessed: 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Art thou Elias [Elijah risen from the dead perhaps]??' And he saith, 'I am not.' 'Art thou that Prophet [like unto Moses, whom the Lord promised to raise up among His people]?' And he answered, 'No.' Then said they unto him, 'Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?'" (John 1:20–22).

The Jews gave John plenty of opportunity to “toot his own horn.” And “high profile” *belly-servers* today would have gotten plenty of mileage out of it too! For they want to be KNOWN; they look for NAME RECOGNITION; they cultivate a PUBLIC IMAGE; they plaster their PICTURE everywhere —on every flier, poster, and advertisement for their church or “ministry,” as they like to call their programs, so that people recognize their face when they see it. Unlike St. Paul, who said, “*We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus, the Lord*” (II Corinthians 4:5a), they preach THEMSELVES and hire booking agents to schedule “personal appearances.” Not so **John**, however; and not so any faithful Christian pastor who desires humbly to serve his Lord Jesus Christ and the cause of His precious truth!! “Christian” preachers in the proper sense of the term confess with the Psalmist: “*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto **Thy Name** give glory, for **Thy mercy**, and for **Thy truth’s sake!**” (115:1).*

And when John was pressed to say something about himself, he responded with the words of the Prophet Isaiah (40:3) concerning the Messiah’s forerunner: “*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said the Prophet Esaias*” (our title-text). Isaiah had prophesied of John that he would be a preacher of **repentance** —a forthright preacher of the **Law** in all its fierceness to convict impenitent sinners, to humble the arrogant, to clear “offenses” or stumblingblocks from the roadway of the heavenly King with the “bulldozer” of God’s truth, to bring the people to their knees in humble contrition (or sorrow) for their sins, and thus to prepare their hearts to receive the comfort of the Gospel. —Where indeed do we find such preaching today? It’s so RARE that it’s practically EXTINCT!! Belly-servers and the “church-growth” people who are interested in playing the “numbers game” on their growing databases will tell you straight out: “Such preaching drives people away from the church! It’s counter-productive! People don’t want a guilt-trip laid on them when they come to church; they want to feel **good about themselves**! That’s why even Jesus’ own steps of Christian admonition [Matthew 18:15–17] have such a **poor record** of ‘gaining’ people!! Can’t you see that??” —Apparently JOHN didn’t “see it” that way! Neither did JESUS! Neither did PAUL and the other apostles! And neither do WE “see it” that way, when God says to every Christian pastor, Ezekiel 33: “*...If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall DIE in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at THINE hand!*” (v. 8).

But John’s message (and the message of all faithful Christian preachers) dare not be confined to the threats of the **Law** and the proclamation

of God's **wrath** against all impenitent and ungodly men. For to those who are humbly and sincerely contrite — brokenhearted over their sins (Psalm 34:18), disavowing their own merits as having any value in the sight of God for salvation (Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:20), begging God for even the crumbs of His mercy (Matthew 15:27) — the **Gospel** in all of its sweetness must be preached for their comfort and assurance; yea, it must **predominate**, lest penitent sinners be driven to despair, left in hopelessness, and plunged into hell by **unevangelical** preaching!

Thus, John the Baptist spoke not only of his mission to preach the Law to the impenitent, but his mission to preach the **Gospel** to brokenhearted and dejected, penitent sinners; for his citation of Isaiah's prophecy was well-known to the Jews —the 40th chapter which begins: "**Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!' Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it!**" (vv. 1–5). —That's the **CHRISTMAS GOSPEL** which the **angels** [in Hebrew and Greek = "*messengers*"] of **God** proclaimed: "**Fear not! For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people! For unto you is born...a Savior, Christ, the Lord! ... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!**" (Luke 2:10–11, 14).

That glorious "good news" of the Gospel has real value, of course, only to hearts **prepared** to **receive it** by the preaching of the Law — **thirsty** hearts longing for the Water of Life, **hungry** hearts yearning for the Bread of Life, **dying** hearts craving the Resurrection and the Life! To the impenitent, those who persist in wickedness and "*continue in sin that grace may abound*" (Romans 6:1b), the grace of God means nothing; and the proclamation of the Gospel falls on deaf ears! Therefore it is wrong to comfort the **impenitent** with its sweetness! But from a humble, contrite sinner, whose hardness of heart has been hammered to pieces by the Law (Jeremiah 23:29), the precious assurance of forgiveness, life and salvation dare never be withheld; for the Lord doesn't want to break off the "*bruised reed*," the plant whose stem has been bent and kinked —He wants to splint it, bind it up and heal it! He doesn't want to

extinguish the spark on a still but barely glowing wick —He wants to restore its flame to new brightness with the Oil of the Gospel (Isaiah 42:3)! And so John the Baptist pointed his penitent hearers to Him “*who [was] preferred before [him], whose shoe’s latchet [he was] not worthy to unloose*” (John 1:27), identifying **Jesus** the very next day and saying, “*Behold the **Lamb of God** which taketh away the sin of the world! **This is He** of whom I said, ‘After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for He was before me.’*” (vv. 29–30).

But the exemplary confession of the Savior’s forerunner is not only the **prototype** of all **public Christian preaching**; it is also the **model** for all **personal Christian testimony**! Every true Christian confesses to the Lord 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). And that same humility of spirit characterizes the testimony he gives to others. When asked, as was John the Baptist, “*What sayest thou of thyself?*” how better to answer than with the **Apostle Paul**, who said that he was “*chief of sinners,*” with the **Centurion of Capernaum**, who said that he was not worthy that Jesus should come under his roof, with the **woman of Canaan**, who freely admitted that she was no better than a dog in Jesus’ sight and yet hungry for the crumbs of mercy that fall from the master’s table! For of ourselves we are but dust and ashes (Genesis 18:27; Psalm 103:14) and totally unworthy of the Lord’s grace and mercy toward us (Matthew 8:8; etc.). And even as regenerate children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26), we confess with Isaiah regarding even our best works of sanctification as Christians: “*We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*” (64:6a), and in the words of the Lord Jesus regarding the best efforts of His disciples: “*Say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty to do’*” (Luke 17:10).

Moreover, as was John the Baptist in his public proclamation of God’s Law for the conviction of sinners and for their contrition, we must be ready at all times to bring to the erring and to manifest, impenitent sinners the admonition of God’s Law in all its **fierceness**, lest they imagine their sins to be of *no great consequence* and their result *no great matter*! For their very souls are **in imminent jeopardy of damnation**, the Bible tells us; and it’s our job in our day-to-day relationships with people, just as it is your Pastor’s in his public office, to warn the wicked of God’s wrath against sin and to urge them to repent quickly before it is too late and their time of grace is past! (Cf. Jesus’ mournful words over Jerusalem, Luke 19:42). This will not make us “popular” with

those who brush off our admonition, who counter-accuse us, and who malign our good intentions toward them; but it is our **Christian duty**, according to our Savior's own specific instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 and in many other passages of God's Holy Word (cf. James 5:19-20), to endeavor to gain those who have erred and gone astray.

Then too, lest we convict a manifest sinner with the Law of God and see him brought to sincere and humble contrition, but then leave him to twist on the executioner's rope in despair, let us be well-versed in the comforting passages of the **Gospel**, whereby we can bring *needed* and *immediate* assurance of **forgiveness** to a penitent sinner, with, if nothing else, the soothing words of Jesus Himself to the man sick of the palsy: "Son [Daughter], be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!" (Matthew 9:2) or, according to the exemplary confession of John the Baptist six verses following our title-text: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), or with Martin Luther in the beloved verse of his Christmas hymn:

*This is the Christ, our God and Lord,  
who in all need shall aid afford.  
He will Himself **your** Savior be,  
From all your sins to set **you** free! (TLH 85, 3)*

Christmas is indeed one of the happiest times of the year for us Christians, and for good reason! But let us not permit these precious days to go by —with all the opportunities we have in our visits with friends, relatives and co-workers— without following the **exemplary confession** of John the Baptist and putting it into bold and yet humble practice, telling others WHY Christmas is such a happy time, WHY we so desperately NEED a Savior, WHY we could never save ourselves, WHO Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, really IS, WHAT He accomplished in our place to satisfy God's justice and redeem us, WHAT God for Jesus' sake declared for all the world in view of Christ's vicarious atonement, and HOW we and all penitent sinners receive the blessings of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by faith in this dear Savior of ours! Make up for the oftentimes empty messages of off-the-shelf Christmas cards with an added message of your own! It may well be the **best Christmas gift** a friend or neighbor, even a relative, will ever receive! And may God grant for Jesus' sake that they both **hear** and **heed** your confession to their own great Christmas joy, both now and in eternity!

— D. T. M.

## The Christmas Angel's Message (in verse by Martin Luther)

“From heaven above to earth I come  
to bear good news to every home;  
glad tidings of great joy I bring,  
whereof I now will say and sing.

“To you this night is born a child  
of Mary, chosen virgin mild;  
this little child of lowly birth  
shall be the joy of all the earth!

“This is the Christ, our God and Lord,  
who in all need shall aid afford.  
He will Himself your Savior be  
from all your sins to set you free.

“Glory to God in highest heaven,  
who unto us His Son hath given!”  
Thus angels sang with pious mirth  
the gladsome tidings of His birth.

(TLH 85, 1-3, 15 adapted)

## *Isaiah 7:14 — A “Rectilinear” Prophecy of Christ’s Virgin Birth*

*“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*



It’s back in the news again, not the virgin birth of Christ, but that old skeleton still rattling around in the closet of “modern” exegetes that Isaiah 7:14 is **not** a prophecy of the virgin birth of the Savior, nor of **any** “virgin birth” at all. The so-called “higher critics” of the Bible have long held that the Hebrew word *almáh* can legitimately be translated “young woman” or “maid”, and that therefore Isaiah 7:14 should not be “forced” in English translation to “prove” the “*virgin*” birth of *anybody*, much less of Jesus Himself. And so we

find most “modern” English translations of the Old Testament following that subversive “line” of the modernists who flat out **deny** the virgin birth of Christ and represent it to be a figment of Christian “mythology.”

Why is it so **popular** among “modern” interpreters of the Bible to discount the virgin birth of Christ and to pull Scripture “props” out from under this blessed doctrine?? Why would they even **want** to cast *suspicion* upon Isaiah 7:14 and its completely proper translation in our beloved King James Version?? Why would anyone even **try** to discredit the time-honored view of this passage as a direct (or “rectilinear”) prophecy of the miraculous conception and birth of Christ “*of the Virgin Mary*,” as believing Christians have confessed it in their creeds for eighteen centuries?? Is it because of *genuine evidence* recently uncovered in legitimate scholarship? —No! Is it because of *genuine concern* for Christ’s sheep that they not be led astray into the byways of error? —Certainly not! Is it perhaps because it

doesn't *really matter* what exegesis of this prophecy we accept, as long as we still have "respect" for the Sacred Scriptures?? —Not unless that "respect" is nothing but a sham and a pretense!!

To such willful and wanton perverters of divine truth should be directed the Savior's words in John 8:43 and 44, "*Why do ye not understand My speech? Even because ye cannot hear My Word. Ye are of your father, the devil!*" **Satan** is the artful master at turning Scripture on its head, of perverting it, and of casting doubt upon its sure and certain words. **He's** the one who invented the lie when in Genesis 3 he cunningly planted the seed of uncertainty in the ear of Eve with his contrived question, "*Yea, hath God said??*" And now we have modern-day sons of Belial, "*wise in their own conceits,*" who dare to attack the "*sign*" that "*the Lord Himself*" gave to indicate which "*son*" born of a woman would be "*God with us;*" and thus they undermine saving confidence in the son of Mary, the virgin of Nazareth, as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God!*"

We, however, do not hesitate to state in simple terms and without equivocation the FACT that **Isaiah 7:14 is a direct, rectilinear prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ, referring only and alone to that blessed event, and was fulfilled only by the conception and birth of Jesus of Nazareth of the Virgin Mary.** We do not argue with the linguist who says that *almáh* in Hebrew CAN be translated out of context by the English "young woman" or "maiden" or "maid" (marriageable but not married) as well as "virgin." The fact remains that in Isaiah 7:14 the word *almáh* **MUST** be translated "**virgin.**" Why? Because the only *legitimate* exegesis of this passage is determined NOT by etymology or lexicography or linguistics or history or the study of manuscripts but by the Holy Ghost Himself. The principle rejected by modernistic theologians, namely, that Scripture is its own interpreter (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*), is what makes the correct understanding (and translation) of Isaiah 7:14 **so utterly simple.**

The Evangelist St. Luke, in the first chapter of his Gospel account, records in detail the message of Gabriel "*to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*" (v. 27). The Greek of the New Testament is as specific as it could possibly be about the gynecological status of Mary in her pre-gestational condition. The Greek word *parthénos*, unlike the Hebrew word *almáh*, allows of only **one meaning**, namely, "**virgin,**" as Mary knew herself to be, "*seeing I know not a man.*" (v. 34). The operation of



the **Holy Ghost** in the inception of Mary's pregnancy (rather than the wicked calumny that Mary had had a quick last minute affair with a former suitor OR that she and Joseph had been sleeping together on the sly) is the **stated reason WHY** both Mary, and Joseph (according to Matthew 1:20), and **we too** can be certain that the "*holy thing which shall be born of [her] shall be called the **Son of God***" (v. 35), not a "love child" produced by carnal intercourse. The Greek word,  $\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma$  ["wherefore" or "for this reason"] makes the virgin conception and birth of Christ essential to His identification as the true Messiah. To be sure, to the "*carnal mind [which] is enmity against God,*" a **virgin birth** is "unscientific," "impossible," and therefore must be a kind of "sanctified myth" or legend created by the early Christians to distinguish their beloved Master from other religious prophets of His stature. We would indeed expect an **unbeliever** to reason in this fashion and to blaspheme the God of all grace, who caused the Redeemer of sinful men to be born in this miraculous manner. But for any professing **Christian** to reason and speak the same way and to challenge the virgin birth of our Savior as an impossible event is completely unthinkable, "*for with God **nothing** shall be impossible.*" (v. 37).

Moreover, Matthew records the circumstances of Christ's conception and birth in the first chapter of his Gospel account, verses 18 through 25. There he quotes the Lord's angel announcing also to Joseph concerning Mary's pregnancy: "*That which is conceived in her **is of the Holy Ghost.***" And right here is where the exegesis of Isaiah 7:14 is easily settled; for Matthew points to **this event** as fulfilling "*that which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold, a **virgin** shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,' which being interpreted is, 'God with us.'*" If indeed we truly believe in the **verbal inspiration** of the Scriptures and their **inerrancy** as the Word of God Himself; if we believe, as we confess in our Catechism, that "*God the Holy Ghost moved the holy men to write, and put into their minds the very thoughts which they expressed and the very **words** which they wrote;*" then we also believe that in Matthew 1:23 the **Holy Ghost** quoted the **Holy Ghost** with divine, infallible precision, and that **God Himself** translated the Hebrew word *almáh* for us with the Greek word *parthénos* and thus made any speculation on this point completely moot AND completely out of place. God Himself settled any translation "problem" —a happy fact which all the church fathers recognized down through the ages by the grace of God for our comfort and assurance. But is Isaiah 7:14 a "**rectilinear**" prophecy, pointing **ONLY** to the virgin birth of Christ and fulfilled **ONLY** by the virgin birth of Christ? Consider the following questions:

—Does not Matthew **state** unequivocally: “Now all **this** was done **that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet....”?

—Does anyone (particularly one who already scoffs at the virgin birth of **Christ**) seriously think that there was **another** virgin birth at some time in the past to fulfill this prophecy??

—Does the Lord Himself “give [us] a **sign**” to point to His own Messiah, but an identifying mark, so flawed that it can refer to any number of messiahs born at any number of times and places??

—Is it indeed a “**sign**” at all for “a young woman,” “a maiden,” a marriageable but never before married female (though not truly and necessarily a **virgin**), to conceive and bear a son out of wedlock, when it happens hundreds, perhaps thousands of times every day??

—Did all those non-virginal young women or maidens who supposedly **also** fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy by giving birth to sons have offspring that could legitimately be called “*God with us,*” “*the Son of God,*” “*the Son of the Highest,*” “*the Dayspring from on high,*” and the “*Horn of Salvation*”??

What profound absurdity presents itself when the truths of Holy Scripture, “*given by inspiration of God,*” are set aside in favor of bizarre theories and wild speculation! Indeed, those who reject **rectilinear Messianic prophecy** (directly pointing to Jesus and to Jesus alone) in favor of “**typological**” prophecy which *may* or *may not* point to Jesus AT ALL but only to someone or some event that by pure happenstance *resembles* Jesus and His life here on earth, such “theologians” are not worthy of the name; for they do not speak “*as the oracles of God*” (I Peter 4:11) but “*by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Romans 16:18). **From this preserve us, dear heavenly Father!** Let us rather hold fast in confidence to the clearly rectilinear prophecies “*spoken of the Lord by the prophets*” concerning our precious Savior; for “**to Him** give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

Hail the day so rich in cheer for each earthborn creature!  
God’s own Son from heaven draws near, takes our human nature.

Of a virgin born is He; Mary, by the Lord’s decree,  
is become a mother!

See the miracle of love:

God Himself from heaven above came to be our Brother!

Hallelujah! (TLH 78, 1)

— D. T. M.

Christ the Lord to us is born,  
Hallelujah!  
On this joyous Christmas morn,  
Hallelujah!  
of a virgin lowly  
He, the King most holy,  
born this day to save us.

Prophesied in days of old,  
Hallelujah!  
God has sent Him as foretold,  
Hallelujah!  
of a virgin lowly  
He, the King most holy,  
born this day to save us.

Our poor human form He took,  
Hallelujah!  
realms of glory He forsook,  
Hallelujah!  
of a virgin lowly  
He, the King most holy,  
born this day to save us.

*(TLH 86, 1-3)*



## *Keeping CHRIST in Christmas*

*“For unto you is born this day in the City of David  
a Savior, which is **CHRIST**, the Lord.”*

Luke 2:11

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The concern for keeping *the word* “Christ” in Christmas often arises out of the fact that people sometimes abbreviate or shorten the word “Christmas” by substituting the letter “**X**” for the name of Christ. Contrary to what many people *think* about that, namely, that the substitution shows unbelief, blasphemy or, at the very least, lack of respect for Christ’s name, Christian people should know that such is NOT the case. In Greek, the name “Christ” is *cristor*. Thus the letter “X” is really **the first letter in Christ’s name**; and the first TWO letters are often used together as a Christian symbol or monogram embroidered on altar paraments, Communion linens, and for other decorative purposes in Christian liturgics. So the use of the letter “X” is NOT “taking Christ out of Christmas.”

Although the **date** of Christ's birth in Bethlehem is not known, and its anniversary was not celebrated for several hundred years after His death, it is acknowledged that **December 25th** (January 7th according to the Julian calendar) was eventually *chosen* by the early church and celebrated beginning in the Fourth Century A. D. The English word "Christmas," however, was a much later development, having "grown" over time predominantly from Latin, French and Middle English words to signify "Christ's service" or the "service" celebrating "Christ's" nativity. Interestingly, the celebration of "Christmas" was actually *prohibited*, historians tell us, not so much by pagans and heathen governments, but by nominal *Christians*, by early *Puritans* at the time of the Reformation, by *Presbyterians* in England, and by the later *Puritans* both in England and in the American colonies, largely because of the worldly revelry and heavy drinking that often accompanied the celebration. There was also disagreement as to the relative importance of celebrating *the event* of Christ's **birth** as being truly significant compared to celebrating *its purpose* in His **redemption** of the world by His holy life and by His innocent suffering and death.

Nowadays Christmas has lost much of its *theological* and *religious* significance and has taken on a merely *cultural* role in our largely *secular* society. It's all about family, friends, gift-giving and receiving, support of charitable endeavors, kindness to the less fortunate, sympathy to the helpless and abused, carol-singing or at least listening to Christmas music, decorated trees, jolly Santas, yard decorations, lots of colored lights, and *some* attendance at Christmas pageants and church services — and a *materialistic* role in the financial health of "Wall Street" — "shopping days" until..., a spike in consumer spending (\$ 920.00 for the average American), a surge in the economy of one trillion dollars, increased temporary employment, Christmas bonuses, and a literal "wealth" of entertainment. And what is left of the *spiritual* significance of Christmas has deteriorated into a purely *social* role, centering on the so-called "*social Gospel*" of the Babe of Bethlehem — Jesus' love toward all men, Jesus as man's example of acceptance, kindness, self-sacrifice and generosity, and Jesus' non-judgmental attitude toward people with differing opinions — and therefore its positive impact on homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty and the "disparity of wealth," sexual orientation (or *re-orientation*), gun violence, racism, misogyny, human trafficking, the increased rate of suicide, the need for prison reform, and "inhumane" immigration policies. Concerning ALL of these *social issues*, it is said that "*Jesus is the reason for the season*" — whatever THAT means! It is "*The Spirit(s) of Christmas*"

according to Charles Dickens in his “*Christmas Carol*” and the “*social Gospel*” of “*good will toward men*” (**man’s** good will toward his **fellows**) that is the message of the season. And while some actually *go to church* at Christmastime, observing one of the two days of “obligation” for professing Christians (the other being Easter), it is to many of them merely a “**custom**” that can be “enjoyed” by the “whole family” as a *Christmas tradition!*

Considering the purely *social* impact of Christmas, the season has been adopted in most countries of the world as **culturally** important, even acknowledged by Jews, agnostics, and occasionally some atheists. As a *cultural* holiday —apart from the celebration of *Christ’s* birth— Christmas is marked by the decoration of trees, the giving of gifts, the hosting of parties, the feasting at Christmas dinner, the special music sounding in the streets and bells ringing from church steeples, and small-change contributions deposited into red kettles. We have a “national” Christmas tree in Washington, D.C., and an even bigger one in Rockefeller Center in New York, recognizing “the season” of “*JOY to the world*” (for whatever the reason) and the always elusive “*peace on earth*” (which never seems to occur). Instead, drug overdoses spike at Christmas-time, as well as incidents of domestic violence, and so do suicides; and we shouldn’t have to wonder why, since in most cases there is no “Christ” in Christmas. The “*good tidings of great joy*” don’t seem to be all that “*good,*” and the “*joy*” and “*peace*” they are supposed to bring is not all that “*great.*” Just WHY IS THAT?

Keeping “Christ” in Christmas doesn’t mean that we have to “cleanse” Christmas of family get-togethers, reasonable, wholesome parties, gift-giving and receiving, kindly consideration of the less fortunate, and even Santa Claus, holly and mistletoe. Rather, **keeping “Christ” in Christmas** means that we should focus on the **REAL REASON for the season** — the **REAL reason WHY** Christ was “*anointed*” (the meaning of the word “Christ”) and was given to the world, the **REAL reason WHY** He was born of a *virgin* mother contrary to the objection of blaspheming skeptics to that “legend,” the **REAL reason WHY** His birth was lauded by choirs of angels, the **REAL reason WHY** He lived among us for thirty-three years suffering poverty, contempt and persecution, the **REAL reason WHY** He was crucified and slain, the **REAL reason WHY** He “*rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty,*” and the **REAL reason WHY** He will come again on the Last Day, a day known only to God but unknown to men. ALL of **those** reasons are either *unknown, disre-*

*garded* or just plain *ignored* in the celebration of Christmas by most people today; and such is the case, sad to say, even among many *professing Christians!*

The **REAL REASON** for the season is to declare, celebrate and treasure the fact that “*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). When God created Adam and Eve, our first parents, He made them perfectly **holy** and blessed. Their relationship with God was **perfect!** There was no enmity between them! They were *perfectly* able to live up to God’s expectation that they *remain* holy and blessed, in a state of complete harmony with Him, God-pleasing in every way. BUT when they yielded their *perfectly* free will to the devil’s enticement (Genesis 3:1-11) to **disobey** God, to **transgress** His commandment, and to **rebel** against His legitimate expectation of obedience, they immediately **lost** their pristine **righteousness**; they fell into “*sin*” (which, the Bible says, “*is the transgression of the Law,*” I John 3:4); they **destroyed** their perfect **relationship** with God, became His **enemies**, and brought His **wrath, displeasure** and **just punishment** upon themselves and all mankind after them (Romans 5:19a; Galatians 3:10; Romans 6:23a; etc.). Man was no longer perfect.

“But NOBODY’s **PERFECT!**” people say in their lame effort at self-defense, the effort which at the very same time is their **guilty plea** before God. And that is precisely where we must begin in order to **keep “Christ” in Christmas!** “*ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God!*” (Romans 3:23). “*There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not!*” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). “*They are ALL gone aside; they are all together become filthy; there is NONE that doeth good, no, not one!*” (Psalm 14:3). And, as we well know, this is just a sampling of Scripture passages that condemn us before God by nature. And, because of God’s perfect, uncompromising **justice**, according to which He abhors sin, hates sinners (Psalm 11:5, etc.), and must punish them with eternal damnation for their transgressions (Proverbs 10:29; Romans 6:23a, etc.), natural man lives in **fear** of God’s judgement and in **terror** of His curse. The once perfect relationship was destroyed by man; “*the carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7), and “*[the Lord hateth] all workers of iniquity*” (Psalm 5:5). That’s the **BAD** news!

The **GOOD** news, the “*good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people*” (Luke 2:10), the gladsome news of the **Gospel** to poor sinners, on account of which the Christmas angel could exhort the shepherds,

“*Fear not,*” is the **blessed fact** that **God** unilaterally “*reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). **God restored the relationship** that man destroyed by sending His only-begotten Son into the world to **satisfy His justice** (I John 2:2) by earning righteousness for all mankind by means of His perfect life in the sinners’ place (Romans 5:19) and by bearing the penalty of their guilt by His suffering and death on the cross (Galatians 3:13; II Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-8; etc.). **God** justified “*the ungodly*” (Romans 4:5) by making His holy Son “*to be sin for us*” (II Corinthians 5:21) as man’s Substitute “*under the Law*” (Galatians 4:4-5). **THAT’S** the **GOOD** news!! **THAT’S** the *indescribably good* news of **God’s** “*unspeakable Gift*” (II Corinthians 9:15) to the world on the first Christmas night! **God**, “*in Christ,*” that is because of Christ’s satisfaction of divine justice in our place, “*reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19) since He had already imputed them to Christ, and declared unilateral amnesty, **peace on earth**, because of **HIS good will** toward sinful men, the peace of which hosts of angels sang on that first Christmas night (Luke 2:14)! And He “*hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19b), the Word, the message, the Good News of this **reconciliation** to share with the world, the Word that brings to troubled hearts **REAL** Christmas peace because of **God’s** forgiveness of their sins!

**Jesus Himself** tells us how to **keep “Christ” in Christmas**. “*Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God,*” He said: “**Repent ye, and believe the Gospel!**” (Mark 1:14-15). “**CHRIST,**” God’s “**anointed**” Redeemer from eternity already, chosen to be manifested “*in the fulness of the time*” in fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies, was “*sent forth*” by God Himself (cf. I John 4:9; John 3:16), identified as “*His Son,*” “*made of a woman*” — born of the *Virgin Mary*, “*made under the Law*” as our Substitute — subject to its demands as well as to its curse and punishment, “*to redeem [buy back] them that were under the Law*” — us and all human beings on the face of the whole earth— from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil (Galatians 4:4-5). Had it not been for that Gift (John 3:16) of God’s grace, we would still be “*sit[ting] in darkness and in the shadow of death*” (Luke 1:79, etc.), “*all [our] lifetime subject to bondage*” (Hebrews 2:15), under “*the curse of the Law*” (Galatians 3:13), and deserving of “*the wages of sin*” (Romans 6:23a), eternal death in hell!! Terrors of conscience produced by the condemnation of God’s Law should move us to **repentance** (in its *narrow* sense), to acknowl-



edgment of our sin and guilt, to true terror and brokenheartedness over them, and to the change of attitude that recognizes their severity and the just wrath of God toward sinful men because of them.

But *repentance* in that *narrow* sense, as necessary as it is according to Jesus' words (and the preaching of John the Baptist as His forerunner, Matthew 3:2, etc.), brings us **no joy and peace** at Christmas-time. It leaves us in a state of **fear!** It is only the "*good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people,*" to all lost and condemned sinners, that brings us, together with the shepherds on Bethlehem's field, the Christmas angel's comforting words, "***Fear not!***" These words are **the essence** of the ***Gospel***. "*Don't continue to be fearful...considering the good tidings [Gospel] of great joy that I am here to bring you.*" Exactly what is that good news? "*Unto you [for your benefit, as your Substitute, as your Redeemer, as "the Propitiation for [your] sins, and not for [yours] only but also for the sins of the whole world"* (I John 2:2)], *is born this day in the city of David* (Micah 5:2) *a Savior* [a Rescuer, a Deliverer, a "Joshua"], *which is CHRIST* [the *Messiah*, the anointed Redeemer foretold throughout the Old Testament], *the Lord* ["*Jehovah,*" "very God of very God," "*God manifest in the flesh*" (I Timothy 3:16)]." —Putting aside the *cultural*, the *social*, the *political*, the *emotional*, the *materialistic* and the *traditional* aspects of the celebration — many of which have little if *any* connection with the birth of Christ and the **true meaning** of Christmas — "***believe the Gospel,***" Jesus says (Mark 1:15). Humbly **confide** in "*the Word of Reconciliation*" according to which a poor sinner has the **assurance** of God's forgiveness, the **joy** of being on loving and friendly terms again with his heavenly Father, and the **peace** which only God can give to otherwise terrified souls. Only the ***Gospel*** gives us the "*great joy*" that God wants "*all people*" to hear, to know, to accept and to confide in for their souls' salvation; and God-wrought faith in that Gospel is the only way in which a poor sinner accepts, lays hold on, and has for his very own the comfort and "*peace with God*" (Romans 5:1) that the Gospel imparts.

By truly keeping "***CHRIST***" in *Christmas*, as you "***repent and believe the Gospel,***" many of the sights, sounds, symbols and customs of the season will take on added meaning as you celebrate anew the birth of your Savior, "***CHRIST, the LORD,***" because of what He **accomplished** for you and all mankind; and many of the sights, sounds, symbols and customs of the season — which have *no* spiritual significance according to the Word of God — will become less and less important in your observance. And, if you are one of the shrinking number who sends greeting cards to friends and loved ones at Christmas-time, be **selective** in

choosing designs and especially messages, so that they convey, as your testimony of faith, the **REAL** “**reason for the season.**” “Season’s Greetings!” “Happy Holidays!” and “Wishing you the best of the Yuletide Festival!” do not convey to friends, colleagues and relatives *anything* about what you believe; and they say virtually *nothing* about the **REAL** “*reason for the season.*” Your author once noticed a card with the “hip” message, “Have a Cool Yule,” which, considering the sacredness of the season celebrating the birth of Christ and appreciation of His work of redemption, borders on blasphemy, as does another one: “Have Mirth at the Birth!” Even such wishes as “Good Tidings at Christmas,” “Christmas Blessings,” “Peace to you at Christmas,” and “May you have Christmas Joy!” say *virtually nothing* about what those abstractions *mean* —unless, of course you’re sending them only to believing Christians (in which case you’re “preaching to the choir”).

Christmas is a wonderful opportunity for Christian mission work! Taking the shepherds as your example, make known abroad the sayings (the blessed Scripture truths) which have been told YOU concerning this Child (Luke 2:17) by the “*angels*” of the churches (Revelation 1–3), who, as Christ’s ambassadors, proclaim them to you (II Corinthians 5:20). Considering how “amazing” the grace of God in Christ Jesus is to poor sinners, **keep Christ in Christmas**; and don’t be surprised if all who hear or read your message about the **REAL** significance of Christmas “*wonder at those things*” that **you** tell them (Luke 2:18), that they are *amazed* at the glad tidings **you** bring them!

Oh, may we keep and ponder in our mind  
God’s wondrous love in saving lost mankind!  
Trace we the Babe, who hath retrieved our loss,  
from His poor manger to His bitter cross.

(TLH 84, 5-6)

Hark! The herald angels sing:  
“Glory to the Newborn King!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!”

(TLH 94, 4)

— **D. T. M.**

## The Christian and Parties: “*What Saith the Scriptures?*”

“Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness ...so that day come upon you unawares.” — Luke 21:34

At this time of year many of us are invited (and even expected) to attend various parties centered around the holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s Eve. How do Christians make the wise moral choices necessary regarding these parties? Holy Writ gives us all we need to know as to how to live a Godly life by faith in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:15-17). Upon the basis of God’s own Holy Word, we shall consider what the Christian’s attitude should be toward parties and partying.

What do we mean by a “party”? The noun “party” refers to “a social gathering for conversation, refreshments, entertainment, and so forth.” The verb, used in an informal sense, means “to go to parties, especially to a series of parties.” Today the verb is used in the slang expression “to party” meaning “to enjoy oneself thoroughly and without restraint” (*Random House College Dictionary*, p. 970). Parties may celebrate special occasions (holidays, birthdays), or they may simply be given for their own sake. The purpose of the party determines, to a large extent, the form the party will take. Parties may be large or small, public or private; they may last a few hours or even be protracted for days. Parties have been given and held throughout history in every culture and nation. In order to address the issue of whether or not a Christian should attend parties and participate in them, it is necessary to differentiate between a wholesome party and a wicked one.

What is a “good party”? Certainly it is a party that not only serves a good *purpose* (celebration of a birthday, confirmation, wedding, etc.) but also is conducted according to sound Christian *morality*. Such a party can provide an opportunity for Christians to share their lives with one another and to enjoy one another’s company. A good party encourages moderation in food and drink and presents wholesome entertainment that does not foster immoral behavior and the may even edify those who attend. The Bible records several examples of good parties. One example is found in the Book of Job. In Job 1, we learn that Job’s children celebrated birthdays with a fine feast. Pious and God-fearing

Job was concerned that his children not overindulge and fall into sin on such occasions, and so he would pray for them and offer sacrifices after each such feast: Job 1:4-5. In the New Testament we find several examples of our Lord Jesus and His disciples attending feasts. For example, Matthew (Levi) made the Lord a great feast in his own house (Luke 5:29ff.). The Savior also attended a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee and performed a miracle to supply the very best wine when the bridegroom's supply had run out (John 2:1ff.). Many times the Lord and His disciples were guests at feasts given at Lazarus' house by his sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38ff., John 12:2ff.). Our Savior was even falsely called a "glutton" and a "drunkard" by His enemies simply because He attended such feasts (cf. Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:34). Obviously then, the *form* a party takes may itself determine its acceptability for a Christian. If the party takes the nature of a godless and worldly indulgence of the flesh, where all present attempt "to enjoy themselves thoroughly and without restraint," a Christian cannot, in good conscience, attend without leading *themselves* into temptation or *giving offense* to those who look to them as Godfearing examples. And this brings us to our next subject: Wicked parties.

The Bible also mentions parties in which sin and vice are encouraged and indulged in freely. One of the common components making up a wicked party is the abuse of alcohol (or drugs). While God allows the *moderate* use of alcohol for man's pleasure (Psalm 104:15), He emphatically forbids *drunkenness* as a gross outward sin of the flesh and the pastime of the heathen (Ephesians 5:18). The Apostle Peter in particular describes the connection of drunkenness to parties: "*For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*" (I Peter 4:3-4). Note how unrestrained passions (sexual desires, various lusts) are found together with "*excess of wine,*" which refers to "a debauch with wine, drunkenness, an extravagant indulgence in potations long drawn out such as may induce permanent mischiefs on the body" (Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 226). The Bible often warns that drunkenness leads to other sins (Proverbs 23:29-35, Hosea 4:11, Isaiah 5:11-12), as well as to poverty (Proverbs 21:17, 23:20-21) and shame (Proverbs 28:7). As the Scripture warns, "*Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise*" (Proverbs 20:1). But note that drunkenness is also connected to two terms that refer to parties in I Peter 4:3, namely, "*revellings and banquetings.*" "*Revellings*" is translated "*rioting*" else-

where in Scripture (Romans 13:13, Galatians 5:21); and, in these other two references, it is connected to drunkenness also. This word refers to feasts and drinking parties that extend late into the night and at which guests indulge in unrestrained raucous behavior and boisterous foolish merry-making. The word translated “*banquetings*” also refers to a drinking party, carousing, and here includes the notion of riot and excess in wine. How often parties are simply a running to the “*excess of riot,*” as Peter speaks of a wild and unrestrained indulgence of the flesh (I Peter 4:4). The Bible records numerous examples of feasts which led to idolatry (Exodus 32:6, Daniel 5:1ff), lust (Proverbs 23:31-33), drunkenness (I Samuel 25:36), cursing (II Samuel 30:16) and even murder (Mark 6:21ff). Wicked parties which promote unrestrained indulgence of the sinful flesh in drunkenness and numerous sins (violence, fornication, theft, etc.) must be avoided by a Christian for the sake of his or her immortal soul. For Peter exhorts every Christian: “*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul*” (I Peter 2:11).

Our Lord Jesus Christ issued this special warning to His disciples regarding the temptations that arise before the Judgment Day: “*And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares*” (Luke 21:34). Our Savior warns us about falling into these common sins *at any time* —for any day could be *our* last day *in* this world or *the* Last Day of this world. He specifically mentions “*surfeiting,*” which refers to both carousing and intoxication, as well as the result of such excess — drunken headache and hangover; for the word literally means “to toss about the head,” referring to dizziness and staggering when the head refuses to function. In other words, Jesus specifically warns against the unrestrained party so popular today. He also mentions “*drunkenness*” and “*the cares of this life,*” for these are two common attendants to surfeiting. People often party to get drunk and to find a temporary escape from the worries and anxieties of real life. Our Savior says: “Don’t fall into such sins *at any time!*”

Now sometimes Christians think that they can attend worldly parties where drugs and alcohol are abused and not be tempted to indulge themselves. We should not attend such parties because, as Christians, we are not to tempt God by willingly exposing ourselves to sin and danger. Paul warns “*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (I Corinthians 10:12). How can we pray “*Deliver us from evil*” when we willingly expose ourselves to evil? Moreover, once we do fall

into sin, it is too late. How many Christians have trusted in themselves and in their own imagined strength and then have fallen into gross outward sin. Many times young people are led into drunkenness and drug abuse at a party. Some have even fallen into fornication while drunk and have fathered children or become pregnant. Others have unwittingly taken an overdose of drugs courtesy of some “joker” who slipped something into their drink. Many drink and drive and end up killing people with their cars—sometimes even themselves. How often the newspapers report an accident due to drinking or drugs — severe falls, pool accidents, house fires, hit and run accidents and the list goes on. Remember: Once something terrible happens it’s too late. Why ruin your life just for a few hours of fleshly “happiness”?

Instead, trust your faithful God to bless you with true happiness and inner contentment. Rather than turning to parties of alcohol, drugs, and illicit sex, find true joy and peace in your Savior. As Paul exhorts us: “*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful [anxious] for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report — if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you.*” (Philippians 4:5-9). The Lord promises: “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things (food, clothing, shelter, etc) shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33).

We are “*accepted in the Beloved,*” God’s only-begotten Son, who paid for our sins in His own blood! (Ephesians 1:6-7, I John 1:7). Jesus, our Savior, has prepared mansions in heaven for you where you shall enjoy fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore! God forbid that you forfeit heavenly bliss for the pleasures of sin for a season! One day we shall attend the very best party of all — the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride, the Church. Then we shall be glad and rejoice forevermore (cf. Revelation 19:1ff). God grant that we hold fast to the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ that, being saved through faith in Him alone, we shall feast together with our God forever and ever. In Jesus’ Name, Amen!

— E. J. W.

(Re-printed from November-December 2006)

## Any Plans for the New Year??

“Ye ought to say, ‘If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.’” — James 4:15



It is a completely “normal” thing as the new year approaches and as the new calendar is posted on our wall or refrigerator door to begin filling it out with reminders of events, special days and even vacation plans to which we are looking forward. After all, that IS the purpose of a calendar, isn’t it? And we wretched human beings are so earthbound because of our sinful flesh that “time” is often our “master” from day to day and from year to year. In fact, prisoners in a penitentiary are said to be “doing *time*” because of the *length* of their sentences; and they often “chalk up” on the walls of their cells the number of days they have *already* served, or, if they are forward-looking, the number of days (or years) *left* to serve.

Particularly for the children of this world, but also for Christians because of their flesh, there is the expectation that “time” will continue to go on *without interruption*; and they are taken aback if *anything* gets in the way of their schedule, their plans, and even their life-in-general! That is why the Lord tells us that His second visible advent will come “*as a snare... on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*” (Luke 21:35). They won’t see it coming. They’ll all be “asleep at the switch” like the ten virgins in Matthew 25. In fact, the Apostle Peter speaks of “*scoffers*” in the latter days of the world’s existence “*walking after their own lusts and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation’*” (II Peter 3:4). Jesus said: “*Surely I come quickly!*” (Revelation 22:20); and the scoffers mock His promise as being empty words. After the waters of the Great Flood receded (Genesis 8:14), the Lord guaranteed that **time**, as He had created it in the beginning (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:2-3) — including its seasons, its weather patterns, and even its days and nights — would be and remain consistent, measurable and dependable, NOT *forever*, but “*while the earth remaineth*” (Genesis 8:22). On the Last Day, when the earth will be destroyed by fire, **time** will cease; and immeasurable eternity will return as it was before “*the beginning*” (Genesis 1:1).

In the meantime, however, specific *intervals* of time and specific *incidents* on the spectrum of time, as they have been determined **by man**, are subject to change, either by the action of man himself who changes his plans, or by the interference of God in His wisdom and omnipotence, or by the circumstance of pure chance permitted by God. Therefore, with regard to events, plans, and other future endeavors, the Apostle James reminds all planners: “Go to now, ye that say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain,’ whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow...” (James 4:13-14a) and shows them and all of us the **futility** of making plans that we regard as being “set in stone” since we have no way of knowing what tomorrow might bring, or whether there will even be a tomorrow.

As to life itself, the apostle continues in the latter part of verse 14: “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.” “Life is short; don’t waste it,” we hear people say. For some it’s far shorter than for others! Babies die in infancy from SIDS or from some childhood illness that came up suddenly and became fatal within days! Children die in accidents, in house fires, or, again, from the ravages of some illness like cancer; and their grieving parents had fully expected them to grow up, have families of their own, and produce children and grandchildren. And some perfectly healthy young men and women, even conditioned sports enthusiasts in the peak of health, suddenly die in a football scrimmage, or walking down the hallway in their school, or sleeping in their beds! And, while most people expect to live at least to the “Biblical age” of “*threescore years and ten*” (Psalm 90:10), they don’t *really* expect to live that long, or they wouldn’t pay good money to buy “life insurance” to provide for their families in case of an “untimely” death.

True believers, who recognize that their life here in this world “*is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away,*” and who, according to their New Man, happily confess with the Apostle Paul concerning the “catch-22” of “*liv[ing] long on the earth*” (Ephesians 6:3) or, like Simeon, “*depart[ing] in peace*” (Luke 2:29): “*[I have] a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better*” (Philippians 1:23), leave the matter of their life and death in the hands of their merciful and gracious God, who controls all such things in the interest of His believing children, saying with the Psalmist: “*My times are in Thy hand*” (Psalm 31:15). Therefore, as far as we are able, as God Himself gives us the ability and grants us both the time and the strength, we are to be engaged in “*redeeming the time because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:16), making the most of our time of grace, “*grow[ing] in grace and in the*



*knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*” (II Peter 3:18), and, by His grace, remaining steadfast in the true and saving faith even unto the end (Revelation 2:10, 25; 3:3, 11).

As to the “plans” which we lay for our future, the “events” to which we look forward in the years to come, the list is almost *endless* BECAUSE we imagine, as earthbound mortals, that our **future** here in this world is also *endless*! We imagine our children growing up, graduating from high school and from college, establishing a career, getting married and having children, purchasing a house, buying nice cars, taking enjoyable vacation trips, and finally retiring at an age early enough to enjoy the free time! And **we** of the previous generation imagine ourselves living long enough to witness and to enjoy with them all of those things! And we actually **expect** all of that to happen just as we *imagined* it, just as we had *planned* it.

How utterly foolish we are who “*know not what shall be on the morrow...*” to establish such expectations when the Lord has not promised us such things, when He has not told us what the future will hold, and when He has not revealed to us the length of our life here in this world! We, who are but “*dust and ashes*” (Genesis 18:27), have the great privilege as God’s adopted children by faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26) to “ask Him as dear children ask their dear father” (Luther, *Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer*); but we are constrained, with regard to blessings not promised to us in His Word, to ask Him to grant them to us *if it be His will* (I John 5:14).

Therefore, as we deal with our 2020 calendars and begin to pencil in various plans, events, hopes and dreams, let us remember according to God’s precious Word that we are only “*strangers and pilgrims*” (I Peter 2:11) here on earth and the recipients of God’s gracious favor for Christ’s sake — even concerning the many *temporal* blessings that He bestows upon us. But when we say “*Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain, whereas [we] know not what shall be on the morrow, ...[we] ought to say, ‘If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that.’*” Consequently, the Christian **adds** to his projected plans, ideas, events and hopes for the future, in recognition that it is God who permits and enables all good things to come to pass for us, “**God-willing**” or “**the Lord willing**” we look forward to those things as His gracious blessings to us who are “*not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which [He has] showed unto [His] servants*” (Genesis 32:10) for Jesus’ sake.

— 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

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### **CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Olu-Ama (Kula), Nigeria  
**(Pastoral Vacancy at present)**

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

Abule Egba, Lagos, Nigeria  
**(Pastoral Vacancy at present)**

### **HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Idama, Nigeria  
**The Rev. Innocent Karibo, Pastor**  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Idama, Rivers State, NIGERIA  
**E-Mail:** kariboinnocent@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  
**(Pastoral Vacancy at present)**  
76 Abba Street, Mile 1 Diobu  
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, NIGERIA

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

Kula, Nigeria  
**(Pastoral Vacancy at present)**  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Kula, Rivers State, NIGERIA

### **ST. PAUL'S NYEMONI LUTHERAN CATHEDRAL**

Abonnema, Nigeria  
**The Rev. Nimi B. Fyeface, Pastor**  
P. O. Box 123  
Abonnema, Akulga, Rivers State, NIGERIA  
**E-Mail:** njohnfyeface@yahoo.co.uk



## Directory of Member Congregations

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

### **PEACE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

Central Avenue at 171<sup>st</sup> 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)

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.

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

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118

**E-mail:** [revworley@gmail.com](mailto:revworley@gmail.com)

On the Web at:

[StLukes-CLC.com](http://StLukes-CLC.com)

Telephone: (206) 723-1078

Pastor: (206) 723-7418

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

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

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

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

### **ST. MARK'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

**Worship Service** ..... 3:30 p.m.

**Adult Bible Class** ..... 4:45 p.m.

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

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411

**E-mail:** [d\\_mensing@hotmail.com](mailto:d_mensing@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

## *The Good News of Christmas*

The **GOOD** news, the “*good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people*” (Luke 2:10), the gladsome news of the **Gospel** to poor sinners, on account of which the Christmas angel could exhort the shepherds, “*Fear not,*” is the **blessed fact** that **God** unilaterally “*reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19).

**God** *restored the relationship* that man destroyed by sending His only-begotten Son into the world to *satisfy His justice* (I John 2:2) by earning righteousness for all mankind by means of His perfect life in the sinners’ place (Romans 5:19) and by bearing the penalty of their guilt by His suffering and death on the cross (Galatians 3:13; II Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-8; etc.). **God** *justified “the ungodly”* (Romans 4:5) by making His holy Son “*to be sin for us*” (II Corinthians 5:21) as man’s Substitute “*under the Law*” (Galatians 4:4-5).

**THAT’S** the **GOOD** news!! **THAT’S** the *inde-scribably good* news of **God’s** “*unspeakable Gift*” (II Corinthians 9:15) to the world on the first Christmas night!

— Excerpt from *Keeping Christ in Christmas*, p. 184