

# Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*"Engage Others with Jesus."*



*"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)*

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# From the President

## A Throw-Away Phrase

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

A lexicographer has defined a cliché as “the lubricant of language, summing up a point by easing transition in thought while often adding a seasoning of humor.” Clichés are disdained, but rarely avoided by each of us. Many phrases, in fact, quickly lose the intended comical appeal when sensibly analyzed. Shall we say, they are “weighed in the balance and found wanting”?

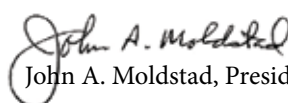
Here is a cliché that easily rolls off lips, but comes up deficient theologically: “You’re goin’ to have hell to pay!” We hear it often. Has it come from our own mouths? Said in anger? Meant as a warning? Trying to send a message how reckoning is coming and consequences will be severe? Unless such and such is done, then—as the saying goes—you know where payment will have to be made.

We must acknowledge how even one sin, great or small, brings with it the consequence of eternal punishment. The wages for sin is always death and the souls who sin shall die. The Law does not mince words. Punishment is severe for every transgression before our holy and just God.

There are, however, two false assumptions in the “hell to pay” cliché. The payment for sin is never to hell or to Satan or to fate. Every necessary payment for sin needs to be made only to one spot—the seat of holy justice. The ransom payment necessary to release any sinner from the expected and deserved punishment must be rendered to God himself as the One to whom we must all give an account (Romans 3:19).

More egregiously, the “hell to pay” cliché disregards what has already occurred. It throws aside the best news ever recorded! It overlooks why Christmas means so much for our world! God’s own Son came in the flesh and with his holy life went before the justice bar of the heavenly Father in our place! The message of Christmas, the message of Good Friday, and the message of Easter combine to bring the announcement from God himself: There is no more hell to be paid for any sin! The hell punishment every one of us deserved has been taken care of by our God-Man Substitute. “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). Tampering with another cliché and trying a sanctified twist, we can say to one another, “You get what He paid for!” Because Christ’s hands were raised at Calvary, we by faith in Him “win hands down!”

Have a blessed Christmas, everyone!

  
John A. Moldstad, President of the ELS





# Christ IS Christmas!

In our household, Christmastime meant getting out the “Christmas albums” to be played while cookies were being made and baked; the house decorated, inside and out; and the Christmas tree trimmed and lighted. With Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and Andy Williams crooning out various holiday songs, one in particular called “Christmas Present” would cause us to stop and think about the true meaning of the season:

*“Christmas present, Christmas tree,  
Children’s eyes are wide to see,  
Santa’s presents ‘neath the tree,  
All they’d asked for on his knee.  
Christmas present, Christmas past,  
From the presents, which one’s last?  
Christmas future sure to be,  
Looking underneath the tree.”*

Then would come the good part:

*“For the Present, look high, not low,  
Christmas was a Gift itself many years ago.  
Christmas Present at the start,  
Was a Gift from Someone’s heart.  
Christ is Christmas! That day is His.  
That’s what Christmas Present is!”*

Ok, it’s not theologically meaty, but it was different from so many of the others. The first part pointed out the world’s view of what Christmas is all about: *presents!* Ask any child (and plenty of grown-ups, too), “*What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word, ‘Christmas?’*” and you’ll get an enthusiastic shout: *Presents!* And who among us doesn’t like presents? And so the world says that Christmas is all about Santa, family gatherings, and, oh yes... presents!

The last part of the song, though, would cut through the frivolity of the season and, in its own simplicity, bring it home to what the true meaning of Christmas is really all about! And guess what? It *is* about presents—not earthly ones, of course, but divine presents!

The first present God gave mankind was the gift of life, both physical and spiritual, along with a Garden, filled with perfection to be enjoyed for eternity. But the Garden came with one restriction: Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sadly, Adam and Eve failed to honor that restriction, and Adam’s disobedience brought sin, death, and eternal punishment not only to them, but to every generation that would follow.

Left to ourselves, we are all lost and condemned to hell

because of our sins. But God, in His amazing grace, offered another gift—the gift of a Savior!

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem’s stable was the fulfillment of God’s promise made “*many years ago*,” in Eden’s Garden, where He promised to send a Messiah, a Savior who, through His perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection, would defeat the unholy three: sin, death, and the devil himself. And now, to all who believe in Jesus are given the gifts of forgiveness, new life, and life that lasts forever in God’s heaven.

Christ IS Christmas! He was the first Christmas gift from God’s heart to all mankind so that all who believe in His Son Jesus will not perish, but receive the gifts of forgiveness and life—life now and life forever! God’s own Christmas present to all mankind! That’s what makes Christmas truly “Merry.”



**Rodney Flohr** is pastor of King of Grace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota.

# The Story of the Three Trees

It is said that late one Adventide, Martin Luther was seen dragging two evergreen trees through Wittenberg and right into the Castle Church where he regularly preached. Folks, seeing and hearing of this, must have wondered what the great Doctor was up to this time!

Christmas morning, there the trees stood, one on each side of the altar with apples tied to their branches. What could it mean?

Drawing attention to one of the trees, Luther asked if they didn't recognize the Tree of Life, which our Lord Himself had planted in the Garden long ago. What a wonder it was, for here man could reach out, take the fruit it bore in every season, eat, and live. But what tragedy has befallen us sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, for our first parents were tempted and ate of that other special tree: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Good, our first parents well knew, for our Lord had given them every good thing for our life and blessing—but eating, they sadly now knew (and you do, too) what evil is, for it brings sorrow and death to us all. Loving us, our Lord came calling that afternoon and, seeing man now fallen, He would not that we should forever be separated from Him by sin forevermore, so we were driven from Paradise, lest we eat from the Tree of Life.

Drawing attention to the tree standing on the other side of the altar, Luther apologized for only bringing the one, for this was a representative of that vast forest glade—the trees planted along the banks of the river which flows from beneath the throne of the Lamb, which John writes of in the Revelation of Jesus. Yes, and there are fruits on that tree as well! For they bring us life and their leaves are for the healing of the nations. Ah,

but don't you know it, this December we feel the cold, and doesn't your stomach grumble for the breakfast waiting the end of the Mass back home? Fine as you may think it, sixteenth century Wittenberg is not yet heaven, that new Jerusalem. That is yet to be. This Tree of Life is just as far out of our reach as the one barred from us in Eden!

Now wait, what about the Tree standing there in the middle? You see it every time you come to church. What about that tree, there above the center of the altar? Yes, the Tree on which our Savior poured out His life for you! Behold the Holy Cross. Here my beloved, Jesus Himself is made for your good, the Fruit of Life. As the rivers once flowed from Eden, as the water of life flows from the throne of the Lamb in that Paradise yet to be (oh how we long for it!), so the water of the Baptismal font is here mixed with the Word of Life as Jesus joins us to Himself and we are made living. And there, you see the pulpit Luther's preaching from, the glad proclamation of the Word of Life! And here, beneath the altar cross, Jesus—the Word made flesh—meets us in His own Body and Blood,



a wondrous Feast for our forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation!

By sin, we've lost the first Tree. The second awaits us in heaven's Paradise. But to bring us from death in sin to eternal Life, Jesus has given us the Tree of the Cross.

Happy and blessed Christmas, fellow redeemed!

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**James Wilson** is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in North Bend, Oregon.

# Mercy with Cheerfulness

Some have a gift for being merciful. When a person wants to talk, they're the ones who patiently take the time to listen. When someone needs help finishing a project for work or school, they're the ones who gladly step up to lend a hand. When a friend shows up on their doorstep, they will not turn that friend away. Even if the need goes beyond their ability to render aid, they do what they can, showing that person where to find help.

We all know someone like that. Maybe you are that merciful person.

It's easy to have mercy on those who understand the depth of the sacrifice being made for them. In fact, it's downright pleasurable to deal mercifully with those who you know will thank you later.

Yet there are times when mercy is not so easy. Perhaps in the past, mercy that was shown went unnoticed. Maybe someone took advantage of you and the mercy you offered. We might still help such a person, but that help does not come with much willingness or cheer.

Is that kind of help truly merciful? Mercy is more than helping people who are in desperate circumstances. Mercy is the "kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mercy>). True mercy is help for people who do not deserve it.

That was the mercy God gave to us. We were born dead in sin, doomed to an eternity of hellfire. Yet the Lord had mercy. He sent His Son Jesus into this world to suffer hell in our place at the cross so that we could live with Him forever in heaven. Jesus willingly carried

out His Father's plan. As sinners, we did not deserve God's help, yet God's mercy in Christ can be seen in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NKJV).

Your mercy has not been perfect, and how often have we forgotten to thank God for His mercy? Yet by the saving mercy of Christ, you are forgiven. And His mercy now fuels your own mercy. By the mercies of God in Christ, you can offer love and help to those

who don't deserve it, kindly assisting those who have abused your help in the past (perhaps with a bit more wisdom this time). You can happily forgive those who have hurt you.

It will not be easy. In fact, without Christ, that kind of mercy is impossible, but with Christ all things are

possible. With His good news beating in your heart, you can show real mercy, "mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:8, NKJV).



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**Piet Van Kampen** is pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin.



# LEFT BEHIND?

You've probably heard about *Left Behind*. *Left Behind* was the title of a bestselling series of books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins dealing with the popular, but wrong, theory of the Rapture. There was a 2000 movie by the same title, starring Kirk Cameron. And there was a *Left Behind* remake just last October, starring Nicolas Cage.

You know the Rapture. Maybe you've seen the bumper sticker that reads, "In case of Rapture this car will be unmanned." In the rapture theory and in the book series and "Left Behind" movies, the plot line is that Jesus returns secretly to earth prior to his final, visible coming in glory and power. At that secret coming, Jesus calls, or raptures, out of this earthly life all his *true* believers. As the rapture theory goes, all the true believers are suddenly removed from this earth, leaving even their clothing behind. Mayhem results. Moving cars are left driverless, airliners in flight are suddenly without a pilot, and critical services of all kinds fall apart because so many Christians have been raptured away to be with Christ. Left behind are the unbelievers, who must struggle through a period of terrible tribulation. Some of the left-behinders come to faith through the process and are ready to meet Jesus when he comes again for the very last time.

The word *rapture* never appears in Scripture, nor can the doctrine of a rapture be found in Scripture. Those who teach the theory appeal to numerous Bible verses for support, but the verses they use simply speak of the prophesied second and final coming of Christ on the great last day. (His first coming was his coming in the flesh when he lived a perfect life for us, died on the cross for us, and rose again for us as our Savior.) One of the verses often cited by rapturists is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Je-

sus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds

to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

In those verses, the Apostle Paul is not describing a secret coming of Christ to rescue a select few "true" believers. He is simply teaching the series of events surrounding Christ's promised return to earth. Christ will call forth His believers from the grave and after that, He will call to Himself those such as are still alive at that moment. All are caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord as he

arrives. Paul's words are a great comfort to all who believe in Jesus. You will not be left behind when Jesus comes again. Whether long dead or still alive, He will not forget you when He comes again. He has said He will never leave you nor forsake you, and that includes the day of His coming—Judgment Day. He who redeemed you on the cross and who has called you and sustained you in the faith will certainly gather you to Himself when He comes again. Left behind? No, Jesus won't leave you behind.



**Karl Anderson** is pastor of Heritage Lutheran Church in Apple Valley, Minnesota.



# *On the Synodical Scene...*

## **Evangelism-Missions Counselor Installed**

Rev. Larry Wentzlaff was installed as the Evangelism-Missions Counselor for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod on October 1 at Heritage Lutheran Church in Apple Valley, Minnesota. Rev. Wentzlaff previously served as pastor of Family of God Lutheran Church in Ft. Mohave, Arizona, and most recently as pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Clara City, Minnesota.



*L to R: Rev. Larry Wentzlaff, Stephanie Wentzlaff, President John Moldstad.*

## **Gloria Dei Celebrates 50th Anniversary**

A fiftieth anniversary service and special dinner took place at Gloria Dei Lutheran in Cold Spring, Minnesota, on October 19, 2014. Former pastor of the congregation, Rev. Rodney Flohr, served as lector. Current pastor, Rev. Cory Hahnke served as liturgist, and ELS Pres. J. Moldstad delivered the sermon, "Glory Be to Jesus," based on Revelation 1:5b-6. The text and the entire worship service duplicated the original worship service at the founding of Gloria Dei. The church joined the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1996, and today also operates a preschool.



*L to R: Rev. Rodney Flohr, Beth Ann Flohr, Rev. Cory Hanke, Julie Hahnke.*

## **Circuit 9 Mission Rally**

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church of Cold Spring, Minnesota, hosted the 32nd Annual Rally of the Circuit 9 E.L.S. Women's Missionary Rally on Saturday, October 25, 2014. Approximately 60 attended to hear Pastors Tim Hartwig and Steve Petersen tell us of the mission work being done at home and in our foreign missions. Pastor Cory Hanke led those attending in opening and closing devotions, focusing on the mission field we have with the children in our own congregations and homes. God's Word is our great heritage to cherish and share.

## **2014 ELS-WELS Forum**

The Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum met October 20-21. This biennial forum brings together administrators, leaders, and theologians of the ELS and Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to discuss theological issues and joint projects and as an expression of the unity that exists between the synods. This forum was held at the WELS mission and ministry center in Waukesha, Wisconsin.



## **John Krueger, 1931–2014**

John Krueger died on November 17, 2014, in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, at the age of 83. He was born in Bayfield, Wisconsin. John attended Concordia High School and Concordia College, both in St. Paul, Minnesota. Then he attended Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. John served LCMS congregations at Redfield, Rockham, Doland, and Vermillion, South Dakota; and Cooperstown and Binford in North Dakota before serving ELS congregations in Bowling Green and Weston, Ohio; Cottonwood and Tracy, Minnesota; Eau Claire and Bloomer, Wisconsin; and Piedmont, Missouri. John is survived by his wife, Daphne, and their children Deborah, David, Luther (Johanna), Naomi, Stephen, and Mark.



# Pastor, I Have a Question...

**Question:** *Was John the Baptist ever baptized?*

**ANSWER:** God sent John to prepare Israel for the Savior. Luke 1:16-17 states, "And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1: 76-79 states, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

John links Old Testament promises and the fulfillment in Jesus. He is the last Old Testament prophet. He dressed like a prophet. He lived in the wilderness, as did many Old Testament prophets. He preached repentance, the main task of the Old Testament prophets. John became a member of the kingdom of God on the eighth day of his life when his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, presented him to the Lord for circumcision.

Baptism was not a new concept. There were special washings for defiled Israelites and for Gentile converts. From the wilderness, John called Israel to repent and be baptized. This was unique. John preached: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.""

There is no Biblical record John was baptized. Matthew (3:13-17) recorded Jesus' baptism: "Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for

thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

Jesus didn't baptize.

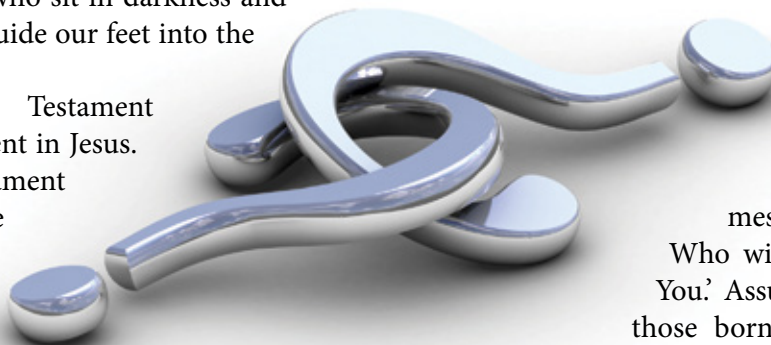
Jesus didn't need to repent. He had no sin. He stepped into Baptism for us, empowering our baptism. By it, we received the Holy Spirit, the source of our faith, and all Jesus did for our salvation. He washed us in His blood.

He made us fit for His kingdom.

Jesus said of John, "For this is he of whom it is written:

'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not

risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 11:10-15).



**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.





Photo by David Norris

# Bethany Lutheran College Auxiliary

The Bethany Lutheran College Auxiliary met on Monday, September 22, 2014, on the Bethany campus for a day filled with fine arts and theatre performances, informational presentations, and enjoyable fellowship.

This group of dedicated supporters of Bethany Lutheran College was originally formed in the 1920s and spent hours on the campus prior to each school year's opening to paint and clean. Today the mission of the Auxiliary is to support scholarships and special projects, and its membership includes friends from many of our ELS congregations throughout the nation. The Auxiliary is one of the most consistently supportive support groups of the college.

Without the generous support of the Bethany Lutheran College Ladies Auxiliary so many projects would go unfunded. This year, the group voted to support the following projects:

- Green altar paraments in Trinity Chapel \$1500
- TV for the lounge of Edgewood Place \$1000
- Curriculum library upgrades for the education major \$2000
- Electric heated sterilizers for the biology major \$1036
- Rapid prototype printer to be shared by the media arts, chemistry, and psychology majors (and probably others at some point) \$2000
- Network printer in Teigen Hall \$950
- Dorothy Theiste Memorial Scholarship Fund \$5000

These projects were chosen from a list of over \$38,000 in identified needs. As the College grows, more and more needs arise and worthy projects are in need of funding. If you are interested in supporting or learning more about any currently unfunded projects, please contact Lance Schwartz at Bethany Lutheran College by calling 507-344-7427.

Current Auxiliary Officers are: Rebecca DeGarmeaux, Treasurer, Cheryl Harstad, Secretary, Lois Johnson, President, and Carol Petersen, Vice President

Bethany Lutheran College is grateful for all the Auxiliary does to support the faculty and students and to make the college a truly special place.

Projects in need of funding include:

## Theatre Department

Audio Descriptor  
Amount: **\$1,952.00**

## Bethany Studios

Quadcopter Drone  
Amount: Total: **\$1694**

## Psychology Department

Student Travel Funds for Professional Conferences  
Amount: **\$2000**

SPSS Statistics Software

Amount: **\$1567.84**

## Biology Department

Supplies for Ecology Stream Survey

Amount: **\$2,300**

Equipment for Biological Inventories

Trail camera for remote sensing, SD cards, security locks, etc.--\$500/unit (we could use 2-5 units) 2-3 GPS units--\$175/unit

Amount: **\$2025.00**

Native Vegetation outside Meyer Hall

Maintain: **\$500** annually, Maintain and Expand--**\$1,000** annually

Project: Z-axis rotator for the fluorescent microscope and software

Amount: **\$2,000**

## Chemistry Department

Thermostated hotplates (single-position digital stirring)

Amount: **\$1,020/each**

Ultrasonic Bath

Amount: **\$850**

## Mathematics Department

iPads for students to display work from desks

Amount: **\$2000**

## Meyer Hall

Lockers for off campus students

Amount: 12 Lockers **\$1,000** Additional Lounge Seating **\$2,000**

Weather Hallway Display

Amount: **\$1,000**

Building Artwork

Amount: **\$500** annually

Educational Displays

Amount: **\$500** annually



*L to R: Cheryl Harstad, Secretary, Lois Johnson, President, Carol Petersen, Vice President, and Rebecca DeGarmeaux, Treasurer*

500 Years Ago...

# Luther is the Teacher Who is First and Always the Learner

**Martin Luther - 1514**

Today there is no shortage of motivational speakers that address dietary, emotional, social, legal, medical, monetary, personal, political, and religious issues. They attract an audience with some pressing concern and then often try to sell something. Many are successful in building large corporations. Few, however, sustain a lasting demand for the products they peddle. They rise and fall like waves in the wind. Their popularity waxes and wanes. This cycle is typical of all strictly earthly enterprises.

Although considered a novice by many of his colleagues, the popularity of Luther's lectures continued to grow in Wittenberg. Melancthon, Luther's closest colleague, tells us that Luther's lectures were attended by a growing number of students. Even prominent citizens began attending. They recognized that Luther was teaching something that they hadn't heard before: "the consolation of the Son of God." The reformation of the University of Wittenberg had begun.

Much like his publications that would follow, Luther's popularity continued to build from 1515 through 1523. The first part of this transformation commenced once Luther approached the Scriptures by respecting their grammatical meaning in the context in which they were written and abandoned the many-layered interpretation of the text that was common in medieval times. The second part of this was his "ruminating" upon the plain meaning of the text.

For Luther, the study of the Scriptures was not merely a theological exercise, but an activity that engaged his mind, soul, and life. He listened intently to the text and it continually occupied him. He pondered it and was trained by it. His spiritual instruction continued as he remembered and applied God's Word throughout his waking hours. This approach was a dramatic change from the sterile, scholarly formulations that characterized the religious instruction in Luther's day. The connection of God's Word with the daily experiences in one's life made him something of a novelty. In his occupation with the biblical text, Luther did not abandon it to human speculation, make it a servant to the reasoning of his mind, or twist it to conform to his emotions. It instructed him. In this manner, Luther the teacher was first

and always Luther the humble student of God's Word.

As "the most distinguished teacher of the churches which confess the Augsburg Confession, whose entire doctrine as to sum and substance is comprised in its articles," the instruction of Luther and those who confess it with him abides with us. Such confessors may be novel in some respects; however, they repeatedly insist, "We teach nothing new." For them, the ancient faith of Christ and His inspired apostles alone provides the "immutable rock" of all that is taught in the church. Luther insisted that he had "repeatedly traced out" from the Scriptures the doctrines which he confessed and that no one should after his death claim that if he were living today, he would have held this or that doctrine differently.

But for Luther, the instruction of God's Word was never disconnected from the mind, heart, and life of a believer. In this, Luther (ever the learner) provides a God-pleasing model for all believers. The Word is on the believer's mind and heart at the beginning and throughout and at the end of every day. A true child of God will be instructed by the plain meaning of the Word of God, hold it sacred, and gladly hear and

learn it. This Word lives in the mind and heart of the believer in all the experiences of life. It brings contrition, comfort, and correction. The Word includes the will and law of God for human attitudes and life. It also includes the gracious and saving will of God who sent His Son to bring to sinners "the righteousness of God" and cleanse them of all unrighteousness. Both doctrines are the Word of God. They live in the heart of a believer as life unfolds, confronting and comforting saints that remain sinners in this world. For this purpose, God gave His Word and therefore it remains the treasure God intended it to be for those who are trained by it.



**Thomas E. Smuda** is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Deschler, Ohio.

# Vocation Gives Us Purpose

A young man said recently, “What is the use of getting up every day and going to school?” Many people have felt this way about the drudgery of everyday life. Whether one is at work or at home, the daily routine can feel crushing and unnerving.

Such an attitude should not be surprising since through Adam’s sin, work became a punishment as God told him: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:19). God created mankind to enjoy creative work done to His glory, but sin brought to our work pain and drought, weeds and hindrances, drudgery and tiredness. In addition, King Solomon expressed another sad consequence of sin: “I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Solomon describes this uselessness further: “I hated all my labor... because I must leave it to the man who will come after me” (Ecclesiastes 2:18). Another aspect of work in our fallen world is discontentment: “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied” (Ecclesiastes 5:10; 6:7). Now God gave Solomon plenty of everything the world could offer, yet this very abundance led Solomon away from the worship of God for a time. And having wealth will cause others to rise up and take it away by force or by theft.

Work can be drudgery, but our vocation is a blessing because it gives us a purpose in life. As explained before in this series, one’s vocation is a “calling” from God to carry out tasks and responsibilities in service to God, to society, to family, and to oneself. In order to fulfill His callings, God gives people the skills, interests, and abilities necessary to carry them out.

The teaching of vocation also gives God’s children a purpose for their tasks. St. Paul writes, “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,” and adds that he does not seek his own profit, “but the profit of many, that they may be saved”

(1 Corinthians 10:31, 33). By serving our neighbors through our vocations, we “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is [our] reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Vocation shows that our whole life is a service to others and therefore a service to God. Parents raising children to know God’s Word and to learn a skill contribute to the peace of society as they teach obedience. Workers in a factory are involved with making things for others. By doing their best work, Christian workers serve those around them and the people who purchase the products to use in their homes or businesses. Christians working in a service job can go out of their way to help people deal with life, get the care they need, or fix what is broken.

When vocation is viewed as helping others and having the purpose to serve God, our work and everyday life takes on greater significance. For through our daily labors, God is helping other people and giving us opportunity to serve Him in thankful devotion for His salvation in Jesus!

While on this earth, all is vanity because all people die and leave what they have to others; on the other hand, we thank God for giving us “a time for every purpose and for every work” (Ecclesiastes 3:17),

so that we “do not grow weary in doing good” (2 Thessalonians 3:13) through our vocations.



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**Theodore Gullixson** is an ELS pastor emeritus living in Mankato, Minnesota.



# 2014 Reformation Lectures

The forty-seventh annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures were held at the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center, Mankato, Minnesota, on October 30–31, 2014. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

This year there were two presenters. The first lecture was given by Professor Allen Quist of St. Peter, Minnesota.

Prof. Quist holds a B.A. from Gustavus Adolphus College, an M.A. from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and B.D. from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. He currently serves as a member of the Doctrine Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Prof. Quist was Professor of Psychology at Bethany Lutheran College from 1968 to 1982 and served three terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1983 to 1988. While in the Legislature, he served as Chair of the Social Services Subcommittee and as Vice-Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee. Prof. Quist was the author of numerous bills, including the bill that created Minnesota's Department of Jobs and Training. In 1994, he won the Republican party endorsement as a candidate for governor of Minnesota. Prof. Quist is the author of seven books, one of them an unofficial bestseller with sales of over 10,000 copies. He is also the author of numerous articles in a wide variety of publications and has been a frequent speaker at national conferences dealing with education policy. His recent publications include *Ten Truths About Evolution that Everyone Should Know* and *Proclaiming the Truth of Jesus to a Post-modern World*. Prof. Quist and his wife, Julie, live in rural St. Peter. They have 10 children and 42 grandchildren.

The second presenter was Dr. Daniel van Voorhis. Dr. van Voorhis received his B.A. in Theology from Concordia University, Irvine, and earned his Ph.D. in History from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. He is currently the

chair of the department of History and Political Thought at Concordia University, Irvine. He is the author of numerous articles in fields ranging from Reformation polemics to contemporary issues in Religion and Politics. He is the co-host of the *Virtue in the Wasteland* podcast (a production of the League of Faithful Masks) as well as a speaking fellow for both the League of Faithful Masks and the 1517 Project.

Dr. van Voorhis is currently co-writing a book with colleague Dr. Jeffrey Mallinson on Christianity and culture. His article "Who's Afraid of the Enlightenment?" was accepted as a chapter in an upcoming work on the legacy of Western Civilization. Dr. van Voorhis and his wife, Beth Anne, have been married for 11 years and are blessed with two sons. He is a native of southern California.

The theme of the lectures was "Apologetics in Lutheranism." The first lecture, given by Prof. Quist, was entitled "The Doctrine of Creation in Lutheran Apologetics." The second lecture, presented by Dr. van Voorhis, was entitled "Lutherans and the Defense of the Faith."

The Reformation Lectures were a study of biblical apologetics. There is a considerable amount of discussion among Christians today concerning apologetics. The term "apologetics" refers to the defense of the Christian faith.

Defending the Christian faith may include an explanation of the basic beliefs of Christianity. It may also include giving grounds or reasons for accepting the Christian Gospel message as true or a refutation of criticisms of the faith, as well as exposing inadequacies in alternative religions and worldviews.

The complete lectures will be published in the March issue of the Lutheran Synod Quarterly.



*L to R: Rev. Gaylin Schmeling, Professor Erling Teigen, Professor Allen Quist, Dr. Daniel van Voorhis, Professor Lyle Lange, Rev. Donald Moldstad.*

# CHRISTMAS

The word “celebration” implies a “joyous, festive remembrance.” When we celebrate Christmas, we do so with joy because of what God has done in the past. God kept His promise to send into the world His Son Jesus, “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Our celebration of Christ’s birth calls for joyous thanksgiving as we rejoice that “God has visited and redeemed His people” (Luke 1:68).

We celebrate Christmas as the joyous apex of all human history. “Apex” means that Jesus’ birth is the center of all earthly events. All worldly history before His birth was a preparation and expectant waiting for God to send a deliverer for the sins of the world. All earthly history since Christ’s death on the cross, resurrection from the tomb, and ascension into heaven looks back to the great events in Jesus’ life and carries out the divine purpose to proclaim Christ to all the world.

The Christmas events occurred within human history: “A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Luke 2:1). Augustus ruled the Roman Empire from 29 B.C. to A.D. 14. This census of the empire took many years to complete. At just the time God intended, Joseph was required to travel to Bethlehem, “because he was of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 2:4). Jesus came into this world of sorrow and sin, born in a stable “because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

In 2014, our Christmas celebration also is a joyous reality. We celebrate Christmas—not to re-enact this great event, but to thank God for sending His Son to be our Savior from sin and to grow in our faith, trusting that Jesus was born in our world to earn for us “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). For by God’s will, Jesus paid the costly price to ransom us from our sins by His innocent death on the cross. Jesus promises eternal life to all those who believe on Him as their Savior from sin.

Jesus has prepared a joyous celebration in heaven for all who trust in Him. Jesus promised that He would prepare a place for all His children and return to take them all to heaven (John 14:1-6). There they will celebrate with great joy and peace into eternity. They will not celebrate Christmas in heaven, but will give thanks to the Lamb (Christ) in a new song: “For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by

Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

Now, our joy of Christmas has a dark cloud hanging over it. Not all people in the world celebrate Christmas with joy, faith, or understanding. Some have never heard the story of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem. Others have heard, but have rejected the idea that Jesus is God’s Son born in human flesh to be the Savior of the world. Many others “celebrate” Christmas with the joy of mammon. We are told

repeatedly that children cannot have a good Christmas unless they have presents. People get upset when their Christmas bonuses are too small, when they did not receive the gift they wanted, and when people did not meet their expectations.

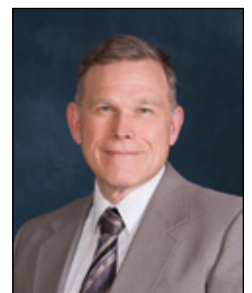
Along with our joyful thanksgiving to God for sending us His Son, our Christmas celebration has this added purpose—to share our joy in Christ’s birth with others. This can be done through sending cards and gifts to friends and neighbors; through sending out a Christmas letter that explains why Christ’s birth is so important to all people; through singing the hymns and carols of Christmas to the elderly in nursing homes, to the sick in hospitals, and

even to the public in shopping malls; through inviting people to Christmas services; and through celebrating Christmas until January 6th, which is the “Gentile Christmas.”

Celebrating Christmas does not mean that we must always smile, must always be bubbly and merry, for we live in a sin-corrupt world that will impact our lives with temptations and trials, disappointments and disasters. But in spite of all these negatives, our Christmas celebration can give us peace of mind, knowing that Jesus was born to set us free from sin and its punishment; give us a certain happiness, knowing that Christ was born to reconcile us to God; and give us hope, knowing that those who believe in Jesus have forgiveness and eternal life. May our celebration of Christmas be a truly joyful one this year.

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## Melvina's Chair

Melvina Aaberg (1926–2011) was the secretary of the seminary for 28 years. After the synod presidency became a full time office, she was also the secretary for the synod president. During that time, she was the friendly face of the seminary and synod. When a call was made to the seminary or the synod office, the warm, kind voice of Melvina was heard. She understood the internal workings and administration of the seminary and synod and had everything in hand. Melvina was a mother to many of the seminarians, offering scones, kringla, lefse, and clementine cake. Her warm smile, encouraging hugs, counsel, and advice brought warmth and Norwegian kindness to the seminary.

A chair and a beautiful floral sitting area has been given in honor of Melvina's many years of service to the synod and seminary by her family and friends. The plaque in the area reads as follows:

Melvina was a faithful secretary to the presidents of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for 28 years, 1976–2004. This sitting area is given as a memorial by her family and friends. Blessed be her memory!

The sitting area is a reminder, as her daughter Marie noted, of the many years that she greeted us as we entered the seminary.

*Marie Aaberg and the chair dedicated to her mother, Melvina.*

