

# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



*the Gospel* according to  
**ISAIAH**

DEVOTIONAL SERIES: **PART 1**

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YOUNG BRANCHES:  
TWO KINGDOMS

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*Accidentally*  
LUTHERAN  
LYRICS

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**IT IS WRITTEN:**

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:23-24)

# Absolution Certainty

.....

**I**f I remember correctly as a 1959 five-year old it was a Friday night activity at our home. People would stop by the parsonage and speak with my pastor-father whenever the Lord's Supper would be offered at the church next door on the following Sunday. I never knew, of course, what was being said in those conversations in his private office behind the wall of our living room.

In answer to my adolescent curiosity, I was told members of the church were coming to announce their intention of taking Communion. It was also relayed to me, with no specifics or further comments, how some would take the opportunity to mention a sin or struggle they were encountering. In return, they received absolution personally, right then and there, from the voice of their called spiritual shepherd.

The full authority to forgive sins rests with God alone. It is paramount, then, that all sins be confessed to Him, regardless of whether one uses a confessor or not. At the same time, the sinner who confesses sin is to be certain of God's full forgiveness — a forgiveness based only in the reality that Christ made once-for-all the atoning sacrifice for every sin of every sinner.

When sin is confessed (even those we do not know about, as in the Lord's Prayer), there is no hiccup or hesitancy on God's part in granting full pardon. The sinner is to be sure of the Heavenly Father's pardoning announcement since the Savior's act of redemption for sinners has been completed.

Martin Luther, in reaction to the practice of forced confession and penance in the Roman Church, stressed the teaching of the universal priesthood of all believers. Christians need not go through a priestly mediator to communicate with God and are therefore assured of having his absolution. Unfortunately, some people drew the assumption Luther, as a result, discouraged church members from approaching their pastor privately and making confession. This was far from the case.

We sin much daily and are painfully aware of the tendencies of our carnal nature. This sobering fact of our tenting trip in the present desert does not destroy the validity of God's absolution. We have an oasis of life-giving water! *"If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself"* (2 Timothy 2:13). Only God's absolution empowers the Christian for the continued battle versus sin, Satan, death and hell. The pastor is God's servant eagerly holding the quenching cup at the rim of the well.

Any heart deliberately set on plotting sin cannot and does not benefit from the validity of God's absolution. Faith apprehends the blessings. *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13).

O God, grant us in this new year of your grace a renewed appreciation for your loving-kindness in offering us your absolution. Thank you also for providing faithful shepherds who convey your grace to our wounded souls. Amen.

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THE SYNOD'S CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

## ANNOUNCES THE ANNIVERSARY LOGO,

WHICH WILL BE USED FOR TWO SIGNIFICANT ANNIVERSARIES:

**2017** the **500<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY** of the **LUTHERAN REFORMATION**

**2018** the **100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY** of **REORGANIZATION** of our **EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD**

At the center of the logo, which has been designed by Bethany Lutheran College professor Andrew Overn, is the Lime Creek church building located near Lake Mills, Iowa. It was here that the synod was reorganized in 1918 to continue in God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure.

To the left is a hammer and two nails, reminding us of the day when Martin Luther posted the "Ninety-Five Theses." To the right is the symbol of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the "Chi Rho." This symbol is made from the first two letters of "Christ" in the Greek language and emphasizes the importance of keeping Jesus at the center of our teachings.

The dates at the top of the logo are the quinquennial anniversary dates of 1517-2017 for the Reformation. The dates at the bottom of the logo are the centennial anniversary dates of 1918-2018 for the ELS. The banner across the logo bears the anniversary theme *Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done*, taken from a hymn written by Martin Luther. During these anniversary years, we wish to look back both at what God has done

and also to proclaim His name, His deeds, and His salvation to a new generation and to a generation yet to be born.

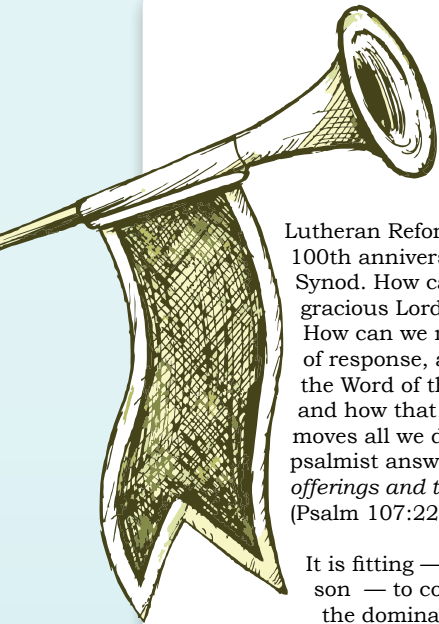
The main components of the observance will occur at the time of the 2017 and 2018 synod conventions. In addition, a Bible study is being prepared for the fall of 2017 and a special congregation anniversary service for the Fall of 2018. Two commemorative issues of *the Lutheran Sentinel* are anticipated, and both a published book and video are being prepared.

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## PROCLAIM THE WONDERS GOD HAS DONE!



Two major celebrations are coming! 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. 2018 commemorates the 100th anniversary of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod. How can we properly acknowledge our gracious Lord for his goodness and mercy? How can we reflect, in some humble measure of response, a spirit of gratitude for the way the Word of the Gospel has touched our lives, and how that message of salvation in Christ moves all we do together in our church? The psalmist answers: "Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy" (Psalm 107:22).

It is fitting — especially in this Easter season — to connect our joy and praise with the dominant event of our Savior's resurrection and what it means for all we do. Fifty days after the first Easter came the great festival of Pentecost. The apostles shared with the multi-lingual crowd on that day the resurrection-filled message. And what did the people exclaim? "We hear them 'declaring the wonders of God' in our own tongues! (Acts 2:11)

In the spirit of Jesus' resurrection and in thankfulness to God for the milestone years — the 500th and the 100th — of abundant grace, here are just some of the things we are planning:

- **A centennial thank-offering, kicked-off at our upcoming June convention**
- **A Lutheran Reformation hymn festival in 2017**
- **A new publication on our synod's history, authored by Rev. C. Ferkenstad**
- **Seven topical Bible studies prepared by the Doctrine Committee**
- **Special essays assigned for our 2016, 2017 and 2018 conventions**
- **A centennial banquet scheduled for Tuesday, June 19, 2018**
- **An instructive video on the origin and purpose of our ELS**

The main theme for our celebrations and for our thank-offering is "*Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done!*" It is a phrase taken from Dr. Martin Luther's familiar hymn, "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" (ELH 378).

[▶](#) (article continued on page 15)

QUESTION:

“Pastor, why are so many of my Christian friends waiting for The Rapture”?

ANSWER:

**T**he idea of the Rapture is relatively new. Those who believe in the ancient Jewish heresy called “Chiliasm” or “Millennialism” promote it. It is not Biblical.

Millennialism has too many forms to cover in this column. It speaks about the end when Jesus returns to earth and teaches Jesus will establish an earthly kingdom lasting 1,000 years. Christians will reign with Him, after which they will go to heaven. It is supposed to come from *Revelation 20: 1-7*. Reading the verses carefully, we learn they do not speak of where or when Jesus rules. They do not speak of Christians ruling on earth at all.

Pre-Millennialism is a variation that proposes a time of tribulation preceding this kingdom. And here comes the rapture. Two centuries ago, the rapture was first imagined. It is the idea that God will take His people from this world sparing them this tribulation. It gives hope to those wanting relief from this world’s problems.

God teaches Jesus ascended to His right hand to rule heaven and earth (Ephesians 1:20-22). On Pentecost, Peter preached on Joel, who prophesied about the end times. Peter proclaimed Pentecost as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophesy. *“But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be, God declares...”* (Acts 2: 16-17). The end times began on Pentecost. Now the church endures tribulations in this world. God does not spare us. *“When they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22).

In the lifetime of this writer, non-Lutherans have expended great effort to publicize the rapture. *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey was a best seller in the ’70s. Tim Lahaye and Jerry B. Jenkins wrote a series of best selling books as the last millennium ended, which sired a series of motion pictures depicting the rapture. A popular radio preacher, Harold Camping, went a step further and predicted the actual date. It came and went. Camping recalculated. His last prediction was October 21, 2011. Movies continue to be produced.

A Harvard historian estimated that between 30-40 percent of Americans believe these things. They are regularly taught in many protestant churches. Christians use the promise of the rapture to inspire evangelism by frightening the lost as well as lukewarm Christians to embrace Jesus.

One might speculate that rapture-believing Christians eagerly anticipate relief from worldly problems. Believing in a tribulation even greater than that which the historic Church endured, there is comfort in the hope that we might be taken from it. Also, it would be nice to have physical proof of what we have believed all along. If a mass of believers were miraculously removed from this world, leaving others in the lurch, it would seem to be a great demonstration of the power of Jesus.

We believe in the resurrection of the body and life in the world to come. Jesus conquered Satan, sin and death. He earned for each of us eternal life in heaven (John 14). God has promised to take care of us while we live in this world of woe.

Sin will continue making life difficult. We will endure tribulations. But we live in the sure and certain hope that we have died with Jesus and will rise to eternal life. We do not let the false hope of a Rapture replace the certainty of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.



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*the Gospel* according to  
**ISAIAH**

**PART 1: ISAIAH PREACHES LAW AND GOSPEL (ISAIAH 1 & 40)**

*There are two main teachings in the Bible: Law and Gospel.  
The Law is that Word of God which shows us our sins.  
The Gospel is that Word of God which shows us our Savior.*

.....

**E**very Christian pastor is called to preach the Word of God by correctly preaching Law and Gospel, *rightly dividing the word of truth* (2 Timothy 2:15). Pastors do not preach the Law because they love to go negative and make people feel badly. Preaching the Law is done to prepare the sinner to receive the Gospel and be comforted by it.

This is what the book of Isaiah is about. All the prophets were preachers. The prophet was sent by God to speak the Word of the Lord. The Word of the Lord came to each prophet and he spoke that Word of God. Instead of “the word of the Lord came to Isaiah,” it is: “the word of the Lord that Isaiah saw...” Even though Isaiah lived 700 years before Christ, he was allowed to see what Christ did as a completed work. In Isaiah, you see Christ.

*...Even though Isaiah lived 700 years before Christ, he was allowed to see what Christ did as a completed work. In Isaiah, you see Christ.*

The book of Isaiah is divided into two parts. Chapters 1-39 are fairly chronological, the preaching responding to historical events. Chapters 40-66 are known as “the Book of Comfort,” containing all the beautiful pictures of Christ. We will look briefly at the first chapter in each part.

## ISAIAH 1:1-18

> (Read the entire section from your Bible.)

In verse 2, Isaiah tells what the Lord has said to him: “*I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me.*” Starting in verse 4, the prophet preaches the Law. He calls God’s people a “sinful nation,” no better than the heathen unbelievers. He says they are “*laden*” — loaded down — “*with iniquity.*” Also: “*They have forsaken the Lord.*”

In verses 5-15, Isaiah the preacher describes how they really look to God because of their sins (having unbandaged, open wounds and sores — hideous!); warns them what is coming in the future because of their sins (“*your cities burned with fire ... your land desolate*” — punishment!); and declares how they have made God’s holy place unholy. Instead of being made clean by the holy blood of true sacrifices, “*your hands are full of blood*” (verse 15).

This is the preaching of the Law: It shows what you really look like as a sinner. How do you feel when your pastor preaches this to you? Do you bristle? Do you want to make excuses? Remember, like Isaiah, he is describing how your sins make you look to God. But it is for your good — so that good will result. Isaiah is a pastoral preacher. He says in verse 5: “*Why should you be stricken again?*” This purpose is to soften a prideful heart.

Then Isaiah preaches the Gospel, giving these words of the Lord in verses 16-18: “*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean... Come now, and let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*”

This is the Gospel: God makes you pure, white, and clean in His eyes. The language of the Gospel is the language of promise: what “you shall be,” by God’s doing alone! Isaiah is allowed to see the pure whiteness of God’s people. This is what God says to you. This is the Gospel your pastor loves to preach to you. No sin, only holiness. God promises to bandage your sin-wounds, wash clean your blood-guilty hands, heal you completely. How? You know: by the blood of Jesus. “*They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Revelation 7:14).



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## ISAIAH 40:1-11

> (Read the entire section from your Bible.)

Because this begins the “Book of Comfort,” the sins are mentioned in passing. The preacher is dealing with troubled sinners.

Isaiah speaks of “her warfare... her iniquity” in verse 2, which reminds you of how you lack peace with God because of your sin. He speaks of the “rough and crooked places” in verse 4, which reminds you that your sins bring all sorts of difficult consequences. He says in verses 6-8 that “all flesh is grass,” reminding us: the wages of sin is death.

But the first words in the Book of Comfort are: “‘*Comfort, yes, comfort My people,*’ says your God.” After all the sins, He says He is still “*your God.*” The word He speaks is “comfort.” This means “cause to breathe again.” He is granting you relief — from what? Sin and ALL its consequences. He has redeemed you from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

The Gospel is the forgiveness of sins: “*Her [your] iniquity is pardoned!*”

What about each little sin? Is there one that is unforgiven? “*She has received from the Lord’s hand DOUBLE [the forgiveness] for ALL her [your] sins.*” The forgiveness is overflowing!

He says in verse 4 that the crooked places will be straight and the rough places will be smooth. How? He makes them straight and smooth. He does this to you by forgiving your sins.

Finally, He is the Shepherd (verse 11) who takes the tiny lambs and the ewes who are nursing their young — all who cannot keep up or walk on their own, the weak and the helpless, all who do not have the reason or strength to come to Him, believe in Him, or stay with Him — and He carries them. He carries you! His grace carries you all the way.

*I, a sinner, come to Thee  
With a penitent confession.  
Savior, mercy show to me;  
Grant for all my sins remission.  
Let these words my soul relieve —  
‘Jesus sinners doth receive’.*

*O how blest it is to know,  
Were as scarlet my transgression,  
It shall be as white as snow  
By Thy blood and bitter Passion,  
For these words I now believe —  
‘Jesus sinners doth receive’.*

**(ELH 426 v. 5, 6)**

NEXT ARTICLE (PART 2) IN THE SERIES: ISAIAH’S DIVINE CALL

# GOD'S GOODNESS

## *in Christian Marriage*

**"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord....  
Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5:22 & 25).**

**L**ike most congregations, mine requires that couples who wish to get married go through a course of pre-marital counseling. During this time, we talk about mundane topics, like how a couple's lives will change as they begin living with each other and how to resolve issues, and of course we talk about spiritual topics, like what God has to say about marriage. The above passage from Ephesians always shows up in our conversations, and yet when it does, it is not as controversial or provocative as you might think. After all, the couple sitting across from me is a couple very much in the emotional glow of love. The bride-to-be finds it easy to say she will be happy to see her husband as the head of the home and submit herself to his decisions, and the husband-to-be cannot think he will do anything but love his wife more than anyone else and put her needs and desires above his own.

Invariably, the emotional glow ebbs. Each wife finds that her husband is not always worthy of her respect, and each husband finds his wife is not always worthy of his love. Invariably each husband and wife begin to wonder if this marriage is worth the energy they are putting into it. Because, after all, what am I getting out of it?

Questions like this are one of the reasons St. Paul wrote this section of Ephesians, reminding us that marriage is not about me feeling the tingly glow of romance or how much this other person can do for me, but about me serving my spouse. When I condition my love for my wife on how lovable she is, or the respect for my husband on how kind he is to me, then my view of marriage is no better than that of the world, which looks upon marriage as a contract that one is free to break when it no longer benefits them.

God created marriage as a place where, having fallen in love with someone, we then promise always "to love and to cherish until death parts us". In this way, we mirror the love that Jesus shows to us, who, even though we are undeserving, willingly submitted Himself to His Father's will and gave His life as sacrifice for our sins. This includes the times when we do not love and honor our spouse. Not even death parts us from Jesus, who shows His love and faithfulness now and in eternity.

In his Genesis commentary, Luther wrote that when God says, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:16), we hear the prohibition, but Adam heard an opportunity. He did not hear a restrictive command or God infringing on his liberty, but the opportunity to demonstrate his love for God by doing (or not doing) this thing God had asked of him.

*St. Paul wrote this section of Ephesians, reminding us that marriage is not about me feeling the tingly glow of romance or how much this other person can do for me, but about me serving my spouse.*

This tends to be our difficulty with *Ephesians 5:22-33*. Because of our sin, we hear restrictions and accusations. Every wife struggles at times with the command to submit to her husband's authority, and every husband struggles at times to show love to his wife. Our sin makes these behaviors unnatural to us, and so it is natural that when it comes to marriage, we would rather hear a nice reading of *1 Corinthians 13* and be allowed to meditate upon love as a feeling or concept rather than hear how it actually gets put into practice and thereby hear how we fall short. But St. Paul would remind us that what you have here is more than the mirror of God's Law. You have a proclamation of His love. *Ephesians 5* tells us how the joining of husband and wife is a demonstration of God's providence, giving us someone to be our partner and supporter in life. It is our opportunity to show our love for God by serving and loving the spouse He has given us. And most importantly, we hear God declare to us how He has loved us as His Bride, cleansing us of our sins even against our spouse.



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# GOD'S GOODNESS

## in Granting Children

**A** wonderful Christian wife and mother with five children went to her doctor because she was expecting their sixth child. Surprisingly she received anger from the doctor and staff as if being pregnant again was a curse to her and the whole world! At a time when her family was very thankful to the Lord, they were also shocked at the response of the world around them. As the years went on, strangers who saw her in public with all her children would sometimes ask her with disgust, "Are they all yours?"

When the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, met for the first time after many years of estrangement, Esau was amazed at the size of Jacob's family. We read: "And when Esau raised his eyes and saw the women and children, he said: Who are these with you? Jacob said: The children whom God has graciously given your servant" (Genesis 33:5). Large families may be a mystery to the world but not to the Lord and the Christian. They are graciously given gifts from God.

Parenting certainly has its trials. Your toddler may throw a tantrum. A teen may be rebellious. Grown children may be a dishonor to their aged parents. Our sinful nature will want us to view children as the world often does: as a curse — something we endure. Our selfish thinking may only look upon our children as a drain on our resources and time. They bring to us trials and even times of great sadness. Sin has come to our children as well as to us. Yet children are never a curse.

In fact, from our Lord we learn that children are always a blessing. Psalm 127 says: "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:3-5).

The eternal Son of God was sent by His Father to be a baby and child — to be man. Jesus was the perfect child. Baptized into Christ, our children are given new birth, forgiveness of sins and a new life. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children..." (Acts 2:38-39). Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16).

A parent will have those dark days when the family seems to be falling apart: when parenting gets tough, when children sin, and when we parents sin, too. And then we repent. We repent of sin and Christ is right there with perfect forgiveness. Who would have thought that Jacob and Esau would have such a wonderful meeting as they did in Genesis 33? By God's grace in Christ there is divine reconciliation.

Our children are always a blessing from God. Even as teens and adults, they are still God's gracious gifts. Look how the adult Christ cares for, loves, and honors His dear mother as He dies for the sins of the world. Jesus says: "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26-27).

As you look into your children's eyes, as you bring them to Jesus, as you watch them grow into teens and adults, you can know from God's Word that they are always God's gracious and giving hand open toward you.

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# GOD'S GOODNESS in Granting Old Age

*"If you want to attract families and young people into your church, you should \_\_\_\_\_. Families and young people are the type of people you want to bring into the church." You've probably heard a comment like this before with one of many catchy outreach or worship ideas in the blank. Perhaps you even have made this comment to your pastor or to a worship or outreach committee.*

**A**re families and young people the type of people we want in our churches? Certainly we want families in our churches along with all the blessings and challenges that a family brings to a church. Even the occasional interruption of laughter or crying during a sermon is a blessing, not a curse.

However, does this mean we want only the young? Does this mean we believe the elderly somehow are holding us back? Does this mean for every new member couple over 65 we need to make sure we also receive into the congregation a couple in their 30s with 2 kids?

When this becomes our mindset, we become guilty of two errors. We have failed to recognize the blessings God desires to provide through the elderly and we have failed to recognize the blessings God desires to provide to the elderly.

Yes, the elderly are great blessings to a congregation. They serve as role models both by example and by offering advice and guidance to the young (Titus 2:2-5). Some have been blessed with great material blessings and are able to help the congregation through generous giving. All, even shut-ins, even those confined to their beds, are able to participate in the work of building up the church through their prayers. God blesses the church through the elderly.

And yes, the elderly still have much to gain in this life. Every day we have on earth is an opportunity to grow in the Word of God. How blessed are the elderly who remain able to attend worship regularly! How blessed are the elderly who are confined to their homes, but for whom the Lord has provided faithful pastors to visit them regularly with Word and Sacrament!

How blessed are the elderly who have doctors, nurses, and loved ones caring for them. We may tend not to think of this care as a blessing because we would prefer not to need it. We value our independence. We desire to be young and free again.

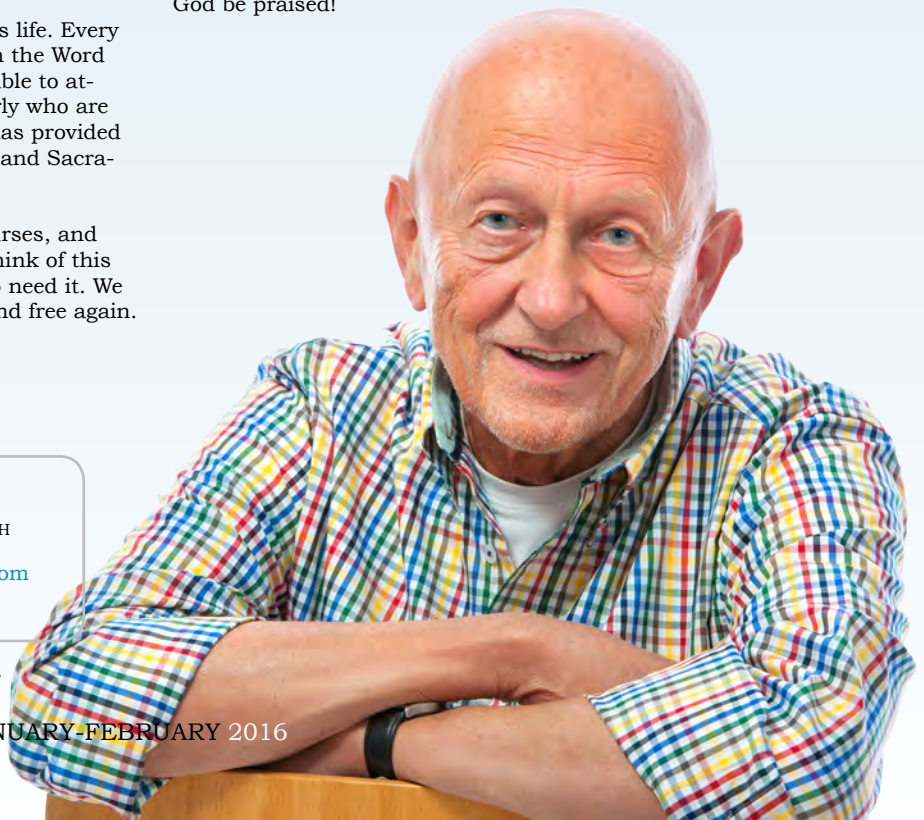


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Our Savior would, in fact, have us be like children again (Matthew 18:3). However, the child-like virtue Jesus encourages here is not youth or independence (small children are anything but independent). On the contrary, Jesus extols child-like faith, neediness, the lack of pride, the joy of receiving the care and compassion of others. As we grow old, we do well not only to recognize where we may still be of service to others, but also to recognize where we are in need of assistance and to accept that assistance as a blessing from God.

Most pastors have heard shut-in members say, "Why am I still alive? Why doesn't God just take me to heaven?" The reality is that so long as we remain in this world, God still has blessings to provide to us through others and God still has blessings to provide to others through us. In the words of St. Paul, "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, ESV). This is an excellent reminder for young and old alike. Just as the young should not long for death before God chooses to call them home, so the old should not long for death before the appointed time. Just as the old should not fear physical death and desire to live forever on earth, so the young should not be unwilling to endure physical death and to enter into eternal life when God wills it.

Young or old, rich or poor, healthy or infirm, every day we spend on earth is a day filled with blessings from the Lord. God be praised!



# Accidentally LUTHERAN LYRICS

WHEN A POPULAR ARTIST OR SONGWRITER, PROBABLY BY PURE ACCIDENT, GIVES EXPRESSION TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN KEEPING WITH LUTHERAN CONFESSION.

**SONG: "LOSING MY RELIGION"**

**ARTIST: R.E.M.**

**YEAR: 1991**

: "That's me in the corner.  
 : That's me in the spotlight -  
 : LOSING MY RELIGION -  
 : Trying to keep up with you  
 : But I don't know if I can do it."

There was once a very religious young man. He sought out Jesus and called him "good teacher". He very respectfully and sincerely wanted to learn from Jesus what good thing(s) must be done to ensure eternal life — to ensure heaven.

Jesus cared very much for this man, too. So he asked him what he knew about what "good" means... Turned out, the religious man didn't know much at all about what "good" was. So Jesus gave him the tools to know. He gave him God's demands of holiness (the 10 Commandments) one table at a time. The religious man heard all the demands about being "good to our neighbor" and he still felt pretty "good" about himself — like he was keeping up with the "good-standard" — like he was managing the spotlight pretty well.

Then Jesus loved him so much that He helped the young man lose his religion. Jesus gave him the law of "love God above all things" — even all his wealth and possessions. The man left Jesus very sad — not because he lost all his wealth, though (He seems to have kept it!). He was sad because Jesus' words had just stripped him of his religion — getting right with God by good deeds done.

We don't know if this wealthy young man ever came to faith. What we do know is the loss he sustained that day is the best of all losses. It's the loss that must precede good religion — THE religion that saves. This is the loss of any goodness or righteousness before God made by our own hearts, hands, or minds. Sometimes it's us in the corner trying to be "sorry enough" to earn God's favor. Other times we're standing in the spotlight trying to get our pat-on-the-back from God's proud hand. Either way, it's us trying to "keep up" with God's law. Either way we're brought to the cold, hard truth that there's no way we can do it. That's us ready for God's gracious subtraction — the losing of OUR religion.

In Holy Baptism, God graciously loses our religion in the flood. Washed away is our native-born self-righteousness. Supplied in its place is His religion — JESUS, our perfectly clean conscience before Him. In confession and absolution, this best of all losses is fast at work: our sins with all their guilt are taken from our lips in confession. God puts them away, forgiving them fully and freely for Jesus' sake. In Holy Communion we approach God's altar as beggars. Singing the Sanctus (singing of the holiness and glory of God) finds us stripped of any notion of righteousness we might be bringing to that altar. And there with our religion lost, God's hand doesn't strike. It serves. It supplies His Son's body given for you; His Son's blood shed for you. God gives the religion that saves — the forgiveness of sins.

Losing OUR Religion... Yes, we are.  
 Yes, indeed! And happily so.

*"...there is no quality in my heart at all,  
 call it either faith or charity;  
 but instead of these  
 I set Christ Himself before me,  
 and I say,  
 'There is my righteousness.'"*

- MARTIN LUTHER



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# TWO KINGDOMS

**O**ne of the many benefits of being a member of an ELS congregation is the chance to meet and become friends with people you might otherwise have never met. I remember that growing up in our Synod's Cape Cod, MA parish, there weren't many kids my age. Of course I knew, in sort of a theoretical way, that there really were other Lutheran teenagers out there. It's just that I hadn't seen too many of them with my own eyes.



In your blest body let me be / E'en as the branch is in the tree / Thy life my life supplying.  
P. NICOLAI



When I was confirmed and was able to attend the LYA convention, it was as if my eyes were opened to a whole new world. Before me, no longer only in theory but in flesh and blood, were living, breathing, LUTHERANS; people my age who believed the same things I believed. Now that I'm serving as the pastor of yet another far-out ELS parish, I can't encourage the young people in my congregation enough to also attend the LYA conventions. If nothing else, it reminds them that they aren't alone. Even if, in their everyday lives, they are surrounded by people who have a completely different faith and worldview, there really are other teens out there who believe and worship God just like they do.

An important part of the LYA convention is fellowship, but it's much more than that. There are also opportunities for worship and study, both of which are centered on a specific theme every year. The theme for 2016's convention is the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. In this country, a Christian's understanding of the Two Kingdoms is often equated with the concept of the separation of Church and State. And while the two definitely have a relationship, they are certainly *not* the same.

The kingdom of the left (the world) and the kingdom of the right (the Church) have been instituted by God for different purposes, but they have both been instituted by God. These kingdoms are ruled differently, but again, the same Triune God rules both the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of the Church. In the world, God rules through the law and the threat of punishment if one breaks the law. In the Church, God rules by the Gospel, and all the blessings we are promised through faith in Christ. In the world, God has given power to our governing authorities, who should mirror God's will in how they rule, but often don't. In the Church, Christ is our king, and His will in the Word of God is the only standard for the Christian faith and life. Finally, in the kingdom of the world, God does not promise any eternal blessings. You may live now in peace, but eventually you will die. But in the kingdom of the Church, God promises every eternal blessing. Along with the forgiveness of sins now, God has promised those who are His through faith, eternal life in heaven.

As Christians, we are constantly living in both of these kingdoms. We don't cease being people who live in this world when we are in worship, nor do we cease being God's people, through whom He "salts the earth," in our everyday lives. And this dual existence is not always easy to navigate. This is why it is important to study what it means to live in these two kingdoms. Hopefully, you and/or your teenager will be able to attend the youth convention this summer. If you do, you won't just have a good time (and you will!). Through the study and reception of God's Word, you will be equipped to live as God would have you live in His two kingdoms.

***In this country, a Christians understanding of the Two Kingdoms is often equated with the concept of the separation of Church and State. And while the two definitely have a relationship, they are certainly not the same.***



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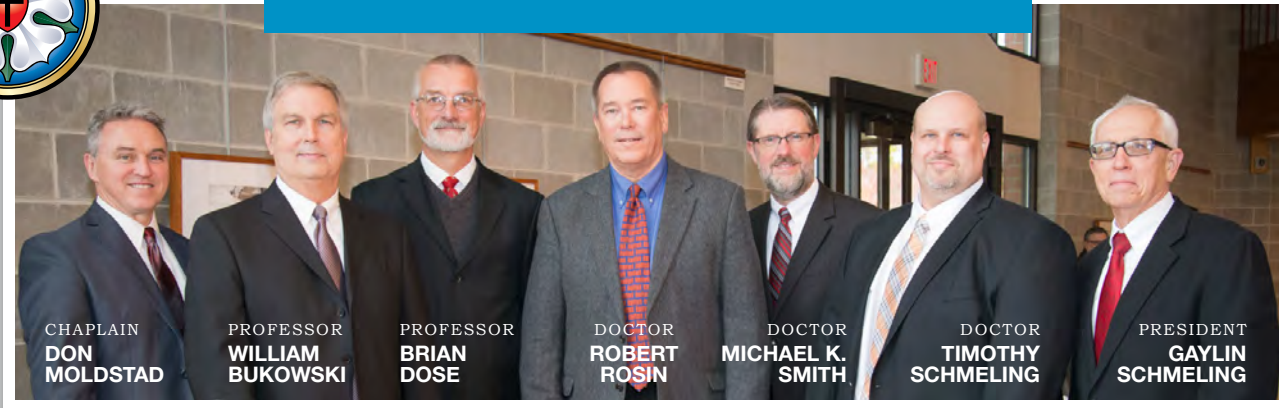
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PORTRAIT OF MARTIN LUTHER  
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This year there were three presenters. The first lecture was given by **Prof. William Bukowski** of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. Prof. Bukowski teaches painting, drawing, and art history and serves as exhibition coordinator of Bethany's Fine Arts gallery. He is also a founding member of the Christ in Media Institute. He received his M.A. and M.F.A. at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and studied fresco at the Academy Caerite in Ceri, Italy. Prof. Bukowski painted the Life of Christ altarpiece in Trinity Chapel at Bethany in 1996 and the

research interest areas include the connection of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation, the intersection of Christianity and culture, and theological educational curriculum in mission contexts. He is the author of *Reformers, The Preacher, and Skepticism: Luther, Brenz, Melancthon, and Ecclesiastes*; the editor and translator of Luther's comments on each of the biblical books for the *Concordia Reference Bible*; and the editor and author of *A Cup of Cold Water: A Look at Biblical Charity*. He has also contributed essays and translations for numerous scholarly books. In addition, he has written articles and book reviews in many distinguished and popular journals. From 1997 to 2013, Dr. Rosin served as the director of the Concordia Seminary's Center for Reformation Research. He has been an officer and board member of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, the Society for Reformation Research, and the American Friends of the Herzog August Bibliothek. Beginning in 1983, he has been a guest instructor or lecturer in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Korea, Japan, China, Brazil, Ethiopia, Croatia, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, England, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan. Dr. Rosin's wife, Laine, is a senior copy editor at Concordia Publishing House.

Creation Fresco in Meyer Hall of Science and Mathematics in 2002. He has also painted numerous works of art for Lutheran sanctuaries. His paintings are in many public and private collections throughout the Midwest, including Minneapolis Children's Hospital, the Madison Art Center, Fairview Hospitals, and Pathstone Living in Mankato. He has participated in more than 180 art exhibitions across the country. Prof. Bukowski has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Holy Land, and Egypt. He has led instructional group travel to Italy and New York City for Bethany students over 35 times. Bill and his wife Sherri have been married for 39 years. They have three children, all Bethany graduates, and two grandchildren.

The third lecture was given by **Prof. Brian Dose** of Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Prof. Dose has served as an English professor for 25 years. He began teaching at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1990 after serving as a pastor in Corpus Christi, Texas, and Detroit, Michigan. In 1995, he moved with the pastor-training college to Martin Luther College in New Ulm. In addition to his pastor training at Northwestern and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Dose has pursued graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin — Milwaukee (M.A. in English) and a number of other institutions, including Wroxton College in Oxfordshire, England. He presently teaches general education English courses in writing and literature and classes in older British literature courses—Chaucer through Wordsworth—as well as Modern World Literature. Prof. Dose grew up in Wabasha, Minnesota. He and his wife, Donna, have been blessed with seven children, two of whom are still in high school. As both a professor and Christian father, he believes he has two of the greatest calls possible. He serves by combining a love for words with a devotion to the Word, and he has had the joy of reading to his children nearly every night literature both inspiring and inspired.

The second presenter was **Dr. Robert Rosin**. Dr. Rosin is a professor of historical theology and the Eugene E. and Nell S. Fincke Graduate Professor of Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. A faculty member since 1981, he served as editor of Concordia Seminary Publications (1995–2005) and chair of the department of historical theology (1995–2004). He received his Doctor of Philosophy and Master of Arts from Stanford University (1986, 1977); M. Div. from Concordia Seminary (1976); and Bachelor of Arts from Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Illinois (1972). Dr. Rosin's



ANNIVERSARIES



**NEW LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
SEBRING, FL

On Sunday, December 6, 2015, New Life Lutheran Church of Sebring, FL, celebrated its 25th anniversary. In a special afternoon service, Rev. Joel Willitz, the founding pastor of New Life, preached on 1 Thessalonians 3:7-13 with the theme “Lord, clear the way.” Following the service, the members of the congregation served a ham dinner to all who attended.

The theme of the lectures was *Lutheranism and the Arts*. The first lecture, given by Prof. Bukowski, was entitled *Lutheranism and the Visual Arts*. Dr. Rosin presented the second lecture, *Lutheranism and History*. The third lecture, given by Prof. Dose was entitled *Lutheranism and Literature*.

The Reformation Lectures were a study of Lutheranism’s relationship to the arts. The lectures explained the influence of Lutheranism on the visual arts, history, and literature. Lutheranism was open to the visual arts, beautifying our worship in contradistinction to the whitewashed churches of the Reformed; it has given direction to the study of history as seen in the example of the *Magdeburg Centuries*; and it has affected our literature. Lutheranism has touched every aspect of our Christian vocation.

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

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> (continued from page 4)

*Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,  
With exaltation springing,  
And with united heart and voice  
And holy rapture singing,  
Proclaim the Wonders God hath done,  
How His right arm the vict'ry won;  
Right dearly it hath cost Him.*

**(ELH 378)**

The ten-verse hymn beautifully expounds the way of salvation, stressing God’s mercy in sending his Son for us sinners. The deep but clear theology of this hymn led a prominent early Lutheran educator to make the remark, “I do not doubt that through this one hymn of Luther many hundreds of Christians have been brought to the true faith.”

The “Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done” offering was approved by our synod in 2014. Funds gathered will be used by our Board for Home Outreach to start new home missions, and also for the board to work with our seminary “in identifying and placing suitable candidates into the pastoral ministry among our missions.”

Will you, in advance, prayerfully consider participating in the offering with a generous gift? More information will be coming soon.

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## CONCEIVED FOR THIS: **MARCH 25, 2016**

**M**arch 25th is the traditional date for Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Luke 1:31). Mary believed these words and the Christ was conceived in her by the Holy Spirit.

But why was March 25th chosen as the day for this festival? Some cite an old Jewish tradition which assumed that the great patriarchs and prophets died on the same calendar day they were conceived. If it were true that Jesus died on March 25th as some early Christian writers suggested, then it was reasonable to think that Jesus might have also been conceived on that date. While the dates of His conception, birth, and death cannot be absolutely verified, the Western Church has settled on March 25th for Jesus' incarnation and subsequently December 25th for His birth.

The date of Jesus' death is a movable day on the church calendar, which means that Good Friday can fall anywhere from the end of March to the end of April. Only on rare occasions does Good Friday fall on March 25th. It happened just three times in the 20th century (1910, 1921, 1932), and it happens only twice in the 21st century (2005, 2016). After this year, the convergence of these special days will not happen again until 2157.

What a wonderful opportunity we have in 2016 to celebrate these holy days! Good Friday answers the why of the Incarnation: the Son of God took on flesh to save sinners by His death. We are not the first to mark this significant event. The English poet John Donne (1572-1631) wrote the poem "Upon the Annunciation and Passion," which converged in his lifetime in 1608. These couplets capture some of the themes in Donne's poem:

*Today we feast, for God has come to save;  
Today we fast, for sin sent Him to cross and grave.*

*Today the Christ by Spirit was conceived;  
Today the spirit of His Son did God receive.*

*Today was God made flesh in Mary's womb;  
Today was Jesus laid to rest in Joseph's tomb.*

*Today was Virgin found to be with Child;  
Today were God and man forever reconciled.*

*Today came Christ to crush the serpent's head;  
Today for your salvation Jesus gladly bled.*

The Worship Committee of the ELS has produced a special service to mark this occasion. It can be found on the els.org website. The combined themes of Christ's incarnation and crucifixion on March 25, 2016, make this a particularly good Good Friday.



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