

# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



## POST-CHRISTMAS QUESTIONS

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INSTAGRAMMABLE  
LITURGY

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ANNOUNCING: THE FIRST ANNUAL  
CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS  
CONFERENCE

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IT IS WRITTEN:



*"And the light shines in the darkness..." (John 1:5)*

# Another Year of God's Grace

***Dear Members and Friends of our ELS:***

*“OK, now you can open your eyes!”*

A sense of excitement prevails. What will be the big “reveal?” The mood is that of celebration – a birthday, a graduation, a party held in one’s honor.

How different was the mood for a man named Gehazi. Surrounded by an army of Arameans, the servant of Elisha was terrified for the welfare of Israel and for his own life and that of the prophet. Horses and chariots encircled the city of Dothan. Far from celebration, here was total devastation! “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked his master.

Elisha exuded calm assurance. Prayerfully, the prophet asked the Lord to open Gehazi’s eyes. God gave him the sight of a lifetime. *“Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha”* (2 Kings 6:17). God’s holy angels, the hosts of heaven who were sent as protectors, became visible. No wonder Elisha exclaimed, *“Those who are with us are more than those who are with them”* (2 Kings 6:16). What a scene for the weary and worried eyes of Gehazi to behold!

Entering another year of God’s grace no doubt comes with at least a little celebratory hoopla. Yet the parties, promises, and resolutions fade about as fast as seasons change. Threatening issues peek through on the horizon. Is guilt hanging on from the previous 365 calendar squares and

accumulating clouds for the next round? Are we tested with health concerns? Worry about finances can easily suffocate our optimism. Then, there are bigger issues – the rise of nukes in the hands of unpredictable world leaders; unrest among many who feel disadvantaged; the proliferation of world religions countering the Christian faith; the dominance of secular humanism and the ascendance of atheism in the prestigious halls of academia.

As with Gehazi, we can become blind to the Lord’s reality and feel so trapped by our own sin-laden surroundings and the devil-driven armies eager to besiege us. But the Lord would have us, as his redeemed children through faith in the Savior Jesus, open our eyes! *“Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”* God daily sends his angels to watch over us (Hebrews 1:14).

Even more assuring than an eye-opening sight of an army of angels, ringing us day in and day out, is the *blessed promise* of God’s great caring love that never fades. *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:31, 32). Endless optimism is ours through the reconciling work of Christ!

REVEREND  
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# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 2018

Trinity Lutheran Church, Brewster, MA

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# The Anniversaries Continue...



Our anniversary year continues as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod observes the dual anniversaries of the 500th anniversary of the start of the Lutheran Reformation and the 100th anniversary of the reorganization of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

These events are interrelated. The centennial anniversary of the reorganization of the synod is a continuation of the quincentennial anniversary of the Reformation. Both events find their impetus in the Biblical teaching of salvation by grace alone. Five hundred years ago, in 1517, Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This led to the Lutheran Reformation, which centered on the truth that God's grace is given to us in Jesus Christ. One hundred years ago, in 1918, nearly two hundred people gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church near Lake Mills, Iowa, to reorganize the Norwegian Synod (today the Evangelical Lutheran Synod) and maintain the teaching that salvation is given completely by God's grace in Jesus Christ "without any merit or worthiness in me."

Our anniversary year began at the 2017 synod convention and will continue through the 2018 synod convention with a concluding event on October 14, 2018.

You can **EXPERIENCE** the synod's centennial:

**Read** the centennial history book, *Proclaim His Wonders*, which is available from the BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE BOOKSTORE 700 Luther Drive, Mankato, MN 56001 (507) 344-7777 or ask your pastor about a copy.

**Travel** to Lime Creek Lutheran Church (near Lake Mills, Iowa) for the ELS Historical Society meeting on Saturday, June 16. We hope all pastors and delegates will make special efforts to come to the synod convention early and attend this event.

**Sing** at the June 17 Synod Sunday Service (at Bethany Lutheran College) and be part of the Choral Union Choir.

**Attend** the synod convention, which will meet Sunday, June 17, through Thursday, June 21, and hear the convention essay, *Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done: Give Thanks to His Name*.

**See** a history video of the synod, which will be premiered during the synod convention and made available to congregations.

**Celebrate** the anniversary at a Centennial Program and Reception on Tuesday, June 19, at 5:00 pm in Trinity Chapel (at Bethany Lutheran College).

**Study** the synod's doctrinal heritage with the Bible study *Proclaiming God's Truth*.

**Plan** for a centennial observation in your own congregation on Sunday, October 14, which was known as "Founders' Day" in the old Norwegian Synod.

Together, may we give thanks to God and proclaim the wonders God has done!

REVEREND  
**CRAIG A. FERKENSTAD**  
CHAIRMAN  
CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

## **A NOTE FROM THE ANNIVERSARY OFFERING COMMITTEE:**

*Our home missions work is an integral part of our ELS. Be sure to support the Anniversary Offering by giving generously.*

Visit [els.org/offering](http://els.org/offering) to learn more and support our students and missions online.

SEND YOUR GIFT TO:

**ELS Anniversary Offering**  
6 Browns Ct.  
Mankato, MN 56001

Q

## QUESTION:

***I feel alone when tragedies strike. Does God leave me?***

A

## ANSWER:

The obvious answer is a resounding “no.” Jesus promised, “*Lo I am with you always even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

The answer doesn’t change the feeling. When the storms of life devastate us, even Christian hearts and minds can be overwhelmed. We know we always have hope and help from God, though at times we may feel alone. With your home falling in pieces around you, despair shouts helpless thoughts into our minds and our hearts sink and ache.

This pastor recently experienced such a struggle. Through the storm, he and his wife did what they could to stay safe and protect as much of their home as they could. When the sun came up, his house was a terrible mess. The wind continued to howl. He wondered what he would do, what he could do. The night had been filled with prayer, but God’s answers were hard. How quickly the question invades our hearts: “Where is God?”

And God appeared not like He did on Christmas when He was incarnate to live, die, and rise to redeem the world of sinners. God appeared, not like He does when He comes to us with His love and grace through the preaching of His word and administration of the Holy Sacraments. There He comes to us to create and sustain faith in our hearts whereby we receive the salvation He earned for us. God appeared this time when a neighbor came over and offered assistance. He was with us when friends and fellow believers climbed the roof to cover the damage with tarps to keep future storms out. He was there when a friend and contractor and others went to work almost immediately repairing the damage. Unseen people from all over the country traveled to

Florida to work on the recovery so that electricity could be restored, so that water, food, and gas would be available for those who were struggling because of the storm. Unseen people, some known and most unknown, provided financial assistance. The insurance company, for a profit, went to work to settle claims to pay for the damage. The government was ready with help through F.E.M.A. Other organizations joined the work, all of whom were sent by God. God hid in them to be our very present help in trouble.

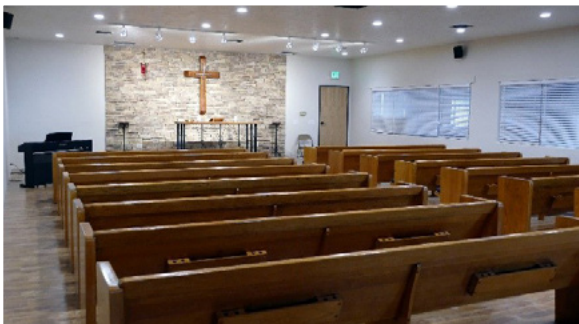
Feelings can be overwhelming. Feelings are difficult to ignore. God is even more difficult to ignore. By faith, we know His promises to take care of us in all things. In the past, He has proven Himself. He rescued us all from sin and death, promising us the forgiveness of all our sins and life everlasting through His Son, our Savior. In past struggles, He saw us through. By faith, we see Him hiding in every worker, friend, neighbor, and fellow Christian as they do the mundane things of life to earn a living. They are working. We are working. God is working through our labors to care for His people and all people. Thanks to all who helped us in Florida as well as our fellow citizens in Texas and Puerto Rico. Thanks be to God.

REVEREND  
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# Your Offerings at Work in Home Missions:

## Anniversary Offering Update

About a year and a half ago, the ELS embarked on an exciting journey as we started gathering a special thank offering to help celebrate the 100 years of grace God has given us as a synod and the 500 years of grace God has given us as Lutherans. This special offering, “Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done,” has already provided many benefits for the home mission work of our synod. The proceeds from this offering will be used to: **(1)** start new home missions, **(2)** support the Vicar in Mission program, and **(3)** support cross-cultural mission projects. How are we doing thus far in supporting these goals?



Christ the King (Cristo Rey) Lutheran Church, Bell Gardens, CA

In Bell Gardens, California, Pastor Matt Behmer and **Christ the King (Cristo Rey) Lutheran Church** are hard at work reaching out to their primarily Hispanic community. Recently, the congregation, with the assistance of Kingdom Workers, remodeled their sanctuary, updating it and adding additional usable space. The congregation also helped the community celebrate the true meaning of Christmas with a traditional Christmas carnival, which included a posada. With the aid of the offerings received thus far, the Board for Home Outreach is able to support the outreach in Bell Gardens by helping to provide sufficient funds for Cristo Rey’s work.



Current students of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, MN

At **Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary**, eleven men are currently hard at work studying to be full-time servants in God’s kingdom. As part of their training, these men will need to serve vicarages after their three years in the classroom. Lord willing, some will be able to serve in mission settings. In recent years, two men served as Vicars in Mission: Rev. Joshua Mayer served at Redeeming Grace in Rogers, MN, and Rev. Daniel Ruiz served at Hope in Leander, TX. Part of the funding received through the special thank offering will be used to support vicars who serve in mission settings in the future.

While we have not started new mission congregations recently, two of our newer missions are being supported through the special thank offering.

In Leander, TX, Pastors Brad Kerkow and Daniel Ruiz serve **Hope Lutheran Church**. In early 2018, Hope will move into its new building. The construction of their new home has already generated much interest in the community.



Hope Lutheran Church, Leander, TX

In Weatherford/Hudson Oaks, TX, Pastor James Kassera serves **Divine Mercy Lutheran Church**. The congregation recently held an outreach event in a park, which featured a pumpkin giveaway and a mini-carnival. Your gifts to the anniversary thank offering are assisting both of these missions with the important work of spreading the gospel to their communities.



"Pumpkins in the Park" held by Divine Mercy Lutheran Church, Weatherford/Hudson Oaks, TX

Indeed, your gifts to the offering have been blessings to God's work thus far. But there is more work to be done! If you have been able to participate in the offering already, thank you, and prayerfully consider continuing to support mission work through the offering. If you haven't been able to participate yet, please consider doing so. The need is great and we as a synod have been given some marvelous opportunities for labor in the Lord's kingdom.

DOCTOR  
**MICHAEL K. SMITH**  
CHAIRMAN  
BOARD for HOME OUTREACH  
PROFESSOR of NEW TESTAMENT  
BETHANY LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# INSTAGRAMMABLE LITURGY

How the historic liturgy of the ELS can help modern worshipers.

Instagram is great. Short, sweet pictures or videos to scroll through, each grabbing our attention in a unique way. Sometimes our liturgy seems the exact opposite: not short and not really attention grabbing.

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Reorganization of our Synod, can something from our past, namely the liturgical history of our Synod, be helpful in this area? **I'd suggest it can.**

Backing up to the Reformation era, a man named Johannes Bugenhagen (who was Luther's pastor) was called to be the missionary to Scandinavia. As a musically gifted theologian, he developed an order of service for Lutheran churches that became the standard liturgy among northern European Lutheran churches. Rite I in our Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary is this Bugenhagen order.

The original constitution of the Old Synod on which the ELS was reorganized 1917 stated (and still states) that the official order of service for our Synod would be the Bugenhagen order of service. This didn't mean that all churches must use it, but that this would be the preferred order of service. This was at a time when Pietism was running rampant among Lutheran churches in America. With regards to the service, Pietism essentially believed that worship was something you do to please God, rather than primarily being something God does for you.

Bugenhagen's service had the proper emphasis of God serving us, so it became important for ELS churches to use this order of service in order to fight together the ideas of Pietism.

Today the teachings and practices of Pietism are still around, which is perhaps reason enough for using this liturgy. In addition, our order of service can actually help us get more out of the service. It's not that we are somehow less able to intake the spoken word than people 10, 20, or 100 years ago, but rather that our culture has programmed us to look for the wrong things.

American Christianity tends to treat the service as a place for spiritual selfies, with the focus on your worship to God, your self-improvement, and your

**THE CHIEF HYMN** (sometimes called the "hymn of the day") is a product of the Lutheran reformation. Luther himself introduced this particular part of the service in order to give the congregation a chance to confess to each other in song not just the theme of the sermon, but the theme of the day. For this reason, most of these hymns are usually from the Lutheran tradition, and are essentially mini-sermons sung by the congregation, tying together all the lessons and themes heard so far.

**THE INTROIT** (Latin for "entrance") is usually a Psalm with another verse (antiphon) appropriate for the day. The Introit is the first musical part of the service (sometimes replaced with a hymn). It's very short, just a few sentences. Each Introit sets the stage for the rest of the service. It's a way to focus attention on what the theme is.

## WORD



## PREPARATION

OPENING PRAYER

INTROIT

CONFESSION

KYRIE

ABSOLUTION

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

SALUTATION & COLLECT

OLD TESTAMENT

PSALM

GOSPEL

CREED

CHIEF HYMN

SERMON

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

BENEDICTION



personal likes and dislikes especially with regard to music styles. It's Pietism rehashed.

The Bugenhagen service not only combats that idea, but helps us refocus at every point. It's like having mini-sermons scattered throughout the liturgy. The whole service is actually jam-packed with instagrammable little pieces. I'm not advocating - necessarily - that you actually instagram the service, but that there are these beautiful little bits everywhere, every Sunday, and they're all new each week and used by most churches in our Synod. **#Trending?** Plus, it's all good quality old stuff - like a well curated Instagram account (and not your annoying cousin's account full of selfies).

Here's a few examples of Propers (things that change in the liturgy from week to week):

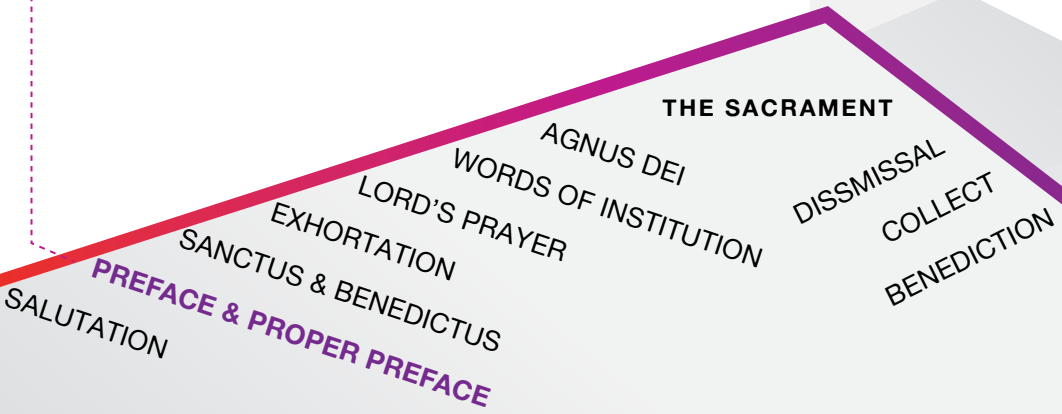
**THE PROPER PREFACE** comes before the Sacrament and changes based on the season of the church year. We move from general thanksgiving to specific thanksgiving, reflecting a specific aspect of salvation emphasized during that season of the church year. This reminds us to give thanks specifically for what God has done for us (heard already in the service) and how He now wishes for us to personally receive His gifts of salvation in the Sacrament.

Together these little Instagrammable pieces of the liturgy help us to see one large panorama: what amazing things Christ has done for us.

Since 2018 is the anniversary year of the reorganization of the ELS, in our Young Branches articles this year, we'll take a look at how the history of the ELS can apply to us today.



## SACRAMENT



REVEREND  
**JEFF HENDRIX**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
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Speaking of Instagramming...

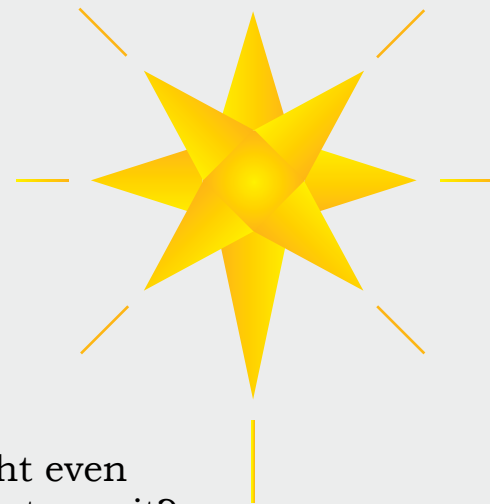
Get your smartphones ready for LYA 2018

# Even When Steeples are Falling

THURSDAY, JULY 26-SUNDAY, JULY 29  
SEATTLE, WA



# WHAT DO WE KNOW OF THE Bethlehem Star?



*A star! A star, dancing in the night,  
with a tail as big as a kite;  
with a tail as big as a kite.*

You've probably heard that song many times. It might even be stuck in your head now that I've brought it up; but was it? What did those Magi see? Why did they think—or how did they know—that thing in the sky was connected to the Savior's birth?

These are great questions for which we can only provide partial answers because, in the end, God didn't tell us precisely what it was. Over the centuries, people have postulated some pretty interesting ideas. Here are some of them:

## Comet

Probably what the song is referring to because comets have tails. In fact, comets with big tails are depicted in most of the oldest "Bethlehem Star" images.

**Difficulty:** Comets orbit the Sun in precise predictable patterns (Halley's). Thus far, no comet has returned that would have been in the sky at the time of Christ's birth.

## Astrology

Author Michael Molnar, in his book *The Star of Bethlehem—The Legacy of the Magi*, theorizes that the Magi were reading horoscopes and were able to foresee that Christ would be born. Molnar has them traveling to Israel in anticipation of His birth.

**Difficulty:** God expressly forbids the practice of astrology among His people. It seems inconsistent to announce the Savior's arrival in a way He has declared to be sinful.

## Constellation & Conjunction

On the fourth day of creation, God made things in space to "be for signs and seasons and days and years" (Genesis 1:14). Constellations are "dot-to-dots" in the sky with stories associated with those pictures. A conjunction is when, from earth's perspective, one planet is lined up in front of or very near another planet or star, their separate lights merging to form one greater light. The constellation & conjunction theory is conjunction occurred inside of a significant constellation.

**Difficulty:** Constellations are unique to cultures. We've been taught to see a big dipper, the Greeks saw a female bear, the Iroquois saw four different animals and a cooking pot in the same group of stars. This theory seems to necessitate that Persian and Jewish constellations be identical.

## Supernova

A nova, or supernova, is a star that is exploding, emitting incredibly bright light.

**Difficulty:** Neither Greek nor Chinese astronomers recorded a new nova in the sky anytime that could coincide with Christ's birth. Both groups are renowned for the meticulous records they kept.

## Nova/Constellation/Conjunction

This is a fascinating theory put forward by our synod's own **Bill Overn**, a member at Heritage Lutheran Church, Apple Valley, MN. Let me try to break this down into digestible points:

1. First, Bill mentions a nova that appeared in the sky more than 100 years before Christ was born. Where most novae burn themselves out in days or weeks, this nova remained in the sky more than 100 years after Jesus' birth. Noted in the records of both the Greek and Chinese astronomers, it was bright enough to be seen during the day and even became colloquially known as "The Day Star."
2. This nova appeared within a constellation which Middle Eastern cultures called "The Desire of Nations." This constellation was a woman holding a baby boy in her arms.
3. Because of the Babylonian captivity, Persian astronomers had ready access to the Old Testament. Among other verses, the following may have influenced the Magi:

- Balaam's oracle concerning the Israelites. *"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel"* (Numbers 24:17 ESV).

- Isaiah's prophecy concerning a virgin birth. *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14 ESV).

- Haggai's prophecy. *"For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts"* (Haggai 2:6-7 ESV). While the ESV gives us the translation "treasures," the Hebrew word is singular: "treasure/desire/something dearly wanted."

4. With the "Day Star" in the "Desire of Nations" and with access to these Old Testament verses, the Magi may have believed it was time to go when, in 7 B.C., the planets Jupiter and Saturn passed in conjunction three times. This same conjunction occurred in 1526 B.C. and in 576 B.C. The historian Josephus says that the 1526 B.C. conjunction is partially why Pharaoh commanded all baby boys be killed, the time of

Moses' birth. King Cyrus of Persia was born in 576 B.C. It is certainly interesting that in both cases when this conjunction occurred, a son was born who freed the Hebrew people!

And of course, it could have been something completely unique to the sky, something that can't be researched or explained because God made it specifically for that purpose.

Even though most of this article has spent its time on what the Star of Bethlehem might have been, what's more important is *Who* those magi found when they finally did arrive in the city of David.

- Indeed this was the treasure of humanity, the desire of all nations.
- This was a child of a virgin woman, Emmanuel, in Him God had come to dwell with us in our flesh.
- But lest His humble appearance deceive you, know also that this is the promised King of Israel.

If these wise men had access to the verses above, then they also had access to Isaiah 53 and its verses about Him being laden with their sins and dying in their place. They could have read about the Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9, their names being engraved on His hands in Isaiah 49.

They could have known the entire story—their entire story: where they came from, what's wrong with this world, and how determined God is that sin not define them and that death not be the final word.

"Could have" and "might have been." On this side of eternity, we just cannot say exactly what they knew or what they saw. But isn't it fun to take the truth we know, that God wants all people to be saved through His Son, and to imagine how He might have used comets, exploding stars, or conquering nations to accomplish His will. God bless us this Epiphany as He uses all things in our lives for the good of our salvation.

REVEREND  
**TONY PITTENGER**  
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+ **For more research on the Bethlehem Star,**  
 visit this link from our own Bill Overn:  
[http://www.tccsa.tc/articles/birth\\_christ\\_overn.pdf](http://www.tccsa.tc/articles/birth_christ_overn.pdf)



# Who Were the **MAGI** and How Did They Know to Look for a **STAR**?

We're used to seeing them in our Nativity Scenes, lavishly dressed and usually as a trio, like the Christmas carol: "We three kings of Orient are...."<sup>1</sup>

Whether there were three of them, we don't know. Whether they were kings, we also don't know. Just what "Wise Men" (magoi in Greek) means, we don't know. Just where in "the east" they came from, we don't know.

Are you noticing a trend? There's not a lot that we know about the Magi.

What we do know is what they themselves said: "They asked, 'Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him'" (Matthew 2:1-2)<sup>2</sup>. They saw a star and they knew that it meant a very important King had been born—a King they themselves wanted to worship!

Perhaps the most likely theory is connected to the prophet Daniel. Long before he was thrown into the lions' den, he interpreted the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar, so "the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him... chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48, ESV).<sup>3</sup>

Hundreds of years before Christ was born, the nation of Israel was taken into bondage in Babylon. Daniel was one of the faithful Jews who lived in bondage and witnessed to the truth of

God. Then, many years after they were taken into bondage, the Jews were allowed to return home.

But not all of them did. Many of God's people remained living in Babylon, keeping the Old Testament Scriptures with them. Perhaps it was some of the same order of wise men of which Daniel was prefect, hundreds of years later, who were familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, that looked into the sky when Jesus was born. Perhaps they had learned what the Jews believed, including a passage from the prophet Isaiah:

*For behold...the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will be seen upon you.  
And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising...  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall bring good news, the praises of the  
LORD. (Isaiah 60:2-3, 6, ESV)*

The Word of God reached the ears of these Wise Men, making them yearn for the Savior. Seeing the signs, they rushed to worship him. Perhaps they did not understand the real significance of this baby, but this only meant that they were a ripe mission field—like so many around us who light their lights and give gifts. They know there is some significance to this season, but do they know the full significance? They are a mission field, ready for the joyous Word of Jesus to be preached to them.

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1. John H. Hopkins, "We three kings of Orient are," *Hymnary.org* (accessed November 29, 2017), [https://hymnary.org/text/we\\_three\\_kings\\_of\\_orient\\_are](https://hymnary.org/text/we_three_kings_of_orient_are).

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# The Tragedy of the Holy Innocents:

## What Can We Say?

*“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men” (Matthew 2:16 ESV).*

The death of children is always a difficult thing for us to comprehend. Understandably, then, the Gospel lesson appointed for December 28th (the Day of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs) and the 2nd Sunday of Christmas are disturbing because they both cover this tragic mass murder.

Our hearts certainly go out to the bereaved parents. They really had no good answer for why their children had to die because their children were innocent of the “crime” of being the King of the Jews. We might ask along with these parents, “How could God let this happen?”

We certainly want to be careful not to think that we know better than God or can know His mind. While we don’t know the mind of God, looking deeper, we can see elements of His wisdom and gracious provision for all people. And as it turns out, this story isn’t all tragedy.

In Herod’s “senseless fear,” he carelessly ordered the death of all possible contenders to his crown “according to the time [and location] that he had ascertained from the wise men.” He didn’t make a careful search. He figured that if he slaughtered all the boys, then surely the one Boy he feared would be killed. Of course, he wasn’t counting on the fact that God would protect His only-begot-

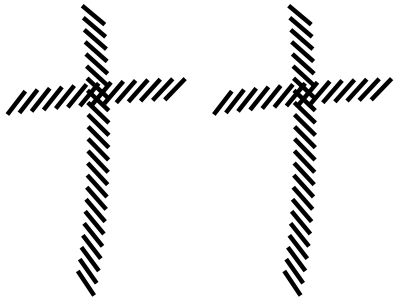
ten Son from this premature death by sending Joseph, with his family, down to Egypt. In a way, then, these proto-martyrs provided a screen for the Christ-Child. Their deaths put Herod at ease so that he wouldn’t seek any further for the King. But God didn’t just use these boys as a screen. Their salvation was already taken care of.

According to God’s Law, these boys would have already been under the spiritual protection and provisions of God’s Covenant of Circumcision. Back in Genesis, God commanded Abraham, “*He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations.... So shall My covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant*” (Genesis 17:12,13). This Covenant of Circumcision bound God to these young boys just like the Sacrament of Baptism binds God to us. Those who were circumcised were members of God’s family and heirs of His heavenly realms. So while we still struggle to see past the pain of the parents, God in His mercy had simply delivered them from this evil world before they experienced very much of it.

Only 33 years later, God would watch His own Son be put to death under evil rulers. “How could God let this happen?” people asked. We thank God that He did not spare His own Son that we might see the fulfillment of our salvation in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

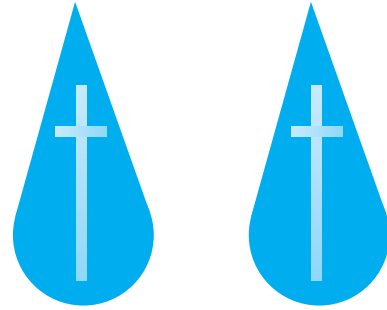
*The star proclaims the King is here;  
But, Herod, why this senseless fear?  
He takes no realms of earth away  
Who give the realms of heav’nly day.  
(ELH #173:1)*

REVEREND  
**SAMUEL GULLIXSON**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
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Re-Ash?

✓ **Certainly!**



Re-Wash?

✗ **Never!**

It has become a tradition at Parkland Lutheran Church and School that we offer the imposition of ashes at our three services on Ash Wednesday. The first service of the day is our weekly chapel for the students of our school. One of the most memorable Ash Wednesdays was back in 2001 when later that morning there was a 6.8 earthquake. As the students filed out of the buildings (which we learned later was the wrong thing to do), the students still had their ashes on their foreheads in the shape of a cross. The girls emerged sobbing while the boys for the most part were laughing! (Tell me that God did not wire females and males differently!)

Ash Wednesday gets its name from a very old tradition among Christians. This day starts the season of Lent, the time during which we as Christians especially remember Jesus came to earth to suffer and die for our sins. Ashes are a symbol of our sadness over what our Lord had to endure to make payment for our sins. We have accounts of believers in the Old Testament who wore ashes as a symbol of their sorrow over their sin (Cf. Esther 4:1-4 and Daniel 9:3-15). The imposition of ashes is a human rite that can serve as a wholesome spiritual practice for us, just like the rite of Confirmation was retained from our Roman Catholic roots and is still observed among us Lutherans today.

With the imposition of ashes, we are reminded first of all that we are sinners and that the wages of sin is death. Remember what God says to Adam after he sinned: “*Dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (Genesis 3:19). Ashes are placed upon our foreheads in the sign of the cross to remind us of what was done and said at our baptism: The pastor made the sign of the cross over our forehead and heart, saying, “The merciful and eternal God, who alone saves from all evil, and who graciously called you to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light through our Lord Jesus + Christ, deliver you from the + power of darkness, sin, death and Satan.” In other words, the ashes remind us that eventually we will all die, returning to dust, but the cross reminds us that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, so our sins are forgiven and we too will rise from death to live with Him in heaven forever – from dust we shall rise again!

Now for the memorable 2016 Ash Wednesday story: At our traditional soup supper prior to the third service for the day, Grey, one of our Kindergarten students, came to me and asked, “Pastor, can I be *re-ashed*?” I looked at her forehead and indeed her black cross was no longer visible. I assured her I could do as she requested. She was in Pastor Ring’s line with her grandparents to have the imposition of ashes reapplied. At the last second, she darted into mine; it was from me she had received permission, after all. So Grey was *re-ashed* that day.

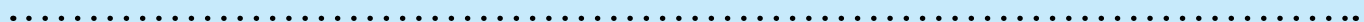
Some weeks later at our Faculty Study, we were discussing the episode in *The Hammer of God* (a must-read for all Lutherans by the Swedish

Lutheran Bishop Bo Giertz) where Conrad, a longtime friend of Pastor Fridfeldt, had written to him, proudly telling him how he had been re-baptized with “the true baptism” (p. 155 ff.), rejecting his infant baptism. But as the Nicene Creed clearly states, the Christian Church acknowledges only “one Baptism for the remission of sins,” not multiple baptisms. This afforded me the opportunity to speak about granting Grey’s *re-ashing* request. However, there is no rewashing because Holy Baptism is God’s work, which does not diminish even if we become unfaithful. The imposition of ashes is a human rite and can be repeated yearly or, in Grey’s case, repeated the same day.

Many Christians in America today follow the false teaching and practice that Baptism is the work of sinners supposedly showing God and the world they have chosen Jesus as their Lord. Subsequently, when they fall seriously into sin again, often called “back-sliding,” in order to return to God, they assume they must be re-baptized. How can baptism be the sinner’s work? We read in God’s Word that Baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21) and through Baptism our sins are washed away, forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Consider how arrogant it is to suggest the sinner’s work saves and somehow earns forgiveness. Such a perverted teaching can only come from the bowels of hell to be sure.

Over five years ago, I had the privilege of baptizing Grey. I pray she will never be misled by the lies of those who *re-baptize* and convince her to be re-washed. But I do expect to see her next year on Ash Wednesday to be *re-ashed* and, who knows, to be *re-ashed* again before the day is over. This pious practice of being ashed does not confer forgiveness, but is only an outward sign to remind us of our great need to be forgiven by God through the holy blood shed on the cross for us all, whereas being washed in Holy Baptism, the cleansing fountain, red with the dear blood of Jesus (ELH #247.7), sins are truly forgiven by God Himself.

REVEREND  
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# An Epiphany Devotion

Have you ever imagined living without light? Maybe this thought occurred to you as you fumbled around in the pitch blackness of a closet? Perhaps you had this fear-filled thought when you were a child trying to fall asleep in a very dark room.

In reality, though, a life without light is more than a scary childhood thought or a few stumbling moments in a closet. Life without light – well, that would be *DEATH*. It's simple biology (the study of living things). To study life *IS* to study light. In fact, God's six-day creation began with the giving of *light*... "and it was good" (Genesis 1:2).

The connection between life and light is not just good biology, though. It's also good *Christology* (the study of the *Christ*). Life is who and what the Christ (the promised One) of God is. And the Christ's life is the very light from which all mankind also draws its life. The gift of God to all sin-draped humanity is eternal life and that life is found only in Jesus – *the Promised One of God*. Christ is Light and he is Life – and He is these things *for you* and for your salvation and for all who sit in darkness.

## St. John 1:1-5 (ESV)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

## Hymn ELH 198:1, 3

"O Christ, Our True and Only Light"

*O Christ, our true and only Light,  
Enlighten those who sit in night;  
Let those afar now hear Thy voice  
And in Thy fold with us rejoice.*

*O gently call those gone astray  
That they may find the saving way!  
Let ev'ry conscience sore oppressed  
In Thee find peace and heav'nly rest.*

## Prayer

Jesus, my Savior, You bring life and true light to a darkened world. Let all who do not know You hear Your Word and believe. Amen.

REVEREND  
**KYLE MADSON**  
EDITOR, *THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL*  
NORSELAND LUTHERAN CHURCH  
ST. PETER, MN  
NORWEGIAN GROVE LUTHERAN CHURCH  
GAYLORD, MN





# THE GOSPEL BEFORE OUR EYES

In 2017, we looked at some of the famous art pieces that were born out of the beginnings of the Lutheran Reformation. This year, we'll consider some of the artwork that adorns our own churches, helping to hold to the good news of Jesus before our eyes.

Trinity Lutheran Church was blessed to have as a member, Cape Cod artist Robert Heath. In 2009, he created the painting that graces the altarpiece, one that brings out the richness of Word and Sacrament according to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.

The mural is a triptych, a work of art divided into three panels that arose in Christian art to signify the “three-in-oneness” of God, the Holy Trinity. The two outer panels show the grape and wheat motif that frame the context, namely, the altar at which the faithful commune, receiving “the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and drink.”

At the top of the center panel is seen the Hebrew tetragrammaton, יהוה, which means “I AM,” from

Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-14).

Descending from God the Father is God the Holy Spirit in the bodily form of a dove, as happened at the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21-22). Under the dove is the chalice and host of the Sacrament of the Altar, and under that is written in Greek ΕΝΟΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΧΡΕΙΑ (trans. One thing is needful) from the story of Mary and Martha, that “one thing” being to sit at the feet of Jesus to hear His Word (Luke 10:38-42).

Finally, suspended from the frame in front of the Chalice and Host, standing out as the chief focal point of the work, is a wood carved crucifix. The host on the canvas behind it encircles the head of Christ, serving the added purpose of a nimbus signifying the divinity of the Crucified Lord Jesus.

REVEREND  
**JAMES BRAUN**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
BREWSTER, MA

# SYNODSYNOPSIS

## **First Annual Christian Apologetics Conference to be held Thursday, June 21, at Bethany Lutheran College.**

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod, at its 2016 regular convention, adopted a resolution which called for "...equipping the membership of the ELS with a working knowledge of Christian apologetics" (Synod Report, 2016, page 106). The 2017 convention then asked the synod "to provide information to its members and other interested parties [regarding Christian apologetics] by various activities that may include... (2) Hosting an annual workshop on worldview, apologetics and/or evangelism at Bethany Lutheran College scheduled in coordination with the synod convention" (Synod Report, 2017, page 116). Pursuant to fulfilling these resolutions, the synod's newly appointed ad hoc committee will be hosting this apologetics conference, to begin at 1:00 pm on June 21 immediately following the synod convention. *(The committee recognizes that the primary application of apologetics is to evangelism and that apologetics includes a study of competing worldviews.)*

**The program of the conference will feature three speakers with question and answer periods to follow. The topics and their respective speakers are as follows:**

### ***Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?***

**DR. JOHN EIDSMOE**

*John Eidsmoe is one of the most highly respected Lutheran scholars in the United States. He holds two doctorates, one in law and one in ministry. He is the author of 12 books, including Christianity and the Constitution. Dr. Eidsmoe is also a constitutional attorney and retired Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.*

### ***What's Worldview Got to Do with Everything?***

**DR. RYAN MACPHERSON**

*Ryan MacPherson is Professor of History at Bethany Lutheran College. He is the author of five books, including Debating Evolution before Darwinism and The Culture of Life. Dr. MacPherson is also a contributing author in several books, including Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal (CPH, 2011).*

### ***Is Apologetics Lutheran?***

**ALLEN QUIST**

*Allen Quist is adjunct Professor of Christian Apologetics at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Quist is the author of eight books, including the newly published The Reason I Believe: The Basics of Christian Apologetics (CPH, 2017).*

### **ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:**

*The conference will be structured as a free conference similar to the Reformation Lectures. All interested persons are invited to attend. Further details about the conference will be forthcoming.*

### **CALL FOR NOMINATIONS**

## **Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary**

Pursuant to the guidelines of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for calling a professor to the seminary (cf. Guidelines for Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary II.A.2), the Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, herewith issues to the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod a call for nominations to a professorship.

The nominees must be ordained clergymen of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod or of its fellowship. Nominees are to be qualified primarily to teach New Testament, which requires the necessary expertise or aptitude in the Greek language and a willingness to pursue further study in the area of exegesis. The nominees also need to be able and willing to teach other courses in the curriculum as needed.

The individual called will serve as the Dean of Students and lead the seminary's field education program. He will begin teaching fall 2018.

Nominations are to reach the undersigned by March 1, 2018.

Rev. Edward Bryant  
Secretary, ELS Board of Regents  
527 N Main St  
Lombard, IL 60148  
[elbryant50@comcast.net](mailto:elbryant50@comcast.net)



**Left to Right:** Pres. Gaylin Schmeling, Dr. Timothy Schmeling, Dr. Erik Herrmann, Rev. James Langebartels, Prof. Em. Erling Teigen, Dr. Michael Smith, Prof. Nicholas Proksch

## 2017 Reformation Lectures

The fiftieth annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures were held at the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center, Mankato, Minnesota, on October 26–27, 2017. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

This year, the theme of the Reformation Lectures was “*Luther’s Three Treatises: The Reformation Platform.*”

The first lecture, given by **PROF. EM. ERLING TEIGEN**, was entitled “*Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.*” In this treatise, Luther demolishes the three walls of the Catholic church: 1. Temporal power has no jurisdiction over the church. 2. Only the pope can interpret Scripture. 3. No one can summon a church council except the pope.

The second lecture, presented by **DR. ERIK HERRMANN**, was entitled “*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.*” In this treatise, Luther discusses the three captivities of the medieval church: 1. Communion in one kind. 2. Transubstantiation. 3. The sacrifice of the mass. He rejects the seven Roman sacraments and speaks of two: Baptism and the Bread (LW 36:124).

The third lecture, given by the **REV. JAMES LANGEBARTELS**, was entitled “*The Freedom of a Christian.*” Here Luther points out that the Christian man is a perfect lord of all, subject to none, and at the same time, the Christian is a perfect dutiful servant of all, subject to all (LW 31:344).

The complete lectures (with presenter’s credentials) will be published in the March issue of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.



## BIOGRAPHY BRIEFS: **The ELS of 1918** JANUARY-FEBRUARY

*We here begin a series of biographies of the pastors who attended the reorganization convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1918. There is evidence for the presence of at least thirteen pastors along with two hundred guests at this convention.*



Christian Anderson

In 1918 **Christian Anderson** continued his opposition to the “Madison Settlement” (Opgjør), which led to the merger of three Norwegian Lutheran church bodies the previous year. The Church Council of the Norwegian Synod had deposed this forty-four-year-old man from his call in 1916. The majority of his congregation reorganized as Fairview Lutheran Church (now King of Grace) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The minority of the Norwegian Synod gathered with this congregation in 1917. He later served as the pastor of Rock Dell and Our Savior’s Lutheran Churches of Belview, Minnesota and also as the president of the synod, 1926–30. He married Inger Wulfsberg and following her death, Bergine Livdahl. He died in 1959.



A. J. Torgerson

In 1918 **A. J. Torgerson** and the minority of the members of his congregations opposed the “Madison Settlement” (Opgjør). He refused to resign his call or vacate the parsonage, and after the court ruled against him in 1919, he served the reorganized Somber and First Shell Rock congregations at Northwood, Iowa. In 1918 he was elected as the treasurer of the synod, a position in which he served for fourteen years. He married Ingeborg Pederson. He died in 1963.