

November–December 2015

Lutheran Sentinel

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

"Engage Others with Jesus."



"'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

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From the President

Dear members and friends of our ELS:

“Should we be surprised?” we might express with sad sarcasm. The barrage of attacks on the Christian faith increases. Little can shock the Christian community any more. Blasphemy seems the order of the day. The warnings our Savior gave to His disciples ring truer than ever: “You will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Matthew 24:9–11).

Now, we hear once again of another leader in the Christian community fueling the fire. A lesbian bishop (sic) from the Lutheran Church of Sweden advocates removing the cross from a seaport church so that visitors from other religions will not be offended. She also wishes to set up a prayer room in the church for Muslim visitors to use. Catering to people of divergent faiths, especially Islam, is seen as more important than the message of the Christian cross. Bishop Eva Brunne states: “Making a room available for people of other faiths does not mean we are not defenders of our own faith. But that does not mean we are stingy toward people of other faiths.” Many Swedish Lutherans disagree with the bishop and see this as simply another woeful sign of the “Islamization of Europe.”

The message of Christ’s cross is central to the Christian faith. Without it, all is lost. Even our national holiday of Thanksgiving loses import for Christians, were the religion of Christ gutted from His crucifixion. Can one *truly* enjoy the fruits of the earth without the fruits of the cross? Christmas certainly would not bring joy if the cross were not already in the divine plan at the manger.

A cross hanging in a sanctuary or hanging as jewelry around the neck always begs the question: What is its purpose? Embedded in that symbol—used by Christians of every generation—is the news we sinners cannot live without. The Gospel speaks of how long ago, on a rugged piece of wood erected outside Jerusalem and up the hill of Calvary, our loving Lord made full atonement for the sins of you and me and the entire world. His bloody sacrifice was and is a full substitute for every soul who has ever lived and ever will live! Why would anyone who knows and believes what the cross of Jesus means care to hide it? Lift high the cross! The real story of Christmas, of Good Friday, of Easter is the story of LIFE for *all*, through faith in the Holy Child who came to the Bethlehem manger.

Good conversations about the Savior have occurred in reference to the cross symbol—around a neck, on a jacket, on a vehicle, or... even in a seacoast sanctuary!

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14).

John A. Moldstad
John A. Moldstad, President of the ELS



Behold, I Am COMING...

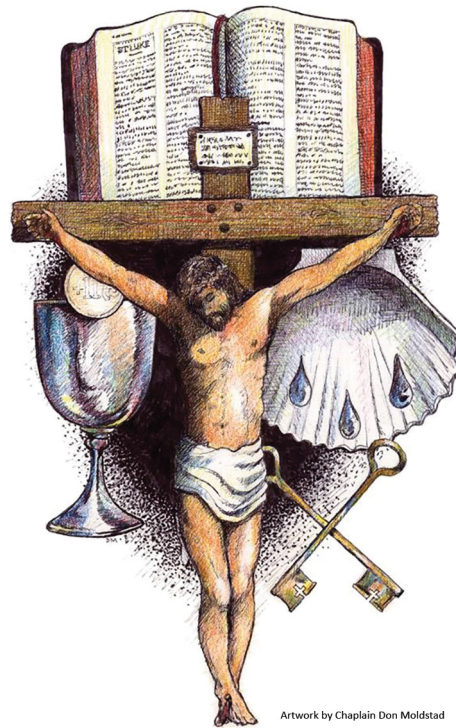
The best thing about paradise, maybe even its defining feature, is that the people live in the presence of God. Jesus said from His cross to the penitent thief, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The empty tomb of Jesus gave evidence that He is eternal God. Believers in Him look forward to His glorious presence. The Church clings to His promise at the end of His revelation to St. John, “Surely I am coming quickly” (Revelation 22:20). Yet when He ascended, He also gave this promise: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Is this a contradiction? How can He be present, but also be coming at the same time?

Apparent contradictions like this are resolved when we have enough information to see how the pieces fit together. There is more than one way for Jesus to be with us. In one way, the Kingdom of God exists already here on Earth (Matthew 4:17, Romans 10:6–10). In another way, the Kingdom of God will find its ultimate fulfillment after the resurrection of all the dead (Matthew 25:31). Even before their bodies are raised, Christians enter the glorious presence of Jesus with the crucified thief on the very same day they depart in faith from this world. So when Jesus promises His presence to believers, it pays to notice exactly when and what kind of presence He means.

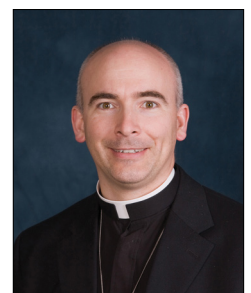
In Revelation 22, Jesus is speaking of His second coming, the great return of the King in power and glory for judgment and the final justification of His beloved Church. In Matthew 28, Jesus promises to be present with His Kingdom of grace, or His Church militant, which continues on Earth until the End. There is really only one highest King throughout Scripture and therefore one greatest kingdom, but it exists for us in three ways. (See the ELS’s *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*, questions 177 and 250.)

Christians on Earth live under Christ in a state of “now, but not yet.” We already possess the eternal gifts of God, but haven’t yet reached the full experience of them. So in Mark 1:14–15, Jesus began preaching the message of His Church until His second coming: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Even now on Earth, there are special ways that the Lord is already present. In the final Judgment, everyone will have to receive Him (Jesus) whether they want to or not. But now He comes in the message of the Gospel, and in the outward sacramental actions that Jesus has connected to it. These are often called the Means of Grace, because God uses them to convey His merciful forgiveness and the faith needed to receive it. The Means of Grace are our opportunity to hear and be saved through faith. Unlike His final coming, the Means of Grace can be resisted, neglected, and despised. That’s the reason for the Third Commandment. (See the ELS Catechism for more about that connection.)

Perhaps it seems strange that almighty God should be present in such a mundane way: in a message and in certain outward acts connected with it. Yet this is consistent with His work throughout history, even in the Beginning. God reveals that Creation was accomplished entirely through words spoken by God. In a special way these words are identified with Jesus by the apostle and evangelist John: “In the beginning was the Word.... All things were made through Him” (John 1:1, 3). Now, Jesus’ promise to be with His Church is likewise fulfilled when we gather around His Word and bring it with us into our daily lives. The Kingdom of God is at hand already, *AND* Jesus is also coming soon.



Artwork by Chaplain Don Moldstad



Jesse Jacobsen is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in the Dalles, Oregon, and Concordia Lutheran Church in Hood River, Oregon.

Behold, I Am Coming SOON!

Eschatology (es-kə-tā-le-jē) is the study of the end times. There does seem to be a rekindled curiosity in the end times these days. Reality television shows featuring doomsday “preppers” suggest a growing interest. Equipped with pre-packaged food guaranteeing a twenty-five-year shelf life and sheltered in creatively designed bunkers, preppers plan to overcome a nuclear holocaust or the lawless chaos of an economic meltdown.

Truly, the time is coming, regardless of how one materially preps, when this world in its present form will pass away (1 Corinthians 7:31). While some may try to “head for the hills” and even pray for those hills to “cover” them (Luke 23:30), none will escape the Lord on Judgment Day. St. Paul’s plea to be spiritually prepped should remain on our minds, since “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Are we prepared for our Savior’s second advent? Some fear that day. Worse than any science fiction nightmare of a zombie apocalypse, sin and unresolved guilt grip them with terror at the reality of standing before a holy, righteous Judge. Such fear remains one motivator why some seek to predict our Savior’s return. They foolishly think that if they can calculate His second coming, they will have time to tidy up their spiritual houses in God-pleasing order.

When our Savior previewed the end of the age (Matthew 24), however, He did not do so for any to forecast the exact time of His return. Rather, by sharing these “signs of the end times,” Jesus urged constant vigilance for His second arrival at any moment. St. Paul added to Jesus’ “*Behold* [“pay attention”], *I am coming soon*,” (Revelation 22:7) that our Savior would come like a “*thief in the night*” (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Of course, scoffers will mock our Lord and deny His return. St. Peter pictures their sinful skepticism: “*Where is this ‘coming’ He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation*” (2 Peter 3:4). “*But*,” as Peter counsels, “*they deliberately forget.... with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day*” (2 Peter 3:5, 8). Our eternal God is not bound by time as we His creatures are. Why does the Lord seemingly delay His return? Peter further adds, “*The Lord is not slow in*

keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). In divine wisdom garnished with gracious patience, our God, “*who wants all people to be saved*” (1 Timothy 2:4), ensures His gospel will be preached to all nations according to His perfect timetable before the end comes (Matthew 24:14).

With that in mind, personal preparedness calls for us as Christians to daily repent of our sins of thought, word, and deed. St. Paul pleads with the Day-denier ignoring the Savior’s imminent return, “*I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor and now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Even if Jesus does not return during our lifetimes, our judgment day will come soon since “*the length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength*” (Psalm 90:10).

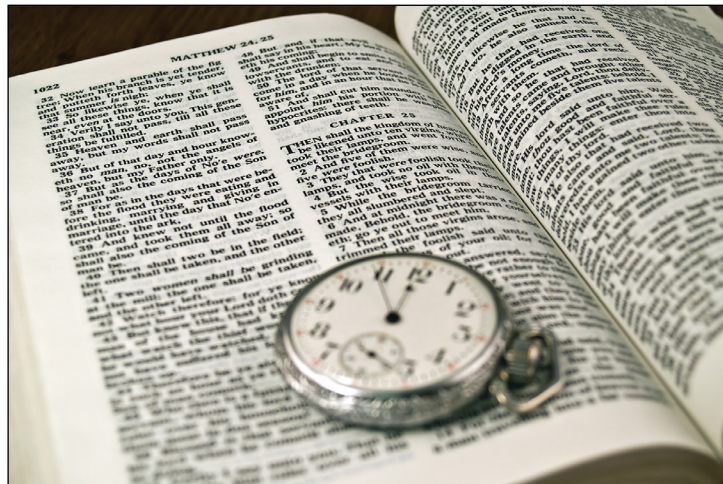
Instead of fixating on the “when” then, by God’s grace through Word and sacrament the Holy Spirit keeps God’s preppers ever-ready spiritually for His arrival. Our daily staple is the Gospel, the bread of life securing an eternal value. The Gospel feeds our faith by proclaiming the Bread of

Life, who lived a perfect life to satisfy a heavenly Father’s demand for our perfection. The Gospel shelters sinners with the absolute truth that Jesus completely paid for all our sins. The Gospel nourishes the hungry soul mourning the death of a loved one, fearing at times the unknown, or feeling sometimes crisis in chaos.

That’s why living in the Gospel’s state of grace, with the Holy Spirit’s gift of confident faith rooted in our hearts, we eagerly “*lift up our heads*” (Luke 21:28) as we see signs of the end. As our final “*redemption draws near*” (Luke 21:28), there is no need to try to escape. By God’s grace we have no fear of our Savior who promises, “*Behold, I am coming soon!*” (Revelation 22:7).

Soli Deo Gloria.

Jeffery Luplow is pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan.





Pondering Mary's Pondering

One of my favorite Christmas stories was the magical life of Frosty the Snowman. I thought about that story a lot as a child; I imagined how awesome it would be if the snowman I built would come alive and be my best friend throughout the winter. If I woke up one morning to find that Frosty had come alive in my back yard, I would be in complete amazement; it would be hard to truly realize the amazing thing that had happened.

In reality, what the angel told Mary would happen that first Christmas morning was more astonishing than Frosty could ever be. Mary was told that, even though she was a virgin, she would become pregnant with a child and that this child would be the Son of God. Mary was told that this child was the promised Savior who would rule over heaven and earth. Can you imagine the thoughts that might have run through her mind? She was going to be pregnant even though she was not yet married; what would everyone in town think? She was going to be the mother of the Christ child, the Son of God; what if the child fell and scraped His knee, what if she lost her temper with Jesus? Can you imagine the burden of caring for God's only Son, who was God Himself? Mary knew her own sinfulness; who was she to be chosen to care for Jesus?

That last thought we should truly ponder ourselves; who are we that Jesus should come to be our Savior? We are sinners who have disobeyed God throughout our lives. Being Christians actually makes matters worse; we know God's Word, we know what God demands of us, and yet we still fall into sin. We know that the wages of sin is death, and we smugly think at times that God will just have to forgive us no matter what we do. Who are we that God should come to save us?

Of all the worries and concerns and feelings of unworthiness that may have run through Mary's mind, there is one thought that we know Mary pondered greatly: she was giving birth to the Savior, the one who would take away her sins and the sins of her family and even the sins of the entire world. Reading Mary's song in Luke 1:46–55 gives us a glimpse of the joy in her heart as she carried her Lord and her Savior.

Mary would have no idea of exactly everything that was going to happen over the years as Jesus won the world's salvation. We are blessed to have God's Word in our hands so that we can read and ponder all that Jesus did for us. He lived a perfect life in our place to cover up our failings. He went to the cross to suffer the just punishment for our sins so that all the times we have disobeyed God would be paid for and completely forgiven. Jesus died and rose again to life so that all who believe in Him can rejoice that their place with Him is secured.

I thought a lot about Christmas miracles as a child; but a Christmas miracle really did happen. The impossible happened as God was born in the manger, not just to be our friend, but to be our Savior. God has given us the full counsel of His Word to sustain our faith. We ponder on the Law and our sins, and God leads us to repent. We ponder on Christ's sacrifice and rejoice that by faith alone we have eternal life.

Of all the worries and concerns and feelings of unworthiness that may have run through Mary's mind, there is one thought that we know Mary pondered greatly: she was giving birth to the Savior, the one who would take away her sins and the sins of her family and even the sins of the entire world.

James Kassera is pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota.



The Apostle Paul in the 21st Century

About thirty years after Christ's resurrection, the apostle Paul was revisiting some of the early congregations. As told in chapter 19 of the Book of Acts, he came to Ephesus: "And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Following various dispersions, the Jews had spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Ephesus was a great center of commerce and industry and was home to many of those who had been dispersed. Unbelief and the Pharisaic cultural roots of the Jews challenged Paul's message of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, so he moved his teaching ministry out of the synagogue (Acts 19:8–10). Similarly, the hardheaded unbelief of many people of the 21st century exhibits their disdain and open hatred for the message of Christ.

Paul's message challenged the idolatrous worship of the Greek goddess Artemis, also known as the Roman goddess Diana. Demetrius was a successful industrialist, manufacturing the silver shrines of Artemis. "He gathered together the fellow craftsmen and their employees. 'Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that ... this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted for nothing'" (Acts 19:25–27).

Demetrius, his moneybag suffering painfully, attacked Paul with two weapons. First, he addressed the economic pain that was being caused his associated craftsmen and the families of their employees because of the loss of sales of the man-made gods. Second, he called on the culture of fear that was evident if anyone spoke against Artemis. A 21st century industrialist might seek out a "Paul" to blame for his business failures, and if he can swing a punch pleading for his favorite charity or religion, it is just so much more fun. The crowds of Ephesians erupted after Demetrius' "revelations" just as the media-provoked citizens of today react.

The Jews who had rejected Paul's teaching of Christ wanted the Ephesians to know that Paul, a Jew, was not their kind of Jew. "Don't blame us for his damage to your economy." They thrust forward Alexander to make their case. Recognizing him as a Jew, "for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'" (Acts 19:34). A wild, uncontrolled mob; a frightened and

concerned Jewish citizenry; probably a smiling and gloating Demetrius—he had disrupted this anti-Artemis thing, now back to the good old days!

But, then it appeared that the Lone Ranger came riding in on his white horse. The city manager, apparently a powerful local political leader who also had connections in the Roman government, stepped forward and choosing his words carefully, brought calm. He played to the crowd by praising Artemis. He told the crowd that these men they had brought to the stadium, Gaius and Aristarchus, associates of Paul, had done nothing wrong. "For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious or blasphemous of our goddess" (Acts 19:37). Next he told Demetrius that if he had a problem, he should take it to court, warning him that going to court could bring in Roman officials (Acts 19:35–39).

Then he emphasized his real concern: "For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion" (Acts 19:40). Rome's power had spread over much of the Mediterranean world, spreading its control very thin. Therefore, it permitted the local people to handle their own affairs, but, if there were any disturbances, a very heavy hand of the military would assume authority, usually with little regard for the righteousness of any uprising. Therefore, the city clerk cut off all further activity by dismissing the crowd (Acts 19:41).

What was the result for Paul? "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia" (Acts 20:1). Paul had work to do. He had other congregations to encourage, to correct, and generally he must keep spreading the message of salvation by God's grace alone.

The 21st century world has all of the same idol worship, crafty and cunning obstructions to the Word of God, the outspoken hatred for those who bring the message of salvation. The difference between 55 A.D. and 2015 A.D. is only in the intensity of the evil that has been expanded by 2000 years of man's discipleship of Satan.

All praise to the God of our salvation who is in control and who will right all harm according to His standards!

Norman Werner is a member of King of Grace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, Minnesota.

The Christmas Tell

“Oh, great. Another article to make me feel guilty about witnessing to others.” Maybe that thought crossed your mind as you scanned the title. I would understand completely if it did.

The word “tell” implies verbal action. You “tell” others what to do. You “tell” on your brother. You “tell” a story. Jesus is clear when He tells us, “Go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). There is no escaping the fact that we are commanded to verbally tell others about sin and its solution, Jesus Christ.

So, why aren't we all little chatterboxes for Jesus? How come we don't take advantage of all the opportunities God has given us to tell people about His Son? Simple really. We're afraid. We're afraid of making someone mad. Afraid of saying something wrong. Afraid of losing a relationship. Afraid of being labeled intolerant.

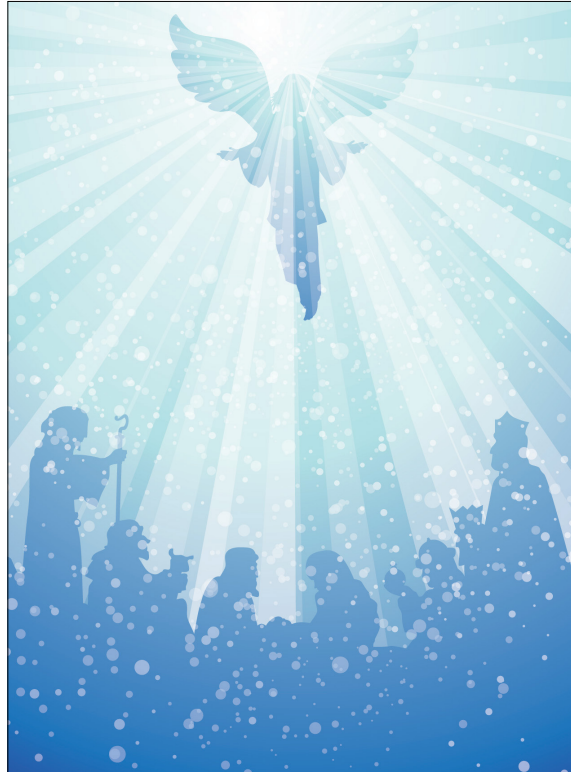
But for those less verbally inclined there is good news. There is another kind of “telling” that doesn't require a single word. The card players reading this know what I am talking about. Card playing, in all of its forms, is a game of human interaction. And whether we know it or not, we “tell” people what we have, or don't have, by our actions, our physical demeanor, our breathing patterns, what we are doing with our hands, how we use our eyes. These “tells” and many more are witnessed by people, and strategic judgments are made based on these “tells.”

During Christmastime you have a huge opportunity to let people see your Christian “tells.” Are you visibly burdened and stressed by all the things you have to do, or are you cheerful and lighthearted during this busy time of year? Do you look like you just smelled a rotten fruitcake, or are you ready with a smile for all who see you? Are your eyes focused on the things of the world, or are they confidently looking to the Babe in Bethlehem and into the eyes of the lost who are all around you?

Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

One way that you tell people you are a Christian is by how you conduct yourself. Your actions will attract or repel people. They are watching. They will be able to see what kind of person you are by your “tells.” We want our “tells” to be a light that attracts the sad, lonely, and lost.

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)



Now comes the reason for it all. The chance to tell others why you are the way you are. And the simple, sweet answer is, “Because Jesus loves me.” Though I have given in to my fears, Jesus forgives me. Because the greatest gift I'm getting this year is not under a Christmas tree, it is in a manger—God made flesh to be my substitute in His living, dying, and rising for my salvation. Because heaven is my home!

One last bit of good news for the less verbally inclined. There is no need for some fancy, elaborate response. You don't have to quote Luther or the Church Fathers. Simply speak the truth. “Jesus loves you.” Telling people that simple, beautiful truth will lead to more questions, which will lead you to the Bible, which will lead you to more answers and more confidence.

And you being drawn back to the source of God's love—*Jesus*—will make you want not only to tell people about Christ through your actions but also with words as well.

‘Tis the season to “tell” others about the Good News of Christ's birth and God's love!

Greg Schmidt is pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Naples, Florida.





On the Synodical Scene...

Saved By Grace Lutheran Celebrates 25th Anniversary

On Sunday, July 19th, 2015, Saved By Grace Lutheran Church of Gresham, Oregon, celebrated its 25th anniversary. The theme for the anniversary was “Grounded and Growing in God’s Grace.” Synod Vice President Glenn Obenberger preached in the morning divine service on 1 Kings 4:3-13 with the theme: “Seek First the Lord’s Kingdom, He Graciously Provides All You Need.” The congregation’s first resident pastor, the Rev. Nathan Krause, preached in the afternoon anniversary service on Philippians 1:3-6 with the theme “Thank God!” Both services were adorned by special choir and instrumental music led by musician Brad Hall. Many members from the congregation’s early days were able to come and share her joy in God’s continuing grace. After the anniversary service, the members of the congregation served an excellent dinner to all who attended.



(L to R): The Revs. Glenn Obenberger, Nathan Krause, Timothy Bartels

Anniversary dinner at Saved By Grace Lutheran Church.



The Rev. Richard Tragasz Installed

The Rev. Richard Tragasz was installed as pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Weston, Ohio, on October 4, 2015.



Back Row (L to R): The Revs. Dan Basel, Peter Heyn, Timothy Nass (WELS), Alois Schmitzer, III (WELS).
Front Row (L to R): The Revs. Paul Lange, Richard Tragasz, Paul Schneider, Homer Mosley.

Christ Lutheran School Dedicates Building

Christ Lutheran School, Port St. Lucie, Florida, dedicated its new school building on Sunday, October 10, 2015. ELS President John Moldstad preached for the dedication service. A dinner followed the service, along with tours of the new school building.



Pastor, I Have a Question...

Question: *Why was Mary chosen? Surely there were other young women who were virtuous and virgins.*

ANSWER: Surprisingly little is said in the Bible about the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus. She is mentioned in the first chapters of Matthew. We learn she was betrothed to Joseph. She was a virgin. Luke in the first chapter of his Gospel tells us of the visit of Gabriel to “a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’” (1:27-28). Gabriel explains to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” (1:30-31). Upon visiting her relative, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Mary is greeted with the words, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (1:42)

These verses partially answer the question. Mary fulfilled various aspects of prophecy that pointed to the coming of the Lord. She and Joseph were of the house of David. (II Samuel 7: 13-15). She was a virgin, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (7:14): “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”. They were from Bethlehem, the town prophesied to be the birthplace of Jesus (Micah 5:2). The phrases “O favored one” and “You have found favor with God” translate the Greek word for grace or favor.

Mary takes no credit for God’s blessing. She responded to Elizabeth with these words of the Magnificat, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in *God, my Savior*, for he has looked on the *humble estate* of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed: for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and his name is holy.” Luke 1: 46-49.

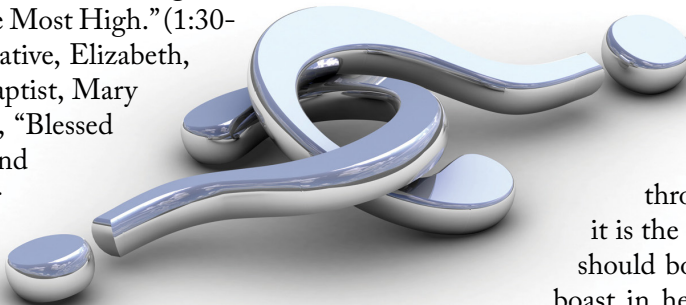
She tells us God chose her because of her humble estate and because God is great. She gave all glory to God. We might like more information. God limits us to His word. God did not choose her because she was virtuous. He chose

her because He is good. He saw her humble estate. Because of God’s grace Mary is blessed by all generations. Because of God’s great love, we honor her as being the mother of our Savior.

Expanding this question, we find comfort. God chose us as His children also because of His grace. Nothing in us, not virtue or goodness caused God to choose us. God is gracious. He chose us in spite of ourselves and for the sake of the One born of Mary. Jesus earned this grace for us. God looked into our hearts and saw sin. Jesus took that sin and in its place imputed to us His holiness. Jesus paid the debt our sin deserved and gave us the glory He earned.

God sent the Holy Spirit by means of His Word to call us to faith so that we would receive the benefit of all Jesus did for us.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Mary didn’t boast in herself. She boasted in God and His goodness. We also give all glory to God. If we boast, we boast in God’s goodness as it comes to us in Jesus.



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.

Lutheran Military Support Group

Denny Behr knows what it's like to be shoulder to shoulder serving his nation. Drafted in 1965 during the Vietnam era, he served in the Navy throughout the Cold War and continued serving until his retirement in 1999. "My military career in the Navy totally changed my life forever," he says. "It taught me followership, mentorship, leadership, teamwork, and how to accomplish missions. It took me from cultivating corn on that small Minnesota farm to flying open ocean patrols all over the world chasing Russian submarines!"

Since his retirement, Behr, a member at Faith, Oregon, Wisconsin, has divided his time serving his two great loves—the church and veterans. A recently formed organization, the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG), is now giving him the chance to serve those two loves at the same time.

Run by a board of ELS and WELS veterans from around the country, the LMSG is working to strengthen the church's ministry to the military.

"We are a national level organization designed to have national reach, but local impact," says Philip Mowry, LMSG president. "We are designed to be both an auxiliary to WELS Military Services in their support of active duty service members as well as an independent organization supporting the needs of our military veterans and our military families of both active duty members and veterans."

Behr is excited that WELS and the ELS are joining forces to tackle this important ministry. "As a small synod, we don't have a lot of resources at this point [for ministering to the military]," says Behr, an LMSG board member. "That's why it is so promising to be partnering with WELS in forming this new organization."

He continues, "Working with the newly forming LMSG team has totally re-energized me to help carry out this important military ministry," he says. "To work shoulder to shoulder with these brothers and sisters all over our nation and beyond—most of whom I've never met before, but we share the powerful bond of having have worn our nation's cloth—this is truly a humbling and rewarding experience."

The Lutheran Military Support Group is focusing on several national priorities:

- Providing logistical, financial, and educational support to WELS Military Services as it ministers to active duty military members. "As current and former military people, we bring a host of skills, relationships, and perspectives not generally found among civilian church leadership," says Mowry, who served during the Gulf War.

- Helping address post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans.

- Supporting military families. The group is looking to start an annual synodwide recognition day for those families as well as to help active military families in remote locations stay connected through, for example, catechism and Bible classes.

The LSMG is also working to create awareness and activity in local congregations. Its goal is to have a liaison—either an active military person, a veteran, or a military family member—in every ELS and WELS congregation who can help educate and encourage members. "We want our congregations through their liaisons to open their eyes and look around their congregations and community and say, 'This is a mission opportunity we haven't thought of before,'" says Mowry. "We're driving awareness, which will stimulate individual congregational activity."



*Command Master Chief D. E. Behr
USNR (retired)*

That awareness is important to Behr, who notes that supporting and recognizing active military members, veterans, and their families is his personal mission as a retired military veteran. “Just as our synods reach out to people and cultures throughout the world carrying out God’s Great Commission, our military and veterans have unique experiences and challenges that need God’s Word. We owe them and their families our support and our thanks, and we need to share our Christian love to help bring them back into our society through our church family.”

Discover more about the Lutheran Military Support Group, how to get involved, and tips on ministering to military members in your community at the group’s website, www.lutheranmilitary.org.



Julie Wietzke is managing editor of the WELS magazine *Forward in Christ*.



LUTHERAN MILITARY SUPPORT GROUP

Shoulder to Shoulder in Service

www.lutheranmilitary.org

Luther 500 Years Ago

ENLIGHTENED BY THE SPIRIT:

Martin Luther, 1515

There is a reason why the preacher often has a captive audience at a funeral. Death touches us all. We are mortals living in a mortal universe and have no power to save ourselves. Luther was teaching something he personally experienced. It's impossible to separate the instruction of Luther from the internal turbulence of his spiritual life.

As is evident in his lectures and writings, his approach to Scripture is marked by his respect for the text as the Word of God. The truthfulness of God was at stake. He began with the traditional four-layered method of understanding the Scriptures as was taught by the religious authorities of his time. However, very quickly his study and teaching were reduced to the plain meaning of the text. The grammar, the historical setting, and the subject of the Scriptures spoke to the soul of Luther. He was an authentic vessel—a minister of the Truth—the practical teacher to whom the Spirit through the text conveyed the enlightenment the prisoners of this dark world need. He recognized the Author and His intended audience. The text spoke to Luther in his spiritual struggles. He was familiar with the subject not just for scholarly analysis and debate, but also because God intended it for sinners in order to reclaim them and bring them hope. Luther experienced the darkness, but dawn was breaking upon the soul of Luther.

The Law prepared Luther to receive the Gospel. It is the gift of righteousness in Christ that brings a sinner to the Gate of grace, which Jesus is for those who have nothing to offer God by their observance of His Law. It is the grace of God in Christ that brings the new heart by which believers are eager to please God not for merit but in thankfulness for Christ. Only those with the Spirit can rightly “discern” the meaning, purpose, power, and place of the Law and the Gospel, and only they can “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Luther was no longer trying to please God in order for God to be pleased with him. His lectures evidenced a change in his understanding of Saint Paul that had not more clearly been set forth since the apostle himself walked and taught on earth. Luther's own handwritten lecture notes for Romans (chapters 1–3) dated 1515 as well as the students' notes taken during these lectures indicate that Luther understood “the righteousness of God” as God's gift to the sinner and distinct from the righteousness of observing the Law. As Luther frantically searched for relief by means of the formal righteousness acquired by his personal devotion, the Spirit liberated him through His words “the righteousness of God” to the light of grace and hope in Christ.

Every age until the end needs this enlightenment that speaks to the weary soul. When teaching and preaching lose sight of the intended purpose of God in sending Christ and the Spirit to bring to light the only righteousness that has the power to save a sinner, they fail to produce God's intended results. The how-to approach that attempts to make Christianity relevant to the masses by offering a god that is pleased with sinners because their love and commitment are good enough and makes them feel comfortable with themselves and promises success that can be measured in human terms catastrophically misses the point. The Scriptures were written “to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15) so that we “have God's approval.” Apart from the Spirit—“faith”—“it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). The Law expresses the will of God, and it is the purpose of a believer's life to do the good things God wants done. But this is the result of faith that trusts the merciful God revealed in Christ and is given with the Spirit through the Word. The Law is not the reason God loves sinners. The righteousness that God freely gives in Christ is the reason. This is what dawned in the soul of Luther and wherever “the lamp” of the Gospel shines in the heart. As Luther explained 2 Peter 1:19, “The gospel does the very thing that happens when one is caught in a house in the middle of the darkest night. Then it would be necessary to provide a light until daybreak, so that one could see.... The world, too, is nothing else than a kingdom of darkness. In this darkness God has now ignited a light, the gospel....” How can people have God's Spirit if they do not have God's Word? In 1515 Luther was coming to see “the righteousness of God which is through faith” everywhere in Scripture.

In a dark world dark hearts try to justify themselves. This darkness is pervasive in our times as the Laws of God are removed from prominent places and the institutions of God are redefined as if it was enough to be righteous in our own eyes. But Luther remains for us an illuminating example of a heart enlightened by the Spirit. For to him the clearer the Law became, the more apparent the foolishness of human righteousness and the more precious the “righteousness of God” were.

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Open My Lips

There was once a man who lived by a mountain lake. The benefits he received through that lake were many. It provided him fish to eat. It drew deer to hunt for food and skins, geese for food and their warm down feathers. It provided him water that could be purified for drinking and plumbed into his house for bathing. It gave occasion for many leisure activities, such as swimming and sailing in the summer and ice-skating in the winter, which also brought tourism and opportunity for employment. The water table from the lake supported the surrounding pine forest, giving lumber for all kinds of building. The flow of the nearby stream powered the mill that he used to make flour. The soft lull of the lake lapping the shoreline at night even proved to be just the medicine he needed for a sound night's sleep. The lake was a bountiful gift—like a cornucopia overflowing with blessings for the man who dwelled on its shore.



The man who lived “by the lake” (not only as in “next to the lake,” but also as in “lived off the gifts the lake provided”), was stunned and hurt when one spring the lake of blessing dried up. He crept down to the lake, kicking the scales of mud to see if the water was hiding underneath. He lifted up stones to see if water would burst forth. He’d been so busy fawning over this great gift lake, he’d never stopped to thoughtfully consider from where this body of blessing came. The lake, even with all of its attending blessings, was still itself only a gift, *NOT* the Giver. He followed the dried-up stream beds that fed the lake to the foot of the mountain. He scaled the mountain and its waterfalls to its top where he met a pregnant cloud—a cloud that would soon give birth and shower water on to the mountains that would be funneled through the streams to fill the lake. So the lake, the stream, the mountain, and the cloud all led him to the feet of a gracious God who causes the rain to fall on the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). It was absence of gift that proved the true gift for the lake-dwelling man; it drove him to the true source of his every blessing.

You, dear child of God, have your own bountiful lake of blessing—your own distinct lake—often overflowing with divine mercies far beyond your needs or wants. And sometimes it too is dry, mercifully giving you the repentance that abundance cannot. There are moments when you lack thanks altogether. Far more often, however, your *thankfulness* simply finds you at the “shore of your lake”—your life—*happily* cherishing *the gift*—like nine cured lepers—but failing to trace that gift back to its *True Source*.

But greater than any gift your own “pool of blessing” offers, your gracious heavenly Father has worked in you *the spring of faith, welling up to eternal life*. Faith given and sustained by the merciful God of heaven is saving you from aimlessly emptying your thanks into a pool of blessing that is here today and gone tomorrow. The faith given *you* by God the Holy Spirit humbles you at the feet of the Giver. It supplies you with repen-

tance for thanklessness. That gift of faith fixes you to the supreme Gift—the holy life, sacrificial death, and life-giving resurrection of His only Son, Your Savior. With our eyes we see the pool of blessing. With our tongue we taste its fruits. With our ears we enjoy its calm refrain. And in faith, given by the same merciful Lord, we give thanks to the Source of every good and perfect gift.

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. (Psalm 51:15)

Kyle Madson is pastor of Divine Mercy Lutheran Church in Hudson Oaks, Texas, and serves as managing editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel*.



Aubrielle's Story

Aubrielle Howley, daughter of Dustin and Kelly Howley, was born on May 16, 2015, with a condition called OEIS complex, a very rare and serious condition with multiple birth defects. It's only seen in 1 in 400,000 pregnancies and 1 in 200,000 live births.

The story began when our specialist informed us that our baby had OEIS complex. Life as we knew it was about to be turned in a completely different direction. Our baby girl developed with her intestines, liver, partial stomach, bowel, and bladder all on the outside of her body. Her bladder was split into two halves. They also saw an abnormal curvature in her spine as well as a moderate form of spina bifida. Fears of her not walking and needing a colostomy bag for life immediately set in. We knew from the first day that we would not give up on her and would continue to fight for her survival.

After many appointments and many people asking us if we were going to continue the pregnancy, we clung to Christian faith, explaining how that decision was not ours to make. We wanted to continue the pregnancy and give our baby girl the chance at life she deserved. The Lord was placing us on this new path for a reason and we were to follow. We were ready to face this battle at Aubrielle's side.

Aubrielle still remains in intensive care at the University of Minnesota Masonic Children's Hospital. The outpouring of love and support we have received from family and friends has shown how the Lord is present in our lives and those around us. We rely on Him every day to give Aubrielle and our family the strength and courage to continue on this new journey through life. With many challenges still to come, we know Aubrielle is in His hands and trust that this is His will. We know we will make it through this in faith and with family and friends.

Thank you to all for the continuous prayers and support.

Dustin, Kelly, Lilia, and Aubrielle Howley



Aubrielle Howley



The Howley Family