

THE INVISIBLE CHURCH • MUSIC IN WORSHIP

DECEMBER 2008

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness

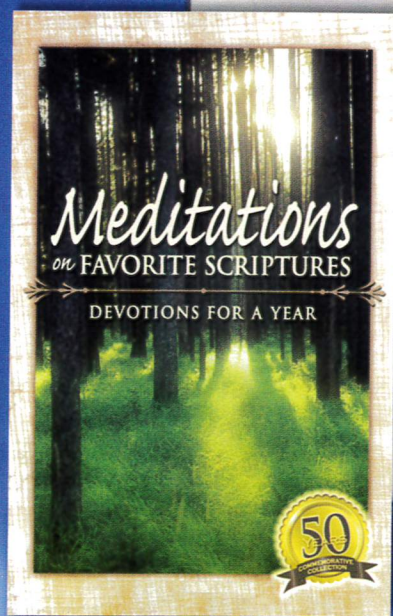


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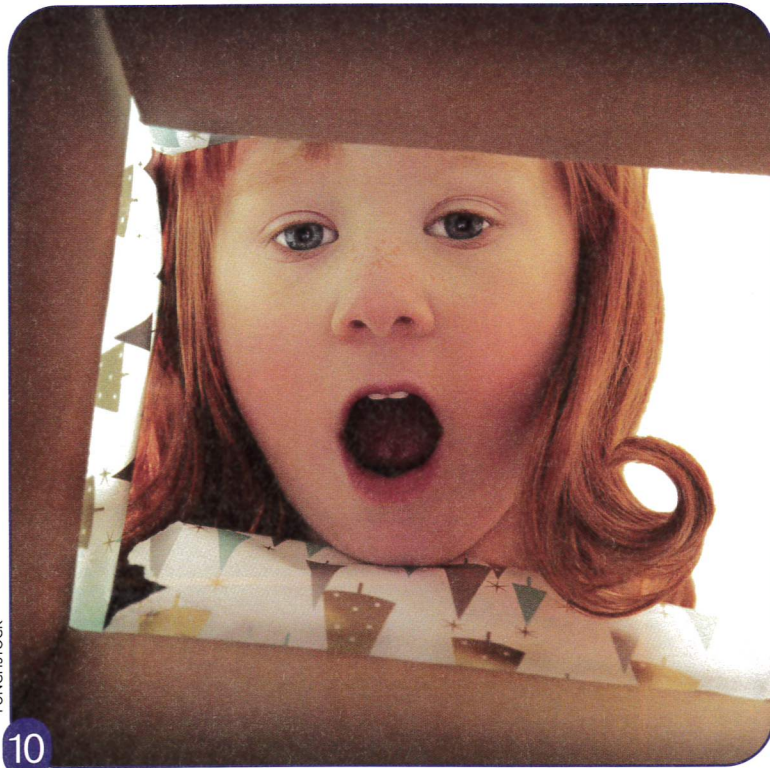
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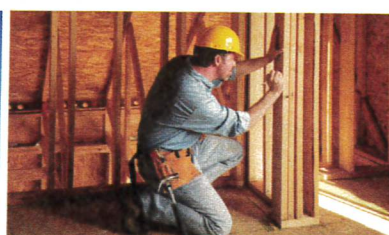
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Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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POSTMASTER

Send address changes to *Forward in Christ*, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Individual: USA—\$16; Canada—\$16.96; all other countries—air mail \$48.40. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

DECEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

What's inside? Maybe you ask that question every month when you receive the latest issue of *Forward in Christ*. That's the question I try to answer for you in this column.

You might also be asking, "What's inside?" this Christmas when you see that oddly sized, beautifully wrapped package under the tree. Unfortunately, when you open it you may be disappointed with what's inside. It may not be exactly what you wanted, or maybe you expected something bigger, something greater.

Pastor Joel Heckendorf looks at the most well-known Christmas present we as Christians have ever received—the gift of our Savior (p. 10). As he writes, on that first Christmas many might have expected the birth of the Messiah to be something bigger, something greater. Some may have been disappointed. Even today, we may act disappointed in what our Savior has done for us lately. Heckendorf reminds us exactly who our Savior is, what he's done—and is still doing—for us, and what that means for all eternity.

That's a message that we at *Forward in Christ* want inside our pages every month.

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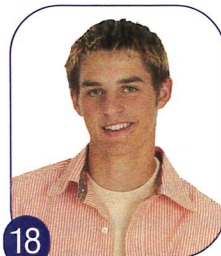
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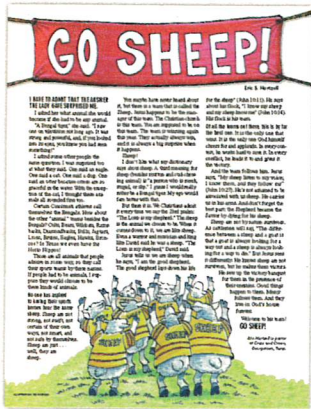
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GO AMNOI!
In response to Pastor Eric Hartzell's article "Go sheep" [Oct.] in which he states, "No one has aspired to having their sports heroes bear the name sheep," we are an exception. Good Shepherd

Lutheran School carries the name "Amnoi" (from the Greek word meaning "lamb") as our school mascot. Think of the opportunities that are presented when someone asks, "What's an Amnoi?" to explain the relationship we have with Jesus, our Good Shepherd, as his lambs and sheep! We boldly cheer, "Stand up, be proud, say your name out loud . . . WE ARE THE AMNOI!" And we echo the sentiment expressed by Pastor Hartzell when he writes, "Go sheep!"

*Matthew Schwartz
Downers Grove, Illinois*

THE GIFT

We live in a time when most Christian churches—other than conservative Lutherans—teach that an individual may play a part in his or her salvation. The Bible—and WELS—clearly teaches otherwise.

The article "The Gift" [Oct.] used phrases such as "whoever opens it," and "whether or not a person has taken possession of his free gift." This language fails to clearly profess that our salvation is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit.

We are surrounded by those who see no contradiction between what the Bible teaches about the gift of faith and the act of "accepting" or "choosing" Christ. Longtime WELS members may read these words without alarm because they are firm in the truth. But using this phraseology in the authoritative context of a synod publication offers ammunition to

those who would deny the significance of this distinction.

*Jami Thomas
Aurora, Oregon*

DYING AS A LUTHERAN

Re: "Dying as a Lutheran" [Oct.]. I have no question about the content, but about the title and the possible connotation of the last line. My concern is for communicating the way of eternal life to outsiders and casual readers.

Let's help get across to outsiders (and insiders?) that it is not the Lutheran label that makes us citizens of heaven; trusting in Jesus does.

A related factor is that the Lutheran label is not copyrighted and has always represented varying beliefs to various people.

Fifty some years ago I was called to a Pima County, Ariz., cotton camp to minister to a man from Arkansas, suffering with a pulmonary condition, confined to a dilapidated barracks. When I got there relatives advised me: "Don't tell him you're a Lutheran." Without much delay he wanted to know what church I came from. I replied: "Before I tell you that, I would first like to tell you about something more important than churches. It's God's gift of forgiveness and life with Jesus." He listened. He asked questions. He was grateful for God's assurance of redeeming grace. And he remarked: "Then you're not like them Luther'ns where I come from."

Especially in today's world, of course, "Lutheran" has a range of connotations, many anti-scriptural. For some people "dying Lutheran" means disaster.

I would suggest that our emphasis be not on dying Lutheran, but on ministering as evangelical, confessional Lutherans so that the people we minister to in their last days might, under the Spirit's power, die as children of God, trusting in Jesus.

*Bob Hochmuth
San Jose, California*

FORMS OF PUBLIC MINISTRY

In the article titled "Overseeing God's People" [Oct.], 1 Corinthians 12:28 was cited as a proof passage that Scripture does not prescribe a specific form of public ministry. However, this passage is not speaking directly to the subject of the public ministry. Instead, its context is speaking of the many different gifts God gives to the body of Christ, that is, all believers. Thus it speaks both of the fact that God appoints some to be public ministers and of the fact that God gives many different spiritual gifts to individual Christians. . . . To quote this passage as proof that there are different kinds of public ministry leaves the impression that each of the kinds of service mentioned (i.e. healing, speaking in tongues) are all forms of the public ministry.

I know that it was not the intention to say this. But I think of some former Pentecostals I served this past summer in the congregation in Toronto, Canada, who had questions about this passage in one Bible class and were confused as to what it was saying.

Perhaps a clarification something like this in a future FIC might avoid any misunderstanding. "Since 1 Corinthians 12:28 refers not only to forms of the public ministry but also to spiritual gifts given to individual Christians, it would have been better to quote a passage such as Ephesians 4:11,12, which speaks only of the public ministry as proof that Scripture speaks of different forms of the one-gospel ministry."

*David Kuske
Jackson, Wisconsin*

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.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*.

Do not be afraid

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news." Luke 2:8-10

James A. Mattek

“**E**asy for you to say” might have been the quivering response of the shepherds. One couldn’t blame them for at least thinking those thoughts. Grown men, accustomed to dark nights in the fields, were terrified. We’re not talking about Hollywood’s digital imaging, which makes the impossible appear real. We’re talking about the impossible being real. Do not be afraid?

Justified fear

The biblical scrolls trumpeted the anger of God and the destruction of sinners. What is there about God that the shepherds should not fear? After all, he torched two wayward cities by raining down fire from heaven. He turned Lot’s wife into a salt block for daring to watch the event. What is there not to fear? He had drowned the crack troops of the Egyptian army in the sea. He had opened the earth to swallow insubordinates. These were actual recorded events. Do not be afraid?

For the times when you and I think of sin but lightly, it would be good for us to revisit Scripture’s horrifying exhibitions of God’s wrath. They should leave no doubt in the reader’s mind that God is not casual about our sinning. What does God think when we lose our temper, lose control, lose our priorities, or lose our innocence? Why wouldn’t his blood boil when we parade as law-abiding citizens only to live on the

wrong side of his commandments? “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). Do not be afraid?

News that dispels fear

“I bring you good news.” The heart of the Lord brims with amazing love for people. He not only takes our sinning seriously, but he also takes our rescue seriously. And his long-planned rescue mission had begun. An angel had appeared to a priest and left him speechless. His senior-citizen wife suddenly was expecting their first child. A virgin relative became pregnant.

Then, in the town where Rachel died and David was born, our fears died and hope was born. The night was cold, and our rescuer was in a feeding trough. With animals watching and their dung steaming, Mary and Joseph hold him in amazement. Her child was both God and a small helpless baby. In a place made for animals, she and Joseph—and later the shepherds—were in the presence of God. Strangely, they were not afraid. He became flesh and dwelt among us.

God had waded into the sinful sea of humanity. He would grow up and learn the carpentry trade. One wonders what he thought when he held a hammer and nail in his hands. The only ones who were afraid of



the God-man were those who made themselves out to be man-gods. He became friends with prostitutes, shady tax collectors, and leper outcasts. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. God came to rescue you and me from our sins. He came so that for all eternity he would never need to say: “Do not be afraid.”

Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer at Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

Never forget

Joel V. Petermann

As I'm writing this the United States recently observed the 7th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. As you read this you will be preparing for the 2,008th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. An event earlier this year built an interesting bridge between the two.

The event was the christening of a new Navy warship named the *USS New York*. Its name already marks this ship as unusual since Navy policy reserves state names only for nuclear submarines. An exception had to be made to name this amphibious assault vessel after the state in which the World Trade Center once stood. Even more unusual is the fact that 24 tons of steel used in this 25,000-ton vessel came from the twisted steel salvaged from Ground Zero. This steel was melted down in a foundry in Louisiana. More than seven tons of that steel was cast into the bow stem of the new ship. Even in the wake of the destruction of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the building of this ship continued. Workers, then dealing with the loss of their own homes and lives, returned to work—out of loyalty to those who had made the sacrifice on 9/11. The ship's motto is "*Strength Forged Through Sacrifice. Never Forget.*"

One article about this ship had the subtitle, "Out of the Rubble" (*Reader's Digest*, Sept. 2008, p. 30). That subtitle brought Isaiah's words to mind: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1).

Isaiah pictures the once great nation of God's people as a towering tree. There never was a nation like this nation, a nation which God loved dearly and dealt with graciously. But the people forgot. They forgot the God who blessed them. They forgot to read his Word. They forgot to give

him thanks and honor. They forgot to follow his commands. Then one day came the tree's 9/11. Like the Twin Towers, it toppled with a horrific crash. At ground zero was a stump, that's all. Nothing left. Only rubble. The people of God were not his people anymore—only a twisted mass of humanity with no hope and no peace.

Isaiah predicted a shoot. Just as the *USS New York* had something from the rubble of the Twin Towers, so this shoot had something of the toppled tree in him. He had humanity. In the divine plan this humanity was forged into the Godhead in a way that no one can comprehend. The result was something new—the God-man, Jesus Christ.

His greatest strength was not becoming a gleaming warship, however. His greatest strength was his sacrifice. Even though the storms of his own people's rejection, his disciples' desertion, and Satan's assaults lashed at him, he would not give up his mission because he was loyal to those he came to redeem. He came to rebuild the tree by dying on a tree. By his death he became the strength of a new tree.

Why do we celebrate Christmas year after year? So we never forget. Just as the *USS New York* was built and named so that we would never forget what happened on 9/11, we celebrate Christmas so that

we never forget what happened in a small, Middle Eastern town 2,000+ years ago. A shoot came up from a stump. A Savior came to those who had forgotten their God. Through that Savior, God made even gentile Christians, like us, his people. He gave us life. He gave us every blessing. He gave us glory and a new home. Never forget.

Contributing editor Joel Petermann is pastor at St. Paul, Amherst, New Hampshire.

We celebrate Christmas so that we never forget what happened in a small, Middle Eastern town 2,000+ years ago.

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

Apparently quite a few articles on this subject circulate every year about this time, and many Christian consciences are burdened or at least concerned as yours appears to be. Answering the question also allows us to examine the way we read and understand the Bible message.

A basic yet important principle in reading and understanding the Bible is that all texts must be read in their contexts. What is the subject being discussed or the circumstances involved? Why is a certain practice or activity being approved or condemned? Does the rest of Scripture tell us more about this subject?

Sinful uses of trees

In Jeremiah 10, for example, the prophet is in the middle of a prolonged affirmation that the LORD is the only God and a denunciation of worthless, idolatrous religious practices. Notice in verses 5, 8, and 11 that the focus is on “idols” and “gods” of nations and people. The cutting, shaping, and decorating of trees that Jeremiah was rebuking had everything to do with idolatry. Idolaters were fashioning wood images cut from trees, decorating them, and worshiping them as images of gods or goddesses. That’s what Jeremiah is talking about in chapter 10. Isaiah attacks the same kind of idolatry (cf. Isaiah 44:13-20).

So a superficial reading of these words might lead someone to think Jeremiah is describing Christmas trees, but a closer look argues against that idea. There is a great difference between cutting down a tree and using it for decorative purposes and cutting down a tree, carving it into an idol, and then worshiping it. The motives and purposes are quite different. Besides, modern Christmas tree customs developed in northern Europe, not ancient Palestine.

Q. Jeremiah 10 seems to condemn the use of Christmas trees. Is this custom sinful?

uses of trees are morally neutral, and God’s children are free to use or not use them as they see fit.


Christians who set up Christmas trees are not worshiping them as gods or goddesses, nor do they love them more than their Savior, Jesus Christ. They are simply using the Christmas tree as a custom that is neither commanded nor forbidden by God. It is wrong when perhaps well-meaning people call something sin that is not sin and burden the consciences of fellow believers without good reason. The seasonal flood of articles condemning Christmas trees as sinful is lamentable.

Beneficial uses of trees

If in Christian freedom we choose to use Christmas trees, we may make an effort to see in them more than mere decoration or a colorful display. Some siblings in Christ allow these trees to remind them of Jesus who is the Branch of David (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15) and Root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:10). It also can remind us of the tree profiled when Adam and Eve fell into sin (Genesis 3:6) but, more important, the tree on which Christ Jesus died to atone for the sins of the whole world (Acts 5:30; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24).

To use the tree for these purposes and with this mindset is not at all related to the sin of idolatry condemned throughout Jeremiah.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.



**This Christmas, let's spend
time in the stable and realize
just what the "it" is when
we murmur, "That's it?"**

Joel S. Heckendorf

That's it?

IT'S TIME TO OPEN PRESENTS! IT'S WHAT YOU'VE WAITED FOR ALL YEAR.


Wrapping paper is tossed in the air and floats to the floor. Children hold up toys to pose for cameras. Christmas cookies disappear. You are enjoying the holiday scents in Grandma's living room while listening to the buzz of a family reunion.

But in the midst of the festive gift-opening ceremony, you notice your pile of gifts isn't as high as you anticipated. Only a few packages remain under the tree. As the "elf" of the family reads the label on each remaining package, he neglects to say your name. You start to feel a little uneasy. You

know you shouldn't be ungrateful. You know that Christmas isn't about what you get. You know Christmas is about Jesus' birth and celebrating with friends and family. But there's a little part of you that's disappointed. You're ashamed to admit it, but inside you're thinking, "That's it? This is all I get?"

A testimony we may take for granted

The hype leading up to that first Christmas was tremendous. A few thousand years earlier God initiated the biggest marketing campaign ever when he announced to the devil in the Garden of Eden, "Somebody's coming to crush your head!" The marketing campaign continued for generations. Prophet after prophet relayed the message of a promised Savior. Parent after parent sat children on their laps and told them



about this Great One who was to come. Daily and weekly ceremonies at the temple pointed ahead to the great Messiah. The expectations were magnificent. Jesus was the most hyped person in history.

But then he came as a seven-pound package wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feed trough. He was born to a poor family. He was humble in his appearance. During his whole life, onlookers inquired, "That's it? This is what we've been anticipating for thousands of years? This is the Great One who is supposed to bring us freedom? You must be kidding . . . that's it?"

Do you ever ask, "That's it?" about Jesus? We go through life hoping for success. We want to be accepted to *that* college, marry *that* person, buy *that* car, or get *that* job—but it doesn't always happen. We're disappointed—not only with ourselves but also with God. "Where were you, God? Why didn't you come through for me? I wasn't asking for anything wrong!" Or sometimes we suffer trials, and somebody tries to comfort us with promises from God's Word. We walk away from that conversation thinking, "That's it? That's all you can do for me, Jesus, is a promise that these trials will be gone when I'm in heaven. Is all that you can do for me is to say that my sufferings here below aren't worth comparing to the glories of heaven? That's a nice thought, but what does that do for me now, Jesus? I still hurt. I am still disappointed. I can't believe that's all that you can do."

If we're disappointed with Jesus, perhaps we don't fully grasp—or we temporarily forget—who he is and what he does for us. This Christmas, let's spend time in the stable and realize just what the "it" is when we murmur, "That's it?"

A testimony of God's love

Examine the gifts you will give this Christmas. The thought, time, and effort you invest in buying just the right gift for someone demonstrates that the gift is a testimony of your love.

Now look at what God gives us: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all . . ." (Romans 8:32). God didn't give us beautiful jewelry, the latest fashion item, or the hottest toy. He gave us his Son. That baby in the donkey's feedbox was not just a baby that God created and said, "Go save the world." That baby had a relationship with God. He was God's Son . . . not for a day, a month, or a year. That baby was God's Son from all eternity. Consider the bond that must exist between God the Father and God the Son. They have literally been through everything together. They worked side by side creating the world. Together they cleansed a fallen world by sending a flood. Together they promised a childless Abraham that he would father a great nation. Together they served as the great "I AM" who rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. Together they received honor from the psalms of David. With all these shared experiences, imagine how close God the Father and God the Son must be. Imagine how the Father treasures the Son and vice versa.

Then on that first Christmas God the Father wrapped up his Son, his only Son, and gave him to us. Think he loves us? You bet he does. As we look at the manger today, let's dare not say, "That's it?" Rather, may we marvel and say, "That's it! That is love! That is how much God loves me! He gave me his dearest treasure."

A testimony that God keeps his promises

In light of the close relationship between the Father and the Son, it's amazing that God sent his Son to us. For approximately 5,000 years God watched a world that

was constantly turning its back on him. God could have said, "Those people aren't worth a gift as valuable as my Son. I love my Son way too much to put him through that. I don't want to subject him to the ridicule, mockery, beatings, and killing. Forget it. I can't fulfill that promise I made in the garden." Would you give a gift of love to someone who turned his back on you?

God did. Two thousand years ago, in a crowded town five miles south of Jerusalem, God kept his promise to the world as Jesus was born of a virgin. If God kept his promise of sending his beloved Son into a sinful world, does not that give us confidence that God will keep all his other promises as well? Because of Christmas, you can be sure that God will keep his promise to send his angels to guard you in all your ways. Because of Christmas you can be sure that God has plans to prosper you, to give you hope and a future. Name any promise of God and know it's true. Christmas proves it. "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). That baby lying in a manger is our assurance that God keeps his promises.

So look at that manger. Look at how small the baby is. Look at how needy he seems to be. He needs to be held. He needs to be fed. And yet, this Christmas, I pray you don't look at that infant and say, "That's it? That's my Savior?" Rather, look at Jesus and say, "Aha! That's it! That's what I need. That's God showing his love for me! That's God keeping his promises for me! That is it!"

Joel Heckendorf is pastor at Immanuel, Greenville, Wisconsin.

The LUTHER

Lutheran worship strives to use hymns and spiritual songs to help the

My funeral service got longer again this summer. Let me explain. I came away from the WELS worship conference in July with hymns from the new *Christian Worship: Supplement* ringing in my head. Many were hymns that didn't take long to grow on me and work their way onto my "favorites" list and, subsequently, into my funeral service. You see, I love music, and when God calls me home, I'd like my funeral to be filled with music that proclaims the gospel and feeds the soul of anyone who may be there.

God has blessed the world with the gift of music. He has also blessed the world with his Word. When the two are combined and music is employed as the vehicle to carry his life-giving Word to his people, we are fed well. Lutheran worship strives to use songs and hymns and spiritual songs to help the Word of God dwell richly in us (Colossians 3:16).

The Word of God at Christmas

Every Christmas we look forward to entering our beautifully decorated churches to hear the account of Christ's birth and to sing the familiar Christmas carols that tell of his birth. Wouldn't it be nice if we could take the joy of Christmas and spread it out over the course of the whole year?

We can—and we do—in several songs of the liturgy, four of which have found their way into our hymnals and liturgy.

- When Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth to tell her the good news she had just received from Gabriel, she spoke the words of the "Magnificat." In Evening Prayer, we sing with Mary: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord . . ." (*Christian Worship*, p. 57).

- John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, is also known for the "Benedictus," which is a song of thanksgiving not only at the birth of his son but also for the coming deliverance of God's people. We sing, "Blest be the God of Israel, who comes to set us free; he visits and redeems us; he grants us liberty" (*Christian Worship* 275:1).
- One of the most familiar praise songs ever is the "Gloria in Excelsis," which was sung first by the angels on the hills outside Bethlehem. We join the angels whenever we sing, "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (*Christian Worship*, p. 16).
- Take a trip back in time to the day when Jesus was presented at the temple. When we sing the "Song of Simeon" ("Nunc Dimittis") we can almost see Simeon, the 40-day-old Jesus in his arms, announcing that now that he had seen his Savior. "You let your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation" (*Christian Worship*, p. 24).

The common denominator in each of these songs of praise is that they speak of the reason for their praise. With the words of God, they point to the Word made flesh.

Words are important in worship music

What's the first thing that attracts a person to a particular piece of music? For most, it's the melody. When the ear hears a tune that the brain likes, one finds himself humming or singing a collection of notes that has been put together in a pleasing way.

When talking music in the church, however, there's another element besides the tune that has to be considered. Words are important. To determine whether something should be sung in God's house means to sit down with the text, peel back the layers of music that carry the words, and examine those words critically. Do the words teach what God's Word teaches? Are they

AN WAY of worship

Word of God dwell richly in us.

Steven D. Bode

consistent with Lutheran teaching? Do the words highlight what man has done for God rather than the other way around? Do the words send mixed theological messages? Do they send any message at all? Could the words be misunderstood? Are the words so generic that they could be sung to a god of anyone's choosing?

"I heard it sung at another church" or "But it has such a catchy melody" are not the standard by which we measure what we sing during worship. Ultimately, the words are. As long as the music style is fitting for being in the presence of a righteous God, we need to realize that music is subjective and different people have different tastes. But God feeds us through his words, not through music styles. The words of a song can weaken or strengthen, confuse or feed faith.

Therefore, it's the responsibility of worship planners to choose music that feeds faith with the Word of God. "Appetizer" songs that emphasize God's holiness and transcendence and my adoration and thankfulness have a place in worship, but don't forget to remind me chiefly *why* I am thankful. Don't forget the main course, which explicitly tells me of God's love in Christ. A proper balance is important.

Proclaiming the Word is most important

In the days of the prophet Amos, we read that there would be a time when there would be a famine of God's Word in the land (Amos 8). In much of today's worship music, there is a famine of the Word. Touching the emotions but devoid of proclamation, it leaves the hearer or participant hungering to "see Jesus."

Lutheran worship, as Lutheran preaching, means to proclaim Christ as well as praise him. Praising him means telling "the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD" (Psalm 78:4). The gospel will predominate. If we want to reflect Lutheran, Christ-centered doctrine that gives solid hope and brings the true peace of forgiveness, we will focus on texts that make known what Jesus has done to save us, starting in the manger and

ending outside the empty tomb. Listen to words that proclaim Christ:

In Christ alone—who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones he came to save.
Till on that cross, as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
For every sin on him was laid,
Here in the death of Christ I live.

(Christian Worship: Supplement 752:2)

The tune stirs the emotions and supports the text beautifully. But the lump in the throat and the chills running down my spine come from singing the words that speak of the boundless love of Jesus. When we sing the songs of faith—whether they've been around for years or centuries, we are well fed when we are reminded of what Christ has done for us.

I suppose someday I will have to prepare my funeral service and actually choose a manageable number of hymns and songs that I would want to be sung. The reason is simple: when people leave the church after my funeral, I don't care if they didn't learn anything new about me, but I do want them to have learned more about Jesus. The words, spoken and sung, need to teach and remind them of the Savior whose birth we celebrate with songs and hymns and spiritual songs this Christmas.

Steven Bode is pastor at Zion, Allenton, Wisconsin.

This is the seventh article in a nine-part series on Lutheran worship.



Growing up in Brooklyn, Mordechai Pearlman could have been the poster child for the Orthodox Jewish faith.

In a typical Jewish household, parents send their children to Hebrew school when they are 11 or 12. “My dad sent me at age 9,” says Mordechai. “For the next four years, I went to Hebrew school every day.” At age 13, he became a *bar mitzvah*—a son of the commandment.

Mordechai loved life in the Jewish community. “I looked forward to Saturdays,” he says of going to synagogue. After the extremely long service, his family stayed for fellowship. “My dad and I sat at the rabbi’s table, and he talked about the lesson of the day and how we can apply it. It was a wonderful experience for me.”

Instead of waiting until the traditional age of 18, Mordechai began studying to become a rabbi at 14. “This meant I still had to go to public school and

get an education. Immediately after that, I would study for six to eight hours. I didn’t get home until 9 or 10 or 11 P.M.,” he says.

With this immersion in the Jewish faith and culture, it seemed unlikely he would hear of Jesus. However, this was the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn. “I grew up in a culturally diverse neighborhood—blacks, Hispanics, Jews, Irish, Italians. You name it, we had it,” he says. One of the benefits of such a neighborhood was that his friends’ moms prepared food from their native cultures—and kids followed their appetites. “On Saturday, they’d worship with me. On Sunday, I’d go to a Roman Catholic church or a Baptist church, depending on whose mom was serving the best meal afterward.”

While they ate, they talked. “My friends would talk about Jesus. I would talk about my religious beliefs,” Mordechai says. The more they talked, the more interested he became.

When Mordechai read a King James Version of the Old Testament, he discovered Isaiah 53. As an Orthodox Jew, whose teachings

Confessions of faith

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

Linda R. Buxa

followed the line of the Pharisees, Mordechai believed that there is a Messiah but he has not yet come. So he began asking questions that rabbis could not or would not answer—like who is this Jesus? Is he the Messiah? “I wanted answers,” says Mordechai. “I was told to stop being curious or get out of Dodge. I made the only choice I could: I got out of Dodge.”

Bitter, Mordechai joined the Army. That’s when two gentile men told him more about Jesus. “My heart was hard because of my experience. I said, ‘I’ve read enough of your Bible to know I’m not interested,’” he says. Still they kept after him and promised that if he went to one service, they would never bother him again. So Mordechai sat in the balcony with his arms crossed, legs crossed, and head turned, ready to tell them that he got nothing out of it.

What happened next completely surprised him—the Word worked.

“The only explanation I can figure out is that it was the power of the Holy Spirit just grabbing me,” he says. “When I got on my knees, I believed that he is indeed the true Messiah. My heart immediately changed, but wasn’t fireworks and sparklers. It was a quiet peace that passes human understanding.”

Two days later, the pastor took Mordechai to a shallow part of the Colorado River. “There he baptized me in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. As I was in the water for the third time, I felt all the sin and all the evil and all the terrible things being drawn out of me by God. I came out of the water a new man,”



Mordechai Pearlman grew up as an Orthodox Jew but now believes that Jesus died for his sins.

says Mordechai, who was 19 at the time. As he walked back to the car that day in June 1967, he remembers thinking, “I never walk alone now. I walk with Yeshua.”

His father, however, treated Mordechai’s conversion as a death in the family. He observed shivah, a seven-day period of intense mourning. He also lit a *yahrzeit*—a 24-hour candle—every year on the anniversary of Mordechai’s “death.” His mom simply cried because he became a *mishmuda*, a traitor to the faith. “They felt I betrayed Judaism by becoming a Gentile. But I can’t change from being Jewish to Gentile, just like a tiger can’t change his stripes,” says Mordechai. “I’m still a Jew and still hold my precious heritage very dear. But I find it works well and blends in with my love for Yeshua, who is a Jew.”

Mordechai had found the truth; now he needed to find a church home. He began searching for a

church that taught what the Bible teaches. “I tried every one that is out there—Catholic, Protestant,” he says. One day he got lost while looking for a congregation and walked into a Missouri Synod Lutheran (LCMS) church. He joined the LCMS, developed Jewish outreach materials for them, and stayed a member for 28 years. “I have dear brothers there, yet I could not stay because of personal and theological differences,” he says.

Then one day, as he helped a woman move into an assisted living facility, Mordechai met Dan Witte, pastor at Risen Savior, Bradenton, Fla. “We started talking, and we found we had

a lot in common in terms of love for the Lord,” says Mordechai. “I know the Hebrew language extremely well. We started talking about doctrinal teachings of the church.” Witte invited him to worship, and he joined Risen Savior in May 2007.

Mordechai considers it his life’s work to help people reach out to their Jewish friends and relatives. “Mordechai truly has a God-given desire to tell Jewish people that Jesus died for their sins,” says Witte.

At the time of year when we celebrate the birth of Yeshua—the King of the Jews and Gentiles—there isn’t a more appropriate message.

Linda Buxa is a member at St. Mark’s, Citrus Heights, California.

Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member? Send it to Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net.

The invisible

Church. The word paints a picture. You see the building in which you worship. It may be a small, white-frame building set on a hill in the quiet countryside. Or it may be a large, stone structure occupying a street corner in a busy city. It's not unusual for us to think of a building when we think of church. Worship is an important part of our lives, and that worship takes place in a building we love, whether it is fancy or plain.

But that is not the way the word *church* is used in the Bible. In Scripture, *church* most often refers to people and not to buildings.

The church is invisible

In the New Testament the word *ecclesia* is often translated as *church*. *Ecclesia* refers to a group of people who have been called together. It is an assembly. Yet even that definition does not fully explain what the church is. As the Bible describes the church, it becomes clear that the church is both what we see and what we cannot see. The church is both visible and invisible.

Why would we call a church invisible? You can see a building. You can see the people who gather in that building. Yet we do speak of the church as invisible in the Apostles' Creed when we confess "I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints." Sometimes people mistakenly use the term *saint* to refer to a person who does an abundance of good deeds, someone who helps others. But the Bible uses the term to describe simply a believer. We even distinguish between believers who have been called home to heaven and those who still battle in this world. We speak of saints triumphant and saints militant.

The apostle Peter describes these believers as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). Together all believers form the holy Christian church, a "spiritual house" made up of living stones chosen by God. When the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts, we become part of this structure. The Lord Jesus can see the faith in our hearts. We, however, can only see the fruits of faith and not the faith itself. Because we cannot see faith, the church is invisible to our eyes. The prophet Elijah did not recognize that there were still seven thousand believers in Israel (1 Kings 19:8-18). He thought that he was the only believer left. Likewise, we cannot always tell whether a person is a believer or an unbeliever.

Although the church may be invisible to us, the Lord sees his church clearly. "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). At the same time each person knows what is in his or her heart. Trusting in the promises the Lord gives us, we know that we belong to that communion of saints, the church of God.

Characteristics of the invisible church

This invisible gathering of all believers is not limited by geography. The apostle John reminds us that believers come from different places and "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9). In addition, the church is not limited by time. All believers who have lived, are now living, and will live until Jesus returns at the end of time—all these believers are part of this church. The church, the body of all believers, is invisible, and it is also universal. Once again we confess this fact in the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. "I believe in the holy Christian church." The first people who used

Although the church may be invisible to us, the Lord sees his church clearly.

church

As the Bible describes the church, it becomes clear that the church is both what we see and what we cannot see. **James F. Korthals**

this confession of faith said, "I believe in the holy catholic church." The word *catholic* originally had no denominational connotation. It simply meant *universal*. When *catholic* became associated with a particular organization, the word *Christian* was substituted to prevent confusion. In the Apostles' Creed we confess that we believe that the Lord gathers together everyone whose faith is in Jesus Christ as the Savior.

People believe in many things. We say that we believe in our team, in our country, and in people who are dear to us. Likewise, many people believe in some religious figure other than Christ. God's invisible church gathers together only those people who confess

Jesus as their Savior. We distinguish ourselves from the followers of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and every other religion. We confess that Jesus Christ is true man and true

God. We believe that Christ is sinless and perfect and that he is the Lamb of

God who takes away the sins of the world.

In a world that suggests that it does not matter what you believe as long as you believe, it becomes important to remember that the invisible church gathers together all believers in Christ. Without faith in Jesus we cannot be saved.

Without Jesus we have no part in the communion of saints, the gathering of all believers. Jesus makes that clear when he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

People die. Church buildings may fall apart. Congregations may disband. But the invisible church continues. The Lord has promised that there will always be true believers who are kept faithful by the power of God. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27,28). What a comfort it is to know that the Holy Spirit, who calls us to faith, also preserves us in that faith through the gospel in Word and sacraments!

It is easy to become attached to a congregation. It is in that fellowship that we listen to the good news of Jesus proclaimed. There we hear that our sins are forgiven. In our congregation we draw close to Jesus as we receive the sacrament of his body and blood. Likewise the building in which a congregation worships may be a special place. It may be the same structure in which we were baptized, confirmed, and married. It reminds us of all the blessings God has showered upon us.

But we are part of something that is even more valuable, the holy Christian church. Our triune God has brought us together with people we may never see or know on this side of eternity. Through faith the Lord has made us a part of the congregation of all believers. Right now we are not able to see this church in its entirety. Yet what is invisible to our eyes now will be seen when the Lord returns in glory. What a joy it will be to see all believers from every part of the world and from all times! The day will come when we will gather together and praise the God of grace who gives us membership in his family, the invisible church. That church is not really invisible. It is only invisible to us. God sees it clearly.

James Korthals, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at David's Star, Jackson.

Find a related Bible study on this topic after Dec. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

WHATEVER

Keep watch

Waiting for Jesus' coming is like deer hunting. You have to be ready.

Arik Grefsheim

It's the second week of deer season and still no deer. I've been hunting at three spots and still nothing. As I sit here under this tree I can't help but think that this is just like waiting for Jesus. You have to be ready, so you can't be sleeping while you're on watch. Like those deer, he'll come when you least expect it.

Being watchful is hard. In hunting, not being watchful is falling asleep or getting up and giving up. Spiritually it's giving in to temptation or giving up on Jesus. Now how stupid will you feel if you give in to temptation and then hear the trumpets blasting? You need to be watchful.

Now for the big question: what does it mean to keep watch? Keeping watch means to look out for something, to be attentive at all times. I think Jesus means that you can go on with your daily life but always know in the back of your mind that he is coming. That means you don't give in to temptation. You stay alert.

Another thing: you watch for the signs. On a hill overlooking a marsh with a stream running through it, there are signs of deer all over the place. In the real world, there are signs of Jesus making his coming known: wars, famines, and earthquakes.

True, it is all overwhelming, but the comforting thing is that we don't need to be afraid. The reason was hanging on the cross. Jesus died for us. Jesus suffered the crown of thorns, the scourging, the ridicule for all of us. All our sins are paid for, and Jesus promises to come back to take us to our heavenly home.

Jesus says that if a man knew what time the thief would come to his house at night he would be ready. That is the same with the hunter. If I knew where the deer were going to be at a certain time, I would go there at that time and go "trigger-happy." But it doesn't work like that. He'll come when you least expect him.

The more I think about it, the more that I realize that this is a broader subject than I anticipated. I mean, I recall the hymn "Hark! The Voice of Jesus Crying" that tells us that while we wait, we can do mission work. Also there are the parables "The Ten Virgins" and "The Parable of the Talents."

Now that is something that we can do while waiting for his coming. We can do mission work. Sharing Jesus will help others be ready for his return.

Now let's review our thoughts. Number one: keep watch. Know that Jesus is coming and apply that to your life.

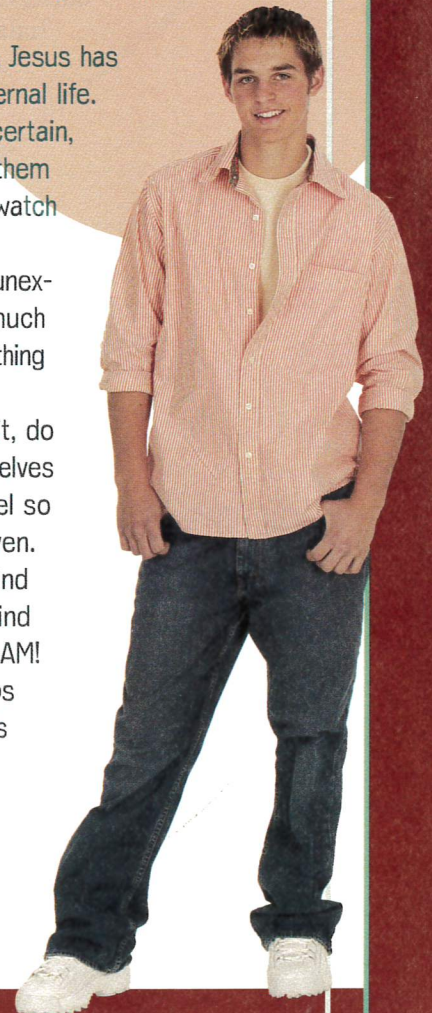
Number two: don't give up. Jesus has forgiven us and given us eternal life. His promises are sure and certain, and we are just waiting for them to be fulfilled. So we keep watch and don't give up.

Number three: expect the unexpected. We may not know much about judgment day, but one thing is for certain, it will happen.

Number four: while we wait, do mission work. Let's keep ourselves busy by spreading the gospel so more people can go to heaven.

So now you know what kind of thoughts go through a mind of a—shhh! A ten-pointer! BLAM! Ha! Got him! I guess it helps me understand that Jesus is coming suddenly. We just need to keep watch!

Arik Grefsheim, a member at St. Matthew, Janesville, Wisconsin, is a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.



Obituaries

Edgar Johannes Wiechmann 1911–2008

Edgar Wiechmann was born Aug. 2, 1911, in La Crescent, Minn. He died Sept. 17, 2008, in Scottsdale, Ariz.

A 1933 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Paul, St. James, Minn.; David's Star, Jackson, Wis.; St. Paul, Arlington, Minn.; and St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Leona. He is survived by 5 children, 10 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren.

John Karl Schmidt 1934–2008

John Schmidt was born Oct. 3, 1934, in New Castle, Penn. He died Sept. 19, 2008, in Parkland, Wash.

He began in the teaching ministry and taught at a school in Baton Rouge, La. Upon graduation from Bethany Lutheran Seminary, Mankato, Minn., he served at churches in Cottonwood, Minn.; Lombard, Ill.; Waterloo, Iowa;

Santa Rosa, Calif.; Fillmore, Calif.; and Lakewood, Wash.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; 3 sons; 2 daughters; and 14 grandchildren.

Katherine M. Hartman 1938–2008

Kay Hartman (nee Daubert) was born Aug. 16, 1938. She died Sept. 20, 2008.

She taught at New Salem, Sebawaing, Mich.; Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.; and St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Robert; 3 sons; 4 daughters; 18 grandchildren; 3 great-grandchildren; and 1 sister.

Donald Frederick Edward Bitter 1929–2008

Donald Bitter was born June 20, 1929, in the Town of Herman, Wis. He died Sept. 21, 2008, in Fort Atkinson, Wis.

A 1955 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Good Shepherd, Fond du Lac,

Wis.; St. Lucas, Kewaskum, Wis.; and St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis. He also served as second and then first vice president of the Western Wisconsin District, as president of the Western Wisconsin District, and as second and then first vice president of WELS.

He was preceded in death by one daughter; two brothers; and two sisters. He is survived by his wife, Marilyn; 5 sons; 3 daughters; 24 grandchildren; and 1 great-grandchild.

William Arthur Meier 1941–2008

William Meier was born May 23, 1941, in Sleepy Eye, Minn. He died Sept. 22, 2008.

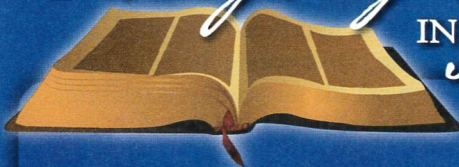
A 1967 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. Thomas/Santo Tomas, Phoenix, Ariz. He also served on the WELS Board for World Missions.

He was preceded in death by one sister. He is survived by his wife, Marcia; six children; nine grandchildren; one brother; and four sisters.

This Bible reading series is designed to take only a few minutes each day. To help you through your Bible study, consider this anecdote and try it in your Bible reading: Peter the Barber once asked Martin Luther how he, an ordinary kind of guy, could read the Bible with profit. Luther answered: Ask yourself . . .

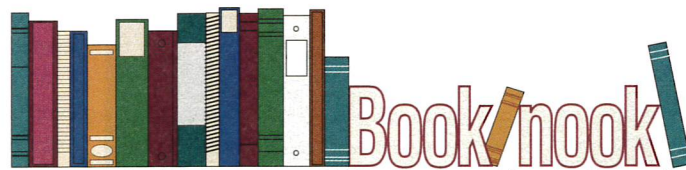
What does God tell me here? What makes me glad? What makes me sad? What do I want to pray for?

Through my Bible
IN 3 YEARS



01/2009

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. 2 Corinthians 6:11–7:16 | 17. 1 Tm. 3:14–4:5 |
| 2. 2 Cor. 8:1–15 | 18. 1 Tm. 4:6–16 |
| 3. 2 Cor. 8:16–9:15 | 19. 1 Tm. 5:1–6:2 |
| 4. 2 Cor. 10 | 20. 1 Tm. 6:3–21 |
| 5. 2 Cor. 11:1–21a | 21. Titus 1 |
| 6. 2 Cor. 11:21b–12:10 | 22. Tit. 2 |
| 7. 2 Cor. 12:11–21 | 23. Tit. 3 |
| 8. 2 Cor. 13 | 24. 2 Timothy 1 |
| 9. Micah 1 and 2 | 25. 2 Tm. 2 |
| 10. Micah 3:1–4:7 | 26. 2 Tm. 3 |
| 11. Micah 4:8–5:15 | 27. 2 Tm. 4 |
| 12. Micah 6:1–7:6 | 28. Leviticus 1 |
| 13. Micah 7:7–20 | 29. Lev. 2 and 3 |
| 14. 1 Timothy 1 | 30. Lev. 4:1–6:7 |
| 15. 1 Tm. 2 | 31. Lev. 6:8–7:38 |
| 16. 1 Tm. 3:1–13 | |



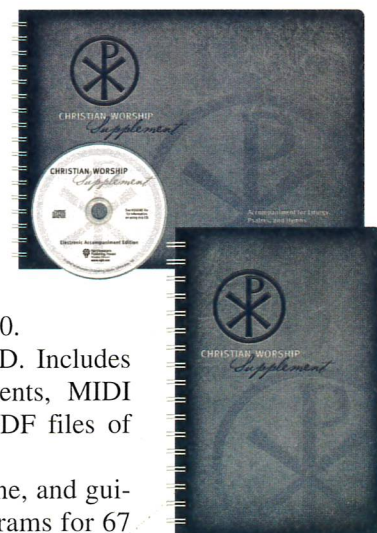
A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit www.nph.net or call 800-662-6022. Note: These reviews are not meant to represent the opinions of WELS or Forward in Christ.

Christian Worship: Supplement

Five editions of *Christian Worship: Supplement* are now available from Northwestern Publishing House:

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Empowering and encouraging WELS world mission fields

In 24 foreign fields from Albania to Zambia . . . in 40 languages from Arabic to Urdu . . . through 47 missionaries, 674 national workers, and many volunteers . . . WELS' world missions serve over 78,000 baptized members around the globe. While these statistics are noteworthy, what's more significant is the action they represent: going to all nations with the gospel.

But did you know that even as WELS enters a new mission field, the eventual goal is to leave?



After three years at the Lutheran Bible Institute in Malawi, Mr. Msamba (pictured with his family on graduation day 2008) is now continuing his studies for another three years at the Lutheran Seminary in Lusaka, Zambia.

In striving to spread the gospel to all nations, the WELS Board for World Missions (BWM) carefully plans how to best use manpower and monetary resources. The general strategy is to enter a new mission field fully focused on preaching the Word and to encourage a self-sufficient, local church body to spring up.

"Establishing an indigenous church means that the national leaders and members have taken ownership of that church and want to operate it not only according to God's truth but also in ways that are appropriate to their own culture, customs, and ways of communicating," explains Pastor Dan Koelpin, BWM administrator. "It stands to reason that no American missionary, no matter how dedicated and talented, can

reach people in central Africa better than an African Christian who intimately understands the people of his own country."

Koelpin says leaving behind a self-sufficient church can also free missionary manpower positions for other areas in the world that need the gospel.

Helping a national church reach these goals can take years, as evidenced by the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Malawi Synod (LCCA-MS), which started as a WELS mission in 1963.

Until 1988, the WELS missionaries did most of the work in Malawi. As congregations grew (now there are 140 with 5,000 worshippers each Sunday), a training system for pastors was established. Today 22 Malawian pastors serve alongside just 7 missionaries. The LCCA-MS also has its own people in key leadership positions.

Still, much time and carefully directed support are necessary before it will reach the four "self" goals of establishing an indigenous church.

Self-supporting: Paul Nitz, missionary in Malawi, explains that "the members of a church are responsible for and have the opportunity to show the grace they have received by supporting the ministry." While LCCA-MS members are now able to support a small portion of their regular budget, the poor African economy seems to push the goal of self-support far into the future.

Self-propagating: "When a church body has a part in efforts to expand the rule of Christ in hearts, it is a clear indication of spiritual health and understanding," Nitz continues. Even with members and national pastors spreading the Word, challenges to becoming self-propagating

face the LCCA-MS. For example, Malawian leaders realize the importance of producing Lutheran literature for outreach and education but lack the necessary skills to accomplish the task. Therefore, plans are in place to call a WELS teacher to coordinate the writing and publication of needed materials by melding his skills and organization with the Malawians' knowledge of their own people. This worker will also help establish a program of continuing education for national pastors.

Self-administrating: "Without good administration, congregations are not provided with call lists to fill their vacancies, opportunities to spread the gospel are overlooked, offerings are squandered, and pastors are not trained," says Nitz. While such growing pains exist, Nitz says it is best that missionaries provide advice but not a controlling influence. "Decisions made by nationals will mesh the Lord's will with their own needs and customs," he says.

Self-disciplining: As the LCCA-MS has taken on church discipline, misjudgments have been made. But Nitz reflects that as a church becomes self-disciplining, it must discover on its own "the joy of learning how to use the precious Word in difficult situations and the joy of seeing the Holy Spirit work his miraculous transformation of hearts and lives."

Koelpin is excited that after 45 years the field has qualified leaders who are increasingly taking over the ministry. "Our job is to empower and encourage them," he says.

Nitz agrees. "It was only a few years ago that discussions at LCCA-MS Synodical Council meetings bounced mostly from missionary to missionary. These days the conversation is dominated by our African Lutheran leaders struggling with decisions about *their* church body."

Understanding different cultures



Two students who attend schools more than four thousand miles apart are seeing what it's like to be in each other's shoes this year. Manuel Drechsler, a student at the Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar (Lutheran Theological Seminary) in Leipzig, Germany, is spending a year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., while Anthony Barthels, a graduate of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is attending the seminary in Germany.

"I wanted to know a different culture, not by reading about it from Wikipedia or hearing about it from someone else, but by living in it and overcoming the obstacles with which I would be confronted," says Barthels, a member at St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.

This isn't the first time for such an exchange between students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and the Lutheran Theological Seminary of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church or ELFK), a sister synod of WELS. WELS students preparing for the ministry have spent time studying in Germany as far back as 1938. Though it is not an

official seminary program, students who wish to study abroad show their interest, and the schools help facilitate the experience.

"You can

ship in doctrinal statements and that's good," says Paul Wendland, WLS president. "But I don't know if there is anything that can replace the one-on-one fellowship when Christian people get together and get to know one another. This is just a way at the seminary level of fostering those mutual ties of Christian friendship and love."

This is the first time in the United States for Drechsler, who has completed three out of eight years of his ministry training. "In Europe you have an imagination of America as something really special—that everything is big and so different," he says. "But it wasn't too bad. It's also normal. But it is true that everything is bigger."

This includes the size of his classes. He left behind only three classmates in Germany. "I have gotten to know a lot of people here who believe the same thing that I do," says Drechsler. "To share fellowship has been a really great experience."

Barthels, who will begin his studies at WLS in 2009, loves the close-knit feel of the seminary in Leipzig. "My first impression of the seminary was that it felt more like a family than a school. We do most everything together: cook, clean, eat, pray, talk, learn, and live. It's outstanding."

Both also are experiencing ministry work unique to the culture. Drechsler has already canvassed in inner-city Milwaukee and will be traveling with other seminary students to Florida in January for more cross-cultural experi-

ences. Barthels is getting involved in St. Trinitatis, the ELFK church located in the same building as the seminary.

While getting used to the food presents challenges—Barthels misses his ranch dressing and Drechsler his German *brot* (bread)—both feel that overall this experience will help them in their preparations for the public ministry.

"I pray that my experiences here are better equipping me to spread the gospel of Christ to a greater amount of people," says Barthels.

Wisconsin radio ministry still going strong



Back in 1928, a young WELS layman wondered if broadcasting church services on the most popular media outlet of the time, the radio, would help folks like his aging parents, who could no longer attend weekly worship services. Little did he know that his conversation with the local radio station manager would be the start of the longest continuously running radio church service in the United States.

Now, more than 10,000 listeners tune in to hear the Lutheran Radio Church Service on WTMJ (620 AM), which has been airing every Sunday morning for the past 80 years. The program features alternating services from WELS and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The WELS services are recorded at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, and a different WELS pastor in the southeastern Wisconsin area leads each service. A volunteer radio choir sings the hymns and liturgy.

"I enjoy listening to your radio program every Sunday morning," writes one listener from Ripon, Wis. "It's a good way to start the day. May God continue to bless the work you are doing!" Another fan from Greenfield, Wis., says, "Thank you for your wonderful radio broadcasts. They really help those who are homebound. Also, they are easy to find on WTMJ every Sunday at 6:05 A.M."

In the future, the Lutheran Radio Church Service Committee hopes to create a Web site where listeners can download archived service recordings.

For more information about the Lutheran Radio Church Service, contact WELS Director Randall Siegel at revsiegel@aol.com.



Manuel Drechsler



Students and professors at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig, Germany: (l to r) Matthäus Stöhr (former student, now studying medicine), Anthony Barthels, Gottfried Herrmann (seminary president), Vicar Michael Müller, John Brenner (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor who was visiting at the time), Michael Soucek, Benjamin Stöhr, Carsten Hoffmann, Prof. Andreas Drechsler.

Q&A with Brian Davison, lead singer for Koiné

Five years ago, a small group of musicians got together and formed Koiné, a band to lead Sunday night services at St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis. Today, they are making music for congregations across WELS. Forward in Christ caught up with Brian Davison, the group's vocalist, to talk about how this ministry has grown.

Question – How did the group start?

Answer – It was just a few guys that got together to lead this alternative service on Sunday evenings [at St. Marcus]. We started doing some of our own hymns that we knew well and just tried to do them with a little different flavor, a different feel. People started talking, and it just kind of snowballed from there. For the first few months there were 20 of us [at the Sunday night service] with our friends and our families, and that was it. Now five years later we have between 150 and 200 at worship on a Sunday evening.

But that was just the St. Marcus stuff. About a year into it, our band, Koiné, was asked to go to many different congregations and share what we do. We didn't have plans of touring or anything along those lines. But then other people started asking and then more people. Now we get two or three requests a week [from other congregations].

Question – Sounds like a busy schedule! How much do you have to practice?

Answer – We practice each week before [the Sunday night] service at St. Marcus. A lot of times we're learning one or two new songs a week, just to keep ourselves fresh. We keep trying to find new gems out there, so to speak. I would say out of the hymnal, with the number of ways we can switch melodies to fit different words, we've probably learned between 150 and 200 hymns.

Question – You mean you can just pick up and start playing any of those hymns?

Answer – Yeah. There are times when I say in a concert, "What's your favorite hymn?" And they'll shout it out. We can't always [play their requests]—they get pretty creative about it and try to challenge us—but there are quite a few of them we know, so it's fun. One of the things that we try to emphasize when we visit congregations is that we are not here to perform for you. We are here to worship with you. It's important that you participate with us.

Question – It sounds like congregations appreciate your music. How do you think it's affected the ministry at St. Marcus?

Answer – It's definitely helped St. Marcus reach out to that 20-something group that people always say they have such a hard time with. When school is in session, during the year we will average close to 200 people on a Sunday night. About 70-75 percent of those people are between 18 and 26 years old. So is everybody from WELS? Absolutely not. But people are telling their friends, which is always the best form of evangelism, and bringing them to services.

Question – What is the best thing you've taken away from this experience so far?

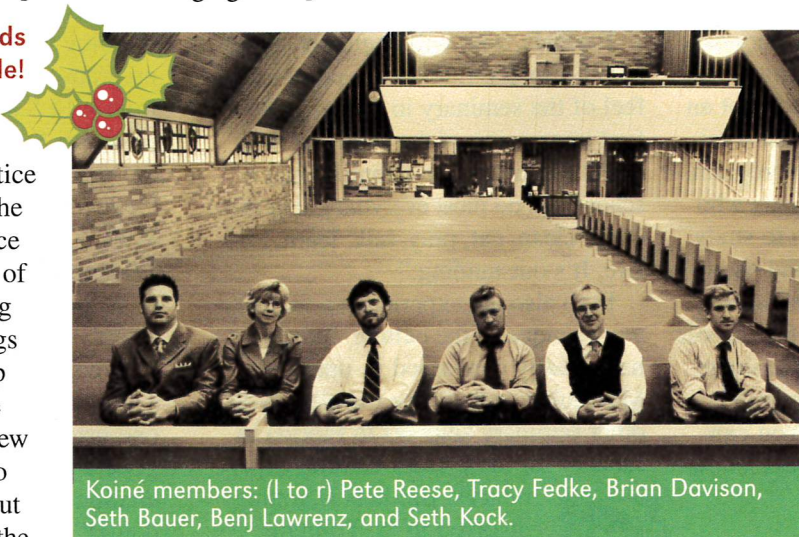
Answer – First of all, the opportunity to work with the musicians I'm working with. They are unbelievably gifted musicians who are using their gifts for their Savior.

Second, the absolute joy on people's faces when they hear these songs again for the first time. I've seen tears flowing off of people's faces, and I've seen the biggest smiles. Music has a way of touching everybody in some way or another. I've had people come up and share intimate stories about their lives and how a song helped

get them through. It's just amazing. Those are by far the biggest joys of doing this ministry.

This Christmas, Koiné is performing a special concert for military troops overseas. WELS will be streaming the concert, which will be held at Christ, Pewaukee, Wis., on Dec. 6 at 5 P.M. Visit <http://streams.wels.net> to watch it live or to listen to Koiné on Streams radio. For more concert dates and times, visit www.koinemusic.com.

To read an extended interview with Brian Davison, visit www.forwardinchrist.net after Dec. 5.



Koiné members: (l to r) Pete Reese, Tracy Fedke, Brian Davison, Seth Bauer, Benj Lawrenz, and Seth Kock.

Let your light shine



Brad and Kathy Clark didn't want to send their children, Bethany (9) and Hayden (7), to a public school. But their church, Christ Our Savior, Rockford, Mich., didn't have an elementary school. After a discussion with their pastor and prayerful consideration, they enrolled their kids in the local school.



Bethany Clark

"Since making that decision it has always been our hope and plan to continue to be very active in and committed to their religious education both at church and at home," says Brad. "We also hoped that public school would allow the kids, as well as ourselves to some degree, plenty of opportunities to share our faith."

Bethany has been taking advantage of those opportunities. Recently her teacher asked the class to write a paper on caring. Bethany submitted the following:

God cares

I listened to the whistling wind. The trees rustled in the breeze. It was another beautiful day God made for us. I put my book down and thought.

God cares for me by making the wonderful world around me. He sent his only son, Jesus, to die so we can go to heaven. He gives us everything we need and some things we want.

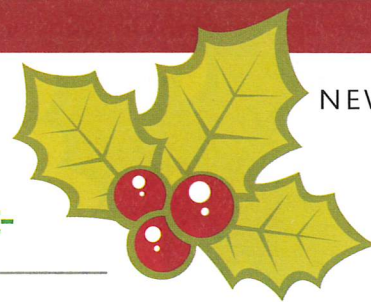
I decided to pray for this wonderful day. "Dear God, thank you for making our wonderful world and for saving us from our sins. Thank you for caring for me. Amen."

I sat on my blue swing and watched the birds fly in the colorful afternoon. I smiled. I know God loves and cares for me.

"At first I feel happy and proud when the kids let their light shine at school, and then I wonder if and when it will generate a negative response," says Kathy. But in the case of Bethany's teacher, the opposite seemed to be true. After reading Bethany's paper, she wrote, "Beth, I enjoyed reading your paper about caring."

"We feel extremely blessed to have caring teachers and staff in our school district who appreciate and even encourage such behavior," says Brad. "It's heartwarming to us as Christian parents!"

Ramping up Latino outreach in Detroit



With help from the Board for Home Missions, WELS Kingdom Workers, and gifts from several congregations in Michigan, WELS began Latino outreach in Detroit in August. Efforts are concentrated in the area known as "Mexicantown," which contains approximately 90 percent of the Latino population of the city of Detroit.

Pastor Daniel Schmidt, previously a teacher at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, is spearheading the outreach efforts. He has been working with two existing WELS churches in the area, Paul the Apostle and Our Saviour, to make contacts in the Latino community.

"Inner city Detroit is an interesting place to work," says Schmidt. "Door-to-door evangelism is a little different—I don't knock on people's doors because they might think I'm a bill collector, cop, or [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services]. So I normally just say hello to those people sitting on their porches and let them know I'm a new pastor in the area. I ask them how long they have been in the neighborhood, and from there some pretty good conversations start up. . . . It's pretty amazing how the Lord opens doors."

Schmidt made presentations about his work at WELS congregations in the area and found more than 50 people interested in helping with English conversation outreach activities, which began Oct. 13. Approximately 80 people have already signed up.

Schmidt is also trying to start computer classes for community members; three laptops have already been donated for the project. Other outreach activities Schmidt hopes to pursue are starting an after-school mentoring or tutoring program, hosting a summer soccer Bible camp, and educating community members on immigration laws and job opportunities.

"All of these activities are ways that we can show the love of Jesus to these people," says Schmidt. "Every time we have an event or class, our goal is to put these people in contact with Jesus either through a devotion or Bible study."

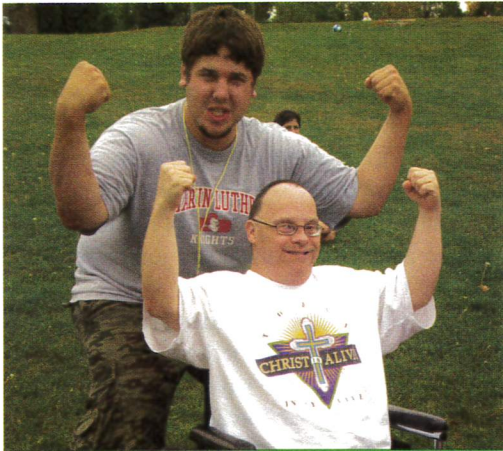
For more information about outreach work in Detroit, e-mail Schmidt at cpdvtdetroit@gmail.com. For more stories from Schmidt's work, check out the Winter 2009 issue of Mission Connection.



Pastor Daniel Schmidt was installed in August to reach out to the Latino population in southwest Detroit.

Joy In Jesus retreat shares gospel with the developmentally disabled

If one could spy on the campers and staff who gather for a weekend each fall for the Joy In Jesus retreat, it would be obvious that the name fits perfectly. As the retreat shares the gospel with people who have developmental disabilities, the songs, the smiles, and the hugs are telltale signs of the joy in Jesus that is cultivated there.



Volunteer John Schleis and camper Tom Kuttner goof around at the Joy In Jesus retreat.

“The greatest joy lies in knowing that the Holy Spirit has touched the campers’ hearts and that these Christian brothers and sisters have the same sure hope of heaven as I do,” shares Juli Liewergen, a Martin Luther College (MLC) student who volunteers for the retreat.

The retreat—a joint effort of the Minnesota District Special Ministries and Jesus Cares Ministries (JCM), a ministry of The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn.—runs for two weekends each fall. Locations near Waterville and Spicer, Minn., provide the settings for hiking, golf cart rides, Bible stories, crafts, devotions at the campfire, singing, and games. “It is hard to restore your spirit while surrounded by your daily people, places, and responsibilities,” reflects Julie Luetke, camp director for the Spicer retreat. “Jesus took his disciples away for days to restore body and spirit. Camp does much the same thing. Campers study God’s Word and escape their daily routines. People who do not drive or have the ability to ‘take off’ need volunteers to make this happen. A mini vacation is good for everyone.”

Both weekend retreats rent facilities with full-time staff and food service. The program is staffed with a few JCM workers and a strong core of volunteers—including nurses as well as students from MLC and Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn. Luetke assigns duties according to their gifts and matches up staff members with campers.

“It is each volunteer’s privilege to get to know his or her campers and become a

friend for the weekend,” says Liewergen. “You play, eat, and bunk together.” As the music director this fall, Liewergen also learned that “music is so important at camp because it allows every camper to participate and teaches them a way to share their Savior with others.”

Most of the campers come from Jesus Cares Ministries around Minnesota. Some bring friends who may not be Christian, but “everyone gets a good dose of law and gospel,” says Luetke.

MLC volunteer John Schleis shares, “I felt so privileged to tell campers about their Savior and mine.” Schleis also notes how remarkable it was to see campers proclaim their faith openly and constantly.

“The name [Joy In Jesus] is really twofold,” Liewergen realizes. “The campers find joy in learning about forgiveness and salvation through Jesus. And when I see the gospel touch the hearts of those with special needs, I feel in my life the fruition of Luke 6:38: ‘Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.’”

For more information about the Joy In Jesus retreat, contact the administrator of Jesus Cares Ministries at 888-600-TLHA (8542).

New videos help teens connect to their Savior

Some are meant to make you think. Others are meant to clearly show you the way. But all of the new *Everyday* videos for teens are meant to explore real-life situations that many teens face—and how to deal with them as dearly loved children of God.

Produced weekly by WELS Youth Discipleship, Wisconsin Lutheran College, and Highlights Media, these three- to seven-minute videos present spiritual messages using a variety of skits, vignettes, scenes, and commercials.

“This format is an effective tool to connect today’s teens with God’s Word,” says Dr. Joel Nelson, administrator of Youth Discipleship. “These kinds of skits were part of the

2007 WELS International Youth Rally devotional offerings and were a high point of the worship experience for all there. We are very excited to offer videos on LivingBold (www.livingbold.net) and on Streams (<http://streams.wels.net>).”

For more information about the videos, visit www.livingbold.net/welspace/everyday.



District news

Pacific Northwest

Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash., recently installed a new portable classroom on its shared site with Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. "The new classroom will provide much-needed classroom space," says Principal Greg Thiesfeldt. He also says Holy Trinity has allowed the high school to use space in the library and fellowship hall. "We are grateful for the blessing of this shared relationship," says Thiesfeldt.

South Atlantic

Almost 20 people attended the Sept. 14 opening service of **Living Promise, Morristown, Tenn.**, daughter congregation of Living Word, Gray, Tenn. A Bible instruction class began in October.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill., and Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn., both held regional choral fests in November. Almost 500 students from more than 20 Lutheran high schools participated in the musical gatherings and performed a variety of song and dance routines. "The choral festival is one of the yearly highlights for our students," says Pastor Tom Bauer, religion professor and choir director at Shoreland Lutheran High

School, Somers, Wis. "It is not only a time to excel musically, but also a time to meet friends old and new from other area Lutheran high schools."

St. John, Slades Corners, Wis., is starting a quilting club to make quilts for those in need. The first batch of quilts will be "baby-sized" and sent to Christian Life Resources, a pro-life, pro-family organization in Wisconsin affiliated with WELS.

Happy anniversary!

AZ-CA—Two teachers at King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif., are celebrating milestones in their teaching ministry: **Sarah Grebe** (35 years) and **Peter Buege** (10 years).

MI—**St. John, Allegan, Mich.**, celebrated its 140th anniversary on Sept. 21.

PNW—**King of Kings, Wasilla, Ala.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary on Aug. 3. **Vaughn Vogel**, pastor at King of Kings, Kennewick, Wash., celebrated 40 years in the ministry on Oct. 5.

SEW—Three professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, celebrated their 25th anniversaries in the ministry on Oct. 17: **John Hartwig, E. Allen Sorum, and Paul Zell.**

Hope, Louisville, Ky., celebrated 35 years on Nov. 2.

St. John, Slades Corners, Wis., is celebrating 150 years this year.

Tim Matthies, teacher at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., is celebrating 25 years in the teaching ministry this year.

WW—Peace, Janesville, Wis., celebrated its 50th anniversary on Nov. 9.

Mt. Calvary-Grace, La Crosse, Wis., celebrated 50 years on Oct. 12.

District reporters for this month: AZ—Frederick Casmer; MI—John Eich; PNW—David Birsching; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

Southeastern Wisconsin



On Sept. 12, St. Matthew, Niles, Ill., hosted a "campfire fest" for its preschool families—some of which are Japanese. "This event is the initial bridge that connects the Japanese families and St. Matthew's congregation," says Preschool Director Minori Yamaki. "We want to make our families feel welcome and learn that they are a very important part of our ministry." The preschool is just one way St. Matthew is reaching out to Japanese families in the United States. Since 2004, they've also offered summer day camps for kids and English as a Second Language courses. "It is our mission to plant the gospel seed into their hearts and to let the Holy Spirit work the rest," says Yamaki, who is originally from Japan. "We have heard many positive accounts of the spiritual impact that we've left on our Japanese families who have since returned to their home country."

South Atlantic



Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga., began its first preschool class in August with nine children enrolled. The congregation dedicated its 6,000 square-foot education building in January.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY**Pastors**

Fleischmann, David C., to Beautiful Savior/Trinity, Austin, Minn.

Golm, Curtis A., to Messiah, Milwaukee, Wis.

Kaesmeyer, Mark A., to First, Lake Geneva, Wis.

Mielke, Thomas A., to St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.

Schleg, Frederick B., to Beautiful Savior, Everett, Wash.

Seelow, James P., to St. John, Riga, Mich.

Skorzewski, James R., to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. The last business day of each month is the reporting cutoff date for the CMO deposit. For the deposit to be included in reported receipts for the month, CMO must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 9, 2009, will be credited as 2008 CMO, if accompanied by a 2008 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 60th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 27-31, 2009, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. The convention delegate fee, usually paid by the congregation the delegate represents, is \$200.

A memorial—usually composed of a series of “whereas” and “resolved” statements—is a formal petition to the synod convention that asks consideration for a particular item of business. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BORAM) is Jan. 15, 2009; they will be selected for inclusion in BORAM at the discretion of the president. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 will not be printed but will be posted at the discretion of the president on the convention Web site, www.wels.net/convention—if they are received by June 1, 2009. Send memorials to President's Office, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; carla.martin@sab.wels.net.

ANNIVERSARIES

Janesville, Wis.—Peace (50). Dec. 14. Worship, 9 A.M. Guest preacher, Pres. Mark Schroeder. Doug Baron, 608-757-0176.

Columbus, Wis.—Zion (150). Dec. 25. Daniel Sims, 920-623-4870.

COMING EVENTS

Living Nativity—Dec. 5, 6-9 P.M., Dec. 6, 6-9 P.M., and Dec. 7, 4-7 P.M. St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis. Live outdoor presentations every 20 minutes. 920-565-3780. Web site, www.stpaulshowardsgrove.org.

Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale Christmas concerts—

• Dec. 6, 7:30 P.M. Calvary, Sheboygan, Wis.

• Dec. 7, 4:30 P.M. Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis.

Alan Ross, 920-684-5833; rossoa4@tm.net.

Joyful Witness (formerly Winnebago Lutheran Chorale) Christmas concerts—

• Dec. 12, 7 P.M. St. Paul, Fond du Lac, Wis.

• Dec. 13, 3 P.M. St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.

• Dec. 14, 7:30 A.M. St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Cascade Lutheran Chorale Christmas concert—Dec. 14, 4 P.M. Grace, Portland, Ore. Joy Williams, jkwilliams4@comcast.net.

WELS ministerial school Christmas concerts—

• Dec. 14, 3 P.M.; Dec. 19, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., 920-261-4352.

• Dec. 14, 3 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.

• Dec. 14, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100.

• Dec. 19, 7 P.M. Michigan Luther Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., 989-793-1041.

Marriage retreats—Looking for a Christmas gift idea for you and your spouse? Consider a marriage retreat near you. 50 percent off for called workers. 1-800-567-8669. Web site, www.welsmarriageretreat.org.

• Jan. 23-25, 2009. Orlando, Fla.

• Jan. 30-Feb. 1, 2009. Grand Rapids, Mich.

• Feb. 6-8, 2009. Galena, Ill.

• Feb. 13-15, 2009. Neenah, Wis.

• Feb. 27-Mar. 1, 2009. Minneapolis, Minn.

Evangelism workshop—Mar. 7, 2009, 9 A.M.-3 P.M. Site, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: “Be prepared to answer.” Speaker: Prof. Mark Paustian. 414-771-2530; church.secretary@FairviewLutheran.com. Web site, www.ShareGrace.net.

Today's Christian Women Retreat—Mar. 13-15, 2009. Site, Sheraton Lansing Hotel, Lansing, Mich. Theme: “Lord, you have the words of eternal life.” Web site, www.tcwr.org.

Pathways to Christ Retreat—Mar. 20-22, 2009. Site, LaSures Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Web site, www.martinlutheroshkosh.com.

Christian Woman Today Retreat—Mar. 27-29, 2009. Site, Olympia Spa & Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Theme: “Love each other as I have loved you.” Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

2009 WELS Regional Handbell Festivals

• Apr. 18-19, 2009. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 19. Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.

• Apr. 18-19, 2009. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 19. St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.

• Apr. 25-26, 2009. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 26. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Web site, www.welsbells.com.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Awareness Retreat—Apr. 24-26, 2009. Byron Center, Brownsville, Wis. Sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service. Elsa Manthey, 920-731-9798; emanthey@wlcfs.org.

2009 WELS International Youth Rally—July 8-11, 2009. Site, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Theme: “Follow the path; lead the way.” www.welsyouthrally.net.

MLC, DMLC, and NWC Reunion Weekend—July 24-26, 2009. Site, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Celebrating five-year incremental class reunion (2004, 1999 and all previous classes ending in four or nine). Steve Balza, 507-217-1731; alumni@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu/home/alumni.

NAMES WANTED

Former students of Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.—Dan Hoffman, 847-965-8596; danny.hoffman@comcast.net.

Volunteer opportunity, Milwaukee, Wis.—for WELS health care workers and others. Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis., Ken Fisher, 414-354-7320; Pastor@RisenSavior-Luth.org.

East Carolina, including Lenoir/Greene/Pitt/Wayne counties, N.C.—Tammy Boehme, 252-526-8598; tlf_boehme@suddenlink.net.

U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.—Donald Tollefson, 908-876-5429; pastor@immanuelnj.net.

Williston, N.D.—Dave Ruddat, 406-635-2180.

Sparks/Spanish Springs, Nev.—Steve Hillmer, 775-354-2800.

WELS members living in Hong Kong—c/o Asia Lutheran Seminary English Language Fellowship, jcl@als.org.hk.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sab.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. View an updated bulletin board at www.wels.net/jump/bulletinboard and a calendar at www.wels.net/jump/calendar.

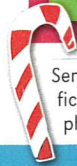
Picture this



My three-year-old daughter was playing outside, when suddenly she came in the house and said, "Mommy, Mommy, I see church outside." I was a little confused, being that we can't see a church from our backyard.

I went outside, and she pointed to the sky and said, "Look, Mom, it is just like in church!" Two jets had made a cross in the sky! How priceless!

Submitted by Heidi Biesterfeld



Send pictures to **Picture This**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

Letting *Christ* shine during Christmas

Put a twist on Christmas this year and include activities that let your light—and Christ—shine in your home, community, and church.

- Incorporate the use of an Advent calendar and/or wreath in your family devotions to prepare your family for Christmas.
- Buy a bag of groceries for or volunteer at a local food bank or shelter.
- Get together with families in the congregation and have a Christmas bake sale, with proceeds going to one of your congregation's ministries.
- Purchase Christmas gifts for a family in need in your congregation.
- Send Christmas cards that share the message of Christ.
- Volunteer to help at your church with music or decorations for Christmas.
- Share the Christmas story through song by caroling in your neighborhood, at a local nursing home, or to your congregation's shut-ins.
- Invite your unchurched neighbors and friends to a Christmas service.



How do you say **MERRY CHRISTMAS?**

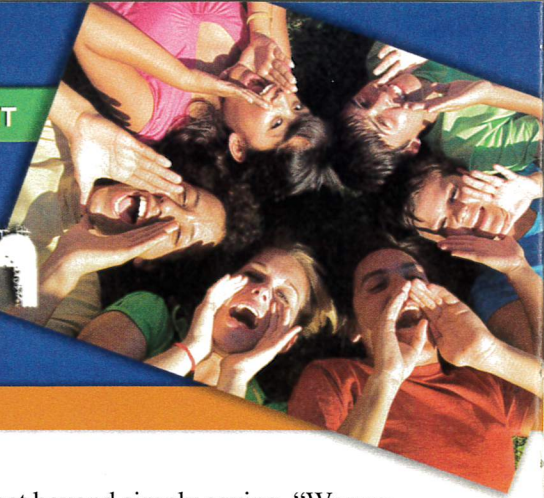
Here is how people from countries around the world will greet each other this Christmas season:

English: Merry Christmas
Chinese: (Mandarin) Sheng Dan Kuai Le
Czech: Prejeme Vam Vésele Vánoce a statný Novy Rok
German: Froehliche Weihnachten
Indonesian: Selamat Hari Natal
Japanese: Shinnen omedeto. Kurisumasu Omedeto
Korean: Sung Tan Chuk Ha
Latvian: Prieci'gus Ziemsve'tkus un Laimi'gu Jauno Gadu!
Portuguese: Feliz Natal
Spanish: Feliz Navidad

Hear people from our sister churches around the world say "Merry Christmas" as well as share what being a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference means to them in the December edition of WELS Connection.

Voices of youth

David D. Sellnow



This imagined dialogue about engaging youth in the church's work includes active and inactive young adults of St. Barnabas Lutheran Church. The comments are based on the 2005 report, "Why Young People Leave WELS."

Riley (recently confirmed youth): I brought a friend along to church recently. Afterward, she said, "I'm curious. Your pastor is a man. The church council members that were installed during the service were all men. Do women play any role at all in your church?" I struggled trying to find a good way to answer her.

Jacki (inactive member, in her 20s): Maybe answering is difficult because we do downgrade women. I think a lot of women feel like second-class citizens in this church.

Mrs. Schnitt (ladies association president): I don't see it that way. I've always been very involved in church activities.

Abby (college student, attends when home on weekends): But the scope of activities and ministries for women seems quite limited.

Mr. Newsome (church council member): Well, there are certain limits established by Scripture.

Gina (active teen member): I wouldn't want to go against the Bible. To put women in the role of pastors would go too far. But women can offer a lot to the church—above and beyond cooking, cleaning, and raising children.

Tim (active teen): We've never said women can only cook, clean, and raise kids.

Jacki: It may seem that way, though, if the main things women are seen doing at church is preparing potlucks and staffing the nursery.

Erin (college student, training to be a Lutheran school teacher): Having women involved in nurturing children isn't a bad thing! They do vital work teaching the next generation God's truth.

Abby: I just think that at a time in history when we've seen women running for president and vice president of the

country, we need to get beyond simply saying, "Women, you need to submit to men."

Rev. James (St. Barnabas' pastor): Our society sees submitting to another person as something weak or undesirable, but in Christ we aren't ashamed to give ourselves in service to one another.

Steven (college student, attends occasionally): So what exactly does the Bible say about what women can and can't do?

Mrs. Bonita (Sunday school teacher): The wife of noble character described in Proverbs sounds like she does just about everything—from managing her household to conducting business and buying property.

Gina: Should our focus be figuring out what women can't do? Or should we instead be looking for every good way in which we can involve everyone—including men, women, boys, and girls?

Rev. James: Good point, Gina. Let's all be clear about a very important truth: God is not against girls. The same apostle who wrote about the different roles God has set for men and women also emphasized that all baptized children of God are equal heirs of God—"there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus."

Abby: So can we talk about more ways to get more women involved in more areas of service in our church?

Mr. Newsome: Sounds like a very good idea! And while we're at it, let's look at more ways to get more men—and teens—serving others too.

The conversation from St. Barnabas continues next month in Forward in Christ. A Bible study, entitled "Creating Youth-full Churches," is available online to help you start similar conversations in your congregation. See resources at www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy.

David Sellnow, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.

we all are called to
serve

Next month: **involvement**

Part of SOMETHING GREAT

A teen shares how she got involved in church work—and what she learned along the way.

Alicia A. Neumann

Tatum Gormley-Nettles,

teen member of 2009 WELS International Youth Rally Planning Committee, wasn't always involved in church work. In fact, she didn't have much to do with church until several years ago when the loss of a loved one shook her world.

"Before my dad died, my family was not active in a specific church," says Tatum, a member at Green Valley, Henderson, Nev. "We went to holiday services and had been baptized, but we did not go regularly. However, because my dad was sick for so long, we had grown very familiar with the fragility of life. We had faith that there was a God and a heaven. . . . My first time in a WELS church was for my father's memorial. After that I discovered that there was something bigger out there, that God was great."

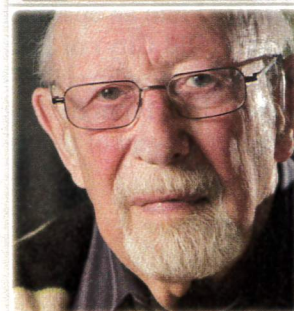
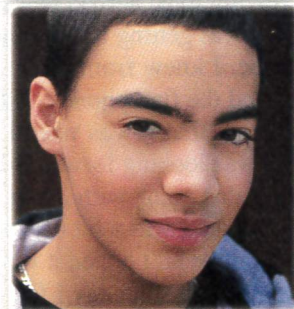
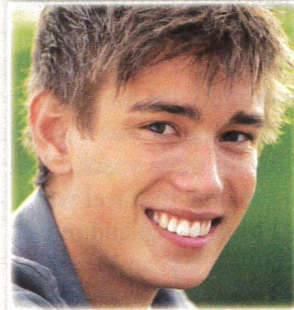
In the months following her father's death, Tatum began attending Sunday school and then catechism classes. "I had never been part of a church, and it felt good to be a part of something so great and to be learning why I believe what I do," she says.

Getting involved

Tatum began attending youth group meetings, and in summer 2007 she attended her first WELS youth rally in Dallas, Texas. That trip made a lasting impression.

"In the last few years, the involvement of youth in my congregation has been very minimal," says Tatum. "After attending the rally in Dallas, I felt that I needed to step up and be a leader for my church."

In addition to helping out in the nursery and teaching vacation Bible school, Tatum helped organize a new high school group called Escape. "We meet every two weeks so we can escape the stress of the week and grow in our faith," she says. "Every few months we do a fun activity away. We also help out the community by vol-



unteering at blood drives, and we will soon be helping disabled children learn how to ride bikes!"

Branching out

Before she knew it, Tatum's involvement led to her appointment to the youth rally planning committee.

"[At the rally] I remember sitting in the audience amazed by the fact that three teens, not much older than me, helped organize such an amazing event!" says Tatum. "I wanted to jump out of my seat and start leading part of it. Honestly though, I felt small and still a bit overwhelmed by it all. I just took a leap of faith in signing up for the committee. When I got the news that I had been chosen, I was ecstatic."

So far, Tatum has helped determine rally essentials such as the venue, rally theme, and logo. At the rally, she will also be helping with the welcome program, speakers, and entertainment.

What she gained

Through these experiences, she's grown as a person. "Everyone has a choice about what kind of impact they want to make," she says. "Even the smallest action or simplest word can do wonders."

She hopes other teens will take advantage of service opportunities in their churches. "Once you feel what it's like to reach out to others and meet new people, you won't regret it!" she says. "You can't deny yourself the opportunity to do such good work for our Father. God will give you the strength you need. He always does."

Alicia Neumann is assistant editor of Forward in Christ.

This is the fourth article in a five-part series on keeping youth involved in the church.

The 2009 International Youth Rally will be held July 8-11 at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. For more information, go to www.wels.net/jump/youthrally.

GOD wants me here

Living abroad in Germany gives me many opportunities to share my faith with a largely unreligious nation.

Leah Bauer

As an American, the season of Thanksgiving has always been my favorite time of year, with all of its treasured traditions and customs. However, I am now living in Germany, and I have a new favorite season—Christmas. Though my expatriate friends and I still celebrate Thanksgiving, the rest of the continent considers it just another work day. But the Christmas season definitely overshadows all other festive thoughts.

What I'm truly looking forward to are the markets. The Christmas markets make the month of December magical. There are stalls filled with traditional trinkets and ornaments; smells of candied nuts, roasted chestnuts, and Christmas spices; tastes of German wurst, sweet crepes, and hot *glühwein* (mulled wine) that warms you from the inside out; and sounds of choirs singing and instruments playing in the streets and cathedrals. All of these things completely transport you to an enchanting place. I'm excited for it and so blessed to be able to enjoy it.

Living abroad

I still have to pinch myself sometimes, wondering if I'm actually experiencing all of it. After years of going back and forth between the United States and Europe, my dream of living abroad indefinitely finally came true. After a sequence of tests, phone calls,

and interviews, I got a job as a full-time proofreader, contracted to the global marketing department at one of the world's largest software companies.

The career move was a fantastic opportunity for me. After graduation from college, I was a full-time copy editor for three years. I loved my job, but the urge to travel was too strong. So I took a leap and moved to Switzerland for a year. When I returned to the United States, I became a freelance copy editor because there was no full-time work available. I worked for a few different companies, but I always took the opportunity to return to Europe. Now my new job not only gets me back into the publishing world full time, but the headquarters is located in Walldorf, Germany—the country I have dreamed of living in for so many years.

Having lived abroad before, I knew what I was getting into by moving to Europe. I knew from the moment I received the first phone call from the company that it was what I wanted, and I was looking forward to the challenges that come with living and working abroad. I was a bit nervous that it wouldn't be all I hoped it would be, but from the very first day I felt at home.

I moved into an apartment in the *Altstadt* (Old City) of Heidelberg, where many employees of the same company live. From the beginning, I was never in want of things to do or

people to do them with. I was on a constant high, loving life and living it to the fullest. There are so many opportunities to travel—right out my back door—and having six weeks of vacation a year really allows me to take advantage of these opportunities. Between the diverse languages, landscapes, architecture, cultures, viewpoints, foods, and traditions, there is never a dull moment on mainland Europe.

One problem

There is only one drawback—one issue I had known would be there. I had lived in Europe before and knew that Christianity is held in such low regard. Yes, Germany has some of the most beautiful cathedrals and was the home of Martin Luther, but Christianity has become all but nonexistent here today. The more I talk to my colleagues and other acquaintances who are fast becoming my friends, the more I realize it is going to be sad and difficult knowing that these people I care about—and have so much in common with as a traveler and expat—are all unbelievers.

Since the first day, this has been both a struggle and a huge opportunity. Since I arrived, I have had at least one religious conversation a week, oftentimes more. The expats all have their different backgrounds—nonpracticing



Leah Bauer enjoying her time overseas.



Catholics, nonpracticing Mormons, nonpracticing Seventh-day Adventists. The theme always is “nonpracticing.” So they are very curious about what a practicing Lutheran believes. The question comes up because they are surrounded by so many Germans who claim to be part of the church but are obviously not living Christian lives. The German way seems to be that one is either Protestant or Catholic, but in name only. To actually live as Christ would like us to live—that’s gone out of fashion. I think this comes from a mixture of what they see as the corruption in the Catholic Church and a long history of people simply deciding that Christian values take away from the pleasure of life.

I still have to laugh at how all of my friends think I’m such a novelty—always stating what I believe and then, with God’s help, actually following it up with actions. It amazes me how everyone I’ve met has never had a guiding Christian influence—to the point of thinking actions have nothing to do with the faith you profess.

An opportunity

Fortunately a WELS civilian chaplain—the only WELS pastor in all of Europe—lives near Mainz, Germany. I ride with a couple from Heidelberg to the church services he conducts in

Wicker, where I have found respite and Christian encouragement. I feel the need for such strength in my daily interaction with non-Christians. Besides attending the services and Bible study twice a month, the organized retreats for Reformation and Easter are also such a blessing to attend. I always come away completely uplifted and revitalized.

In August I was in Wisconsin to attend a wedding, and I was reminded how wonderful it is to be surrounded by Christians. I heard no bad language, heard no sinful conversations, and was spiritually encouraged by everyone around me for the entire time I was there. Coming back to life in Germany was even more of a shock than I had imagined. I wanted to run back to my Christian world. But after prayer and thoughtful consideration, I know that God wants me to be here. I know that I may never see the benefits of my Christian witness abroad, but being given the opportunity to be used by the Holy Spirit to touch people who have never heard the viewpoint of an active Christian is too good to pass up.

If I ever decide to return to the United States, I’ll most likely plant myself directly across the street from a WELS church. But for now, I find encouragement knowing Christ is with me every day. My prayer will continue to be, “Use me, Christ, among these people who do not know you.” I will continue to ask for strength and opportunities. And I trust that he will use me and make me a blessing to many people.

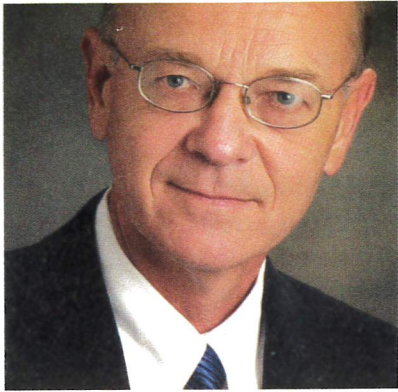
Leah Bauer is served by the WELS civilian chaplain in Europe and attends services in Wicker, Germany.

If you are visiting or living in Europe or know someone who is and would like more information about the WELS Civilian Chaplaincy in Europe, visit www.welseurope.org or contact Pastor Josh Martin at welschaplain@wels.net.



My prayer will continue to be,

“Use me, Christ, among these people who do not know you.”



Mark Schroeder

A synod equipped for its mission

Almost a year ago, I posed these questions to you: What exactly is our identity as a synod? Do we understand and appreciate that identity? Have we forgotten it? Do we even sometimes deny it? Do we allow others to define our identity, with the result that our synod is known only for the things we are “against” and not for what we are “for”? Do we become almost apologetic for belonging to a church body that others might view as “closed-minded” or “stuck in tradition” or “not adapting to the modern world”? If we are not aware of or convinced of the blessings we enjoy, will it surprise us when others are not eager to share what we have? Exactly who are we as a synod? What do we stand for? What blessings do we enjoy that we want to share with the world?

In the articles that followed, I reviewed some of the important things that characterize our synod and why we can be thankful to God for them. In addition, I wanted to identify some of the blessings God has graciously given to us.

Listing these blessings does not imply that our synod is perfect. Redeemed and restored children of God that we are, we remain imperfect sinners living in a sin-darkened world. No synod or church body will ever be perfect on this side of heaven. The effects of human sin and weakness will always be a part of God’s church on earth until the day he returns. Our words and dealings with one another will sometimes show a lack of love. Our worship will often be distracted and our prayer life irregular. The zeal for searching the Scriptures will not always burn within us. Our interests can tend to become parochial and self-centered. Subtle distortions of the truth of God’s Word will be appealing. Called workers will sin and make mistakes, and members will sometimes be

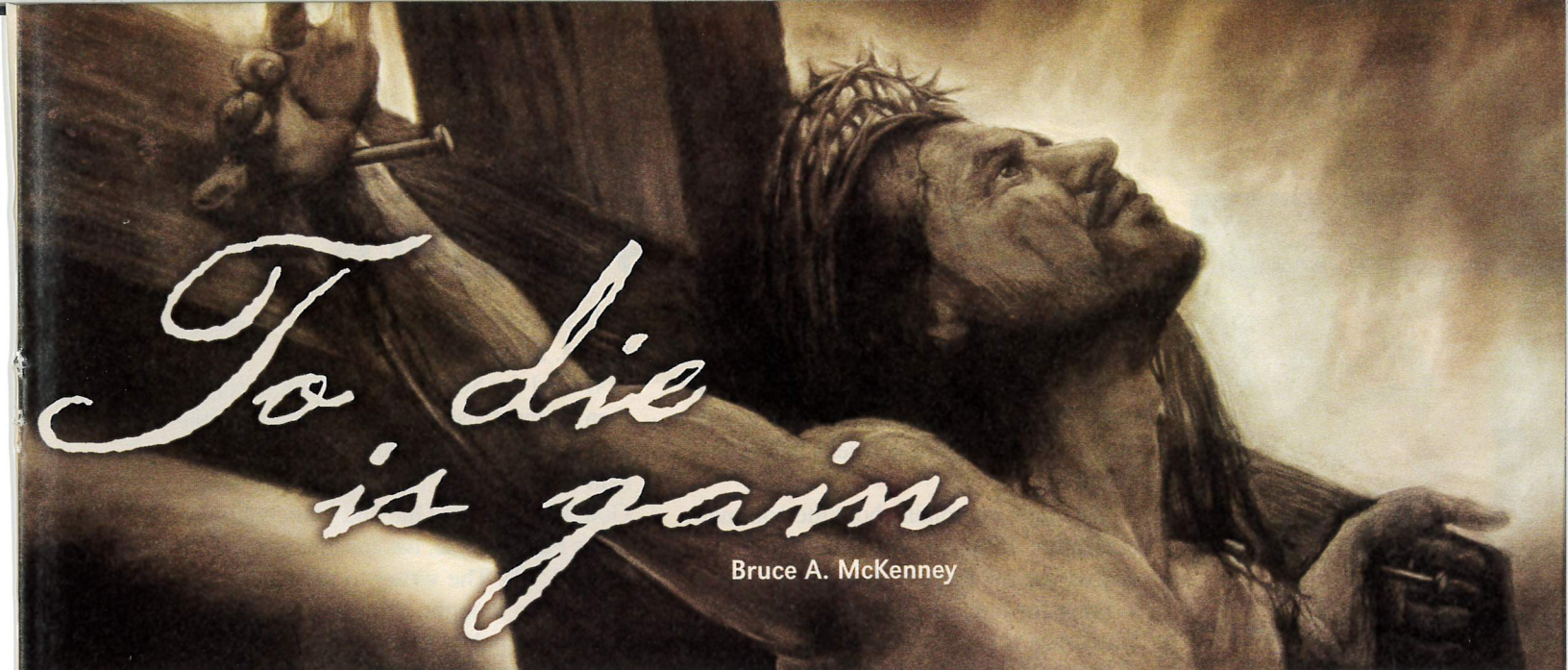
quick to criticize or condemn their spiritual leaders.

So we view this thing called “the synod” for what it is: a gathering of God’s people—sinners who have been washed clean by the blood of Christ and brought into God’s family by his grace. But we also understand that this synod is a gathering of saints who are still sinners living in a sinful and imperfect world.

As we think about our synod, our greatest focus should not center on this human institution we call WELS. Rather our greatest concern is that God would continue to preserve his truth among us, against all attacks and threats from without or within the church. We will continue to pray that God would keep us faithful to his Word, centered on the cross of Jesus Christ, and committed to sharing that Savior with the world. We will want to recognize the blessings that God has given to us in this little corner of Christianity called WELS while not denying or overlooking our own shortcomings and failures. We will want to ask him for the strength and guidance to walk even more closely together with one another and, more important, with him. And as we see the blessings that God has given us in this synod, we will want others to share in those blessings with our families, our communities, and the world.

Armed and equipped with the faith and joy produced by God’s Word and by his sacraments, we can truly be instruments for service to our God. Walking together. Working together. Serving together. Proclaiming together. All for Christ, who gave his all for us.

To read all of Pres. Mark Schroeder’s articles that characterize our synod, go to www.wels.net/jump/ficarchive and search by the author’s first and last name.



To die is gain

Bruce A. McKenney

It wasn't the kind of reception I expected. Ruth had been rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. A blood clot had formed in her lung, and the clot needed to be removed.

As I stepped into the room, she looked at me and said, "Pastor, I'm so angry at you!"

Quietly I asked, "Why are you angry at me?"

"You told us in Bible class that Christians can be afraid to die because of guilt over past sins. But I thought Christians shouldn't ever be afraid to die! But you were right! I'm afraid to die because of my sin!"

By the "twinkle" in her eyes I could tell that Ruth's anger at me wasn't real, but by the sound of her voice I could tell that her fears about dying were.

Guilt over sin when facing the last enemy

In his letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul refers to death as the "last enemy." Although Christ has conquered death for us and in him we have no need to fear death, it still is an enemy with which we must contend.

Certainly, there is the obvious physical struggle as we fight to stay alive. But there is a spiritual side to that struggle too, and the old evil foe never fights nicely. As Christians get ready to meet their Maker, the devil and a sinful conscience can resurrect "skeletons" from the closet of one's memory. Guilt over a life's worth of misdeeds can terrorize the heart and conscience of even the most faithful Christian as he or she does battle with that last enemy, death.

The assurance of forgiveness through Jesus

But God provides the necessary weapon to overcome guilt in that last battle. Listen to what John wrote in Revelation about how God's people can overcome

the accusations of the evil one even on the deathbed: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. . . .'" (12:10,11). It is the good news about Jesus' death that overcomes the accusations of Satan and conscience. For in the blood of the Lamb every sin is washed away, no matter what the devil or our consciences say. In the blood of the Lamb, Christians find the courage to face death and receive confidence for eternal life. In his empty tomb, Christians find a power greater than death and sin. When death launches the final attack, the authority of Christ is simply overpowering.

So what should a Christian do when guilt over sin makes one afraid to die? Look to your baptism! Turn to God's gospel promises in Christ! Remember the Lord's Supper! In Word and sacraments, God gives us the testimony that quiets an accusing conscience and silences Satan. That testimony is this: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25).

No, I didn't receive a "warm" reception from Ruth that day in the emergency room. But I do know this: through her belief in Jesus who washed away all her sin she received a Father's welcome in heaven when she closed her eyes in death!

Contributing editor Bruce McKenney is pastor at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.

This is the fifth article in a ten-part series on death and dying.

What if I'm afraid to die because of my sin? Remember that in the blood of the Lamb every sin is washed away, no matter what the devil or our consciences say.

Celebrate his arrival

On Sept. 1 our first Christmas catalog came, complete with special prices for children's toys and artificial Christmas trees. Now the Christmas season is in full bloom even though it is weeks before the actual day.

We might complain about the commercialization of the birth of Jesus, but in the end we are out there with our lists in hand looking for bargains like everyone else. Christmas is a great time to get together with family and friends, see their smiles, and bathe in the warmth of their laughter and good wishes.

We won't be alone in issuing reminders to keep Christ in Christmas. After all, Christ is the greatest gift. That simple truth is deep and profound. It is so profound that we gloss over it sometimes. Certainly the world doesn't even want to think about it.

Four weeks before Christmas, Christians anticipate the celebration of Christ's birth during the season of Advent. The birth of Jesus is so important that it deserves special thought and a special season of preparation. Nowhere in all of history has there been such an important event. No other world religion celebrates the arrival of its founder with such reverent anticipation. It was and is a big deal.

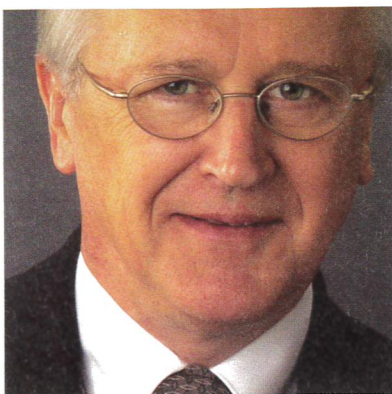
Why? Because Jesus is God come to earth. No other religion makes such a claim. Yes, they all have charismatic founders who launched significant movements. But other world religions do not claim that the God who created all things and who rules all things humbled himself to become human and live with his wayward creatures. We do. The wonder of this truth suggests that God is so interested in humanity that he came here to rescue us from ourselves, from our brutality, greed, arrogance, and hatred. He

did. Such an event deserves to be celebrated. So we celebrate.

If God the Son chose to come to earth, then he must also have important information for us poor limited creatures. John said it so clearly, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). The writer to the Hebrews echoes the thought, "In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son" (1:2). Since that is true we should also "pay more careful attention" (Hebrews 2:1), because he has information no earthbound creature will ever possess. So we celebrate because Jesus tells us what God intends for us to know.

In all the excitement about Christmas, these profound truths hide behind the torn wrapping paper and the family feasts. But they are the reason we celebrate. Sadly too many will choose to remember the birth of a helpless child in Bethlehem and consider him nothing more than a very special child. They will not pay attention to his words either. They will consider his words no more important than the words of so many other great men. Even those who saw Jesus during his first visit to earth chose to discount him and oppose his message. "His own did not receive him" (John 1:11).

Let us celebrate God come to earth. As we do, we remember that this God who became flesh in Bethlehem has said very clearly that he will return. Pay careful attention to his Word. He will come back to take us home to glory. Then the celebration will be unending. Celebrate his arrival in Bethlehem—a profound miracle that has us in mind. Anticipate his second arrival—a glorious triumph that also has us in mind.



John A. Banerjee

THE APOSTLES

St. Peter: Confessing Christ

He was a prosperous fisherman and partner with Zebedee and Sons. He was a devout believer, hoping and waiting for God to make good on his Old Testament promises. And then, one day he was called from his boat to follow a man who was the hope of Israel. Peter, the man so filled with faults and foibles, became a fisher of men and spokesman for the apostles. With one notable exception, he was a man ready to confess Christ first in word and then in deed.

READ MARK 8:27-30

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

²⁹“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.”

³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. Why did Jesus ask them who people were saying he was (v. 27)?
2. Evaluate the list of people they mention in verse 28. What does it tell you about the people’s perception of Jesus?
3. If you were making such a list for a politician in America today, with what great names from the past would politicians hope to be likened?
4. Each of these names had a common theme that disappointed Jesus. What did they all have in common?
5. If Jesus asked you today, “Who do people say that I am?” how would you answer? What does each answer tell you about a person’s perceptions?
6. Explain: There is a great difference between knowing Jesus and confessing him as Christ.

7. Jesus then asked the more important question: “What about you?” He wanted to give his disciples a chance to confess him. How does Jesus do that for you?
8. Look at Peter’s answer in Mark 8:29 and also in Matthew 16:16. What did Peter’s answer confess about
 - a. the Old Testament?
 - b. the Messiah?
 - c. God’s plan of salvation?
 - d. the person of the Savior?

MORE ABOUT PETER

Peter didn’t just know Jesus; he confessed him as Christ. No wonder Jesus said: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:17,18).

On the rock of that confession of Jesus as Christ—not Peter himself—God built his church. And Peter never stopped confessing! The book of Acts tells of Peter’s work among both Jews and Gentiles during the first half of the first century. Tradition says that he confessed to the end and was martyred by crucifixion in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero. The church father Papias (c. A.D. 100) tells us the gospel of St. Mark was written from Peter’s perspective for Roman Christians. St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City is built on the site of a tomb commemorated as Peter’s by early Christians. Since A.D. 258 the church has celebrated his feast each year on the Festival of St. Peter and Paul, observed on June 29. The gospel lesson for that festival is Mark 8:27-35.

Contributing editor Jonathan Schroeder is pastor at Faith, Sharpsburg, Georgia.

This is the second article in a 12-part series on Jesus’ apostles. Find this study and answers online after Dec. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net



God's love was showered upon us when Jesus was born as the world's Savior.

Pam Holz

While the sense of smell is reputed to be the most powerful memory trigger, every one of the five senses is stimulated by Christmas. What sense is Christmas for you?

The five senses of Christmas

Perhaps the sense of smell is what you most associate with Christmas. As you tromp through the forest, memories of Christmases past come flooding to your mind as you inhale the aroma of the freshly cut tree. Or maybe it is the wafting scent of spices that grabs you, transporting you to Grandma's kitchen on Christmas Day when everyone was bustling to get the meal together.

For some, the sense of sight is what brings Christmas to mind. Visualize the twinkling lights and pine boughs hung above the streets, the nativity nestled on the church lawn, people smiling as they carry precious packages home to be wrapped, the glittering tree, the first few snowflakes drifting through the air. Is sight the sense of Christmas for you?

Those first clear sweet notes of "Silent Night" or one of the multitude of carols you will hear this season may be the triggers that tug at your Christmas heartstrings. Hearing the sounds of the season is, for some, the most powerful sense of Christmas. Imagine that first Christmas night in the hills of Bethlehem when the skies were filled with the heavenly host praising God.

Spicy gingerbread men, glistening sugar cookies, tart cranberry-orange relish, savory turkey and stuffing . . . is tasting the flavors of Christmas your favorite sense? Many families repeat the same menu year after year because of the pleasant memories that are infused into the foods. Such Christmas feasts would not be complete without the beautifully browned turkey, smoky and hot from the grill; sage-and-onion stuffing; caramelized sweet

potatoes; cranberries; lefse; pickles; olives; and the lusciously spicy pumpkin pie topped with a generous portion of freshly whipped cream.

Gently taking the paper from each fragile ornament to hang it on the prickly pine, scooping up chilly handfuls of freshly fallen snow, warming hands around a steaming mug of hot chocolate . . . your favorite sense for Christmas may be enjoying these tactile experiences. For some, the act of holding a pen, jotting a note, affixing the postage, and sealing the envelopes of 50, 100, or 200+ greetings is something that keeps Christmas tangible.

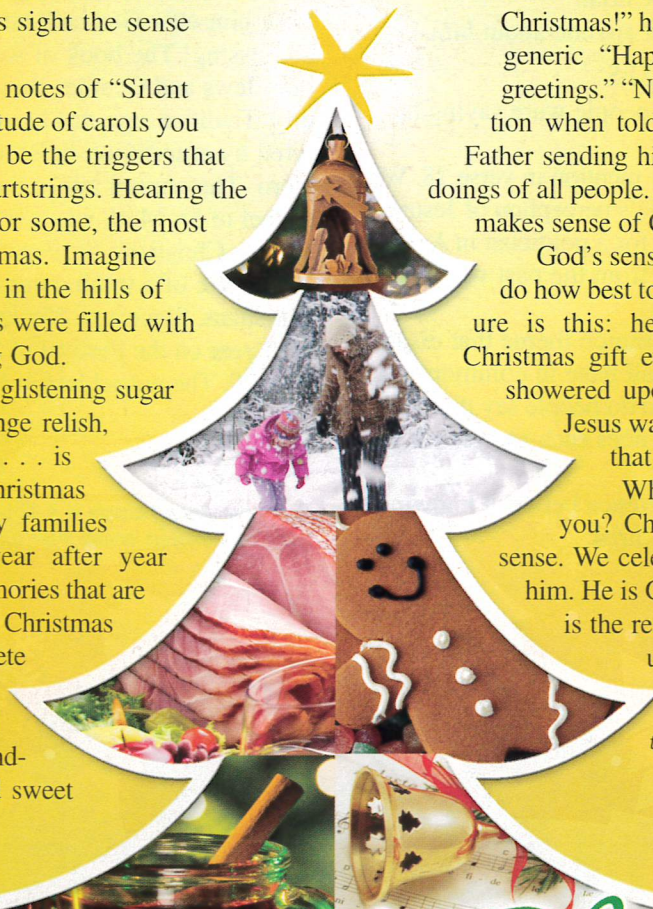
When Christmas makes sense

The world has taken a different approach to the senses of Christmas. The scent of a pine tree is still wonderful, but the tree can no longer be referred to as a Christmas tree. That nativity scene can be set up in the city square, but only if a Wiccan star and a Santa are alongside it. The call of "Merry Christmas!" has been replaced with a more generic "Happy holidays" or "Season's greetings." "Nonsense!" is the world's reaction when told the amazing account of a Father sending his Son to die for the wrongdoings of all people. And yet that account is what makes sense of Christmas.

God's sense of knowing better than we do how best to save us from our every failure is this: he sent Jesus, the greatest Christmas gift ever given. God's love was showered upon us in every sense when Jesus was born as the world's Savior that first Christmas.

What sense is Christmas for you? Christ makes Christmas make sense. We celebrate Christmas because of him. He is God's love for each of us. He is the reason that every sense makes us say: "Merry Christmas!"

Pam Holz is a member at Beautiful Savior, Clarksville, Tennessee.



The senses of Christmas