

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



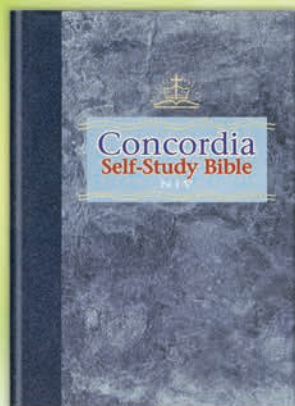
From death
comes life

Our walk in the dark places of
Lent is only temporary. *Page 10*

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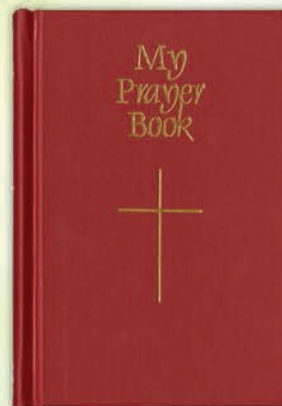
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

Let's face it. Lent is not what you would call a Hallmark holiday. Much of the world would prefer to jump from Valentine's Day directly to Easter. But as Christians we value the Lenten season as a time to contemplate what our Savior has done for us sinners. It may not be a happy time, but it does bring us joy and peace.

Several articles this month discuss Lent and what the season means for Christians. Pastor Jared Oldenburg highlights Lent's focus on suffering and death and how that leads to a better appreciation of life (p. 10). Pastor Ross Else reminds us what Lent is—a time for us to consider our sins and what we deserve and a time for us to consider our Savior and how he saved us (back page). We also put together a short quiz about the Passion history to help remind you of some of the details from the biblical accounts (p. 26).

Part of our mission as Christians is sharing what our Savior has done for the world—whether it is to our children (p. 16) or to those who have not heard or do not understand the saving gospel message (pp. 23 & 30). How will you spread the Word this Lenten season?

Julie Wietzke



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WELCOMING VISITORS

I want to thank the editors of *Forward in Christ* for the "Confessions of faith" articles depicting the travels of someone "living in darkness" and then hearing the saving gospel.

A couple people mentioned that when they visited one of our congregations, they were greeted and welcomed already in the parking lot.

All of our members should be encouraged to offer greetings and a welcome to visitors, whether it be in the parking lot, church basement, gathering area, etc. We need to be reminded that it is not necessary to be a politician running for office, a used car salesman, or an insurance person to be friendly and outgoing!

Alan Ross
Manitowoc, Wisconsin

HEART TO HEART

We asked you to join the conversation about parenting [Jan.], and you responded! Visit www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and look for the Heart to heart link to read more parenting articles

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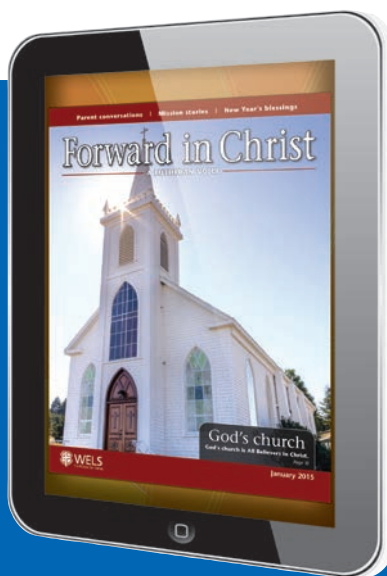
Re: Rob Guenther's article [Jan.]: What is your advice if my son has already played for 30 minutes on the tablet and then asks later in the day to play on the Wii?

Jessica Klawitter

Rob Guenther replies: *In our house, they're one and the same. They can use their 30 minutes on the tablet or video game system but not on both. Otherwise it gets to be an hour of video game time. That may work for some, but we don't want our kids to have that much time, plus with three of them all wanting a turn, the logistics get tricky. But we do make an exception for the Kindle app. They can read a book on the iPad even after their 30 minutes of video game time. But I'm definitely no expert here. We're still trying to figure out a healthy balance.*

[Rob Guenther's article] is such an excellent reminder that God *has* blessed us with technology and like any other blessing it can easily be misused. These are great ideas, Pastor. Thank you!

Kimmie Workentine



Re: Laurie Gauger-Hested's article [Jan.]: Nicely written! Thank you for easing my anxieties, if only for a while!

Kari Koenecke

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, N16 W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.



Join the conversation— LIVE!

Join a group of *Heart to heart's* authors for a live video stream on Tuesday, March 10, at 8 P.M. CST. Learn more about the column's authors and ask them questions. The conversation will focus on the topic of March's column: "How do we talk about Jesus with our children?" (see p. 16). Go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist to view the broadcast and participate in the discussion via the chat feature.

Does your congregation have a mom's group? This would be a great get-together. The group can participate in the broadcast and then have its own discussion after the broadcast is over.

Questions?

Contact fic@wels.net.

Certain victory

With God we will gain the victory. Psalm 108:13

Michael A. Woldt

This month millions of people will spend time filling out NCAA basketball tournament brackets. The odds of randomly completing a perfect bracket are 1 in 9.2 quintillion. If you know a little bit about basketball you can trim your odds to 1 in 125 million. No wonder websites offer huge cash prizes to anyone who fills out a flawless bracket. The uncertainty of the tournament makes it improbable that anyone will receive the big payout.

CERTAINTY OF SALVATION

How thankful we can be that there is no uncertainty regarding the outcome of the Lenten season. Every March we follow Jesus to the cross knowing that his struggles against sin, death, and Satan will result in victory for us. The victory cry will ring out from Calvary: "It is finished!" The tomb will be empty on Easter morning. Satan had no hope of defeating Jesus.

Even during the
somber season of Lent,
we live in Easter joy.
We know the end
of the story.

The certainty of Satan's defeat was expressed in the very first gospel promise. The ancient serpent was told in no uncertain terms that the offspring of the woman would crush his head (Genesis 3:15). Jesus also expressed the certainty of victory well before Holy Week: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he

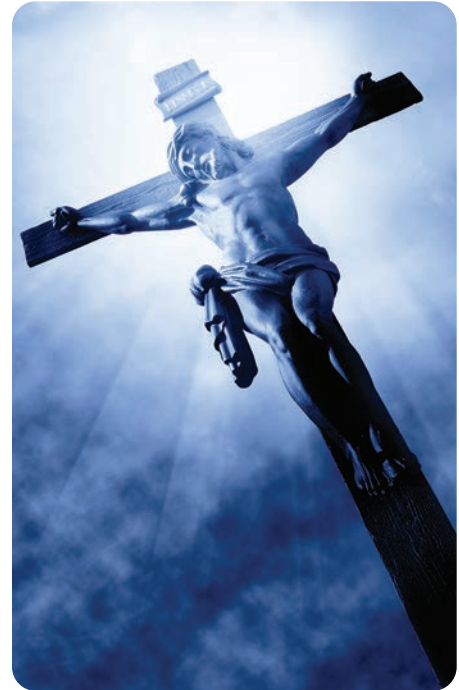
must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Luke 9:22).

By faith we embrace the certainty of our eternal salvation. We stand in the winner's circle with Jesus. Even during the somber season of Lent, we live in Easter joy. We know the end of the story.

CERTAINTY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

The certainty of Jesus' victory helps us live life in this uncertain world with joy and hope. The outcome of a basketball tournament may be unpredictable, but so is most of life. How long will I live? Is my job secure? Will accident or disease disrupt the routine of my life or the life of a loved one? Will the horrors of terrorism strike close to home? Will I always be able to worship Jesus freely without fear of persecution? We can make educated guesses about the future, but only the Lord knows with certainty the paths our individual lives will take. Yet we have this confidence: We live securely in Jesus! We exclaim with St. Paul: "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 8:32).

Satan persists in his attempts to draw us back into uncertainty and doubt. He wants us to believe that our place in God's family still needs to be secured by our own victories over sin and temptation. Satan is there with his accusing finger every time we fall into old sins or invent new ways to satisfy the desires of the sinful nature still residing in our hearts. Oh, how we need to hear the sweet message of the gospel over and over again. It is finished! Jesus won! No more doubt! "While we were still sinners,



Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:11).

Can you imagine being offered a million dollars for filling out a perfect bracket for last year's tournament? That would be money in the bank! The outcome of every game is already in the books! Even more certain is the victory Jesus won for you on Calvary. Enjoy the prize—freedom from sin and life filled with God's blessings forever.

Contributing editor Michael Woldt is pastor at David's Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.



Mark Schweden

God's church
has not been
placed on this
earth to dispense
practical advice
to self-absorbed
consumers.

Wants or needs?

In the days after the first Pentecost, Peter and John were on their way to the temple for afternoon prayer (Acts chapter 3). As they were about to enter the temple grounds, they came across a man who had been crippled from birth. The man's friends placed him there every day at the temple gate to beg for a coin or two from people coming to the temple.

Peter knew what the man wanted. More important, he knew what the man needed. As the man's open hand stretched out to Peter, Peter looked him in the eye and said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you." Then came the double gift that filled not the man's wants but his greatest needs. Peter said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

That first gift was amazing enough. The man miraculously not only got up and walked but also began jumping and leaping.

But the second gift was even greater. As he ran and leaped into the temple courts, he praised and thanked God for what he received in the name of Jesus. The man who had been lifted from his mat to his feet was also a man who had been lifted from his hopelessness and sin into the arms of a gracious Savior. Only minutes later, he heard Peter speak to the gathered crowd and point to the One who made this healing possible—Jesus.

People today are no different than the beggar at the temple. Their lives are often filled with sadness, frustration, and despair. They are searching for something—anything—that will make their lives happier and more fulfilling. They know that something is wrong, but they look for solutions in the wrong places.

In that search, some come to the church looking for answers. Like the beggar, they hold out their hands asking for something that they think will help them. Maybe they desire an

emotional boost to help them feel better about themselves. Maybe they seek to be uplifted by compelling preachers and entertained by uplifting music in worship. Maybe they are looking for practical advice on how to cope, how to be better parents, how to be better managers of their money.

What answer should we give them? Shouldn't it be the same answer that Peter gave to the beggar? God's church has not been placed on this earth to dispense practical advice to self-absorbed consumers. The mission of God's church is not primarily to meet the physical and emotional needs of people who measure happiness on the basis of what they have and how they feel. The answer given by the church to such people should be, "We have none of these things for you. But what we have we will give you."

We have the same message that God gave to Peter and the apostles. We have the message of God's law that unmasks the real problem in people's lives—the fact that they are poor miserable sinners standing before a holy God and deserving only his punishment. And we have the message of the gospel that speaks to crippled and helpless sinners—a message of forgiveness, healing, love, and life. We point them to Jesus, the only place where sinners can find what they really need.

If that's what people get when they come to us, their joy will be as genuine as the man who was healed at the temple—a joy that comes from sins forgiven, guilt removed, and sorrow banished by the blood of Christ. It's maybe not what they thought they wanted, but it's what they really need.

Light for our path

What did Jesus mean when he cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

James F. Pope

This was not a cry of asking for understanding: “Why are you doing this to me?” This was the exclamation of a Savior who knew he had come into the world as a human being for exactly this moment.

Your question provides an opportunity to probe briefly into one of Jesus’ seven “words” from the cross.

PROPHECY DEPICTED

The details of Jesus’ suffering and death that the gospel writers record were not random events or chance happenings. Through his messengers of old, God had prophesied much about what would take place on that Friday we call “Good.” From a friend betraying the Lord to the soldiers piercing his side and not breaking one of his bones, God had foretold what would happen to his Son. Even this word of Jesus on the cross had been foreshadowed in Psalm chapter 22.

This psalm is full of details that pointed ahead to the promised Messiah. Because Jesus came into the world to fulfill all the prophecies of the Messiah, Jesus asked the psalm’s opening question. But notice how he asked it: “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” Those syllables sound strange to our ears, but they illustrate the everyday Aramaic language Jesus spoke. The Lord did not simply recite Psalm 22:1 as it was originally written in Hebrew. He made the prophetic words his own, verbalizing the truth that he is our Savior.

SUFFERING DESCRIBED

More than declaring his identity as the Messiah, this word of Jesus on the cross gives us a glimpse into the real horror of Jesus’ sufferings. To be sure, the physical sufferings Jesus endured were gruesome. But while that physical pain can make us recoil, this word of Jesus speaks of a suffering we struggle to understand. On the cross Jesus was suffering what amounts to hell. Hell is being forsaken and abandoned

by God and punished for sin. That was Jesus’ experience on the cross. No human eyes could see the real extent of that suffering. Ears could only hear Jesus stating that it was taking place. Minds could only imagine what was going on. Hearts—of the faithful—were filled with awe and praise at love like this.

At one point in his inspired letter to the Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul disclosed a remarkable desire: “I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Romans 9:3,4). What remarkable love, right? If it were possible, Paul was willing to trade eternal places with unbelieving Jews. That is how much he loved other people.

Of course, Paul could not do what he wanted. The Bible says: “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him” (Psalm 49:7). But what Paul could not do, Jesus Christ did. His triumphant descent into hell would take place on Easter Sunday, but on Good Friday, Jesus suffered the agony of hell. He allowed himself to be abandoned and forsaken by God his Father for the sins of the world. He did that so we would never have to know what that abandonment is like. He did that so we could be part of God’s family now and forever.

What a loving Lord to be forsaken so that we could be forgiven! How do we respond to that? The hymn writer gives us direction: “Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all” (*Christian Worship* 125:4).

Contributing editor James Pope, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

James Pope also answers questions online at www.wels.net/what-we-believe/questions-answers. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

Your word
is a lamp
to my feet
and a light
for my path.

Psalm 119:105



From death COMES LIFE

**Others may think it
strange that Christians
spend six weeks focusing
on suffering and death.
Yet, in Lent, death and
life come together.**

Jared J. Oldenburg

For centuries, fasting, self-denial, prayer, and repentance have characterized Lent. This stands in notable contrast to just about every other holiday in America.

NOT A SPENDING HOLIDAY

Most American holidays are marked by consumption, indulgence, and a celebratory mood. For the Fourth of July we celebrate our freedom with grand cookouts and fireworks in the night sky. We purchase Mother's Day gifts and go out to brunch. There are Halloween parties and candy to appease the kids who so adorably offer the threatening ultimatum, "Trick or treat." We buy chocolates for our sweethearts, gifts for our fathers, and even throw parties in honor of an Irish Christian missionary.

All of these, of course, are not even in the same realm as Christmas. During the winter holidays, according to the National Retail Federation, Americans spent roughly 600 billion dollars in 2014. If you are doing the math at home, that averages out to around \$1,900 per person in the United States.

From a retail perspective, Lent is not even a "B-level" holiday. Lent does not exist. According to the report, Lent falls way behind St. Patrick's Day, Halloween, and even the Super Bowl.

Jesus himself tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). The only conclusion we can make is that for the American people, neither their treasure nor their hearts are much into Lent. To put it more bluntly, besides a committed group of Christians, no one else seems to care about Lent.

A TIME FOCUSED ON DEATH

I don't think the solution to America's indifference to Lent is issuing some sales promotions. When the season's observance is marked by not eating, not drinking, and not celebrating, there are not too many opportunities for spending. The challenge of Lent runs much deeper in the American psyche. Lent is a season that focuses on death.

To be frank, we don't do too well with death, or even its sister, aging. Historian Arnold Toynbee quipped on his 80th birthday that he was glad that he was aging in England and not America, because America is the only society in history that the older you get, the less you are esteemed. This has a number of implications. The most obvious is the obscene amount of money we spend to hold off aging.

The other is that we, as a culture, are much more prepared for birth than death—countless trips to Babies“R”Us, multiple baby showers, announcements, and birthing classes. We make phone calls, choose names, and schedule regular doctor visits. Death? We hardly prepare for our own, much less for the death of someone else. More than 50 percent of adult Americans do not have a will or estate plan in place. Of all our holidays, only Memorial Day has any recognition of death. And if we are honest, Memorial Day for most seems to be more about a day off and grilling than honoring those who have given their lives for our freedom.

Even among Christians, Jesus' birth seems to be more highly celebrated than his death or resurrection. I guess this should not surprise us completely. In some ways, at least in the prophecies, the Bible itself seems to emphasize Jesus' birth more than his death. Think of the first promise. God condemns the devil in the garden: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Granted, there is an allusion to Jesus' death with

“you will strike his heel,” but it is not too clear that part of crushing the devil means that the Messiah would have to die. Two thousand years before Jesus, the picture of the coming Messiah became clearer. God promised Abraham that through a descendant of his line all the nations of the world would be blessed. A thousand years later, the promise becomes clearer still, but only in the sense that the Promised One would be from King David's family.

Our walk in the dark places of Lent is only temporary.

Of course there are memorable prophecies like Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 that focus on Jesus' suffering and death, but it is probably not a stretch to say that the bulk of the prophecies you can remember about the promised Messiah revolve around his birth, including “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah . . .” (Micah 5:2) and “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son” (Isaiah 7:14). Perhaps this is why Jesus' own disciples struggled so mightily with the predictions of his suffering and death (Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32). It is one thing to contemplate your own death; it is a whole other thing to contemplate someone else's death that was necessary because of your sin.

Given the choice between thinking about death or birth, I don't think there are too many people who would choose death. We seem to avoid it at all costs. Think of our own cultural heroes that are even more famous because of their significant deaths. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968; however, it is in January, the month of his birth, that we have a day to remember him. The same is true of Abraham Lincoln. He was also assassinated in

April, but Presidents' Day coincides with the month of his birth, not his death. I think, as American Christians, we sometimes struggle with this as well. Is your Christmas celebration bigger than, well, everything?

FROM DEATH, LIFE

In a world filled with distractions, it is good that Lent is really our own. No Lenten sales distract us. No Lenten music constantly playing on the radio or public radio Lenten fundraisers. We don't even have to worry about Lenten gifts or sending Lenten cards. No flowers or cakes or candy or even special outfits. Instead, we have six weeks to contemplate sin, pray, worship, and remember Jesus' death for us.

It must seem morbid or strange to others that we spend a whole six weeks focusing on suffering and death. Yet, in Lent, death and life come together. To appreciate the beauty of spring, we need to survive the span and darkness of winter. To appreciate life, you have to know that there is death.

As terrible as that would sound in an advertising flyer, we know that is not so terrible to us. Our walk in the dark places of Lent is only temporary. At the end of our journey, we see the very reason we looked at death, and we can proclaim, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55).

If you are an American, your Lenten walk this season will seem lonely. It is just not the American thing to do. Yet as alone as you might feel, you are never alone. Across the globe and in the heavens, millions upon millions of believers are remembering what you are remembering—out of death comes life.

This Lenten season do more to prepare than just read this article. Take the time to contemplate an extraordinary death that has brought about extraordinary life for you.

Jared Oldenburg is pastor at Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colorado.

GOD'S CHURCH



WHICH CHURCH AND WHY

Richard E. Lauersdorf

Individuals the Spirit has brought to Christ make up God's invisible church. In heaven, they will stand together, revealed as his very own. Here on earth, they look for others like them. They form visible churches to enhance their joy and to carry out their work better together. The question, and a very important one at that, is which church should they join.

LOOK FOR THE CHURCH THAT TEACHES THE TRUTH

Several years ago we had to replace the windows in our home. One night when my wife tried to crank the window shut, the mechanism came off in her hand. The bottom frame of that window was full of dry rot. A defect in the vinyl covering let the moisture in, and slowly the wood deteriorated. Over time, the rot spread till the window was ruined.

False teaching is something like that dry rot. It may begin with disregard for some portion of God's Word that doesn't please. It may spring from the human mind that is conceited enough to think it can judge what is and what isn't God's Word. It may allow forces like human reason, public opinion, and scientific theory to add to or subtract from God's infallible Word. The false teaching may begin small, but like dry rot it spreads, creeping further and further into the solid truths of God's Word. Worst of all, error attacks the central teaching of God's Word—how God paid for the sins of the world through the atoning work of his Son. Any rotting away of any teaching eventually leads to deterioration of that vital, central truth.

Realizing this danger, concerned Christians look for a visible church that teaches God's Word in all its truth and purity. They

understand that error comes not from Christ, the Lord of the church, but from Satan, its archenemy. They realize that false teaching in any form is never helpful but always harmful to faith. They hear their Savior reminding them, “[Teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). They note he didn’t say “some things” or “the things you think are important” or “the things you like” but “everything.” They know that the apostle Paul didn’t just say, “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). He also stated, “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27). With Paul, concerned Christians understand that to preach Christ crucified is to proclaim everything God has entrusted to us in his Word.

Put it this way: When I join a church, I am publicly confessing that I agree with what that church teaches and practices. When I choose a church, I’m joining a group of like-minded Christians with whom I will approach God’s throne in prayer, sing his praises and extol his glory, and receive my Savior’s body and blood. Within that group, God’s saving Word will be proclaimed to me. I’m choosing a church to strengthen me in life, to comfort me in distress, and to prepare me for death and heaven. I want my membership to be in a church that teaches and stands for what I believe and stand for: the whole Word of God.

What church should I join here on earth? One that treasures and preserves the truth. One that teaches “the whole will of God” and administers the sacraments as Christ gave them. One where no dark cloud of error obscures even the tiniest ray of light shining forth from God’s Word.

DEAL IN LOVE WITH THE CHURCHES THAT DON’T

The religious world around us downgrades concern for the pure Word, labeling purity in doctrine as non-essential. We know better. We’ve

heard the Lord’s warning about the devil who “is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). We’ve been cautioned about Satan’s coworkers, the “false prophets” who “come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matthew 7:15). Paul’s warning to his coworker Titus also rings in our ears: “There are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, . . . they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach” (Titus 1:10,11).

Concerned Christians look for a visible church that teaches God’s Word in all its truth and purity.

How can we miss the Lord’s warning? It’s his Word, his truth. He wants no poison mixed into it by Satan and those deceived by him. Furthermore, God wants no harm to come to his own through false teaching of any kind.

Realizing the danger of false teaching’s poison, concerned Christians understand the Lord’s command to “keep away” from those who would proclaim anything “contrary to the teaching you have learned” (Romans 16:17). They realize the importance of John’s words, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 10,11). We are not to worship, commune, pray, have fellowship, or cooperate with those who teach differently than God’s Word teaches.

Why not? Are we saying that we are better than they are? Not if we know what we are. We’re sinners just like them. We’re children of God purely because of his love for us in Christ Jesus. And his Word is retained in our midst not because of our feeble efforts, but because of his grace.

Why, then, do we mark and avoid those who teach contrary to God’s Word? Love for God’s Word moves us. It is his

Word. He gave it to us in love. He asks us to keep it pure. How can I compromise his gift and approve of teaching that goes against it? Must I not join the psalmist in exclaiming, “How sweet are your words. . . I hate every wrong path” (Psalm 119:103,104)? God has warned us that error has a corrosive effect on faith. How can I expose myself to error that can dry-rot—even destroy—my faith? I want nothing to lead me “astray from . . . sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

God had worked this love for his Word and truth within us. It’s what he wants from his children—to honor his words. God has a reason. The Word gives life to us, our children, our neighbors, and future generations. He wants all believers to share that Word of Life with those who share the journey to life and with those who will follow when they are gone to glory.

I love those neighbors who live with me now, and I want to share the truth with them. But I also want to warn them of the danger of false teaching. How can I in any shape or form give my neighbors the impression that false teaching is not dangerous to their faith? It’s “gangrene,” Paul warned (2 Timothy 2:17), and we all know how that infection spreads and what it does.

Which church and why? Important questions. Thank God he has given us the answers. Pray God we always remember them.

Richard Lauersdorf is pastor at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a four-part series on the holy Christian church.

After spending time in other churches, a news reporter finds comfort in applying the truth of the gospel to any situation.

Rachel Hartman

Finding the heart of the story—and sharing it with others—comes naturally to Iris Delgado-Strickler, who works as a broadcast journalist for Telemundo in Philadelphia. From current events to weather forecasts, her reporting career has led her to a variety of places and scenes. In 2013, she won an Emmy for her work on a feature that focused on the sole survivor of a massacre inside a Dominican beauty salon in Caselberry, Florida.

When it comes to religion, however, Delgado-Strickler finds the heart of the story—the promise of salvation through Christ—to be not only powerful but also reassuring. “WELS is so focused on the message that Jesus came into this world and died for our sins,” she notes. “What could be greater than that?”

COMING TO THE UNITED STATES

Delgado-Strickler was born in Puerto Rico and lived there during her early years. “I grew up as a Catholic, but it wasn’t really enforced,” she recalls.

“We went to church every once in a while for big events.”

Then, when she was 15 years old, her family moved to Orlando, Florida. While living there, her family began attending a nondenominational Christian church. “I stayed there during my high school and college life,” Delgado-Strickler notes.

One of the reasons the family became involved in a nondenominational congregation rather than attending services at a Catholic church was that the nondenominational church’s views were more liberal. Also, it was easier for the family to understand the message being taught there, explains Delgado-Strickler.

After high school, Delgado-Strickler began attending a community college in the area. She also worked full time as an employee at the front desk of a hotel. While studying and working, she met another employee at the hotel, Adam, who worked full time as a server in the hotel restaurant. They both attended the same college.

“I was just a Puerto Rican learning to speak English at the time,” she says. “He was in a metal band and invited me to come to his show.”

LEARNING ABOUT THE GOSPEL

She went to the show, and soon the two began dating. After some time,

they were invited to attend a wedding. Adam’s sister was getting married, and the event would be held in Idaho, where Adam’s family lived.

The event came to be a turning point for Delgado-Strickler, who was nervous prior to the trip. “I’m the only Hispanic in the family,” she notes. But the family was very open and welcoming of her. Furthermore, many of their activities involved a nearby WELS congregation. “They were really focused on going to church,” she says. “I saw their enthusiasm about going to worship.”

After the wedding, the couple visited Adam’s family again in Idaho. This time the visit took place around Christmas. “We went to church on a Sunday, and then again for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day,” Delgado-Strickler remembers. She was intrigued by this emphasis on going to church regularly. “They did it so willingly and were happy about it,” she recalls. “In my culture, Christmas Eve is huge—but it’s about the food and party.” The focus on Jesus being born was a new concept for her.

Following the visits to Idaho, the couple got engaged. When talking about marriage and religion, Delgado-Strickler was struck by her fiancé’s focus on the Word. “One of the things I liked about Adam was that he was serious about God and wanted to have God in his

Confessions OF FAITH



life,” she explains. “We started talking about what church we were going to go to, and he told me he wanted to keep going to his church.”

The couple had attended Risen Savior Lutheran Church in Orlando several times while dating. When they wanted to get married, “we heard you could get a discount on a license if you got marriage counseling. . . . So we went to Risen Savior to look into it.”

While there, the couple got to know the pastor, who offered to give them marriage counseling and also perform the marriage ceremony.

BECOMING A MEMBER

The more Delgado-Strickler learned through attending worship and marriage counseling, the more she became interested in WELS. “It doesn’t matter how many times I’ve messed up as a person,” she notes. “Jesus took care of it all.” She took Bible instruction classes and became a member in 2011.

After doing that, however, the road was far from easy.

“There were a lot of things changing in our lives, careerwise,” says Delgado-Strickler, who was working as a news reporter at the time. Her husband was studying to become a CPA. “There was also a new marriage, a baby, and cultural differences.” The newlyweds decided to look for help. “We paid \$300

for a session with a nondenominational Christian psychologist, and it didn’t turn out so well,” she says.

Then the couple turned to their congregation. They started working with one of the pastors at Risen Savior.

He was eager to help. “He always brought us to the gospel,” recalls Delgado-Strickler. The focus on God’s Word helped the couple transition to a better, peaceful situation. “It helped me be less selfish and to humble myself by seeking God first,” she says. “Pastor Sadler also gave us some great wisdom on doing devotions together.”

CHANGING LOCATIONS

In 2013, a significant job opportunity came up for Delgado-Strickler. At the time, she was working as a local reporter and as a national correspondent for Univision from the Central Florida area. She was offered a position in Philadelphia that included being a substitute for the news anchor there.

The family, who by this point had a young daughter, decided to make the move. When they arrived, they found the place lonely. They were far from the family and friends they had been close to in Florida. But when they attended a WELS congregation in the area, Peace, King of Prussia, Penn., they were welcomed with open arms. “You can see the joy the gospel has given her,” her

pastor says. “She also has such a gift of encouragement that draws in others.”

Now the family feels more settled in the Philadelphia area. In late 2014, Adam passed his exams to be a CPA. Delgado-Strickler has taken to her new job as a broadcast journalist. She continues to work as a news reporter and fills in as an anchor in Spanish for Telemundo 62, although you may sometimes find her doing special reports for NBC 10.

And they enjoy being involved at their church. There Delgado-Strickler has helped run a children’s program. Set up for toddlers and parents, the activities focus on combining physical movements and discussions with Bible stories and teachings.

Delgado-Strickler has also helped the congregation’s efforts in reaching the Hispanic community in the area. As her pastor says, “She has remarkable gifts and a servant’s heart to help others.”

Rachel Hartman and her husband, Missionary Michael Hartman, serve in León, Mexico.



Adam, Iris, and their daughter Ilia.



heart to heart parent conversations

Sometimes we struggle to talk about Jesus in natural ways with our children. It's easy to read them a Bible story about Jesus, but it's harder to apply that story as a situation unfolds. This month three parents share how they talk about Jesus in their homes and other ways that they foster spiritual growth in their children.

Want to hear more about this? On March 10 at 8 P.M. CST, FIC is hosting a live web broadcast with authors to delve deeper into this topic. Tune in by visiting www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.



Join the conversation!

Visit www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and look for the *Heart to heart* link. Read uncut versions of the articles, learn more about the authors, and give us your thoughts and reactions.

HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT JESUS WITH OUR CHILDREN?

We recently received bad news. My stepson's grandma was in a car accident. At age 11, Sam is meeting that brutal intruder, death, for the first time. We talk and then pray aloud. It's a messy, tearful prayer, but that's okay. Jesus hears the words beneath the words.

At times like this, when eternity creeps close, it's natural to talk about Jesus.

Other times we're less comfortable. Why is that? Maybe talking about Jesus—or even saying “Jesus,” as opposed to “God”—feels disrespectful. Maybe we know only a transcendent God, powerful but unapproachable. Maybe, lacking positive male figures in our lives, it's hard for us to imagine a loving heavenly Father. Maybe we're afraid we'll say something wrong.

Thing is, God doesn't say in Deuteronomy chapter 6, “Tell your children about me if you're comfortable” or “A few words at meals and bedtime, and we'll call it good.” He says, “Talk about [me] when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”—pretty much all day. But before

Our kids attend a Lutheran elementary school where they hear the Word of God every day and see it applied in all aspects of school. Sometimes I find myself getting a bit lazy when it comes to fostering spiritual growth in my kids or creating opportunities for the Holy Spirit. The Lutheran elementary school does such a good job already! However, I'm pretty sure Proverbs 22:6, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it,” was not written solely for the teachers at school. So how can I help train my children?

The first thing that came to mind was to have a nightly family devotion. I searched and read reviews about devotion books. I made my selection, and one night I pulled out my new devotional book. The kids said, “Oh, that's the one we are using at school.” Not fair! I started reading it anyway. It was obvious that my kids were listening in

My husband and I pray daily that our family will glorify God with our lives. The habits we have established in our home reflect that desire. We pray as a family, worship and sing praises at every opportunity, and study our Bibles frequently. Our hope for our children is that they will continue in faith and enjoy an eternity with their heavenly Father.

Here on earth, the devil is always working to lead us away from Jesus. Recently our three-year-old shockingly insisted, “I no want to pray to Jesus. I pray to Pete the Cat!” A few days later our nine-year-old confided to us that she feels that our family puts Christ on the back burner at times and it bothers her.

I was a bit stunned by each of these incidents. My inner pride wondered how the children in my Christ-centered home could say or feel these things. I wondered if we are pointing our children to Christ with every breath. I pondered the ways that we can do a better job of this.

that—interesting!—he says he wants his words “upon our hearts.” We first take in the Word—in worship, study groups, personal devotions. It fills our hearts and then naturally flows into our speech.

Some of my kids’ college classmates recall their childhood Christianity as an onerous system of rules they couldn’t ditch soon enough. They’ve been taught that Jesus is a squinting judge, noting slip-ups on his blackboard in the sky. Others view Scripture as a loosey-goosey text, open to any interpretation they please. Here Jesus is a backslapping buddy who wink-winks at sin.

When it comes to talking about our Savior, I wonder whether it’s less important to teach children *values* than to teach them they’re *valuable*. Children—all of us—are so valuable that Jesus died for us. When the Father looks at our children, he doesn’t see dirty, undeserving sinners he’s compelled to love. He sees his bright, shiny, holy children! They’re so loved it’s safe to be openhearted, to confess their sins; forgiveness is theirs! God’s excited about the opportunities he’s got on the calendar for them. He’s

right there with them, and he delights in them. What they do for him today and tomorrow matters, and he can’t wait to spend eternity with them.

BC (Before Children), I had this vision of family devotions: bright-eyed little cherubs with chubby hands folded. Broccoli eaten, candles burning, Bach playing. Pfft. I didn’t foresee fidgety legs and droopy eyes (mine!), not to mention lessons and practices that cut supper short.

But that’s okay. We can talk about our Savior anywhere. In the car: *I liked that sermon. Did you?* In the kitchen: *God really answered our prayer, didn’t he?* In the middle of a hug: *You’re forgiven, kiddo. Will you forgive me?* At bedtime: *Jesus loves you, and so do I.*

With Jesus in our hearts, on our lips, and in the room, the line between sacred and secular disappears. It’s all God’s world. And eternity—that exciting prospect—is always close.

Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family that includes her two 20-somethings and his preteen son.



school (good thing) because after reading the title of the devotion, they’d say, “This is the one where . . .”

Experiences like these have really led my wife, Kelly, and me to focus on discovering new and varied ways of helping our kids grow spiritually. We are always searching for different ways to complement the exceptional work done by our pastors and teachers.

Nightly blessing has been an important practice in our home. Every night we spend time singing our bedtime prayers, talking to God, and then blessing one another. That regular time of prayer and blessing has become a cherished time.

How about the morning? Since I leave for work at the crack of dawn, I’m not home to help send everyone out the door. My grandfather always said, “Never leave the home without prayer and Scripture.” So I printed out about 50 different passages, and I attach one to the door before I leave.

When Kelly and the kids leave, they read the passage together or take it along and read it in the car to help focus their hearts on the Lord for the day.

One more idea. A friend of mine recently wrote a devotional “book.” It’s not a traditional devotional book but more of a family thanksgiving journal. Our family is now coming together at some point during the day and sharing what we are overwhelmingly grateful for. We are recording this in a thanksgiving journal, and it allows us intentionally to focus our thoughts on God’s blessings. We don’t do this at the same time every day. I’m less concerned with making a “devotion-time rule” and more concerned with using this as a casual but consistent way to demonstrate the love we have for our Lord with one another.

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a daughter and a son.



The Bible doesn’t share a recipe or a daily schedule for Christian parents to follow, but it is full of guidance and reassurance. Isaiah 55:11 says “. . . so is my Word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Incidents that stun our complacency help us refocus and change what we are doing, but the Holy Spirit is at work in my children’s hearts even when my parenting and Christian example are imperfect and when my family life becomes unfocused.

We want our children to have a true love for the Lord and a focus on him. We are always mindful of this as we put household routines into place. But routines are not necessarily born of faith. True praise and worship come only from the knowledge that Jesus died in our place. Thanks to Jesus, heaven is ours. When we keep our own joy about this amazing sacrifice at the forefront of our

lives and live our days proclaiming that joy, our children see and hear us. We do make mistakes, but God says that his Word does not come back empty.

We guide our families with God’s Word and with an example of faith in God’s promises. Then we can rest in the assurance that God’s Word is powerful. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. We have a faithful God who loves our little ones more than we do. As we learn in Matthew 18:12,14: “If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? . . . In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”

Wendy Heyn and her husband, Juerg, are raising three children ages 3, 7, and 9.



It was just a homemade card

A simple card reminds a couple in hard times always to fix their eyes on Jesus.

Glenn L. Schwanke

Dreary gray skies and a snow-rain mix pelting against the window did little to lift my already dampened spirits. Neither did the scenery: a cemetery. That's the panoramic view I enjoyed every time I looked out the seventh-floor window of my wife's room at St. Joseph's Hospital.

We were there because my wife, Teresa, had undergone surgery to remove a massive cancerous tumor. The surgery itself went well, and the surgeon had informed us the normal recovery time was three to five days in the hospital. But it had already been six. My wife was getting mighty sick of ice chips. No liquids. No solid foods. To make matters worse, a tube had to be inserted down her nose and throat to remove stomach secretions that could poison her. That painful procedure, coupled with all the other tubes still connected to her, had prompted more than a few tears from her—and more than a few from me.

So we prayed together. And we asked, yet again, for others to pray. And the prayers came! From the pastors who visited us in the hospital; from members of my congregation in Houghton; from the congregation I had served in Fort Wayne; from called workers and laypeople in my circuit, conference, district, and beyond. In who-knows-how-many worship services and in who-knows-how-many personal devotions, there were prayers.

Greeting cards came too. Too many to count. Each one special. Each one with the promise, "We are praying for you."

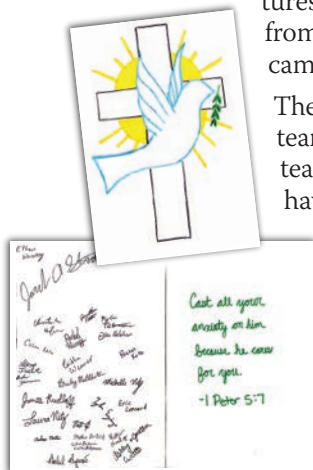
In the stack of cards came one card that was homemade. It had been folded to fit in the envelope. The cover boasted a simple outlined cross with a sun behind and the peace dove overlaid. Inside the card in handwritten letters was the verse, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). On the opposite inside panel were signatures—almost 30 of them. The card came from a number of the college students in the campus ministry I am blessed to serve.

The card prompted even more tears, but not tears of frustration or fear. Instead, they were tears of joy. Tears of knowing how Paul must have felt when by inspiration he wrote, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3-6).

There can be dreary days in ministry, days that pelt our heart and mind and dampen our spirits. Far too easily, we can focus on those days. On the sacrifices we make. On how much time and effort we pour into the work and how little seems to come back. All too often those days are clouded over, because our ancient foe has partnered with our sinful nature to tear our gaze away from the Son, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). And when we take our eyes off of Jesus, we also lose sight of the blessings that come from sharing his good news with others.

It's just a homemade card. I doubt it will ever win an American Graphic Design Award. But it came to my wife and me just when we needed it. It helped lift our eyes back to Jesus. And this humble card reminded me of the privilege I have to serve as a campus pastor.

Glenn Schwanke, pastor at Peace, Houghton, Michigan, serves as campus pastor at Michigan Technological University.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY Pastors

Kiecker, Matthew J., to St. John, Lomira, Wis.

Panning, James A., to St. Paul's, Litchfield, Minn.

Reis, Matthew J., to Trinity, Bangor, Mich.

Tobison, Gregory A., to Grace, Hutchinson/St. Peter, Darwin, Minn.

Wilkens, Timothy S., to King of Kings, Kennewick, Wash.

Zwieg, Larry G., to retirement

Teachers

Bielke, Luke G., to Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.
Fenske, Daniel J., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Fillner, Eric J., to Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.

Gosdeck, Kurt D., to St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.

Hintz, Chris M., to Christ the King, Breckerton, Wash.

Hunter, Samuel A., to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

Kleinke, Samuel J., to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

Krause, Justin W., to Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.

Nolte, Marilee J., to Grace, Yakima, Wash.

Peter, David J., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.

Plitzuweit, Thomas A., to WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools, Waukesha, Wis.

Schleis, John T., to New Hope, West Melbourne, Fla.

Shinnick, Callie L., to St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.

Walta, Jamie C., to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.

Walta, Kristian K., to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.

REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

Kwang Hoon (Peter) Wee, Monmouth Junction, New Jersey, formerly a Christian & Missionary Alliance pastor and now a WELS member, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in the pastoral ministry of WELS. Correspondence related to this request should be sent by April 15 to North Atlantic District President, Donald Tollefson, 40 Coleman Rd, Long Valley NJ 07853; nadp@wels.net.

ANNIVERSARIES

Neenah, Wis.—Trinity (150). Mar. 22. Worship with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus, 8 and 10:30 A.M. 920-722-6712. Website, www.trinityneenah.net.

Kewaunee, Wis.—Immanuel (150). Apr. 19. Worship with guest organist Charles Bonow, 10 A.M.; brunch to follow. July 19. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. Aug. 1. Worship with

Koiné, 10 A.M.; picnic to follow. Website, www.immanuelutherankewaunee.org.

Garden Grove, Calif.—King of Kings School (50). May 9. Worship, 11 A.M.; meal to follow. office@kingofkingsgg.org.

Appleton, Wis.—Mount Olive (100). May 17. Worship, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; meal to follow. Oct. 11. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. Website, www.mountoliveappleton.com.

Saline, Mich.—Trinity (150). May 31. Worship, 10 A.M. Theme: Education and music heritage. Sept. 27. Worship, 10 A.M. Theme: Mission heritage. Website, www.trinitylutheran-saline.org.

Brillion, Wis.—Trinity School (100). June 7. Worship, 8 and 10 A.M.; open house to follow; program at Cobblestone Creek, 1 P.M. RSVP requested. 920-756-3738. Website, www.trinitybrillion.org.

COMING EVENTS

Marriage enrichment—WELS Adult Discipleship holds marriage enrichment weekends around the country. See a list of upcoming retreats at www.wels.net/events.

The Seminary Chorus spring tour—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, www.wls.wels.net.

- Mar. 4, 6:30 P.M., St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.
- Mar. 5, 10 A.M., Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.; 7 P.M., Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich.
- Mar. 6, 1:30 P.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; 6:30 P.M., Bethel, Bay City, Mich.
- Mar. 7, 7 P.M., Resurrection, Maumee, Ohio
- Mar. 8, 8 and 10:30 A.M., Trinity, Jenera, Ohio

The Prep Singers spring tour—Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Website, www.lps.wels.net.

- Mar. 12, 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- Mar. 13, 7 P.M., Grace, Lowell, Ark.
- Mar. 14, 6 P.M., Calvary, Dallas, Tex.
- Mar. 15, 7:45 A.M., Atonement, Plano, Tex.; 10:30 A.M., Divine Peace, Garland, Tex.; 7 P.M., Holy Word, Austin, Tex.
- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., Our Savior, San Antonio, Tex.
- Mar. 17, 7 P.M., Lord of Life, Friendswood, Tex.
- Mar. 18, 7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.
- Mar. 19, 7 P.M., Christ the Lord-Sienna, Houston, Tex.
- Mar. 20, 7 P.M., Abiding Faith, Fort Worth, Tex.
- Mar. 21, 7 P.M., Mount Olive, Overland Park, Kan.
- Mar. 22, 9 A.M., Our Savior, Harrisonville,

Mo.; 7 P.M., Gethsemane, Davenport, Iowa

- Mar. 23, 7 P.M., St. John, Watertown, Wis.

Pathways to Christ (Ladies) retreat—Mar. 13–15. Hawthorn Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: Psalm 46:10. 920-233-1069. Website, www.martinlutheroshkosh.com.

WELS Nurses Association spring conference—Mar. 20–21. WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis. Theme: "The heart of healthcare—the heart of WELS." Website, www.welsnurses.net.

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 20–22. Theme: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Maureen, 262-784-0412. Website, www.christianwomantoday.org.

Ironmen of God 2 men's conference—Mar. 21. St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis. Theme: "His sacrifice . . . our response" (Galatians 2:20). Website, ironmenofgodwi.org.

WELS National School Leadership conference—June 15–18. Hosted by WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Website, www.wels.net/events.

52nd annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 25–28. Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, S.D. Hosted by the Black Hills and Central Dakota Circuits. Early registration deadline: April 1. Website, www.lwms.org.

WELSTech conference—July 9–11. For those interested in learning how technology can aid the ministry efforts of churches, schools, individuals, and other gospel-sharing organizations. Hosted by WELS Technology office. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Website, www.wels.net/welstechconf.

Regional youth rally—July 13–16. Villanova University, Philadelphia, Pa. Hosted by the North Atlantic and Michigan Districts. For teens entering grades 9-12. Theme: "Freedom 513" (Galatians 5:13). youthrallyfreedom513@gmail.com. Website, www.welsyouth.net.

63rd biennial WELS convention—July 27–30. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. Website, www.wels.net/2015synodconvention.

NAMES WANTED

Austin, Tex.—People who have moved to the Austin, Tex., area and are looking for a WELS church. 2811 Aftonshire Way, Austin, TX. 920-238-0541.

Merced, Calif.—Contacts in the Merced area to invite to a new Bible study. pastor.cortright@gmail.com.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

New Spanish-language website for outreach and training

In an effort to get the gospel into the homes of more families in Latin America, a new Spanish-language website, *Academia Cristo* (Christ Academy), has been developed to provide further outreach and training opportunities.

"We have an opportunity to communicate the gospel in Latin America like we've never had before," says Michael Hartman, field coordinator for Latin America, referring to the statistic that there will be 70 million smartphone users in Mexico by the end of 2015. "People are getting on the Internet, and they're getting on with their mobile phones."

Whereas Spanish-language printed materials developed by Multi-Language Publications had been used in the past, the goal is to replace this written material with videos and audio Bible studies that can be distributed more widely through the Internet. Hartman says this will be appealing to Latinos, who don't have a reading culture but are regularly on their smartphones.

While there will be simple courses available for non-Christians, the point of the site isn't strictly outreach. "Gospel outreach happens when you sit down and you talk with your friends or family about Jesus," says Hartman. "What we really want to do is enable Christians to be able to do just that."

For that purpose, *Academia Cristo* will also include a level of courses for local leaders that will show them how to share their faith. A future goal is to

add seminary courses for those training for the ministry.

World Missions sees this site as a way to help serve scattered members throughout Latin America, providing ways for them to grow in the faith as well as share their faith with others.

For example, when violence erupted in villages in northern Mexico due to drug trafficking, members of churches in our sister synod *Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Confesional* (Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico) had to flee south to find safer places to live. "How do you help those people to gather around God's Word?" says Hartman. "You provide simple Bible studies that people can work through and learn from even if there isn't a pastor there."

Or when members of our Bolivian church travel to remote areas and meet others who are interested in learning more about Lutheranism, they now have resources they can use to help them proclaim God's Word.

With more and more Hispanics moving into the United States and connecting with WELS churches there, the site also offers a way for those far away from their homeland to share the gospel message they discovered.

This is not to take away the human element. A missionary or a national pastor is connected to each course, available to answer questions and concerns. Two members of the

Latin American mission team also work directly with national church bodies and their members to explore new opportunities for outreach and training. One lives in Mexico; the other works with Hispanic members throughout the United States.

Access the new site at **www.academia-cristo.com**. If you know of Hispanic/Latino families in the United States and Latin America, share the site with them or contact Nate Wagenknecht at 817-428-2356; natewag3@gmail.com.

DEVELOPING COURSES

Hartman, the Latin American national churches, and other members of the mission team are working closely with Multi-Language Publications (MLP) to create the courses for *Academia Cristo*. "It's been an eye-opening thing for me to see how many different people are involved in the creation of these materials," says Hartman.

According to Hartman, he and another missionary meet four times a year with the MLP director to determine what projects to create and who will manage the projects. A national member of our church in Bogota, Colombia, creates much of the audio content, while Hartman and other national pastors from Latin America work with the videos and write study guides. After editing, all the content needs to be arranged and uploaded to the actual site.

Currently six courses are completed, including two five-lesson Bible studies based on the *Come Follow Me* movie as well as other courses on what Christians believe and who Jesus is.



Severe flooding in Malawi

"At the end of 2014, Malawi was desperate for water," writes Rebecca Wendland, wife of Missionary Robert Wendland in Malawi. "The rains had not come, and the city was struggling to provide water to people."

In mid-January, Malawi went from one extreme to another. Heavy rain led to



Homes destroyed by the floods in Mpemba Beni, Malawi. At least one LCCA member died when his house collapsed on him.

severe flooding in the African nation, destroying homes, crops, and resulting in the loss of life. Many Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Malawi (LCCA) congregations, a church body grounded in WELS mission work, are located in the flooded areas.

Several of the congregations in remote areas are hard to reach on the best days. With travel and communication abilities limited, a full assessment of the damage to LCCA churches and members' homes is ongoing.

"In the short term, many thousands of Malawians are dealing with urgent needs," says Paul Nitz, missionary in Malawi. "There will be long-term effects as well. Where the flood knocked down permanent homes on higher ground, people will have lost crops, clothes, dishes, and more. This will be a difficult time of rebuilding and recovering."

WELS missionaries in Malawi have been in contact with WELS Christian Aid and Relief for relief aid. Christian Aid and Relief is making an initial grant

to help with immediate needs and will be able to offer more assistance as ongoing needs are determined. Christian Aid and Relief has also reached out to the Central Africa Medical Mission, which operates a mobile health clinic in Malawi, as medical needs are expected to increase in the flooded areas.

"God surely doesn't need our help to rescue those who trust in him, yet we can play a role in sharing God's love and power with brothers and sisters in Christ in Malawi," says Nitz. "Join us in praying for those who have been affected by the floods."

Keep up with the latest news on Malawi at www.wels.net.



To help Lutheran churches and members in Malawi, you can donate online at www.wels.net/give (choose Christian Aid and Relief) or send checks to WELS, Re: Christian Aid and Relief, flood disaster relief fund, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive, Waukesha WI 53188.

New associate director of Lutheran Schools

In January, Tom Plitzuweit accepted the call to serve as associate director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. Plitzuweit will begin serving in his new position on July 1.

Jim Rademan, director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools, explains that Plitzuweit's primary responsibility will be to oversee the WELS school accreditation program known as WELSSA. Rademan says, "Tom has displayed a love for Lutheran schools through his volunteer work as district schools coordinator for the Nebraska District. He encouraged all the schools in the district to engage in continuous school improvement. He has also demonstrated a willingness to improve and learn through his personal continuing education."

Plitzuweit currently serves St. Paul, Plymouth, Neb., as a teacher and

school administrator. He notes, "I have always felt that I am doubly blessed to be able to have served as a teacher in a classroom setting and as a school administrator at the same time. Having both the teaching and administrative positions simultaneously has given me a clear picture of what it takes to focus on school improvement initiatives."

In his new role with Lutheran Schools, Plitzuweit says, "I look forward to working with schools to help them see and celebrate their strengths, as well as helping them analyze areas in which improvement is needed. Being part of setting vision and strategic planning for our WELS schools and helping schools achieve their gospel-centered missions will be rewarding."

Finally, Plitzuweit says, "I firmly believe our church body has an amazing treasure in our Lutheran schools. . . . By de-



Tom Plitzuweit is the new associate director of WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. He and his wife, Beth, have four daughters.

voting time, energy, and resources to the vital work of our schools now, we are working together to ensure that our church body is equipped with servant leaders for generations to come!"

Serve the Lord with gladness

Besides its two national pastors, God has blessed the Russian Lutheran Church with faithful, talented women who want to serve their Lord and their fellow believers as deaconesses. Thank God for these women and the work he accomplishes through them!

IRINA VLADIMIROVNA YEVPK— SERVING BY REACHING OUT



"I used to work in a factory from morning until night. The managers forbid us from talking about religion, so I had very little opportunity to talk about

the Savior. Now I can speak freely about the Bible. I am very happy to be telling others about the Savior; it's the most important work any of us can do!"

In 2006, Irina left her first profession as a chemist in order to study at our Bible Institute and serve as a deaconess in Akademgorodok and Berdsk.

Now Irina shares her faith with all who will listen. She welcomes visitors to our church, distributes Christian literature, and helps to post spiritual articles in local newspapers. She sends out weekly sermons and devotions to shut-ins, the sick, members who have moved, and friends of our congregations who live far away—including Russian speakers in the United States!

MARINA BORISOVNA BAYANOVA—SERVING THOSE WITH PHYSICAL NEEDS



Acts 6 tells how the early Christian church chose seven men "full of the Spirit and wisdom" to distribute material help so that the apostles could focus on

their spiritual work. We are following this example in Russia. Deaconess Marina Bayanova, a trained psychologist and social worker, serves as our humanitarian aid manager. Marina is kind, caring and discerning. Studying at our Bible Institute trained her to share the gospel with those in need. Thanks to Marina's service, the needy

receive material help, and we find new opportunities to share God's Word.

Marina is a hard worker who constantly thinks of other people. She has a patient ear for those who need to talk and reasonable advice for those who ask. She visits the sick and comforts the hurting. Marina's motto is: "What can I do to help those around me?"



ELENA SERGEEVNA NESTEROVA— SERVING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Elena serves as a deaconess in Iskitim, her hometown. She completed our Bible Institute in 2000 and

has taught the children of our congregation for nearly 15 years. Even though Elena is now married with her own daughter, she continues serving the church part time.

Elena teaches Sunday school, vacation Bible school, and special children's seminars. She writes the VBS curriculum and prepares the lesson books for all our congregations.

Each month Elena travels to a mining village south of Iskitim to teach "Sunday school" lessons as an extracurricular activity in the village school.

Elena also serves the women of the congregation. She knows them well, feels at ease speaking with them, and visits them when they are sick. The women of our congregation love Elena and appreciate her service.

Jennifer Wolfgramm

If you know a Russian speaker who would like to receive weekly sermons and devotions via e-mail, contact Deaconess Irina Yevpak, christluth@yandex.ru. Learn more about the Russian Lutheran Church on p. 28 or at www.wels.net/missions.

Obituaries

Earline J. Sickinger 1943–2014

Earline (née Retzlaff) Sickinger was born May 22, 1943, in Manitowoc, Wis. She died Dec. 1, 2014, in Oshkosh, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Paul, Arlington, Minn., and Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her father and an infant daughter. She is survived by her mother; her husband, Dick; two sons; one sister; and two grandchildren.

Waldemar Henry Nolte 1916–2014

Waldemar Nolte was born May 23, 1916, in Elmore, Minn. He died Dec. 2, 2014, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1936 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.; St. John, Burlington, Wis.; St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.; and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Gertrude; two brothers; and three sisters. He is survived by 3 sons, 5 daughters, 27 grandchildren, and 37 great-grandchildren.

Esther H. Pape 1913–2014

Esther Pape was born July 21, 1913, in Manitowoc, Wis. She died Dec. 4, 2014, in North Fond du Lac, Wis.

She taught at St. John-St. James, Reedsville, Wis., and Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.

She is preceded in death by five brothers and six sisters. She is survived by three sisters.

John (Johann) P. Meyer 1937–2014

John Meyer was born Feb. 13, 1937, in West Allis, Wis. He died Dec. 3, 2014.

A 1963 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Grace, Eau Claire, Mich.; St. Paul, Hillsboro, Wis.;

Sola Scriptura, Decatur, Ga.; Peace, Holiday, Fla.; St. Luke, New Lisbon, Wis.; and St. Paul, Mauston, Wis.

He is preceded in death by one brother. He is survived by his wife, Annette; one son; one daughter; six grandchildren; one brother; and one sister.

Armin Karl Edward Keibel 1919–2014

Armin Keibel was born Nov. 24, 1919, in West Allis, Wisconsin. He died Dec. 7, 2014.

A 1944 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.; St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.; Gethsemane, Los Angeles, Calif.; and Bethany, Concord, Calif.

He is survived by his wife, Marion; one son; one daughter; and five grandchildren.

Ames Ekern Anderson 1934–2014

Ames Anderson was born Oct. 20, 1934, in St. Paul, Minn. He died Dec. 23, 2014, in New Ulm, Minn.

He taught at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; one daughter; two grandchildren; and one sister.

John Carl Edward Jeske 1924–2014

John Jeske was born Feb. 24, 1924. He died Dec. 24, 2014.

He taught at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1948 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; and St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.

He is preceded in death by one grandchild. He is survived by his wife, Eleonore; 2 sons; 3 daughters; and 19 grandchildren.

Reaching Mormon missionaries

A new opportunity is available to witness to Mormons—without even leaving your home. All you have to do is open your front door.

This initiative from Truth in Love Ministry (TILM)—called “Please Open the Door”—asks Christians to invite Mormon missionaries into their homes for a meal and spiritual discussion. “The vision is to equip thousands of Christians to witness to Mormon missionaries,” says Mark Cares, TILM director.

About 80,000 Mormons are on two-year mission trips around the world, according to Cares. Many are young—18 or 19 years old—with little background or training. While some are passionate about what they are doing, others go mainly because of peer pressure.

Cares says that in his discussions with Mormon missionaries after their trips, many walk away dissatisfied with Mormonism. Unfortunately, he says, most will not turn to Christianity if they do leave. “When we ask them how many times Christians talked to them, it was obvious the average was about once a year. Most of their experiences with Christians is rude.”

The goal of “Please Open the Door” is to change that perception and plant the seed of the gospel. “[The missionaries] basically are going to people who reject them. When they finally meet someone who’s nice to them and feeds them, you can tell them almost anything,” says Cares. “So let’s put a loving face on Christianity and witness more.”

About 60 teams already participate in the program. TILM is actively involved in the process, providing training before teams even request a missionary to visit them and coaching the teams through each visit. “Our strategy is to control the conversation over repeated visits by reacting to what they present,” says Cares.

Jon and Amanda Walker, members at Our Savior, Arlington, Tex., have opened their home to four different

sister missionaries. While they were nervous at first, Jon says that once they got started it was easy because of the relationships that form. “They are very likeable people,” he says. “And when they present their material, they give you these windows where you can take their material and show them God’s love and show them what God’s Word actually says.”

According to Jon, the coaching TILM provides is encouraging and helpful. “They remind you that it’s not your way with words or your intelligence that’s going to bring people to God. It’s only the Holy Spirit’s work. You have the opportunity—the enormous blessing—to be a mouthpiece for God’s Word.”

Jon says being involved in the program has helped his relationship with his wife grow as well as his relationship with his Lord. “When we started sharing our faith on a weekly basis, it became less of we’re in the Word because this is what we’re supposed to do to we’re in the Word because of the amazing blessing that it is to us and the amazing opportunity we have to share it.”



Learn more about “Please Open the Door” at www.pleaseopenthedoor.com.

MISSION OPPORTUNITY

This summer you not only have the opportunity to open the door to your home to Mormon missionaries, but you also can witness directly to Mormons in their homes. For two different weeks, June 13-20 and June 20-27, Truth in Love Ministry (TILM) is sponsoring mission trips to Provo and Salt Lake City, Utah, in which WELS members go door to door in an area that is 80 percent Mormon. Training is provided. For more information, contact TILM at danee@tilm.org.

New mission bringing gospel to LDS community

"My family and I just moved to St. George" is Mike Quandt's standard conversation starter.

Quandt says, "This inevitably is followed up by the question, 'Oh, why, what brought you here?' (Insert big grin!) Now I can and am glad to say, 'We are here to build a church from the ground up. Do you have any ideas for us?'"



The ministry center at Redemption is the site of the congregation's Bible studies and workshops.

Quandt says that this approach has opened many doors for him since he and his family arrived in St. George, Utah, in September 2013, after accepting a call from the WELS Board for Home Missions to start a new mission there.

Quandt says that St. George is different from most communities in the United States because of the strong influence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often referred to as LDS or Mormon). Quandt's background as a pastor in Salt Lake City for 13 years

equipped him to understand the LDS culture and theology and how that even affects local politics and business. His time as a West Lutheran High School teacher and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor is also paying off as Redemption's ministry is currently focusing on using instructional classes as entry points to the church.

Quandt explains that he has spent months meeting people and establishing relationships, while also trying to place the name of Redemption into the public eye through evangelism events such as the community's Dickens Fest in December 2014 (see sidebar). After assessing the community's needs, Redemption has decided to offer "a multi-tiered curriculum for adult Christian education," says Quandt. "This educational ministry will equip adults with basic Bible study skills and basic Christianity know-how."

Morning classes and workshops will be geared toward the community's large retiree population. Higher-level classes and instructional events that lean more toward dialogue-based learning will be held to appeal to faculty and students at Dixie State University. Quandt also wants to develop services for those who have lost their way due to addictions. As he notes, "St. George has tens of thousands of folks who have left the LDS church or are leaning that way, but most of them are not interested in jumping back into a church setting.

Our assessment is they need a different re-entry point, and since most of these souls were previously discouraged from asking questions and not equipped to become students of the Bible, we would like to offer them the chance to do so."

The ministry center that Redemption opened in January will be the site of the classes and workshops that it offers. The center is located in a busy building that sees a lot of traffic, so Quandt will have the opportunity to use his favorite conversation starter with the proprietors and patrons.

During his exploratory work in St. George, Quandt has found a small group of WELS members who are now meeting together for Bible study. Those members are beginning to identify friends to bring to some of the classes that Redemption will offer.

As Quandt says, "The bottom line is that there are tens of thousands here who haven't heard the sweet, unconditional gospel, and we are just beginning to offer them entry points (beyond our personal witness) to dig in and discover it by formal study of the Word. Redemption is ready and eager for the next phase of interaction with this spiritually starving community."

To learn more about Redemption's ministry, visit www.redemptionsg.com.

DICKENS FEST OFFERS OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

St. George, Utah, hosts an annual Dickens Fest that offers its community an opportunity to travel back in time to a 19th-century Victorian English landscape. In December 2014, Redemption was one of more than 200 vendors to participate in this event.

Mary Quandt, wife of Redemption's pastor, Mike Quandt, decorated the booth and borrowed costumes from friends. Redemption won the best costume award for vendors, which was announced over the PA system and gave the church some extra exposure.



Mary and Mike Quandt

Mike Quandt reports that thousands walked past the booth and approximately 500 stopped long enough to exchange a greeting and receive the complimentary Christmas cards that Redemption was handing out. "Dozens stopped and lingered a bit longer to discuss what Redemption is offering to them and the community," says Quandt. "We are most grateful for the opportunity to have met these souls and look forward to possibly reconnecting soon."

District news

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

D-M—Ascension, Moorhead, Minn., celebrated its 50th anniversary on Jan. 18.

MI—On Jan. 11, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **James Wooster**.

NW—Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis., is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2015. The first celebration was held on Jan. 25, and others will be held in May and October.

SEW—On Oct. 12, 2014, Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Thomas Knickelbein**.

The district reporters for this month are: D-M—David Ruddat; MI—John Eich; NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On Jan. 20, five students were baptized at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. A total of ten students (pictured with teachers and staff from the high school) have been baptized this school year, eight of whom are international students.

WELS news briefs

TECHNOLOGY

414-256-3250; martin.spriggs@wels.net

A new, updated version of the **WELS Mobile App** is now available for Apple, Android, and Amazon users. The updated app was designed for easier navigation and to take advantage of built-in features of the phone. Some new features include the ability to play audio and video files from within the application, a new WELS Radio player with improved interface and reliable playback, and additional content. To download the free app, search for "WELS Mobile" in your favorite app store. Be sure to leave a review in your app store to encourage others to download the app as well. For more information, visit <http://m.wels.net>.

EVANGELISM

414-256-3287; evangelism@wels.net

The Commission on Evangelism is offering an **online course on friendship evangelism** April 6 to May 8 through the continuing education program at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. This course is designed to enable learners to confidently share their faith in a personal, transparent, and informed approach. The instructor is John Huebner, retired mission counselor. While this course is one of three that make up the Evangelism certificate program, it also can be taken on its own for those interested in learning more about gospel witnessing. Learn more at www.wels.net/evangelism.

COMMISSION ON INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS

Representatives from WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod met in December 2014 for a **third round of informal discussions**. The main topic was the doctrine of fellowship and its application. These discussions are meant to clarify the doctrinal positions and practices of the three synods. Another meeting is planned for December 2015.

Through my Bible in 3 years

MARCH 2015

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Hebrews 10:1-18 | 12. Num. 6:22-7:89 | 23. Num. 21 |
| 2. Heb. 10:19-39 | 13. Num. 8:1-9:14 | 24. Num. 22 |
| 3. Heb. 11:1-22 | 14. Num. 9:15-10:36 | 25. Num. 23, 24 |
| 4. Heb. 11:23-40 | 15. Num. 11, 12 | 26. Num. 25, 26 |
| 5. Heb. 12:1-17 | 16. Num. 13:1-14:10a | 27. Num. 27, 36 |
| 6. Heb. 12:18-29 | 17. Num. 14:10b-45 | 28. Num. 28, 29 |
| 7. Heb. 13:1-8 | 18. Num. 15 | 29. Num. 30 |
| 8. Heb. 13:9-25 | 19. Num. 16:1-35 | 30. Num. 31 |
| 9. Numbers 1, 2 | 20. Num. 16:36-18:7 | 31. Num. 32 |
| 10. Num. 3, 4 | 21. Num. 18:8-19:22 | |
| 11. Num. 5:1-6:21 | 22. Num. 20 | |

Read or listen online at www.wels.net/spiritual-help/through-my-bible.

The Scriptures provide graphic details of our Savior's last week before his death. How much do you remember?

Each year we listen to the combined accounts of the Lord's Passion recorded in the four gospels. All of the gospel writers focus on the Savior's death. Matthew records Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem in chapter 21. He shares the Savior's teaching in the temple during Holy Week before turning to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Mark begins his account in chapter 11 and takes a similar approach. Luke begins with Palm Sunday in the middle of chapter 19 and spends a little more time on the resurrection. John records Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in chapter 12 and then concentrates on the words of Jesus after he washed the disciples' feet.

Not all the events of the week are recorded in each gospel. John reminds us, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (21:25). But what we have, John also reminds us, "are written that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name" (20:31).

For that reason we hear the record of what Jesus did each year during Lent. I encourage you to listen carefully this Lenten season once again. The little quiz is created to help you listen so you not only rediscover the little details but also marvel at the big picture: Jesus died and rose again for us unworthy sinners.

May God bless your Lenten meditation.



Test your memory

John A. Braun

1 What was the name of the festival Jesus and his disciples celebrated in Jerusalem?

- a. The Atonement
- b. The Passover
- c. Both
- d. Neither

2 What directions did Jesus give two disciples when he sent them to prepare for the festival?

- a. He told them to follow a man carrying a jar of water.
- b. He told them to avoid the scribes and Pharisees.
- c. He took money from the treasury kept by Judas.
- d. He gave them no specific directions.

3 In the upper room, Jesus . . .

- a. Sat at the table quietly because he knew what was going to happen.
- b. Laughed with the disciples because it was their last meal together.
- c. Singled out John to tell him what was going to happen.
- d. Washed the feet of the disciples.

4 At the table, Jesus . . .

- a. Made a new covenant with his disciples, giving them his body and blood with the bread and wine.
- b. Gave the disciples a new commandment to love one another.
- c. Told Judas to buy what was needed for the festival.
- d. All of the above

5 How many swords did the disciples have when they left the upper room?

- a. 1
- b. 5
- c. 2
- d. 11, one for each remaining disciple

6 Jesus told his disciples they would be scattered before the night was out. But he also promised that . . .

- a. He would rise from the dead.
- b. They would gather again in Bethany.
- c. Peter would be their leader from that night onward.
- d. He didn't know if he could go through with everything.



7 Where did Jesus and his disciples go after the meal?

- a. The temple
- b. Gethsemane
- c. The house of Mary and Martha
- d. The owner's home to pay for the meal and room

8 Jesus went a little way off to pray privately. Whom did Jesus take with him to pray?

- a. Peter
- b. James
- c. John
- d. All three of them

9 When Jesus returned from his prayers, . . .

- a. An angel appeared.
- b. The disciples were sleeping.
- c. The disciples were playing dice to keep awake.
- d. The Father spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son."

10 When Judas betrayed Jesus, he . . .

- a. Led the crowd of armed people to Jesus.
- b. Identified Jesus with a kiss.
- c. Neither of these
- d. Both of these

11 Peter was the first to defend Jesus by doing what?

- a. He drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus.
- b. He stood between Jesus and those who came to arrest him.
- c. He and the other disciples formed a protective ring around Jesus.
- d. None of these

12 Who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest?

- a. Judas
- b. Malchus

- c. Annas
- d. Pilate

13 What gave Peter away as a disciple of Jesus in the high priest's courtyard?

- a. He spoke with a Galilean accent.
- b. He looked like a fisherman from Galilee.
- c. Everyone saw him and John together.
- d. The servant girl used to work for Peter in Galilee.

14 The Jewish Council sentenced Jesus to death because . . .

- a. Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah.
- b. Jesus said he was the Son of God.
- c. Pilate forced them to condemn him.
- d. Both a and b

15 Jesus told Pilate, . . .

- a. "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."
- b. "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."
- c. "My kingdom is not of this world."
- d. All of the above

16 The man who helped Jesus carry his cross was . . .

- a. Alexander of Bythnia
- b. Rufus of Cyrene
- c. Simon of Cyrene
- d. Simeon of Tarsus

17 What did Jesus mean when he said, "It is finished"?

- a. He had come to the end of his life.
- b. He had done everything to accomplish our salvation.

- c. He had done everything to accomplish his own salvation.
- d. He had done everything to show us how to suffer for God's purpose.

18 Which two men buried Jesus?

- a. Joseph and Nicodemus
- b. Peter and John
- c. Andrew and James
- d. Malchus and Annas

19 Which best describes the suffering and death of Jesus?

- a. He gave us an example to follow.
- b. We must be obedient to God like Jesus if we are to get to heaven.
- c. The Lord has laid on Jesus the sins of all of us.
- d. We are like Jesus and should suffer for our sins.

20 To whom did Jesus appear after he rose from the grave?

- a. Mary Magdalene
- b. Lazarus
- c. Three disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee
- d. All of the above

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.



ANSWERS: 1. b.; 2. a.; 3. d.; 4. a.; 5. c.; 6. a.; 7. b.; 8. d.; 9. b.; 10. d.; 11. a.; 12. c.; 13. a.; 14. d.; 15. d.; 16. c.; 17. b.; 18. a.; 19. c.; 20. a.

A MASTER FISHERMAN Jennifer Wolfgramm

In an instant, Gennadi Step-anovich's life changed forever. Gennadi loved to tag along with his older brothers as they played and worked in a village just outside of Berdsk, Russia. But one day tragedy struck. Gennadi fell off a horse and lost all hearing in both ears. He was five years old.

Young Gennadi soon stopped talking, but the happy boy with the sunny personality remained popular with his friends. When the other boys started school, Gennadi went to work. In the summer and fall, he picked berries and mushrooms for his mother in the nearby birch and pine forest. Every day in the winter, he and other boys cut holes in the frozen river and dug channels to the riverbank so the village women could draw water. The boys earned just a few kopecks for their efforts. But hardworking Gennadi was the first to save enough to purchase his own long sheepskin coat with a big fur collar. Young Gennadi took pride in his hard work and success!

At age 8, Gennadi started learning carpentry. For 15 years he worked in the village constructing wooden work sleighs. In 1960 he moved to the city of Berdsk in search of better pay. Eventually he landed a factory job building wooden radio cases. Gennadi's years at the Berdsk radio factory brought him new success. He made many new friends among the factory's other deaf workers. The plant manager frequently posted Gennadi's picture on the board of model workers. He joined the factory's acting club and performed skits in Minsk, Kiev, and Riga. He went to dances with his sisters. He met a lovely woman and married her, and they had a baby girl.

Gennadi worked at the factory until it closed in 1999. Then he retired and went to work for himself, doing the things he loved best. He built a pleasant wooden house outside the city on a large

garden plot called a *dacha*. In the summers, Gennadi tended his *dacha*. In the winters, he went ice fishing.

In his own modest way, Gennadi had a successful life: a loving family, a decent pension, lots of friends, summers tending his garden, winters spent ice fishing. What more could he want? Gennadi is typical of many who grew up during Soviet times. He was perfectly happy working, fishing, and gardening—and never gave a thought to God or spiritual things.

But God was thinking of Gennadi.

JESUS CASTS A NET

Larisa Ivanovna can hear, but she grew up using Russian sign language with her deaf parents. When she was just 16, she was commissioned to start a school for the deaf. As teacher and translator, she soon became a trusted member of the deaf community in Berdsk and the surrounding area. When some of the deaf began attending our Bible classes in Iskitim, she agreed to translate for them. She herself was not interested in the Bible, but she did want to help her friends. The Holy Spirit, however, had his own plans. He worked in Ivanovna's heart, and she soon put her faith in the Savior and joined our church.

When the Berdsk deaf club lost its meeting room in 2010, Ivanovna asked Missionary Luke Wolfgramm if they could meet at the church's Christian Information Center. Wolfgramm agreed and started visiting the deaf club's meetings too. Eventually the deaf asked him to lead Bible studies for them.

Because they are cut off from much of society, the deaf love to converse with one another. It was only natural for the group to invite their friend Gennadi to the Bible study. Gennadi was happy to come and talk fishing with the other men. Little did he know there was another Master Fisherman in the room!

Then one week's Bible lesson focused on Baptism. Wolfgramm learned that Gennadi had never been baptized. He asked him, "Gennadi, would you like to be baptized? God wants to give all his wonderful blessings to you personally."

"Oh, no, Pastor, I'm too old for that kind of thing!"

But Gennadi kept coming and kept listening. And God kept working in his heart. Finally, about a year later, Gennadi came to Bible class and announced that he would like to be baptized. What a happy day that was!

Gennadi kept coming, and he kept listening. About six months later, Gennadi came to Bible class and announced that he would like to be confirmed. Why? Gennadi wanted to take the Lord's Supper with us.

Wolfgramm likes to think that the Lord Jesus instituted his Supper just for Gennadi. Do you remember the time when Jesus spoke sign language? Before healing that deaf man, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. He touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven, heaved a sigh, and spoke one powerful word: "*Ephatha!*" Be opened!

The Savior does the same thing now for Gennadi. "Look! Take and eat! This is my body, which I gave for you. Look! Take and drink! This is the blood that I shed for you on the cross. Gennadi, go in peace. All your sins are forgiven!"

RUSSIAN CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Established: 1993

Baptized members: 260

Congregations/preaching
stations: 5

Missionaries: 2.5

National pastors: 2

Unique fact: The two missionaries and their wives love to sing. Every Christmas and Easter the missionary quartet performs outreach concerts at each of the missions' congregations. The concerts are nonthreatening events for members to invite their friends and relatives.

Go to www.wels.net/missions to learn more about WELS missions.

On Gennadi's confirmation day, Wolfgramm said, "Gennadi, we all know you like to fish. Jesus is a fisherman too. The only difference is that Jesus catches people. Gennadi, when you catch your fish, you take them home and eat them. When Jesus catches his fish, he takes them home and gives them eternal life. And now, Gennadi, Jesus has caught you too, hasn't he!" And Gennadi nodded and smiled.

BLESSINGS OF THE CATCH

Gennadi and the other members of our deaf congregation in Berdsk treasure their worship services and Bible study, both for the fellowship with one another and for the peace and joy that only God gives. Even Gennadi, who was living a happy life and not searching for anything, declares, "I like to hear God's Word. My heart is happy. I know where I am going, and I am at peace."

Valentina, another member of the group, recalls, "Before I learned about my Savior, I was always nervous. I would make myself sick with worry. Now that I know Jesus, my heart is at peace. I'm not worried about the future."

Maria states, "We have found a home here at the Lutheran church. Here we can come and learn about the Bible in a way that we can understand, with pastors and translators who take the time to teach us."

"Before we learned about Jesus, we were always angry and fighting with each other. Now we have peace. Now we have joy. Thank you for teaching us about our Savior!"

Jennifer Wolfgramm and her husband, Missionary Luke Wolfgramm, live and serve in Berdsk, Russia.



Meet three deaconesses who serve the Russian Lutheran Church on p. 22.

Top to bottom: Members of the Berdsk deaf club; a Russian *dacha*, or large garden; Gennadi Stepanovich; John Lange, a member of the Board for World Missions, gives Gennadi a fishing lure as a Baptism gift.





Keeping the DOOR OPEN

After parents discover that their son converted to Mormonism, they continue to reach out with the true message of God's grace. Julie K. Wietzke

David and Jane open the door and invite in two clean-cut, earnest young men for an evening meal and some religious discussion. When the men depart a few hours later, they leave behind a few brochures but keep with them some lingering questions and thoughts about what grace really is.

David and Jane are part of the "Please Open the Door" initiative of Truth in Love Ministry, in which Christians welcome Mormon missionaries into their homes for the opportunity to create a relationship and share God's Word with them (see more on p. 23). A year ago they probably wouldn't have been involved in the program, but now it holds special meaning to them. Why? Because a year ago, their youngest son told them he was becoming a Mormon.

Jane was driving to work when she got the call. “He was upset,” says Jane. “It took 10 minutes for him to tell me.”

Jane says she drove to her friend’s house and literally went into shock. “The worst thing in my life had just happened,” she says.

After their son’s phone call about wanting to get baptized into the Mormon church, David and Jane flew out to see him. “We had some time alone with him at first, and we talked to him. It got really emotional,” says David. “But he wanted to get the missionaries in there with us.”

Jane says that their son talked a lot about repentance. “He felt there were a lot of things he’d done [in the past] that he shouldn’t have done,” she says. “He said their religion made sense, and it helped him to change.”

Unfortunately the Mormon definition of *repentance* is not the Christian definition. It stresses a permanent resolve never to repeat the sin and righteous living that includes full obedience of the law and commands of the church (www.tilm.org). And while doing good and working hard may help Mormons feel like they are making strides at the beginning, it often leads to feelings of stress and worthlessness when they realize that they can’t be perfect.

Jane and David returned home, but they continued to keep in touch with their son. And they started researching Mormonism, learning as much as they could about the religion so they could better witness to their son.

“We have ‘Mormon days,’ we call them,” says Jane. “We just study all day long. By the end of the day, you’re just really sad.” David adds, “Then we need a non-Mormon day.”

In the process, they discovered the importance of understanding the terminology used by Mormons. “That’s what makes it hard in the beginning . . . you can be saying the same words and meaning completely opposite things,” says David. They say Mormons also often say they believe the same things Christians do.

David continues, “It’s very difficult if you get into a religious discussion that it doesn’t turn into an argument. It’s almost impossible because the gaps are so wide.”

They both know, however, that they have the Lord on their side. “You have to do your best and pray that the Lord puts the words in your mouth and tells you the right time [to say them] and that he’s going to cover up your mistakes—I pray that a lot,” says Jane.

But it hasn’t been easy. They have asked all the questions: Why our son? Why us? What did we do wrong as parents? Why weren’t we more diligent? “You have your Mormon day when all you do is think about how horrible this is, how broken, and how awful,” says Jane.

To give them hope, Jane says they have been memorizing Bible passages. “In the end, it’s trusting in the Lord and his goodness and mercy,” she says.

They also pray—and encourage others to do the same.

And they reach out more widely with God’s message of free grace. “Rather than sit at home and be depressed and think, *Woe is me*, how can I take that brokenness, that negative energy, and help 20- to 30-year-olds become more involved in their church?” says Jane. “How can we reach the youth with that wonderful message?”

They started by meeting with their church to discuss ways to engage young people. They also are encouraging parents to nurture their own faith and work with their children. “It’s funny because your faith isn’t really what it should be when you’re raising kids. You get distracted,” says David. “But as parents, if you’re growing in your own faith you’ll be better able to deal with and answer the hard questions that people ask and that you know your kids will run into.”

Jane and David also are involved in witnessing to Mormons in general. Last summer, Jane and one of their other sons went on the yearly mission trip sponsored by Truth in Love Ministry to Utah to help with door-to-door

outreach to Mormons. Jane and David also began inviting Mormon missionaries to their home.

David says this wasn’t an easy decision. “We’re angry with these people for stealing our son. I’m trying to focus on how I can reach my son,” he says. “But actually, talking to the missionaries is a good way to get a better understanding not only what the Mormon church teaches but also what the Mormon people think about things.”

Besides helping them better understand Mormonism, inviting Mormon missionaries to their home is helping them grow in their faith. “With all the research we’re doing into the Mormon faith it really makes you understand your faith better because you’re asking questions, you’re probing,” says Jane.

And it lets them plant a seed. “We fervently pray for these young men as we do for our son,” says Jane and David. “We ask that the Lord would work in their hearts and help them to see how much different and precious are the truths of the Bible.”

The “Please Open the Door” initiative is important to Jane and David for another reason. Right now their son is considering doing a mission trip of his own.

“It’s hard to think that he’s going to go out and preach something other than Christ. It’s heartbreaking,” says Jane. “We are not going to bring our son out of Mormonism. God is in control. But something that we say or something that his brother says or even something that someone who we don’t know says may begin to spark something. If our son goes out on a mission, maybe something will happen. Maybe it will be one of our people who will open the door to him.”

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ.

Truth in Love Ministry (TILM) offers support groups to parents whose children converted to Mormonism. David and Jane also are willing to offer support and guidance. Contact TILM at 855-770-3700 or tilm@tilm.org for more information.

Join the “coast” guard

Jeffrey L. Samelson

Guard against coasting, which leads to weak faith, sloppy doctrine, moral confusion, poor stewardship, and spiritual immaturity.

It's a thrill of childhood: picking up enough speed on your bike, probably going downhill, to be able to quit pedaling and just coast—not just going fast, but temporarily ceding control to the forces of physics. That excitement is what makes roller coasters so much fun—or frightening—for young and old alike.

Yet there are times when coasting is not at all a good idea: when you are unable to see what lies ahead or the road is rough, or when your vehicle is not a 20-pound bicycle but a 4,000-pound automobile. In those cases, you'll still get somewhere fast, but the end results may not be good.

Christians and churches coast too, without appreciating the danger they might face ahead. They rely on momentum from the past to move forward or yield spiritual control to uncertain or unfriendly forces. Then, often without even realizing it, just like the driver of a car coasting in neutral down a hill, they end up at the wrong destination or crash and hurt other people or at least lose both power and control when they encounter the rough spots ahead.

Coasting Christians are those who confuse confirmation with graduation. They assume they had everything they needed before they went to high school. Even parents coast when they think that the “spiritual shove” of baptizing their children and a few years of Christian education is the end of their responsibility to their children. It is, tragically, no surprise when such neglect of faith leads to the wreck of faith.

Even pastors are tempted to coast. Sometimes they think, “I learned what I needed in seminary; no need for me to do more study and work through any issues again now!” Their members might also think, “Our pastor was trained in our great seminary and approved by the synod, so why would we ever need to pay attention to and test what he's actually teaching, practicing, or promoting?” In the same way,

we might coast on our synodical identity: “Hey, we WELS Lutherans have the reputation of being the ones who have our doctrine right, so anything we decide to do must also be right.”

What happens when we think, “We worked hard to formulate those doctrinal statements 50 years ago; there's no need to study those issues ever again or find new ways to explain what the Bible says about them to a new generation or communicate them in a different context”? Perhaps a congregation coasts on the outreach done years ago or the friendliness they once had or the giving and service habits of an aging generation.

It's no accident that one of the most common ways the Bible speaks of Christian life is with words meaning “walk.” Instead of inertia or undirected activity, we aim for deliberate forward motion. And since it is God through the gospel who provides the power and guidance for everything in the believer's journey of faith, you want to remember that if you're coasting, then you're going downhill and likely have pushed God out of the driver's seat.

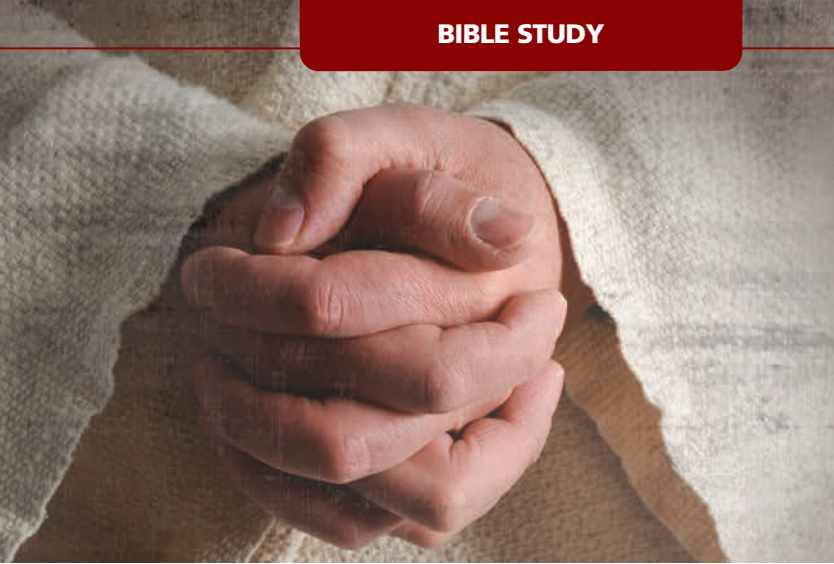
So guard against coasting, which leads to weak faith, sloppy doctrine, moral confusion, poor stewardship, and spiritual immaturity. Consider all the places in Scripture that tell us to “watch out,” “keep on,” “be prepared,” “grow,” “be filled,” and “devote yourselves.” Remember your joyful responsibility to move forward, powered by the gospel in God's Word and sacraments. That's where the real thrill is, because the places God wants to take us are better than anything we can imagine.

Go with God.

Contributing editor Jeff Samelson is pastor at Christ, Clarksville, Maryland.

JESUS

PRAYED FOR US



Jesus prayed for others.

Samuel C. Degner

One of Jesus' prayers in Scripture stands out from the rest. While most are just a verse or two long, this one spans almost all of John chapter 17. Yet if the length is what draws our attention at first, it's the content that keeps it.

JESUS PRAYED ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

The Teacher gathers his students in an upper room for one last Passover meal together. He knows that in a few hours, one of them will betray him. Before dawn breaks, he will be on trial before the leaders of his people. By the next sunset, he will be dead. It's the night before the biggest day of his life.

So he prays. We've come to expect nothing less! But what does he ask?

Well, what do we ask before the big moments in life? In the locker room, the athlete prays for success before the big game. On Friday night, the bride prays that her wedding will go well the next day. As he bows his head in the pulpit, the pastor prays for a smooth delivery of his sermon. So we would expect Jesus, on the night before the biggest moment in history, to ask for a successful completion to his work.

Which he does. But that only takes him five verses. Then he spends the rest of the chapter praying for others, not for himself.

Can you imagine that? How often does the athlete think to pray for his teammates? Does the nervous bride remember to include her attendants, friends, and family in her petitions? Does the preacher also pray for his people as he steps into the pulpit? It's not that it's wrong to pray for ourselves. It's just that sometimes our thoughts and prayers become so narrow that we miss opportunities to remember others before God.

Jesus prayed for you—
and not just about you
but in your stead.

So it is with wonder that we watch Jesus step into the High Priest's role that Thursday evening and offer up petitions to his Father on behalf of his people.

JESUS PRAYED ON BEHALF OF YOU

On this night, with the weight of his work already bearing down on him, Jesus does not fail to lift up his disciples in prayer. He asks his Father to protect them and set them apart by his Word. He prays that they will be filled with joy.

Then he prays about you. He doesn't say your name, but he has you on his heart. He prays that you will be one with your brothers and sisters in the faith. He prays that you will be one even with him and the Father! He prays that you will be with him where he is and see his glory. Yes, on the biggest night of his life, Jesus prays for you.

And could the Father refuse his Son's petition? Through Baptism, you have been united to the Father and the Son and to your brothers and sisters in the holy Christian church. One day

you will see Jesus' glory as you eat and drink with him in his Father's kingdom. This is your confidence because Jesus prayed for you—and not just *about* you but *in your stead*. This prayer and all of his other flawless words and actions rise up to heaven as incense, filling the Father's nostrils with a pleasing aroma whenever he thinks of you.

Now Jesus has made you a priest to serve God. It is your privilege to offer up petitions to the same Father on behalf of others, just as the Son did. You can do so eagerly, knowing that he hears them for the sake of Jesus, who prayed for you.

Contributing editor Samuel Degner is pastor at Bethel, Menasha, Wisconsin.

This is the fifth article in a nine-part series on Jesus and his prayer life.



Hearing the gospel
is our connection
to the Holy Spirit
and the spiritual
power he gives.

Ordinary power

It's not surprising that the world does not think much of Christians or their churches. They observe that people come to a building—sometimes an imposing one and sometimes one used for another purpose during the rest of the week. Those people sit together, sing songs, and listen to a speaker. Not much excitement there! No interactive games to play, entertaining dancing or singing to enjoy, or contest at which to cheer for a victory. In some houses of worship, monitors display attractive images: helps for the message, the liturgy, and the songs. In others, none of that exists.

So we come to sit and listen. It's sort of like going to school again or attending a lecture. That's okay if you are interested in either the content or the speaker. But in a world that measures importance by visual interest or dynamic sensory impact, it's boring. It seems unnecessary, unimportant, and unproductive. Many conclude that they would rather be somewhere else than sitting in church.

We are, of course, interested in the message presented in those gatherings of Christians. We come to hear of Christ crucified. But Paul reminds us that the message of Christ crucified is foolishness to some and a stumbling block to others (1 Corinthians 1:23). Coupled with the very nature of how it's presented—even in the best of situations—we need not wonder why so many find other things to do at the time of worship.

This all may seem too much pessimistic anguish. Paul tempers our dismal assessment and suggests we remember that the message of Christ crucified is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). The message of the gospel, Christ crucified, communicates how God in his love gave us the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. That's not part of the vocabulary of our world.

You may never hear it while seated in front of your television watching almost

all network programing. It won't be there as you play games on your phone or computer. And you probably won't encounter it attending most other events outside the doors of your church. So without that church service, you will miss the wisdom of God. Paul says that he did not come to Corinth with eloquence or persuasive words. He came with one message—the wisdom of God in Christ crucified. That's why we reach to open the door of our church and to find a seat to listen.

I think sometimes we think that if we've heard that wisdom once or twice, we don't need to hear it again very often. But Paul suggests another important reason for regularly stepping into assemblies where we can hear Christ crucified. The message of the cross is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). God doesn't promise to impart spiritual power outside the presentation of the gospel. We call it the means of grace because it is the way God creates, nourishes, and sustains our faith.

We might expect that God would work in some spectacular way. But, no, he works in an ordinary way when we sit and listen to the gospel. I'll admit it may not seem like much, but hearing the gospel is our connection to the Holy Spirit and the spiritual power he gives. Without it we become like the seeds that fall among the thorns and are choked by the cares of life, the seeds that fall on the hardened path and are devoured by Satan, or the seeds that fall on the rocky places and wither because they had no depth. Sitting and listening to the gospel of Christ crucified is simply receiving God's amazing power—and his wisdom—in an ordinary, regular way.

“He . . . was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human.”

Joel D. Otto

One of the earliest false teachings to plague the Christian church was a denial that Jesus was truly human. The apostle John addressed this in two of his letters (1 John 1:1-3; 2 John 7). Some taught that Jesus only seemed to be truly human, but he was not really human. This was called “docetism” (after the Greek word that means “to seem”). In the fourth century, a bishop named Apollinaris said that the divine nature of Jesus took the place of his human soul. While he was attempting to emphasize Jesus’ divinity, his teaching denied Jesus’ full humanity because full humanity means having a body and soul.

The reason for many of these early false teachings was that people immersed in the paganism of the Greco-Roman world didn’t think it was possible or appropriate for the divine to touch the human, much less actually become human. For many, anything that had to do with physical or material things was considered bad. To them it was beneath the divine to become human, and it didn’t make rational sense. How could the almighty, eternal God become a weak, mortal man?

The first confessors of the Nicene Creed correctly understood that the incarnation of the Son of God was at the heart of the Christian faith. *Incarnation* literally means “in the flesh.” The Son of God, who is completely divine in every way, took on human flesh and became fully human. Paul put it simply: “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

This is miraculous on two accounts. First, like the ancients claimed, it seems impossible for the divine to become human. The two are completely incompatible from our perspective. God, however, is all-powerful. He can do what he wants. His plan to undo humanity’s fall into sin and death was that an offspring of a woman would crush the devil’s power (Genesis 3:15). He would accomplish this by suffering death (Isaiah 53:4-7). But he had to be more than a man (Psalm 49:7-9). He had to be the “Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6). For

the miracle of the incarnation to occur, a miraculous birth was needed (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:34,35). This is why angels rejoiced the night of his birth, and shepherds raced to the manger (Luke 2:8-20).

Second, this is a miracle of God’s love. The ancient pagan gods were portrayed as having attitudes of indifference or even contempt toward humanity. Allah and the “gods” of other religions are presented as distant from this world. In all other religions, humans have to climb to the deity. Humans have to progress toward “heaven.” Only Christianity proclaims the God who has mercy on his fallen creatures and loves them despite their disobedience. Only Christianity reveals the God who descends to earth and becomes one of his creatures and suffers the most horrible of deaths in order to win life for his dying creatures (Philippians 2:6-8; 1 Peter 1:18,19).

For good reasons, the writers of the Nicene Creed confessed clearly the full humanity of the incarnate Son of God. For good reasons, we do too.

EXPLORING THE WORD

1. Read Psalm 49:7-9. Explain why both of Jesus’ two natures—human and divine—were necessary for our salvation.
2. Why is Jesus’ virgin birth so important?
3. Think of the different ways Jesus’ humanity is evident in the gospels. Then read Hebrews 4:15. What comfort is there in Jesus’ human experience for us?

Contributing editor Joel Otto, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Salem, Milwaukee.



This is the fifth article in a 13-part series on the Nicene Creed. Find this study and answers online after March 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.

We
believe
as all
believers
have

THIS IS LENT



Lent shows us not only the grim reality of our sins but also a Savior who shed his innocent blood to give us peace.

Ross H. Else

What is Lent? Ask an average person that question, and you're likely to get a blank stare or a confused shrug of the shoulders. The word *Lent* is meaningless to most because the meaning of Lent in this country and in most American churches increasingly has been lost.

LENT SHOWS US OUR SINS

Lent is not all that important to a society that minimizes sin and waters down God's holy law. Lent is not all that important to a culture that tries to ignore death by dressing it up with fond memories of those who have died and then vainly hopes for a "better place" that awaits all who have tried to do more good than bad.

Many people try to wiggle around the simple truths of God's Word by reshaping God into their own image. They create a loving God who would never condemn anyone to hell. They imagine that God will be pleased if you simply try hard. But all such attempts disagree with God's Word. Those ideas will leave them doubting or helpless when they must come face-to-face with death.

The Word is as clear as it is simple: God is holy; I am not. God sets the standards. If you're pure and blameless, heaven is yours. If you're not, you go to hell. The harsh truth is that no one has enough cash to pay for their

own sins. No one has stored enough good to offset the filth of their own sinful thoughts, words, and actions. And the wages of sin is death.

This is Lent. Though the world around us and our own sinful nature only downplay sin and its effects, Lent shows us the grim reality of our sin, its damaging and damning consequences, and its deserved wages not only in this life but also in the life to come.

**Lent shows God's
grace and mercy in
action as he sent his only-
begotten Son for us.**

LENT SHOWS US OUR SAVIOR

But Lent is also Jesus. Lent shows God's grace and mercy in action as he sent his only-begotten Son for us. On Calvary we see Jesus pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our guilt. There he shed his innocent blood to give us peace. He suffered what we deserve so we have eternal life—the gift of God's grace. There he was wounded so we'd be healed. There Christ paid for the sins of the whole world.

It is right for Christians to focus on these truths, especially during Lent. It is

the message of the Scriptures. Roughly 29 percent of Matthew's gospel, 38 percent of Mark's, 23 percent of Luke's, and 43 percent of John's focus on Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. The Old Testament doesn't neglect these truths either. The sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to the death of the Lamb of God. Those sacrifices and the promises God gave his people picture not only the suffering of Jesus but also his love and willingness to pay for their sins and the sins of all people.

This is God's clear Word during Lent. God erases all doubt about whether we have a place with him, whether he cares at all for us, and whether our lives have any meaning. His Word is true. God does not lie.

Through his faithful and powerful Word, your faithful and powerful God connects you to Christ by faith. By this faith in Christ, you are healed and made whole; by faith in Christ, you are forgiven and justified; by faith in Christ, you belong to God, not just for time but also for eternity. In Christ—and only in Christ—we exchange doubt, hopelessness, and condemnation for complete forgiveness and the sure hope of heaven.

Indeed, this is Lent.

Ross Else is pastor at Emmaus, Phoenix, Arizona.