

March 2012

# Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*"Engage Others with Jesus."*



*It is Written*

**"Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."  
(Romans 14:9)**

# From the President

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Dear members and friends of our ELS:

Going with the flow. That is literally how it was for some Minnesota fishermen last December. Unusually warm weather meant that some people needed a rescue from floating ice on Lake Mille Lacs—twice in one week! In one case, the breakaway section was so large and, since it occurred at night, fishermen did not immediately realize they were moving. One man said he was inside his ice fishing house and it suddenly felt like he was trolling. This has happened before, but not where so many needed to be carried to safety.

That ice floe pictures a far more dangerous situation facing each Christian. Whether in areas of morality or in confessing doctrine, a constant threat exists for believers to “go with the world’s *flow*.” How gradually it can happen! Mentally and spiritually we may be “on the move” without noticing the major shift that puts our souls in peril.

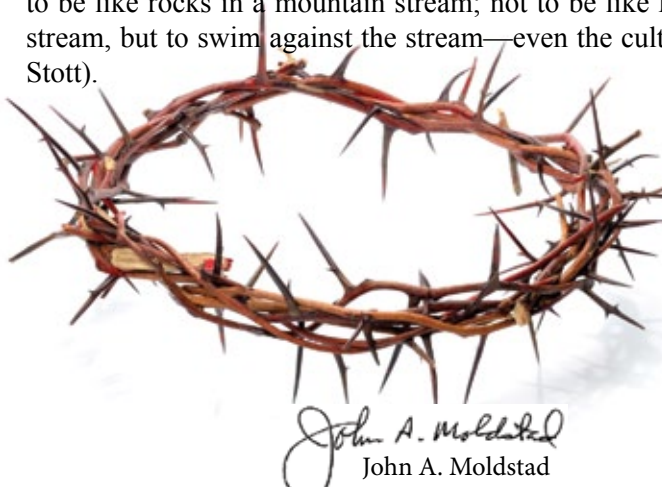
In his second epistle, the apostle Peter urges us to ward off false teaching. He alludes to the way error creeps on the scene. He tells Christians to “be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17–18).

Pastor David Thompson, in his book *What in the World is Going On?*, mentions the subtle impact society often has in changing Christians’ personal beliefs. He writes: “A popular false worldview can be very effective at making the unacceptable acceptable and the acceptable unacceptable. Christians will probably not even realize that their beliefs are changing” (2010 NPH publication, p. 80).

Lent is a time for repentance. It is also a time for renewal. “My cry comes before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word” (Psalm 119:169). The more we delve into what God tells us concerning the sinners’ salvation secured by the Passion of our Redeemer, the more we will be moved to dig deeper into *all* of the promises and precepts laid down in His holy and fixed Word.

Luther noted we cannot stop the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep the same birds from nesting in our hair! Through Word and Sacrament, focused on the suffering Christ, we take our stand—not just for us, but for generations to come.

“We are not to be like reeds shaken by the wind, as Jesus said, but to be like rocks in a mountain stream; not to be like fish floating with the stream, but to swim against the stream—even the cultural mainstream” (J. Stott).



*John A. Moldstad*  
John A. Moldstad

# Jesus Was Born Under the Law for Us

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“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). These words were my nine-year-old son’s part in the Christmas program this year. While it was hard at first for him to get all these phrases straight—“born under a woman?”—this passage is packed with meaning for our salvation.

What does it mean that Jesus was born “under the law?” Consider this: all people who live in the United States are “under the law” of the land. No one can decide that the laws do not apply to them. We cannot tell the government, “I don’t like such and such laws, so I’m not going to obey them,” and expect to get away with it. So also, all people born into this world are subject to God’s laws. The law is given to all people, both in our conscience and in written form in the Ten Commandments. So when Jesus was born as man, He made Himself subject to God’s laws.

Jesus was “born under the law” for this purpose: “to redeem those under the law.” That’s us. The law tells us what we are to do and not to do, but we have disobeyed it in our thoughts, words, and actions. We have done what shouldn’t have done and left undone what we should have done.

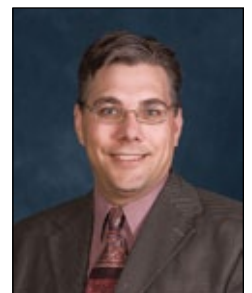
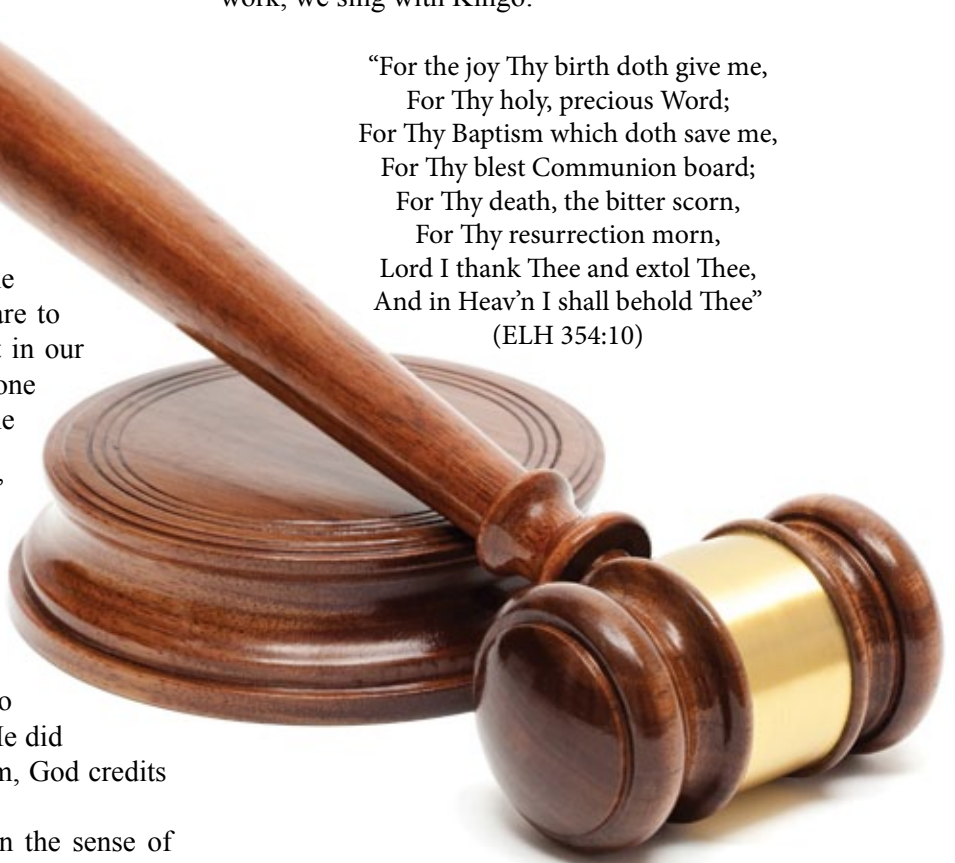
But Jesus was “born under the law” for us. He perfectly kept God’s law every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every month of every year. For example, Jesus became subject to the fourth commandment. This we see in Luke 2:51, where we read that He “was subject” to His mother Mary and her husband Joseph. He did this *for us*, as our substitute. By faith in Him, God credits Jesus’ perfect record to us.

Not only are we “under the law” in the sense of being subject to its rules, we are also under the curse of the law for our disobedience. Our disobedience to God’s law deserves the death penalty, both physical and spiritual, for eternity in hell. Jesus was “born under the law” to “redeem those under the law.” That is, He paid the price to set us

free from the punishment of our disobedience. During Lent, we see Jesus “under the law” as He stands trial under the authorities of the church, the High Priest and Sanhedrin, and the state, Herod and Pilate. He even tells Pilate, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11). As we confess in the Apostles’ Creed, He “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” He experienced death and hell on the cross for us so that we would enjoy eternal life.

Jesus was born under the law for us: to live a perfect life in our place and to pay the ransom price of death that sets us free from sin and death. We personally are given His gift of eternal life when we receive “adoption as sons” through the Holy Spirit working faith in our hearts through the Word and Baptism. In thankfulness to Christ and His work, we sing with Kingo:

“For the joy Thy birth doth give me,  
For Thy holy, precious Word;  
For Thy Baptism which doth save me,  
For Thy blest Communion board;  
For Thy death, the bitter scorn,  
For Thy resurrection morn,  
Lord I thank Thee and extol Thee,  
And in Heav’n I shall behold Thee”  
(ELH 354:10)



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**Shawn Stafford** is pastor of Hartland Lutheran Church in Hartland, Minnesota, and Manchester Lutheran Church in Manchester, Minnesota.

# Lenten Season is Prime Time Worship

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Jesus once said, “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. . . . But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1, 3).

Entering into the season of Lent is prime time for true Christian worship. But what is true Christian worship? Here we must learn from our Savior. As Jesus mentions, in order to receive His reward of grace, we must now follow our Savior to the cross by faith and learn from Him what real worship is. For what is true Christian worship but Christian humility, service and obedience to God? Is not worship what the season of Lent emphasizes: the denial of oneself and putting God above everything else in this world, even our “acts of righteousness?” And what is true service and obedience, but worshipping Christ in spirit and truth and obeying God’s will first, then serving others and giving to those in need from a grateful and contrite heart? Then, you see, our reward will come (Revelation 22:12), which God will graciously give to all those who faithfully believe in Jesus as their Savior.

We learn what true worship is from learning the trait of humility from our dear Savior, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6–8). True worship involves real humility on our part.

During the Lenten season, we also learn from Christ what true obedience entails. This, too, becomes an element of our worship. Jesus prayed, “Righteous Father...I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:25–26). Jesus obeyed His heavenly Father out of His great love for all of us, an obedience

that led to our Lord’s death, “even death on a cross!” As we worship and follow our Redeemer to that cross during Lent, we see and know what real obedience to the will of God is all about. Jesus did.

Now is that special time to worship, to learn from our Savior what the nature of our faith in Him is all about. It is about humility, service and obedience to God’s will. Now is the time, then, to worship and bow in deep humility and repent of our sins. Now is the time to worship and obey the will of God in our life, for His will for us is bound up in what Christ accomplished for us on the cross, and reveals His incomparable love for us and all mankind.

Lenten season is really prime time for the Christian to worship, for now the journey of salvation begins. It is our Lord’s journey to Calvary, as well as all His believers along with Him by faith. Worship is the time for God to come to us with the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through His sacred Means of Grace. At our Savior’s side, we worship. And through that worship we learn what Christian humility service and obedience are all about. Learn from our Savior every step of the way to His cross and, in the end, receive His reward of grace—eternal life.

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**Daniel J. Larson** is pastor of Saude Lutheran Church in Saude, Iowa and Jerico Lutheran Church in New Hampton, Iowa.

# We Cannot Redeem Ourselves

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Can we redeem ourselves? That is, do we have the power to make payment for all of our wrongs? Before we can answer that question, we have to know what is for sale and who is doing the buying. Just as we might look over a used car, we need to “kick the tires and look under the hood” to see what the merchandise is worth.

In years past, one could hear folklore about the devil coming around and trying to buy one’s soul. From “The Devil and Daniel Webster” to the Charlie Daniels’ song, “The Devil went down to Georgia,” there was always that theme where the devil would try to buy your soul for a certain amount of money or fame. But don’t expect the devil to come around with a piece of paper anytime soon. The fact is, from the time of the fall of Adam and Eve, our souls by nature are already tainted and corrupt. Just as Paul says, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22–23). From the day we were born, we were owned and ruled by the devil.

So if Satan is not buying, who is? We hear the Psalmist say, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—that he should live on forever and not see decay” (Psalm 49:7–9). We might want to buy ourselves out of our sinful debts, but we have sticker shock. We see the law and its requirements and we know we will always come up short. Like Paul says, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20).

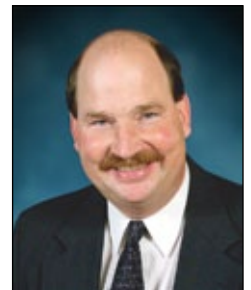
We know we cannot redeem ourselves, so what can we do? The Psalmist has the right answer: “But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself” (Psalm 49:15). This is one of the places in the Old Testament that talks about God’s promise to take those who trust in Him to one day be with Him in heaven. St. Paul says, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify” (Romans 3:22).

But what must we do to get God’s redemption and righteousness? It does not have to do with what we must do, but it has to do with what was done for us. Paul declares, “And [we] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:24–25). Even though we are less than perfect, Jesus is perfect and He suffered on the cross to pay for all of our sins. And who benefits? Paul tells us, “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:22).

So where does this faith come from? Paul answers, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26–27). We cannot redeem ourselves by our own actions. We are given faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, who works through His Word and the Sacraments. Paul asks, “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:27–28). We cannot redeem ourselves, but Jesus Christ as our Savior has redeemed us. He paid the price of sin by His death on the cross to establish our righteousness before God.

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**Paul Sullivan** is pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.



# Still Dead? No! Jesus is Risen!

Maybe you've seen those freaky horror movies with little demon dolls. They're evil and foreboding. No matter what their victims do, they keep reappearing. Finally, the movie ends; it's over. Or is it? There seems to always be a sequel.

That's cinema. But real life brings demons of terror, which are not products of imagination. This real horror doesn't disappear with the words, "The End." In fact, those only add another facet of horror—life's termination. Death!

Maybe people watch movies to escape from fear. Perhaps themes of blood and terror appeal to some people because they leave these themes behind when they exit the theater. However, we can't avoid death. It will creep up on all of us, no matter what diets or secrets to longevity we may follow. It is only delaying the inevitable. The Grim Reaper will eventually cut us down. It sends shivers up and down our spines!

Death would never be haunting us if it were not for another culprit—sin. Everyone has sinned, done evil, thought the lurid, hateful, greedy thoughts. The list of our sins is endless, as is the punishment from our God that we deserve! Just when we think we've overcome one sin, there's a sequel. Nor should we forget the guilt of our sins for breaking God's Law!

Jesus Christ, true God, came to our cemetery-packed world for us. He never gave in to temptation. Sinless, He should not have died, but He did die on the cross. Those spotless thirty-three years were lived for us to fulfill the Law; six hours of hellish death were suffered for us to complete our ransom. But that was not "The End."

Jesus rose from the dead, alive, just three days later. What good news for us, who are so "creeped" out by our sin, guilt and death! With Jesus' holiness credited to us and with His death paying our sentence in full, we are forgiven! The Bible tells us why: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Jesus' resurrection declares that we are **not** still in our sins.

Why? Because if there is no need for a grave, that means there is no death anymore. And if there is no death anymore, that means there is no sin—the cause of death. Jesus rescued us from the victimizing, terrorizing power of our sin, guilt and mortality! Forgiveness ends the fear. This we believe. God's Word declares it.

We are not *still* in our sins. Jesus is risen! We are not *still* mortified by death and its source, sin. Jesus is risen! Should we be bothered by the guilt sequels? No, Jesus is risen! Can we be comforted and secure in forgiveness and certain of eternal life in heaven? Yes, Jesus has risen!

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**Bradley J. Kerkow** is a home missionary in Austin, Texas.



# Jesus' Death and Resurrection Impacts the World

Each January, there is a little giggle that comes over my catechism class when we get to Chapter 20 of Luther's *Small Catechism*. In this chapter, which talks about the Exaltation of Christ, we come to the passage from 1 Corinthians 15:17, which says, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is *futile*; you are still in your sins."

My youth love to say the word "futile," maybe because the word can be pronounced in two different ways. Futile means useless, ineffective, or incapable of producing any result. Paul uses this strong word to describe the circumstance of our faith without Christ's resurrection—futile, worthless, even frivolous. No matter how you pronounce it, having a faith that is "futile" should stop you in your tracks and cause you to reflect on why Christ's perfect life and innocent death are not enough. He also *had* to rise from the dead.

Jesus' death and resurrection is the dividing point that impacts everyone in the world. Either a person believes in Jesus' death and resurrection and one day will hear the words, "Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." Or a person rejects Jesus' death and resurrection and thinks that it is "futile" and will hear the words, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

At this point someone might ask, "Did Jesus really need to die?" The answer is, "Yes!" By His death, Jesus has suffered the punishment for my sins. Someone might also ask, "Was it really necessary for Jesus to rise from the dead?" Again the answer is "Yes!" The resurrection of Jesus assures me that He is the true Son of God who has fully atoned for my sins, that God has accepted this payment and that He has declared me to be forgiven of my sins. Both actions, His death/sacrifice and His resurrection from the dead, are needed to ensure our salvation.

Recall how Jesus' death impacted one of the centurions, who stood at the foot of the cross: "When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).

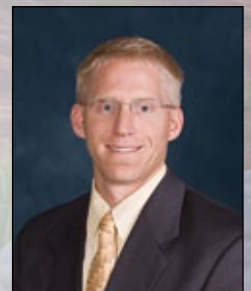
Recall how Jesus' death and resurrection impacted Saul. After he was baptized in the city of Damascus and began to believe in Jesus as his Savior, Scripture tells us, "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

Recall again today how Jesus' death and resurrection has impacted you. If Jesus did not die, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, your sins have not been forgiven and you are eternally condemned. But praise God that your faith is not "futile" and that Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!

Although He had told His disciples and even His enemies it would happen, Christ's death and resurrection was perhaps the most startling event in history. Over two thousand years after it happened, it still provides comfort, hope and joy to Christians.

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**Bernt Tweit** is co-pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin.



# “Learning to Engage Others With Jesus”

## *What Does ‘Learn to Engage’ Mean?*

*In the next five years, we will learn to engage others more faithfully with Jesus.* The most important word of our synod’s mission statement is obviously “Jesus.” This simply reflects how Scripture presents Jesus as the center of everything, such as St. Paul says, “but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:11). Christ Jesus is the cornerstone of our lives (Ephesians 2:20), the very reason for our existence (John 1:3), and the one constant in an ever-changing world (Hebrew 13:8).

I suppose one could make a case that the second most important word in the mission statement is either “engage” or “others.” Or perhaps we shouldn’t try to separate them! After all, if we’re going to set out to “engage,” we have to engage someone.

Let’s focus for now on “engage.” What exactly does that mean, that “we will learn to *engage*”? Here we see that we have pledged ourselves to some serious work. To “engage” someone means more than just casually telling them a story or making a passing reference to your church or religion. It means more than extending a friendly invitation to your church. It means more than hanging flyers on lots of doors. To “engage” someone means we’re going to have a meaningful discussion with them about an important subject, *the* most important subject in this case.

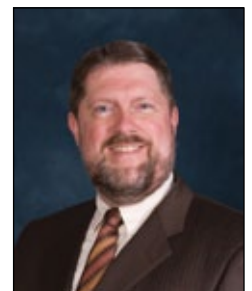
Indeed, all the “outreach” efforts we make—bringing up the subject of religion, invitations to church, hanging flyers on doors in a neighborhood—are aimed at getting the opportunity to share the gospel with someone. Our work as Christians is not merely to try and get more bodies into the pews on a Sunday morning, but to do what our Lord commanded us to do: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). Engaging someone with Jesus is not just telling them about Jesus, but telling them what Jesus did *for them*. Jesus wasn’t just a fine example of someone living a good life, someone who was kind to others, someone who made promises he couldn’t keep. Jesus is your friend’s *Savior*, the one who lived a sin-free life in their place, who died to take God’s punishment for their sins, who rose to guarantee their eternal life with him in heaven.

We know all that about Jesus, right? So why have we pledged ourselves to “*learn to engage others with Jesus*?” It’s true that even young children know the content,

the basic essence, of the Gospel. But how do we tell the gospel to someone in different situations? How should we be prepared “to make a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]” (1 Peter 3:15)? We become better prepared as we make use of opportunities for God to prepare us through His Word. As we listen to God’s Word in the divine service, in our personal devotions at home and on our iPods and iPhones, He uses that Word to make our faith stronger. When we daily recall our baptisms and what took place there and when we receive the Lord’s Supper often, God renews us and builds us up so that we are better equipped to share his Gospel.

Of course, all the faith-building actions in the world won’t really help us engage others with Jesus if we don’t make use of opportunities to do so. Are you looking for an opening in a conversation where you can share the reason you have hope in a seemingly hopeless world? Are you seeking out the chance to share a comforting word with your neighbor whose spouse just passed away?

Being ready for these opportunities, creating these opportunities, watching for these opportunities, praying for these opportunities—it all is part of learning to engage others with Jesus. Make a point of engaging someone you know with Jesus. You *and* your friend will be blessed by it.



**Michael K. Smith** teaches at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and serves as the chairman of the Board for Evangelism and Home Missions.



# Our Comfort from Christ's Human Nature

A great premise concerns us about this topic. Human nature became guilty of sin, thus, human nature must pay the debt of sin!

“When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4–5). Why did Christ not decide to take human nature to Himself as in the case of Adam, from dust, or Eve, from bone? He instead chose to endure all things which pertain to conception and birth in order that He might make amends for our conception and birth, which were corrupted by the sin passed down to us from Adam. He made these key parts of our lives holy and clean. What about the sins of my old age or middle age or youth? Christ substituted under God’s Law for these, too.

This flesh I have, the sinful being, needed reconciliation with God, not some different kind of flesh. And so this Bible verse is of the greatest meaning and comfort: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). We miss out on a great deal of comfort unless we are able to answer the following question for ourselves or others: What was Christ’s active obedience?

When we remember that the Divine Nature is above temptation, yet that the Person of Christ faced temptation, we should find great reassurance in His obedience. His human nature faced down the Old Evil Foe on our behalf. Christ’s response to Satan was not a mere machine-like reaction. Because His flesh was never dulled by sin, He felt temptation even more sharply than you and I do. Evil allurements were fired at Him by Satan in wave after wave. Devilish machination lurked in every attraction. The list of temptations is not short if one includes both temptations explicitly mentioned and those which are implied (Matthew 4:1–11). All other temptations are lumped together by the writer of the Book of Hebrews, which says, “He [Christ] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Of the greatest importance here was that it was my humanity which was involved. Christ’s human nature was my nature. We should fix in our minds the picture of Christ defending us poor sinners who struggle so much. In fact, when this or that particular sin comes to mind and the

memory of it wants to take an icy grip around our hearts, then we do well if we ask ourselves, *How was Christ my Substitute for this sin?* Our answer can truly be the following: *He was tempted just as I was but said NO to the temptation. Now Christ’s obedience to the Law, God regards as my own obedience* (Romans 10:4; Philippians 3:9–10).

Human nature bore our sin, human nature paid the debt of sin for us, and the divine nature joined perfectly to the human in Christ gave eternal value to the payment. The elders in heaven sang to our Lord and our joy is like theirs: “You redeemed us to God by your blood” (Revelation 5:9).



**James Olsen** is an ELS pastor emeritus living in Ontario, Wisconsin.



# On the Synodical Scene...

## Pastor Installed in Jefferson City, Missouri

On January 15, 2012, the Rev. Jeffery Merseth was installed as pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Jefferson City, Missouri, during a 4:00 p.m. service. The Rev. Micah Ernst served as the liturgist and, as the circuit visitor, he performed the rite of installation. The Rev. John Merseth preached the sermon, based on 1 Timothy 4:10–12, with the theme “What Is a Pastor.” Paul Junkens, a long-time member at Peace, served as the organist for the special service. Afterwards, an excellent dinner was served by the congregation in honor of their new pastor and his family.



**L to R, Front Row:** Reverends John Merseth, Jeffery Merseth and Micah Ernst. **L to R, Back Row:** Reverends Edwin Lehmann (WELS) and Michael Dietz (WELS).

## Report from the Planning and Coordinating Committee

On January 17-18, 2012, the Planning and Coordinating Committee (P&C) met in Mankato, Minnesota, for a two-day meeting. The committee focused its attention on the ELS strategic plan known as “Engage Others With Jesus.”

The P&C is recommending to the June 2012 convention the calling of two full-time clergy positions: Communication Director and Evangelism/Home Missions Counselor. The Communication Director is intended to assist the president in responding/promoting on behalf of the synod. Since the P&C is also entrusted with presenting a proposed budget, a \$750,000 “congregation contribution portion of the budget” will be brought forward for consideration.

This represents a \$25,000 increase over 2011, with the increased amount going toward Evangelism/Home Missions, as this board leads our synod in the strategic plan.



**(Left to Right):** Rev. James Braun, Mr. Dennis Behr, Reverends Erwin Ekhoﬀ, Craig Ferkenstad and Steven Petersen, Mr. Tom Reason, Reverends Piet Van Kampen and Wayne Halvorson, Mr. Keith Wiederhoeft, Reverends Alex Ring, Glenn Obenberger and Bernt Tweit, ELS Pres. Moldstad, and Prof. Michael Smith.

## Translation Seminar

About 23 people attended the January 4, 2012, Seminar on Translations at Grace Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin. The main presenter was the Rev. Steven Sparley, pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Grants Pass, Oregon. Rev. Sparley spoke about the differences between translation methods and showed how mistranslation of three Bible words led to a misunderstanding of Bible teachings. He promoted the idea that a new translation would best serve those who strove to be confessional Lutherans.



## With the Lord

The Rev. Norman Pommeranz died on January 29, 2012, at the age of 83 after a long struggle with congestive heart failure. He was a member of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

Norman was born on November 3, 1928, in Toledo, Ohio. He graduated from the seminary in 1963 and served WELS congregations in South Dakota, Michigan, and Florida. Pastor Pommeranz came out of retirement to serve Our Savior Lutheran Church in North Lakeland, Florida, from 1999 to 2003. He is survived by his wife, Helen, and two daughters.



# Pastor, I Have a Question...

**Question:** *How is the date for Easter determined?*

**Answer:** Easter is the most important event in world history. It gives meaning and value to Jesus' Good Friday sacrifice. St. Paul wrote, "He was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). The ELS' *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* teaches, "The resurrection of Christ definitely proves that Christ is the Son of God, that He has made full satisfaction for all my sins, that I too shall rise again on the last day, and it gives me strength to forsake sin and live a new life" (See the references Romans 1:4, 1 Corinthians 15:17, John 14:19, and Romans 6:4) [page 119].

Jesus, both true God and true Man, took all our sins to His cross. His sacrificial death is the punishment for all sins. His sacrifice was complete, One for all people and once for all time. When Jesus rose, God declared us "not guilty." By faith in Jesus, we are God's children, forgiven and eternal. Easter proves Jesus, who said He would die and rise again. He did it. He is God. All other gods are false.

St. Paul taught, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen...if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty...if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen...if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:13–20, selected verses).

The Bible gives us more information about the date of Easter than it does Christmas. One fourth of St. Matthew's Gospel is dedicated to the week of Jesus' passion and resurrection. It occurred during the time of Israel's Passover. We get close to the date of Easter by learning when the Passover occurred. The Bible also reports that Jesus rose on the first day of the week (John 20:1). Thus, Easter will always be on a Sunday.

God commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover in the first month. The Hebrew religious calendar is based on the lunar month, meaning that each month began with a full

moon. The first month of the year is Nisan or Aviv (literally spring). Accordingly, Passover follows the first full moon in the spring: "On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover" (Leviticus 23:5).

The New Testament Church does not follow the Hebrew calendar. The early church lived under the calendar established by Julius Caesar in 45 B.C. Pope Gregory XIII, in 1582, established another calendar, called the Gregorian, Western or Christian calendar. Not all Christians accepted this decree of the Roman Pope. Those in the east preferred the Julian calendar.

By now, even this writer is a bit confused. Understandably, there was little uniformity worldwide on the date for Easter. To alleviate the confusion, the first Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) established the date of Easter as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the first day of spring (in the northern hemisphere). The church also

decreed that the equinox would fall on March 21.

Easter, therefore, will be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21. Thus,

Easter may be on any day between March 22 and April 25 for those who follow the Gregorian calendar. This year, the first full moon following March 21 appears on April 6 and Easter is on April 8.

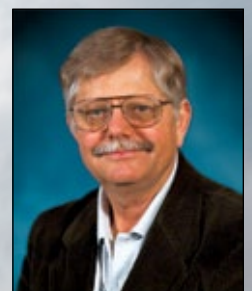
For the eastern Orthodox Christians, Easter is on April 15. Orthodox churches continue to follow the Julian calendar. Eastern Orthodox Easter is rarely the same Sunday as it is for us.

On whatever Sunday Easter is celebrated, its message remains the same: Jesus is risen. He is risen for you. Because He lives, you will live also.



**Send your questions to:**

Pastor Charles Keeler  
117 Ruby Lake Dr.,  
Winter Haven, FL 33884



**Charles Keeler** is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

# Cross Currents

## The Death of An Atheist

There isn't any plus-side to the death of an atheist, nor is there any pleasure in reflecting upon it. It is a pretty negative subject, to say the least. Yet when noted atheist Christopher Hitchens died last December, there were all sorts of positive things said about him. Yet he, along with Richard Dawkins, had become known in this country as the strident voice for atheism.

When it was discovered that he had an untreatable serious illness and that his days were definitely numbered, some thought, or hoped, that this might cause him to reassess his life without God. It only amused him when he heard that some Christians hoped that he might undergo a late-life conversion. When an interviewer tried to get him to admit to the existence of God, Hitchens contemptuously dismissed the thought and said, "That would be like living in North Korea." If anyone should hear that he had had a deathbed conversion, Hitchens asserted, they should "attribute it to sickness, dementia or drugs."

One of Hitchens' admirers was *Washington Post* columnist Kathleen Parker. After a column full of worshipful admiration for the man, she concluded, "In his last article for *Vanity Fair* Hitchens said he wanted to be fully present at death so that he might experience it actively rather than passively. How perfect that a man who was never passive about living would go ungentle (but surely gentlemanly) into that dark night, and dare death to have its last word."

An atheist may put on a bold front in the face of death and "dare to have the last word," but the sad truth is that for the unbeliever, death does have the last word. God's Word states, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

The secular world may admire a brilliant atheist. But brilliant or not, he does not have the last word. God does!

## Great Britain A "Christian Nation"?

A couple of months ago at an event in England celebrating the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, prime minister David Cameron declared that his country was a Christian nation and that it should not be afraid to stand up for Christian values. He spoke against what he called a "passive tolerance" toward wrongdoing and that "live and let live" had too often become "do what you please" among the British people.

In a tribute to the King James Bible, he said it "has helped to give Britain a set of moral values...values and morals which we should actively stand up and defend."

We can sympathize with the prime minister in his honest attempt to rally his people to stand up for the values and morals of the Bible. We can understand his deep concern when he says, "We are to confront the slow-motion moral collapse that has taken place in parts of our country these past few generations."

But while we may admire his ardor to right what is wrong with his country, we at the same time know that real change does not come simply by using the Law, by treating the

Bible as merely a source of Christian values and morals. A certain amount of outward conformity may be achieved that way, but the real change—spiritual change—is achieved only by the Gospel, the vital element that is missing in the prime minister's appeal to his people.

This should really come as no surprise, since this lack-of-Gospel approach to the use of the Bible and its teachings has been present in the Church of England for a long time. This lack can also explain, to a large extent, the poor church attendance in the country that gave us the King James Bible. Even the prime minister describes himself as only a "vaguely practicing" member of the Church of England. Not unlike our own USA, a return in England to using the Bible for its primary purpose, the Gospel of Christ, is greatly needed. We pray that it happens.

## "House Cleaning" in The Holy Land

Sometimes life can get complicated. Just ask the group of clerics who had the task of cleaning the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the church built on the site where Jesus is said to have been born. Giving the church a thorough cleaning is an annual event before every Christmas.

It was during such a cleaning this past Christmas that a fight broke out. It seems that a cleric of either the Greek Orthodox or Armenian Apostolic group accidentally pushed his broom into a space that was the province of the other group. This action was all it took to set off a brawl between the rival clerics. As was reported, "Brooms, fists and vicious insults flew in all directions between 100 monks and priests dressed in their traditional robes." The fight was ended only after Palestinian riot police rushed in with batons to restore order.

It should be explained that control of the sacred site is split between the two denominations, along with the Roman Catholic Church. They each guard their respective territory very jealously, as is seen by this episode.

But is it not a shame that the traditional site for the birth of the Prince of Peace is turned into the site of a battle between broom-swinging monks and priests? They may appeal to tradition as giving them the control of a certain area in the church, but there is a higher authority than mere tradition. That authority says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:9). Such love does not come from slavishly honoring tradition, but from honoring the word of Him who came to earth to bring true peace, who now has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20).



**Paul Madson** is a retired pastor living in North Mankato, Minnesota.



# Treasurer's Report

## Summary of Income from Congregations

Budget	Actual	Balance
\$725,000	\$52,707	\$672,293

### Contributions for January 2012:

**Congregations - Budget** \$52,707

### Designated Contributions

Synod Fund	\$195
Home Missions	\$331
Foreign Missions	\$1,100
India	\$5,169
Peru	\$314
Chile	\$676
Korea	\$2,085
Lutheran Schools of America	\$10,311
Cross-stitch	\$3,301
Thoughts of Faith	\$8,164

### Other

MAP	\$115,000
Subscriptions	\$7,023
Publications	\$13

**Total** \$199,365

Keith Wiederhoeft, Business Adm./Treasurer  
6 Browns Court Mankato, MN 56001

## Memorials for January 2012

### Gifts Received for the Synod in Memory of Memorial by

#### Alvin Ibisch

William Bukowski - Mankato, MN  
Daniel Basel - Mankato, MN

#### Ervin Junkans

Matthew Brooks - Mankato, MN

#### Elizabeth Honsey

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Parkland Women's Club - Tacoma, WA

#### Virginia Goetzke

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#### Mary Wiechmann Chernov

Mary Born - Mankato, MN

#### Donna Hall

Ever Ready Circle - Holton, MI

### Gifts Received for the Seminary in Memory of Memorial by

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#### Luther Spaude

Owen & Evelyn Swenson - Nicollet, MN

#### Tuenis Zondag

Kermit Traska - Oregon, WI

# A Victory Grounded in the Historical Christ

## The Gospel and the Historical Christ

Earthly history is important, but none so much as the history of Jesus Christ. In fact, without the historical Christ as recorded in Scripture, life is absolutely empty. This is brought home in 1 Corinthians 15, where St. Paul clarifies that the Gospel of free forgiveness is inseparably tied to the history of Christ: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you...” (then comes the historical part) “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures, that *he was buried*, that *he was raised on the third day* according to the Scriptures” (1-4). It is critical to grasp that the Gospel is rooted in history—in the historical life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as detailed in the writings of St. Paul and the other New Testament writers. It is Christ’s life alone, lived out in time and space, which achieved real and complete forgiveness. Apart from this historical life of Christ, there is no forgiveness.

But when this Gospel is *stood upon* and *firmly held to*, when it is sincerely believed unto death, it saves.

This historical description of Christ’s life written in the Scriptures has been lifted and transplanted into the creeds of the Church. Note, for example, that most of the second article of the Apostles’ Creed is dedicated to historical events:

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; ascended into heaven...

St. Paul, the apostles and the formulators of the creeds did not just say, “I believe in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins.” No, they described the history of when and how this was accomplished.

## The Historical Christ Is the Resurrected Christ

This truth is crucial to understand, because in our day hordes of “Christian” pastors, theologians, and seminaries proclaim a Gospel of forgiveness without carefully tying it—often purposely—to the historical and biblical Christ. They do this most often by leaving out any reference to a real physical resurrection of Christ. Look at this modern creedal statement used in a liberal church as a substitute for the second article of the Apostles’ Creed:

I believe in Jesus Christ who was ridiculed, tortured and executed for the sins of humankind. He has overthrown the rule of evil and injustice and continues to judge and redeem the hatred and arrogance of human beings.

It mentions a crucifixion, even the forgiveness of sins. But unlike the historic creeds (not to mention the Bible itself), the bodily resurrection of the Son of God is curiously missing. The congregation that confessed it that day (I was there) seemed to be ignorantly comfortable with it.

But St. Paul is absolutely clear on the necessity of Christ’s historical resurrection: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Jesus Himself made it clear that His claims about His person and work would be ultimately substantiated by His bodily resurrection (John 2:18–21). Jesus’ words on the cross, “It is finished,” are meaningless unless He also rose from the dead. If He did not rise, then the real historical Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible. And those of us who worship the Jesus of Scripture worship nothing but a fraud; we “are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

## Victory in This Historical Christ

But the testimony of the eyewitnesses is perfectly clear: “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20). With that resurrection comes victory—a complete victory. No enemy remains unconquered, even if it does not seem so at present. Christians live on this side of the grave. Therefore, they struggle with sin daily. They struggle with a deteriorating and dying body; they struggle with exasperating relationships; they struggle with an increasingly sinful world; they struggle because Satan is hell-bent on dragging them down. But none of these enemies will win, for they have all been conquered. Christians, with St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, stand on and hold firmly to the gospel grounded in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They are able to confess with him, “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

When we confess the creeds, we, along with the apostles and God’s Church throughout history, confess the historical Christ of Scripture. And we don’t do it merely to sound pious on Sunday mornings. We do it because we are confessing Christ’s victory, a victory of the greatest possible kind.

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**David Thompson** is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Audubon, Minnesota.



## FROM THE EDITOR...

# Life After Easter

On Easter Sunday, our whole attention needs to be fixed on the most remarkable event in human history: one who died now lives! The Gospel accounts reveal how Jesus' own followers could not comprehend this truth until they saw Jesus alive. Thomas stubbornly resisted believing all the reports until he could put his fingers into the nail holes and his hand into Jesus' wounded side to verify for himself that Jesus truly was alive.

Jesus gave them evidence that His body was truly alive by allowing them to touch Him: by eating food with the disciples and by walking with them and instructing them in God's Word. For our comfort, Jesus added, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29b). Over the past 2,000 years, people all over the world have heard the Easter message, "He is not here, but is risen!" (Luke 24:6) and believed that Jesus lives. Because Jesus lives, they know that Jesus has paid the terrible punishment of eternal death for the sins of the whole world, since "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Because Jesus lives, they know that Jesus Christ "... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10b). Because Jesus lives, they know that they "shall not come into judgment, but [have] passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Because Jesus lives, they know that Jesus came "to redeem those who were under the law, that [they] might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5). Because Jesus lives, they know that Jesus "... will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

Christ's resurrection also confronts us with another kind of life. St. Paul wrote: "Even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, [God] made us live together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:5, 10). The historic Epistle for Easter Sunday instructs believers, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The point of these passages is made in the Collect for the First Sunday after Easter, "... we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection, may, by the help of Your grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conduct" (Collect for Easter 2, ELH, pg. 155). As baptism connects us with Christ's resurrection, we should live for Jesus, who gave His life for us. This new life is full of joy and confidence as we realize the extent of Jesus' salvation. It is full of trust that God's Word is true and God will keep His promises. The Christian life casts off the works of darkness and walks in the light of God's Word to know what is true and right. Christians live with the expectation that Jesus will hear their prayers, help them in every need, preserve His Church in this world, and take His children to heaven.

Jesus pictures our Easter life as being connected with Him, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Each time we hear the Gospel, remind ourselves of our baptism, and receive the Lord's Supper, we are connecting ourselves to the resurrected Jesus. He moves us to bear the fruits of confessing and worshiping Him, of praying and trusting Him, and of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

We cannot see the proofs of Christ's resurrection as Thomas and the other apostles did. Trusting in the proofs they gave, we can show proof that we believe in the risen Christ in the way we love Jesus by serving Him.

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**Theodore Gullixson** is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin.



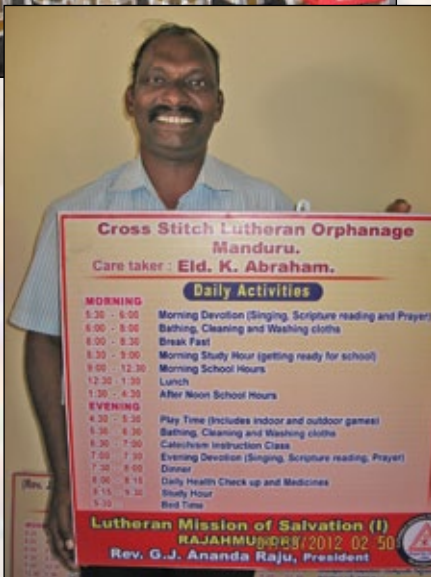
# Blessings from ELS to India

ELS members have been generous to those in need in India. Recently, an anonymous ELS donor provided new school shoes for over 300 orphans who are cared for in Lutheran Mission of Salvation–India children’s homes. The gift also provided for sign boards for each of the 20 homes including each home’s daily schedule, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments.



Dondapati Indira was severely burned in a kerosene fire as a child. When her father died and her mother became very ill, she took residence in the Grace and Truth children’s home in Rajahmundry. Perhaps as a result of her extensive medical treatments for the burn, she developed an interest in medicine. Through the support ELS members give to the Indian Orphan College Scholarship Fund, D. Indira is currently studying nursing, preparing for a career of helping others as she was helped as a little girl.

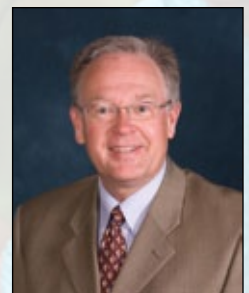
Many thanks from your fellow Christians in India for generous gifts!



Our Savior Lutheran Church of Bishop, California, donated altar paraments for churches in Hyderabad, Rajahmundry and Jabalpur, India.



Steven Petersen is the ELS World Outreach Administrator and lives in Mankato, Minnesota.



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