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And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 ESV)

How Christmas Impacts our Faith

Do you have any special memories of Christmases past? Maybe you got that gift you had really wanted. Perhaps it was the time the whole family celebrated with a parent or grandparent. It could be the blizzard that changed your travel plans or resulted in postponed church services. Whatever happened, it is a recollection that is fond for you and perhaps has been passed down as a favorite story.

We want our celebration of the birth of Christ to have an effect on our lives. We go to a great extent of preparations to make sure it is special. The house is decorated. Family gatherings with a fancy meal are planned and carried out. Thoughtful church services are arranged, practiced, and held. Time is spent on shopping for gifts and wrapping them.

However, despite our preparations and celebrations, sometimes we come away from Christmas thinking, “What was that for?” Worse, we may want to adopt the attitude: “I survived Christmas.”

In order not to miss the meaning and application of the birth of Christ, let us consider some people in the Bible who came away changed by His advent.

Let’s start with Simeon and Anna, even though they didn’t see Jesus until He was eight days old. They were waiting faithfully for the promised Messiah to come. They did this because they heard and searched the Scriptures. They studied them to make sure they knew who to expect and what He would do. When Jesus arrived in the temple, they were prepared to believe He was the Savior even though they saw Him as an infant.

We learn from the Scriptures that hearing and studying the Bible will help us not miss the impact of Christmas. They will focus on our need for Jesus as our Savior as well as how He completed that salvation. No matter how busy we are before Christmas, we should take time for daily advent devotions and/or midweek services.

Next, we consider Mary, the mother of Jesus. When the angel Gabriel announced the conception and birth of Jesus to her, she accepted the message with faith and gave glory to God. She did not allow human reason to drown out those words. She recognized her desperate need for this Savior and the benefits of forgiveness and heaven that He would win for all mankind.

There are a host of competing messages claiming the “real” reason for Christmas. Our own schedule can drown out the blessings offered. To counteract this, we should focus on the Savior born for us. If we think we are losing that focus, it’s time to evaluate our celebration. We ask God to help us to be like Mary in humbly accepting His promises and giving Him glory in our Christmas observances.

Finally, we look at the shepherds. Once the angels had proclaimed and sung their wonderful message, the shepherds immediately went to see the baby Jesus for themselves. Then, when they had worshipped Him,

they went and told others. They shared what they had seen and heard with those who had not had that wonderful blessing. They wanted others to have the joy and peace that the Savior had brought into their lives.

The birth of Christ has had an impact on our lives. We believe He is our only Savior. Let us pass this effect on by engaging others with Jesus. Such is the gift that we want to keep on giving and can have the greatest benefit for those who hear and believe.

God grant us a Christmas and New Year full of spiritual impact!



Gregory Haugen is pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Omro, Wisconsin and Our Savior’s Lutheran in Amherst Junction, Wisconsin.



Christmas Carols That Teach the Gospel

A Charlie Brown Christmas is “must see” viewing in the Gernander home and I know we are not alone in that. Many people claim it as their favorite Christmas TV special. One of my favorite parts is the ending, when the children sing “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” as the credits roll. When I was a child, I was thrilled to find out that the Christmas carol sung by Charlie Brown, Linus, Schroeder, and even Lucy is one that we sang in church on Christmas Eve.

This is one way many unsuspecting people—and children—hear the Gospel. It happens not only when *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is on TV, but also as people are shopping or driving. Not all carols teach the Gospel, of course. Some radio stations that play Christmas music intentionally leave out the ones that speak of Christ and give people a steady diet of *Deck the Halls, I’ll Be Home For Christmas, All I Want For Christmas*, and even *I Want a Hippopotamus For Christmas*.

But some Christmas carols actually do teach the Gospel. Properly speaking, the Gospel is the Good News that God has sent a Savior for all sinners. He has sent Jesus to “save His people from their sins.” Teaching the Gospel is what the Christmas angels did: proclaiming the “good tidings of great joy” that “unto you is born a Savior.”

A Christmas carol teaches the Gospel by telling who Christ is, what He has done, and what gifts He brings (the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation). *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* (ELH #125) actually is a perfect example of a carol that teaches the Gospel.

First, it teaches who Jesus is and what He has done. I use this hymn in catechism class when we learn about Christ’s two natures as God and Man in one Person and have the students answer which nature (God – begotten of the Father from eternity; or Man, born of the Virgin Mary) each line is speaking of:

Christ, by highest heav’n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord, ... (God)
Late in time behind Him come, Offspring of a Virgin’s womb. ... (Man)
Veiled in flesh ... (Man)
The Godhead see ... (God),
Hail, th’ incarnate ... (Man)
Deity! ... (God)
Pleased as Man with man to dwell; ... (Man)
Jesus, (Man) our Immanuel! ... (God)

Second, this carol teaches what gifts Jesus brings when it says:

Light and life to all He brings,
Ris’n with **healing** in His wings.
Mild, He leaves His throne on high,
Born that man **no more** may die;
Born to **raise** the sons of earth;
Born to give them **second birth**.

For a Christmas carol to teach the Gospel, it needs not only to name Christ and tell who He is and what He has done, but also to tell *why* He was born, *why* He was born in poverty. So a Christmas carol also must deal with the subject of sin and Satan. This is a basic Christian use of Law and Gospel, for without the Law, a person won’t think that he needs the Gospel very much.

The English carol *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen* (ELH #126) tells the story of the angels and shepherds in a straightforward manner. However, Satan is mentioned in stanzas 1 and 3. The first stanza, in narrative form, says simply that Jesus Christ was born:

To save us all from Satan’s pow’r
When we were gone astray.

The third stanza puts into the angel’s mouth these words being spoken to the shepherds:

“See, death and hell and Satan
This child shall put to flight.”

The person listening to, or singing, this Christmas carol is confronted with the reality of Satan, death, and hell and also reminded of how we go astray in our sinfulness. The Savior cannot be properly known without knowing these harsh realities. They drive you to the Christ Child for protection from sin, death, and the devil.

Even if some of your friends and acquaintances do not accept your invitation to hear a Lutheran sermon from a Lutheran pulpit this Christmas or if some of your extended family or onetime fellow church members are not actively attending church, you can pray that the Holy Spirit would grant that they fruitfully hear the Gospel that comes to them so easily in carols such as these.

It is a good way for children to hear the Gospel. Sometimes parents may wonder how much their children are getting out of the sermon. Even adults cannot quote from the pastor’s sermon. But nearly everyone can say the words of these Christmas carols by heart. Your children may even quote these words to you and help you in your faith by such a simple reminder of the Gospel.

Jerome Gernander is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Princeton, Minnesota.



Our Comfort from the Lord's Holy Supper

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

God's word is true and not false in any sense. We therefore insist that the above words that He recorded through His chosen writer St. Paul are clear and true. Nowhere in Scripture does the Lord say one thing but mean something else. So when Jesus said, “Take eat, this is my body,” what occurred was not that someone else's body was joined with the bread; likewise, the same can be said of His blood. His very own body and blood are joined with the bread and wine by His word (see Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, and 1 Corinthians 10:21; 11:20; 11:23).

“Christ was the Word that spake it; He took the bread and brake it. And what His words did make it, That I believe and take it.” (Queen Elizabeth I, (1533-1603) responding when someone asked her opinion of the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament.)

Christ's word brings about that which He says, nothing else. It is not our kneeling or eating or attitude, nor is it the pastor. The pastor simply speaks the words Jesus spoke and the Lord's own powerful word brings His body and blood to His Supper.

Much scriptural evidence assures us that Jesus links His power with His word. “Jesus cried out, ‘Lazarus come forth,’ and he who was dead came forth from the grave” (John 10:43). Again, our Lord speaks and there is an effect: “‘Ephphatha,’ and the blind man's eyes were opened,” (Mark 7:34). Finally, the Gospel of Jesus' sacrificial work for our salvation comes to mind: “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:17).

In response to the temptations of Satan which would reject this truth, we may say to Satan: “If God demonstrates what light is, first by showing how it was created and then showing it to us every day, that's what it is, it's not something other than light, (Genesis 1:3–5). If He says through

His chosen writers, all the heavens were made by Him, these didn't come into being by blind fate or by someone else's power (Psalm 33:6). If He says the blind can see, the blind do see. If He calls Lazarus from the tomb, Lazarus walks out of the grave. So, when the Savior teaches that by means of His Word He unites His body with the bread and His blood with the wine, then Christ is truly present as His words say. When Jesus gives us His blood “for the for-

giveness of sins, then we can believe that His body and blood are given us in the Sacrament for *our pardon of grace*, and they are not something else. Our Lord is God and His gives us what His Word says.

How comforting this is in connection with the Holy Supper, because there we receive the very body and blood of God's own Son, given and shed to redeem us, and the forgiveness of all our sins. We receive what He gives in the most intimate, personal, individual manner possible! **“Take and eat, take and drink...given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.”**

A spiritual ancestor of ours, Cyril of Alexandria, (b. 376) unfolds comforting meaning in paraphrasing Christ's words: “I who have come from life which is Mine by nature and have been made man, have filled My body with life, so that he who eats My flesh will live because of Me,” (Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*; tr. By J.A.O. Preus; CPH, 1971; p. 467).

May we use the Holy Supper as frequently as possible for the pardoning Grace of God and for the strengthening of our faith in Christ!



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



Evangelism Follow-up

For most of us, evangelism is scary. You get nervous. You feel ill-equipped and poorly prepared. You fear you'll say the wrong thing, give unnecessary offense, or worst of all, you'll seem weird. You feel like a brand-new teacher in front of a whole class of teenage kids, telling yourself, "Don't mess up. Please, be cool."

Repent of your need to be cool. It's one of the idols of our day, and it won't help you. Divest yourself of the idea that you only get one shot at this, and you'd better make it count. Like that teacher with all those kids, this is a long-term proposition. It calls for love and patience. It's also a proposition in which you're not the saving one—God is.

What's more, you have the words. You've learned them in worship and prayer. You're more prepared than you think. Think instead about the soul to whom you reach out. Scripture says: "The man without the Spirit cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. They're foolishness to him. He cannot understand them. They're spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14). Like a kid with ear buds, he cannot hear you. Also, like a kid dressed in the style of the day, his pants are down. It doesn't matter that he may be older, smarter, or more successful than you. He's not properly dressed, not ready to be seen in public when the Lord appears in the glory of the Father with all His angels.

He does know there is a God. (Everyone knows this from creation and from conscience, whether they admit it or not.) He knows there is a difference between right and wrong. Along with his conscience, he is either uneasy, hoping that someday he will be good enough, or he is self-righteous, belligerently adhering to his belief, so to speak, that flying his pants at half-mast is good enough already.

Gently, from your own experience, you make yourself like him, because you are and you have been just like him. "I'm a Lutheran because first I'm a sinner. I know what's wrong and yet I do it anyway. If I do what's right, pride ruins it for me. Sin is right there in everything I do. I can't escape it. If I live to be a hundred, I'm never going to be pure the way God expects. That's why I worship this way: 'Lord, have mercy upon us!'" If you're anything like me, I have good news for you.

"God our Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He has given His only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgives us all our sins. Now I don't believe in me anymore. I have Jesus to believe in. Jesus is my innocence. Jesus is my perfection. Jesus suffered because I deserved to be punished. Jesus

died because I was dying and *He* took *my* place. If my sin were too much for Him, He would still be dead, but now that He is risen, I know who the winner is, and I know who stands to benefit from it! I do. And so do you. But don't believe just because I say so. Come see for yourself."

Do you believe all this? Pray for the opportunity and the words to say it. Say it like you mean it, because you do. Pray that God would work faith in this person's heart, and let you say it to him again. In the end, whatever your sins in this work of His, your Lord forgives. Lift up your heart! God will fill it with His love for you.



Aaron Hamilton is pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in West Jordan, Utah.



Pastor, I Have a Question...

Question: *God created everything in the beginning and nothing since. When the tower of Babel occurred were all of the languages we have now made or have some new ones formed since that event?*

ANSWER: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Here God reveals, in broad strokes, how and what He created. He does not mention language. This pastor vaguely remembers reading a book in which the author, not a Christian, proposed that language is innate or inborn. God formed Adam from the dust of the earth with the ability to speak. There was one language.

God created everything. Darwin’s theory of evolution is not biblical. Bible-believing Christians reject his false theory. The Bible does not teach that everything remains the same. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. After they sinned, they produced a son created in Adam’s own likeness (Genesis 5:3). After sin, creation changes. Generally speaking, creation decays. Things once perfect become less than perfect. Over the millennia, human beings have changed. We are now taller and we live longer than our great grandparents. God’s creation changes and adapts.

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech...And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech’” (Genesis 11:1, 6-7).

Humanity set itself against God. God confounded human language. From this time, people of different nations spoke different languages. This event was the origin of the various language families about which modern linguists speak. Modern languages can be traced back to these families of languages. Language changes. Modern languages do not closely resemble ancient languages. The Greek St. Paul used to write his epistles, resembles the modern Greek primarily in alphabet, but not in pronunciation or word meanings. Modern English speakers struggle to recognize old English. In the lifetime of this pastor, the church, again and again, has produced new translations of the Bible to keep up with language changes.

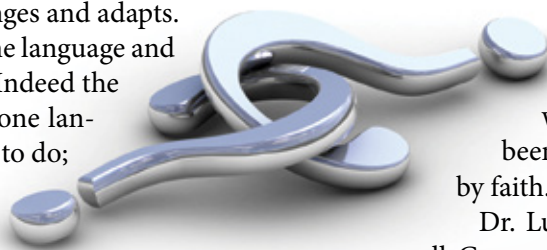
In the 19th century a Dr. Zamenhof created Esperanto to bring people of different nations together. Since different languages separate, he hoped a simple common language would unite. He followed linguistic principles to create his language.

God had a better remedy for the result of the tower of Babel. Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into the entire world to preach the Gospel to all creatures. He equipped them for the mission on Pentecost with the miraculous ability to speak the languages of the people with whom they had contact.

By sin, mankind set itself against God. God came into this world to bring us back. Jesus, God’s one and only Son, was born, lived, died, and rose again to accomplish and to earn for us all the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. God calls us to faith by means of the preaching of His Word.

So that we can understand His Word, God gives the ministers of His church the ability to learn and speak languages people can understand. We hear and we believe God’s word. Thereby, God restores us to His kingdom. We who once were alienated from God have been invited to believe and become His people by faith.

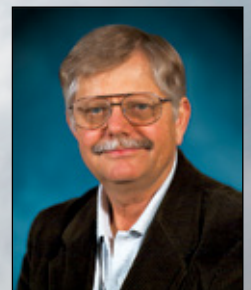
Dr. Luther translated the Bible into German so all German-speaking people could hear and believe God’s Word. His Bible was very popular. Interestingly, his translation had a side effect. From many German dialects, the use of Luther’s Bible resulted in a more unified German language.



Send your questions to:

Pastor Charles Keeler
117 Ruby Lake Dr.,
Winter Haven, FL 33884
or email: cjohnk@aol.com

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





Treasurer's Report

Memorials for November 2012

Gifts Received for the Synod in Memory of Memorial by

Ruth Webber

Silas and Mary Born - Mankato, MN

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Pauline Lillegard - Sebastian, FL

Otelia (Hovland) Ross

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Summary of Income from Congregations

Budget	Actual	Balance
\$725,000	\$594,457	\$130,543

Contributions for November, 2012:

Congregations - Budget \$41,148

Designated Contributions

Synod Fund	\$1,352
Home Outreach	\$446
World Needs	\$30
General World Outreach	\$130
India	\$15,445
Peru	\$1,328
Chile	\$60
Korea	\$1,000
Lutheran Schools of America	\$424
Cross-stitch	\$3,757
Thoughts of Faith	\$19,284

Other Revenue

Thrivent	\$20,000
Publications	\$2,615
Schwan Foundation	\$35,000
Royalties	\$71
Registrations	\$1,350

Total \$147,412

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

ADVENT WATCHFULNESS

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). This warning of Jesus is one of the four themes of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth. Watchfulness is important because we do not know when Jesus will come again on the Last Day.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the people of Israel to acknowledge the Messiah as their rescuer from sin and death. Many rejected Jesus because He did not fit their idea of a Messiah. They did not know the time of His visitation, and so they put Jesus to death.

Watchfulness is important so that our attention is not focused on worldly things. Would the people who were fighting in the stores have been ready for Jesus return if He had come on “Black Friday”? While many were watchful for bargains, the frenzy of the moment left them unwatchful for the future Jesus came to give them.

Our Advent watchfulness means that we direct our thoughts to the study of God’s Word. We need to study the message of John the Baptist, who called on the people to repent of their sins. When John was challenged about his preaching, he quoted the prophecy of Isaiah, “Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). This was a call to straighten lives and hearts made crooked by sin. It was a call to acknowledge sin and be sorrowful that people had broken God’s commandments. For those who did repent, John comforted them with Baptism, the washing away of sin and forgiveness from God—all through faith in the Messiah. John’s message declared, “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 3:26).

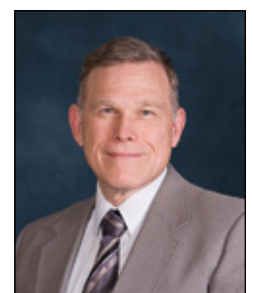
The world considers John’s message to be very unloving and disrespectful of other beliefs. Christian watchfulness includes being aware of the values and thoughts of this world that are in conflict with God’s Word. St. Paul writes,

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11). Just as a soldier who sleeps while on guard duty may allow disaster to strike, so the followers of Jesus need to stay alert for signs of temptation and spiritual danger. Watchfulness is important so that temptations are avoided and that they may glorify God in all that they do and say.

Watchfulness includes seeing opportunities to serve those around us—relatives, co-workers, and friends. We serve Jesus and our neighbors through our kind words, our concern for their lives, and our desire to help in difficult times. Christmas time presents many opportunities to show our love for Jesus through our Christmas cards, our visits and singing to the elderly, our special attention to the young, and our kindness to those who do not know the love of Jesus.

Advent is an important time of preparing our hearts to celebrate Christ’s birth as the

Savior of the world. Watchfulness over our faith and life is an important activity as we wait for Jesus to return on the Last Day.



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