

THE 

DECEMBER 2020

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



EMMANUEL



Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel



O COME



O COME



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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THE GOSPEL, FOR YOU

BY ELIZABETH NEUFELD

As the year 2020 comes to a close, let us not forget the gracious gift of the gospel. We have all witnessed a dark year unfold before us, and in such times what we need to be reminded of the most is not of the latest riot or disease, the cruel comments on social media, or the battles between countries and neighbors, but the power of the cross, and the One who already came to rescue us. He continues to rescue us through His redemptive power. This God whom we serve—who sacrificed Himself for His creation—He alone will reign forever.

This Great Redeemer sent Jesus, His only Son, who came humbly to the human race. Born among animals, and announced at birth first to shepherds, He was raised by imperfect parents and knew our struggles as He grew up in the world He had created and which we had stained. He was perfect, unblemished, completely pure, and yet, “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (Isaiah 53:3, NIV).

He performed miracles, walked with the broken, and healed the sick. And we rioted against Him, tortured Him, and nailed Him to a cross where He died a gruesome death. Though Satan gloated for a time, the enemy had no victory—that belonged solely to the King of kings. Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), and the earth trembled as the Savior of the world died before His creation.

But our awesome Savior and Lord was

raised back to life, defeating the enemy! Many people saw Him and knew beyond doubt that He is our Messiah, who with power overcame death. This all happened just as the prophecies had said it would hundreds of years before, exactly as God had ordained it since the first man and woman turned away from Him.

Now, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). He covers you with a cloak of righteousness; He sanctifies you as you walk with Him and as you learn to obey and trust His righteous kingship.

Our resolution as His ambassadors is to glorify His Name, to share this true testimony of good news with the world, so that everyone around us will know that we are His own, and that we are set apart and liberated from the grips of the rest of this sinful world.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

This Savior is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and He has set you free. Though the rest of the world changes and shakes before you, our God never changes. He is our rock in whom we can rest securely, knowing He alone will reign forever. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.

Neufeld lives in Ewa Beach, Oahu, Hawaii.

We celebrate the First Advent to whet our appetites for the Second. We long for the next coming.

—Max Lucado

Life in a prison cell may well be compared to Advent; one waits, hopes, and does this, that, or the other—things that are of no real consequence—the door is shut, and can be opened only from the outside.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Why should God humble himself to lie in the feedbox of a donkey and to hang upon a cross? The manger and the cross are never far apart for Luther.

—Roland Bainton

For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning—not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.

—Frederick Buechner

Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing.

—John Piper

O come, O come,

Emmanuel,

And ransom

captive Israel,

That mourns in lonely exile

here

Until the Son of God

appear.



God with us

EMMANUEL



by Clara Gunderson

Each situation outlined in Psalm 107 was desperate, intolerable! Wandering in the desert, some could not find a way to any habitation. They were hungry, thirsty, fainting. Dwelling in darkness in the shadow of death, some were prisoners in misery in their chains, yet rebellious against God, spurning His counsel. Fools because of their rebellious ways and afflicted because of their sins, some drew near to the gates of death. Though they had seen the great works of God, some great businessmen went about their affairs, their souls melting away in their misery.

Coming to an end in themselves, they cried out to God in their trouble and He delivered them. He saved them. He brought them out of their distresses. The captives were freed by the Lord of Might. Redeemed, the Psalmist called on them to give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness (Psalm 107:4-32).

"You are a God who sees," cried Hagar, banished to the wilderness. Her son, conceived by Abram, was named Ishmael, meaning "God hears" (Genesis 16:13). To Moses, our Lord of Might said, "I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt ... I am aware of their suffering" (Exodus 3:7). God saw! God heard!

Emmanuel, the God who sees and hears, is with us in His Son, Jesus. In "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," He is called the Rod (stem) of Jesse. He was born in the lineage of King David, the son of Jesse. The cry in this hymn is for Him to free His own from the tyranny of Satan.

In Luke 8:26-39 Jesus did just that. Traveling, He encountered a desperate situation: a demon-possessed man, naked, living in a cemetery among the dead because of his uncontrollable life. Falling before Jesus he cried out to Him, the Son of the Most High. At Jesus' word, the demons fled and the man was freed from the depths of hell. Clothed and in his right mind, he was instructed by Jesus to go back to his house and tell everyone what God had done for him.

When the sun arose the next morning, what was it like for this man? He had encountered the Dayspring and his life was changed forever. The story of his whole life was illuminated by Jesus, who had filled it with new purpose. The darkness was gone.

The healing of this man must have brought new light to his neighborhood. Could they have been part of the crowds that followed Jesus, seeking healing, new purpose in life, and comfort? In his rejoicing, hope must have come to them, too. Jesus, our Emmanuel, our Dayspring, our Rod of Jesse, our Lord of Might, is always with us, always seeing, always hearing. And so, He will always rescue and always heal. It is He who has opened wide heaven's door. He is the Key of David.

The door to heaven was opened wide for Lazarus, the poor beggar in Luke 16:19-31. Laid at the gate of a rich man, Lazarus hoped for crumbs to satisfy his hunger. His body, full of ulcerated sores, was fair game for the neighborhood dogs who pestered him. While Lazarus languished outside a closed gate, inside the rich man put on his rich garments and filled his belly with rich food. He was not ignorant of the beggar at his door ... he knew his name.

Quickly the scene changed. Both men died. The eyes of the rich man were opened, and from hell he saw Lazarus in heaven in the bosom of Abraham. In agony and torment he cried out to Abraham: "Mercy!" He wanted mercy, this man who showed none when alive. Abraham told him that the chasm between heaven and hell is fixed, no one comes and goes. The door to heaven was locked for this rich man. But the Key of David made safe Lazarus' way.

Another wretched man was ushered through heaven's door by Jesus Himself. His story is written in Luke 23:40-43. An admitted thief, knowing he deserved the punishment he had been given, he hung next to Jesus on his own cross and cried out to Him, "Remember me!" "Mercy," was his cry, and the One who opens heaven's door extended mercy and ushered him into His Kingdom that very day. Jesus died so all may enter. There is room for all. We, too, have the choice.

Hebrews 11 lists the heroes of faith who died, still looking for the coming of their Messiah. Chapter 12 exhorts us to lay aside our sin and run with endurance our own race. We wait, we watch, we hope.

As we sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," our hearts cry to be freed from these sinful bodies, we want our spirits cheered by His coming. Together we sing: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel will come soon.

Gunderson is a member of Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore.

W by Pastor Craig Benson

What is Advent? Advent is simply a journey of faith. The path of faith and trust in God, which prepares us and our families for a truly meaningful celebration of the Christ child.

This journey of faith in the one, true God includes personal reflection. And what are we to reflect on? As humans we often focus on our own earthly situation. The ups and downs of life. The obvious reality of sin and death. And of limited human power. Or maybe the realization that you have no power in and of yourself to control what the world dishes out to you.

And this year we are confronted with an even greater enemy in the COVID-19 pandemic. The fear of this disease and the possibility of a painful and lonely death can be overwhelming. As we reflect on this past year, the words of Jesus ring loud and clear, "In this world you will have trouble ..." (John 16:33). The Apostle Paul talks much of the power of sin and of the old sinful nature we wrestle with as Christians. Not much has changed since then. Really nothing has changed. In 2020 we need the Lord more than ever! Wouldn't you agree?

This Advent season let us call upon God to do something extra special. Something great, something never seen before. Let us begin our prayer with these words, "O Come, O Come, Thou Lord of Might!"

Who is this Lord of Might? He is *El Shaddai* in the Hebrew language. He is God Almighty. The Lord of hosts. The Great Provider.

Do you remember Moses and the Hebrews? They were held in bondage under Pharaoh in Egypt. They were suffering. They were dying. Life was miserable. They had no hope of saving themselves.

Then something out of this world happened. God spoke to Moses and said, "I am the Lord; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as God Almighty" (Exodus 6:3). Notice that God specifically uses the words *El Shaddai*, meaning God Almighty.

This Lord of Might would powerfully perform miracle after miracle for Moses and the Hebrews. Leading them out of Egypt. Leading them safely away from Pharaoh and his relentless military forces.

And then on Mt. Sinai's height, this Lord of Might gave the law, the Ten Commandments, to the numerous Hebrew tribes. What a sight! What a display of God's majesty and holiness. There were clouds, lightning, and thunder, plus fire, smoke, and a loud trumpet call. Everyone knew this Lord of Might was real, powerful, and wise (Exodus 19, 20). And He was worthy of their awe, trust, and worship. Today, let us be thankful for God's law which guides us, protects us, and leads us to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Oh, how we need to reflect on God's power this Advent season and beyond. Listen to the prophet Malachi. He helps us focus on *El Shaddai*, the Lord of Might: "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings ... He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers ..." (Malachi 4:2, 6).

We are so happy when the sun's rays and warmth bring healing and relief from pain and cold. How much more we need the Lord of Might to heal us with His Son of righteousness! How much more we need *El Shaddai* to heal hurting hearts and to restore broken family relationships.

This Christmas season is going to be different from others. Maybe less traveling. Maybe smaller gatherings. Maybe less gifts under the tree. But this may not be a bad thing. Christmas is truly a celebration of the heart and soul, of *El Shaddai* reaching down to us in our time of need, of the Lord of Might declaring loudly, "I've got this ... The battle is mine I'm in control Just watch and see how I will deliver you."

Friends, you are not alone. God is with you. Mothers and fathers, your children need your love and prayers now more than ever. Senior members, keep the faith, you still have an important role in your families and in your church. Fellow pastors, keep loving your flock. You are making a huge difference in their lives.

Rejoice, rejoice! This Advent season we rejoice in the power of God's law. We also rejoice in the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Jesus is still the light of the world. If we follow Him we will have the light of life (John 8:12).

Lord of Might, you revealed your power to the Israelites long ago. *El Shaddai*, come to us this Christmas season. Messiah Jesus, come and heal us, save us, and lead us.

Benson serves Grace Evangelical Lutheran, Morris, Ill.



O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might, Who to
Thy tribes, on Sinai's height, In ancient times
didst give the law In cloud, and majesty, and awe.

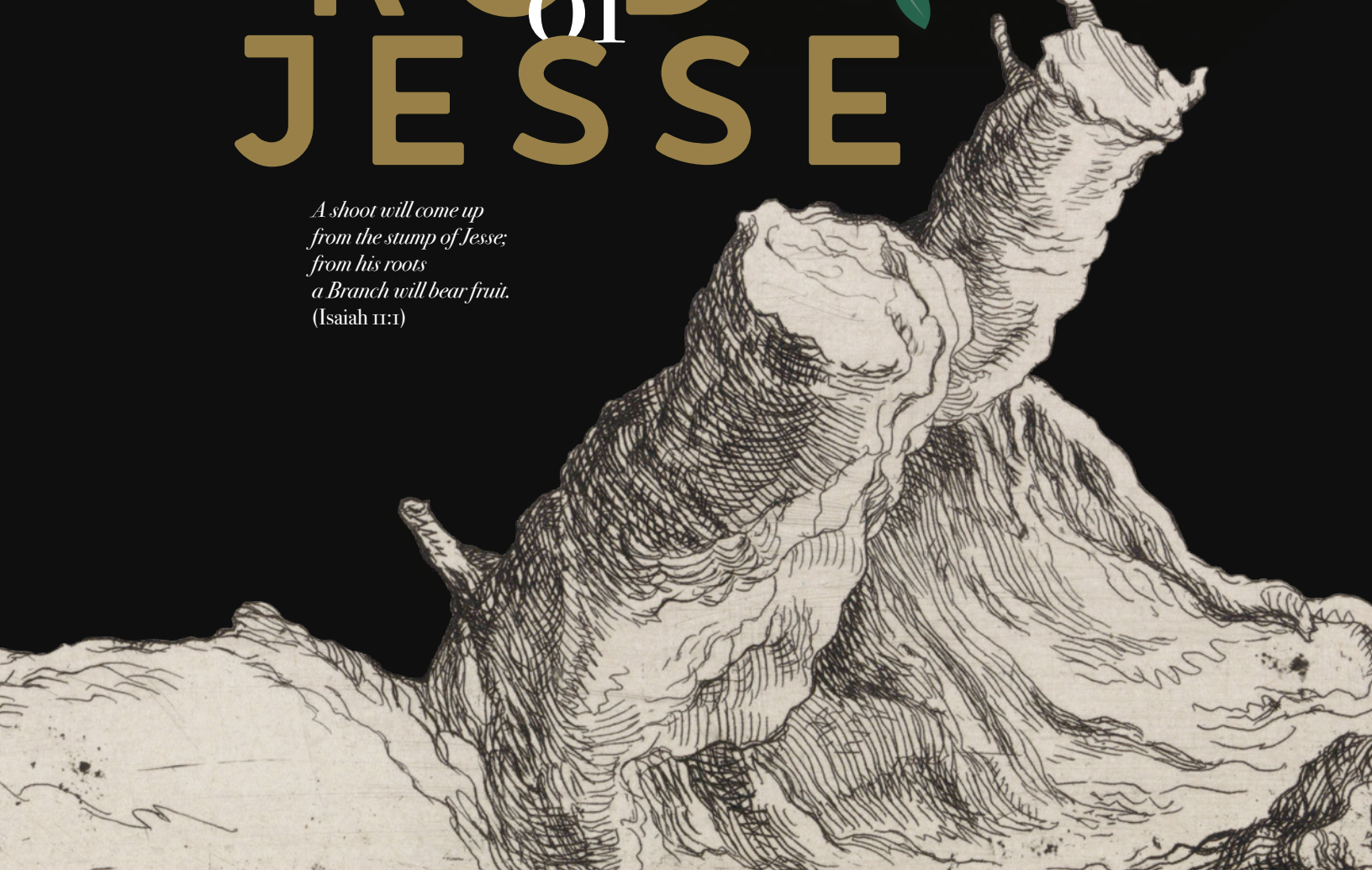
LORD of MIGHT



ROD of JESSE



*A shoot will come up
from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots
a Branch will bear fruit.
(Isaiah 11:1)*



W by Gail Hoff

hen I was growing up my mom kept a potted plant on the dining room table. Sadly, it was a bare, crispy stem that she watered and had high hopes would flourish with green life one day. Mom held on to that hope for a long time.

I love my gardens, especially planting vegetables in the early spring. As a family we shop for the seeds with visions of a bountiful harvest. Once the ground is warmed up enough, we prepare the site for planting. The seeds are so dry and dead looking we wonder if it is worth the effort, but we plant them anyway. Clearly, we haven't given up hope because every day we check for the telltale signs of life, that crack in the soil getting ready to reveal a tender green sprout. What fun it is to announce to the family, "The lettuce is up, and the beets are poking through."

"Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming as men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

"Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind,
With Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to men a Saviour,
When half spent was the night."

(*Es Ist Ein Ros Entsprungen*, translated by Theodore Baker)

Advent has always been a time of waiting, a time of looking forward with hope. When we were young there was an excitement during Advent because Christmas was on the way. As we matured our focus changed from gifts under the tree to the excitement of being together with friends and family.

This year, because of the lock downs, our focus has changed again. Now we long for more ordinary things like gathering together to worship with our church family, shaking hands, and sharing a much-needed hug. We long for simple fellowship over a hot cup of coffee and a cookie. We look forward with hopefulness to the time when we can be together with grandma—not on a phone looking through a window, but sitting on the edge of her bed, holding her hand, and gently stroking her 97-year-old hair. We need it and she does, too.

One of my favorite Advent hymns, "O Come O Come, Emmanuel," always leaves me with a sense of emptiness as I look forward to what has not yet been fully realized. Now that feeling of emptiness has become a part of our daily lives.

"O come, thou Rod of Jesse free, thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell thy people save and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel."

How wonderful to know what has been realized—Jesus, a descendant of Jesse, did come and did free humanity from the tyranny of death. John wrote down the words of Christ in 15:1-2, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit."

Sarah Hornsby writes in her devotional, *At the Name of Jesus*: "Jesus is the True Vine. He is the productive shoot from the vine of Israel which produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, and faith. We must stay intimately bound to Him for life abundant ... [He says,] 'From the tiny seeds of My Spirit within you grows nourishing delicious fruit. Offer this fruit as gifts from Me to those around you. Seeds from your contentment, peace, and love will be planted and spring up in unexpected places.'"

Perhaps God has gotten your attention this year, as well. Maybe God has been causing your eyes to look for something that you haven't seen in the past. Maybe this year God is leading you to live out your hope in ways that you never expected.

Allow God to make room in your life to do something new.

Hoff lives in Olympia, Wash.

M by Jaclyn Czymbor

Merriam-Webster defines “dayspring” as “the beginning of day, or dawn; the beginning of a new era or order of things.”

When dawn, the first light of the morning, approaches, the darkness of night is sent away. So it is that in the Advent hymn “Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel,” the stanza, “O come, Thou Dayspring” connects the dawn with Jesus. As the dawn comes to us each morning, ending the night and filling the day with light, we are invited to reflect upon the significance of Jesus illuminating and filling our days. This Advent hymn verse directs us to reflect upon the birth of Jesus, an event which brought the Light of life that would disperse the darkness of sin in our world and exercise control over the shadow of death that hangs over us every day.

Merriam-Webster defines “darkness” as “not receiving, reflecting, transmitting, or radiating light.” The Light of truth, Jesus Christ, came to seek and save those lost in the darkness. The darkness of the enemy desires to suppress the Light of truth and prevent the sending and receiving of the Light. A simple glance at our lives quickly reveals how successful the darkness has been in suppressing the Light. Our various media forms, whether news or entertainment, are constant voices of philosophies and ideas that are contrary to the light of God’s Word. Our workplaces and educational systems are deserts of God’s truth, which are becoming darker and darker with each passing year.

Consider how Zechariah described the coming Light when he sang over baby John the Baptist in Luke 1:76-79 saying,

“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

And consider also how God refers to the dawn in Job 38:12-15 when He is questioning Job:

“Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken.”

God’s plans throughout history are repeatedly demonstrated in the Bible as intentional, not accidental. In these passages we see much of the significance that Jesus has as the Light of the world, the ultimate Dayspring, and the Dawn that came to bring “the knowledge of salvation” to all of His people. He provides a guiding light to reveal the path of peace He has prepared for His people. He is the Dawn for whom God has designated a time and purpose. And He came not just to seek and save the lost from the shadow of death, but to also to break the power of darkness and shake the wicked out of His creation. The ever-comforting conclusion is that no darkness throughout all of time or space can overcome our Dayspring of light.

The darkness of evil continues to thrive in our world as it actively seeks to overcome the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of our lives. Ideas and philosophies suppress the Light of truth in our communities. Yet we hold onto God’s truth in our churches and homes as we sing and pray, “O come, Thou Dayspring; Come and cheer.” And we are comforted by the promises of God that were fulfilled when Jesus came to us, such that we can boldly sing, “Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.”

Find comfort in these words from the Apostle Paul, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 37-39).

Czymbor is a member of St. Peter Lutheran, Armour, S.D.

Thou DAYS PRING

O come, Thou Dayspring: Come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight...



O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery ...

Key of DAVID

by Patricia Pillman

The final verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” in the *Ambassador Hymnal* starts with the reference to the “Key of David.” While this name of God is perhaps not as common or well used amongst Christians today, the theme of Christ holding the key (and thus being able to shut or open doors) is a common thread running throughout the pages of Scripture and reflects very important qualities of God’s character: His sovereignty and omnipotence. Let’s look at a few of the instances we find of this theme in Scripture and why it’s so relevant to our faith and lives.

One of the best known references to this name of Christ is found in Revelation 3:7, “... These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.” It is almost a direct quotation from a Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah 22:22, which says, “The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.” In these two passages, we see clearly Christ having been given the “key of David” and thus having the sovereign, immutable power to shut and open doors.

What is this “key of David” referred to in these two passages and what are the doors representing? The announcement of Jesus’ birth that Gabriel gave to Mary in Luke 1:32 gives us an answer, declaring that, “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.” Inheriting the throne of David was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecy and an acknowledgment of His divinity and power. It was, in essence, the “key” to all of Scripture. And truly, looking at Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, we have the key to understanding the Bible.

Recently, my children and I were learning about the ancient Egyptians and their hieroglyphic writings. We read about what an important finding the Rosetta Stone was to deciphering the hieroglyphic symbols. Before archaeologists uncovered the Rosetta Stone, Egyptian hieroglyphics were a mystery, a code that could not be decoded. The Rosetta Stone was the key to understanding ancient Egyptian culture as archaeologists began to study and decode their writings. In a very similar way, looking at Scripture through the lens of Jesus Christ helps us to understand the ways and will of God throughout history and to know with certainty the outcome of our future. Without this key, much of Scripture would seem inscrutable and abstract.

The last stanza of the hymn reads like a prayer, earnestly pleading that Christ (the Key of David) would open the door to Heaven and secure this path. The prayer pleads with Christ to close the path to Hell (or misery). Christ has this sovereign power over our salvation. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one may approach the Father unless they go through Jesus. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. Can you see this theme repeating itself? Truly, He opens the door and no one can shut it, and He shuts the door and no one can open it. I am so thankful that nothing can separate me from the love of Christ. He has opened the door of salvation to me and no man can close it. Praise be to His name!

There is another practical aspect to this important truth: God can direct our lives through open and closed doors. While we were still serving as missionaries in Ecuador and sensing the call to return to the U.S., my husband and I prayed many times that God would shut the doors He didn’t want us to walk through and only open the right door to us. And He did exactly that in His perfect timing. We so clearly saw God’s hand leading us because we were willing to pray and wait for those open doors. Paul often mentions in his epistles doors of opportunity to preach being either opened or shut by the Lord. He asks one congregation to pray specifically for open doors to preach (Colossians 4:3).

Finally, we see that this power to open and close doors can be ours as we seek to win the lost. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” As we prayerfully witness to those around us, we are giving them the Key of David, Who alone can open the door of salvation to them. May the Lord open the doors of opportunity for us to share the Key of David to many during this season of hope and joy!

Pillman, a former AFLC missionary to Ecuador, lives in Vermillion, Minn.

by AJ Watland

I cannot think of a more fitting time to ponder the phrase, “The weary world rejoices.” People are weary and frustrated with their lives. They feel broken. It has gotten so that it seems like good news is so rare in our world, and there are many people who have lost all hope. This year has been unlike anything most people have ever experienced before or thought that they would ever experience. Confusion has abounded in so many avenues of our lives that it has become almost unbearable.

As a college student, I have had countless conversations with fellow classmates about how draining this year has been and how the constant uncertainty has proved to be challenging to everyone. In my own life, I have seen how much uncertainty and hopelessness can weigh me down and cause me to become more self-focused than others-focused and to pity the position that I have found myself in life. It is not surprising that this is a typical response when our circumstances are difficult and seem like they will not get any better.

I find that it is also easy to try to rely on my own strength to try to get through tough situations because I think that I can handle them better than others. Often times this approach results in even more discouragement and stress than what I was already experiencing.

This brings us to Luke 2:1-14. Just like people today, the Jews whom Luke wrote about were weary and tired because they had been under Roman authority for many years. In addition, there had not been any prophets of God for more than 400 years, so they had no direct word from God. Therefore, many Jews had lost hope because it seemed like God had forgotten them, and they had to endure under the oppression of the Roman Empire. By looking at the first couple of verses of this chapter, we see even more reason for the Jews to be distraught because Caesar Augustus wanted a census taken of the entire Roman Empire, which meant that everyone had to go back to their hometown to be registered. Mary and Joseph had to make the long trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which is about 90 miles. The strain of the trip would have been very harsh, especially since Mary was pregnant.

At this point in the passage, there has not been much in the story to rejoice over. However, the tune quickly changes once Jesus is born. The first real sense of joy is the angels coming to the shepherds in the field while they are watching their sheep. When reflecting on this passage, verse 10 really stuck out to me, “... and the angel said to them, ‘fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’” I know that I often just read through this passage so quickly that I do not even stop to think about how important that statement is for all of us. The angel tells the shepherds that what they are about to hear is not only “good news,” but “good news of great joy.” In addition, this good news is for the whole world, not just for a particular people group or select individuals. Then the angel finally tells the shepherds the reason for this rejoicing—it is because a Savior has been born, “who is Christ the Lord.”

This was amazing news for the shepherds, but it is just as amazing for us today as Christians looking back on this event that occurred more than 2,000 years ago. After this announcement, we read of not only one angel rejoicing, but of a whole multitude of angels praising God for doing this great work in sending His Son to come to earth as a baby.

It seems like most Christians forget about these simple but life-changing verses. So many Christians live their lives as though they have not heard the good news that the angels announced to the shepherds that night. I know that I often fail to realize the gravity of these verses and live my life without the hope and the promise of Christ being my Savior. However, Jesus Christ is my hope, even in this dark and uncertain world. We can rejoice in Jesus no matter what we face in this world.

Let us not forget the vital message of the angel to the shepherds. Instead, let us live as those who have the good news of Christ and be willing to share that good news in a weary world that is longing for hope in the midst of much heartbreak and turmoil.

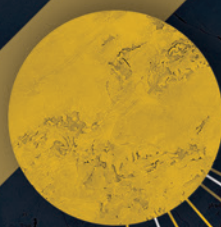
Watland, a 2019 graduate of FLBC, is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn.

A WEARY

WORLD

REJOICES!

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
The thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.





THANKFUL

in spite of it all

by H. E. Wisloff

Most of us are very ordinary folk who don't leave special footprints after us when we leave. To be sure, some prints are left, for even the smallest bird leaves marks after it in the new snow. But the prints disappear so quickly again. They aren't deep footprints that remain.

But there are some people you don't easily forget. Just meeting them makes a great impression on you. You realize that there is a special spirit in them, something unexplainable

which warms others and causes you to pause, listen, and watch.

Let me tell you about someone I met recently, and whom I haven't been able to forget. We were with him only about a half an hour one evening, but they were minutes so filled with God that they made an indelible impression.

The man's name is Øyvind and he is 35 years old. Physically, he is totally helpless in every way. He can no longer feed himself, turn a page in a book, turn around in bed, or chase an irritating fly. He cannot speak clearly at all.

Who is he, really?

He is a quite ordinary farm boy from

one of the fjords here in Nordland. Any special education? He had none. At least, not more than the third class in the folk school. That wasn't where his strength came from.

As a youth, he developed no strong characteristics. He blended in with a group of boys and was dependent on them. Unfortunately, early on he tasted strong drink and then things went downhill. When he was sober, he was good. But when he was drunk, he was quarrelsome and embarrassing to others. People were rather a little afraid of him.

He knew that this wasn't good and made several attempts to free himself



to understand that God's answer probably would be hard to receive. But delivered he must be, cost what it may.

And so it happened one day. He was out on a tractor when suddenly it tipped, and he was underneath it. His leg lay twisted like a screw while blood ran out.

"And while I lay there helpless and saw the black earth become red with blood, I could only thank God for hearing my prayer, because I understood that this was God's answer," said Øyvind.

In the time that followed, through struggle and need, he emerged into a liberated life in God. Everything became new and it became clear that the boy had become something completely different.

But the accident had brought him low. Eventually, with amazing effort, he tried to raise himself up for as long as possible, but then his balance gave way and his muscles failed to respond. Yet joyfully and gently he went about with people and witnessed to them both by his life and word of the God who took care of him.

He continued in this way for some years. He was able to sit on a chair for some time, but that didn't last long. He couldn't live at home because he couldn't get the help he needed there. So, he got a small but nice sunny room in a nursing home. It was there that I met him. Actually, we should have gone home after the service in the home, but the manager stopped us.

"You must meet Øyvind. It will be an experience, not only for him, but for you. When I am dejected and down in spirits, I go to see Øyvind and every time I go home rich," said the manager. Her eyes shone as she said that.

Yes, it was true that it was an experience. They had him dressed up that evening and with both a white shirt and a tie, he lay glowing and expectant in his bed. Beside his pillow lay his opened Bible. He couldn't read very much at a time, but he had to take a look now and then. Sister helped him turn the pages when she came in.

"I have it so good!" smiled Øyvind. "Everyone is so nice, and God is so good. I also have so much to do because I have so many to pray for. I have to pray a lot. I can't understand why, when I lived out and about, I didn't pray for more than five minutes."

The most important time in the week for him is Sunday morning. That's when the children come to visit him. He teaches Sunday school. They bring benches with which they fill his little room. With 31 children, there isn't floor space for more. And Øyvind tells them about Jesus. The children look forward to every Sunday. It makes a strong impression on them to see and hear this young man in such a condition.

"I was a little afraid to begin with because I can't control myself. I laugh when I should be serious," said Øyvind. "For instance, I can suddenly begin to laugh when we pray the Lord's Prayer. But that doesn't disrupt things. None of the children laugh for they understand about my infirmity."

"How long have you lain like this, Øyvind?" asked my wife.

"Five years!" he said. "But I hope to lie even longer, because I have so many to pray for."

"You must pray for us also Øyvind. We need that, too."

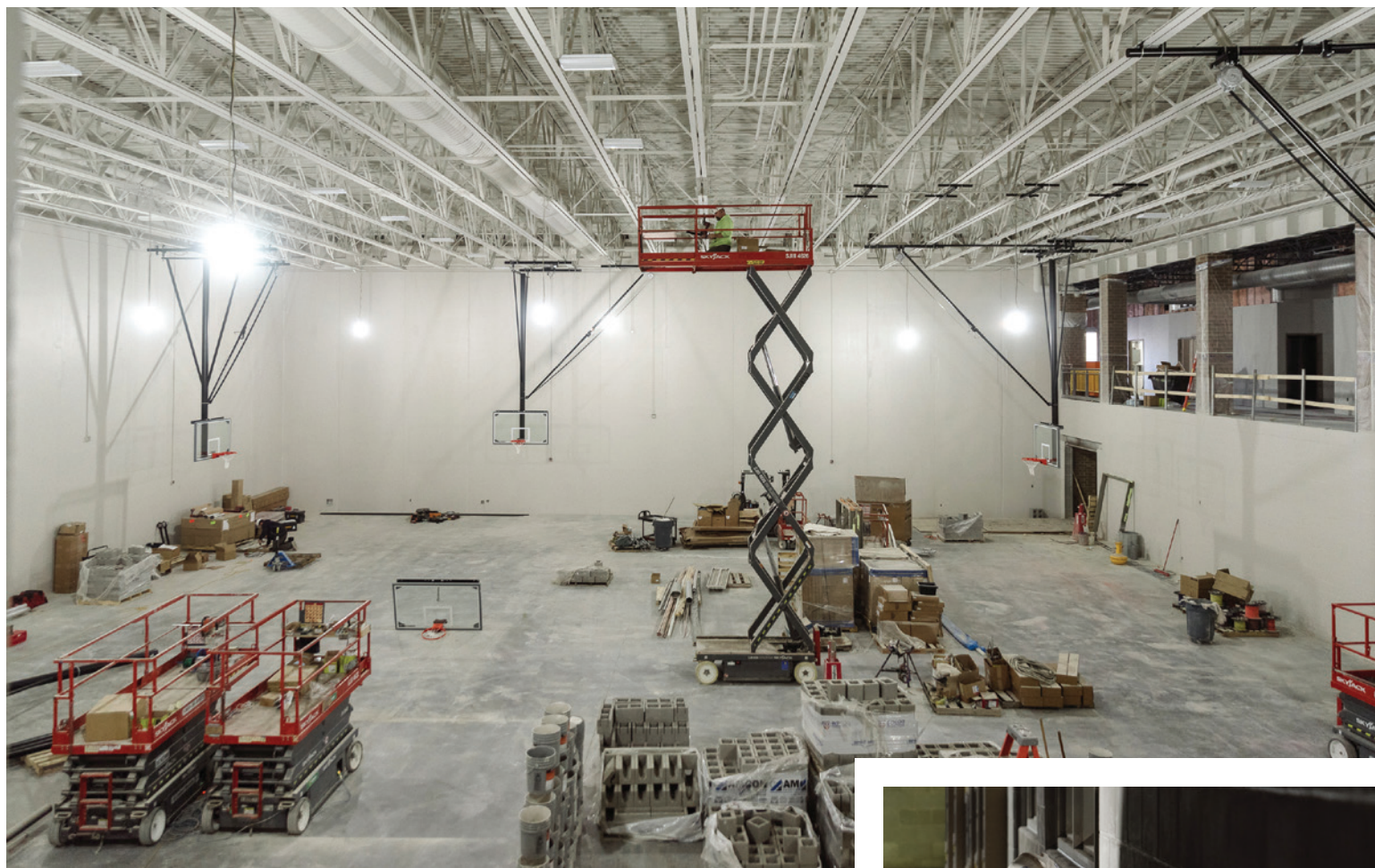
"Yes, be sure of that. No one comes to me without being put on my prayer list. The worst part is that I am not as glad in Jesus as I should be. Think of all that He has done for me. I am ashamed of how poor I am. But I pray that God would forgive me because I want to love Him so much."

Yes, that is Øyvind. His aren't slight footprints which disappear. They are footprints that last.

Originally printed in Norwegian in Juleboken. Translated by Pastor Raynard Huglen, Newfolden, Minn.

from alcohol, but his character was weak. He couldn't break free. He understood that the only one who could help him was God, and he prayed often to be freed from the desire for strong drink. But nothing happened. He heard Satan laugh and chuckle, but he couldn't free himself.

At last he said to God, "You must cause an accident if You can't set me free in any other way." A daring prayer, but he prayed it and was clear enough



SLC work moves indoors



With the cold weather arriving, construction work on the Student Life Center moved indoors, including painting the gym and installing the basketball hoops (top), installation of drywall in the office areas, classrooms (above), conference room, and foyer area; building out concrete walls and installing doors downstairs (right top) and the installation of windows and distinctive red metal roofing (right).



I

sat facing west, my chin propped on the windowsill as I strained my eyes over the cactus

and sycamore trees and across the dry ravine. I was ready to spy the first cloud of dust along the gravel road—a telltale sign of an oncoming car. My sister's little Toyota Corolla, I hoped.

I had posted myself in front of my bedroom window shortly after breakfast that December morning. From there I had the best vantage point in the whole house. I would be the first one to see her coming. The first to run outside. The first to hug her like crazy. And then Christmas would really start.

I love my sister. Sixteen years separate the two of us, so in my 8-year-old eyes, she was perfection. But as a college student at the University of Arizona, she rarely was part of my growing up life. Her visits home were eagerly anticipated. And from the moment she walked through the door, I was her shadow. Just the thought of her coming some time that Saturday sent me to my

COME, LORD JESUS

BY RUTH GUNDERSON

bedroom window, wasting away hours as I stood lookout for her arrival.

That's expectation, isn't it?

I feel a little like that now. I want Jesus to just come back already. I need Him, I want Him. It's been a hard year. Jesus could fix it all, I think, as I watch the news. So I'm at this world's windowsill watching for His arrival. When He returns, He'll shake the dust off of this old world and put everything back into order.

"Come back and make it right," I whisper.

I find my words and thoughts echoed in Paul's words to the church in Rome, "For on that day thorns and thistles, sin, death, and decay—the things that overcame the world against its will at God's command—will all disappear, and the world around us will share in the glorious freedom from sin which God's children enjoy" (8:20-21).

That Day is going to be wonderful! I can't wait. And yet, I must.

The Roman church waited, too. They lived through the reign of a murderous Caesar, endured persecution, and yet never witnessed the cloud

of dust announcing the arrival of the One—once a tiny babe, now reigning at the right hand of the Father—who would make all things right. Not in this world, anyway. So, Paul encouraged them with these words, "We are saved by trusting. And trusting means looking forward to getting something we don't yet have ... But if we must keep trusting God for something that hasn't happened yet, it teaches us to wait patiently and confidently" (vs. 24-25).

And so, when I pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," I am reminded that I can't just sit on pause at the windowsill pining for my Savior's return. Like my 8-year-old self that Christmas Eve, I could waste time meant for God's good purpose. There is work to be done here still. A life to be lived for His glory. I may never see that Day here on earth. But it is coming. I just know it.

Gunderson, managing editor, is a member of Living Hope, Rogers, Minn.

FLY scholarships available

Hanna's Hands offered by Youth Ministries in effort to encourage first-time attendance at 2021 convention

AFLC Youth Ministries is offering a scholarship initiative for the 2021 FLY Convention, which will be held July 5-10 at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colo. Called Hanna's Hands, the initiative seeks to invest in encouraging first-time attendance to the youth convention. AFLC Youth Ministries will award a total of eight scholarships to attend the convention, which will be split between four AFLC congregations. Youth leaders and pastors must apply for the scholarship on behalf of two teens planning to attend the convention for the first time as a student.

A downloadable PDF document application and all contest rules can be found by visiting the FLY Convention website at flyconvention.org, hover mouse over "helpful information," and click on "Hanna's Hands Application." Applications must be postmarked by Jan. 7, 2021, and must include a recommendation by a pastor or youth worker at an AFLC congregation detailing why the teens would be worthy recipients of the scholarship. Any teenager attending the convention with an AFLC congregation is eligible for nomination.

For more information, email youth@aflc.org. Or, visit the FLY Convention website at flyconvention.org.

2021 Lutheran Ambassador schedule

Below is the 2021 schedule for *The Lutheran Ambassador*. Please be in prayer for each issue. Note the deadlines and special emphasis of each issue. If you have an idea regarding a general article, a certain issue, or have an interest in writing, please contact the editors. Email us at ruthg@aflc.org or call (763) 545-5631.

ISSUE DATE	DEADLINE	ISSUE THEME
January	November 30	Christian Ed.
February	January 4	Evangelism
March	February 1	Bible Camping
April	March 1	Lent/Easter
May	March 15	AFLC Schools
June	April 30	Hymns to Treasure
July	June 1	Missions
August	June 25	Conference Review
September	August 2	FLY Convention
October	August 30	Stewardship
November	September 30	Thanksgiving
December	November 1	Advent/Christmas

Please note, information regarding the Annual Conference, scheduled for June 16-19 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Schools, Plymouth, Minn., will be featured in the May issue, with a deadline of March 15. This issue will include the schedule, board and committee nominees, registration, and WMF Day schedule and registration. Other conference information will be printed as it is available, including youth and children's activities.



flbc.edu/Christmas2020

FLBCS plans online concerts

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary announced plans to suspend its in-person annual Christmas concerts in favor of an online event. The concert, titled "The Light in the Darkness," will debut at 7 p.m. Dec. 11, Central Standard Time.

The online concert has been pre-recorded with excellent production quality and music from a variety of groups on campus, including all three choirs from the college and seminary. For those who wish to view the concert live together during the premier, visit flbc.edu/Christmas2020. The program will also be archived following the livestream at flbc.edu.

The annual parents' weekend, of which the Christmas concert is a part, will be delayed until FLBC hosts basketball games in the new Student Life Center. The first games are still scheduled for mid-January.

Youth Workers Weekends Jan. 15-17

AFLC Youth Ministries will host its annual Youth Workers Weekends Jan. 15-17 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis. Featured at the workshop will be trainer Jim Bjork, who has four decades of ministry experience with Young Life. The schedule will include two training sessions focused on "Building Bridges" and a third on "Communicating Truth," a coaching session, and group activities. For more information, visit aflc.org/youth/youth-workers-weekends.

"For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'"

~John 18:37-38

M

any people are searching for truth today, but many are searching in the

wrong places. Truth that lasts, truth that changes us forever, is found only in the One who is truth incarnate: Jesus. Born in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago, He came with a purpose to live a consecrated life and pay the price for the sins of the whole world by voluntarily sacrificing His life on the cross of Calvary. Jesus Himself asserted, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He is the only way that man can be brought back into a right relationship with the Almighty God.

As believers who have embraced the truth of God's Word, we also have a mission: to bear witness to the truth. So many things have changed since Jesus walked upon the earth, but some things never change. This Christmas we can focus on the changeless truths of God's Word, His promises, His presence with us, and His desire

BY BECKY ABEL

CHANGLESS TRUTH IN OUR TIME

that we bear witness to the truth.

What has changed in your life during 2020? Everyone has been affected this year by a myriad of changes as we sail the uncharted waters of the pandemic. As missionaries we've experienced personally the various reactions to these many changes in both our home culture and the culture we have been sent to reach. We've had opportunity to speak truth and allay fears, sharing Jesus, the One who never changes. He is our anchor in the storms of life.

Since my earliest memories, Christmas has centered on the changeless truth of Jesus Christ. As a child I always enjoyed the holiday traditions and celebrated with much joy the birth of our Savior through decorating, baking, Christmas programs, caroling, gift-giving, festive meals, and my father's recounting of Luke 2 by memory and his telling of two special Christmas stories. Then things changed!

When my husband and I answered the missionary call in 1985, my first Christmas in Brazil was much different from in the previous 28 years. The summer sun replaced the snowy



landscapes of the Midwest. The lack of cultivated pine trees gave way to a scraggly, prickly tree to decorate. Instead of great musical programs, we celebrated with simple presentations. Thousands of miles away from my immediate family, we decided to make Christmas special for others who had never had Christ-centered celebrations. We celebrated the same changeless truth in a different way.

After 36 years of celebrating Christmas in Brazil we have formed our own special traditions and have proclaimed the message of Jesus who came to show us personally the character of the Almighty God who is immutable.

Cultures change, customs change, ideas and methods change, governments and authorities change, life situations change. But, in our ever-changing world may we never let go of the one truth that never changes—Jesus, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Curitiba, Brazil.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Scott Stroud has accepted a call to serve Elim Lutheran, Lake Stevens, Wash., and will begin ministry there in January 2021. Stroud currently serves St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Salinas, Calif.

Pastor Robert Fedde, 90, died Oct. 20. He served as interim pastor of Trondhjem Lutheran, Volin, S.D., and was the father of Miriam (Pastor Todd) Klemme, Bagley, Minn., and grandfather to Pastor Micah Klemme, Melvin, Ill.

**Pastor Richard Gilmore**

Pastor Richard Gilmore, 95, of Onalaska, Wis., died Oct. 29. Born Dec. 20, 1924, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, he was the son of Richard and Avah (Strite) Gilmore. He married Audrey Stolen in 1956.

He graduated from high school in 1941 and enlisted in the Air Force. After the end of WWII, he enrolled in the University of Minnesota and graduated with degrees in engineering and business administration. He was employed as an industrial engineer in Duluth, Minn., and Cleveland. In 1962 he enrolled in Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. He was ordained in 1965 and served churches in Winnipeg, Manitoba; Stoughton, Wis., and La Crosse, Wis. In 1978 he became the founding pastor of Christ Is Lord Lutheran in Onalaska, Wis., and served the church for 25 years before retiring Jan. 1, 2004. Along with his wife, they led Marriage Encounter weekends and other retreats for couples throughout the United States. He authored a booklet titled *God's New Covenant for Mankind*.

He is survived by his wife; three children, Tracey (Greg) Finck, Princeton, Minn., David (Gretchen) Gilmore, Nerstrand, Minn., and Judy (Paul) Sather, Geneva, Ill.; seven grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

A private service will be held by the family.

OCTOBER MEMORIALS

Bible College

Ruth Claus
Peter Oie

FLAPS

Robert Bottom

General Fund

Gladys Schauland

Parish Education

Dr. Mary Lindquist

Pastor Dale Mellgren

Seminary

Peter Oie

Don Hylden

Lois Thielen

George Lautner, Sr.

World Missions

Gladys Schauland

Installations

Lay Pastor Kevin Borg (right, center) was installed Nov. 15 at Grace Free Lutheran, Edinburg, N.D. Pastor Terry Olson, AFLC vice president (left), officiated. Jared Ohma, council president (right), represented the congregation. Borg also serves Victory Free Lutheran, Park River, N.D.

Pastor Micah Klemme (below, center) was installed Sept. 13 at St. Peter's Lutheran, Melvin, Ill., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen (left) AFLC president, officiating. Pictured at right is Pastor Todd Klemme, father of Micah Klemme.



AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-October 31, 2020

FUND	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$30,198	\$317,259	\$342,381
Evangelism	28,572	108,983	107,819
Youth Ministries	12,035	108,374	113,046
Parish Education	9,392	119,882	121,989
Seminary	24,959	232,638	225,323
Bible College	26,738	311,916	429,577
Home Missions	59,403	329,307	328,424
World Missions	61,493	329,443	354,812
Personal Support	105,992	727,807	511,556
TOTALS	\$358,782	2,585,611	2,534,927

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

KEEPING CHRISTMAS

The holidays aren't going to be the same this year, we are frequently reminded by the media. A new wave of the pandemic seems to be looming. Family gatherings may be limited in size, and some dear ones will be missing. School vacations will seem strange because so many children are already at home, forced to take their classes online. Adults may be at home, too, due to loss of employment, so financial struggles will make gift giving a challenge for some families.



Pastor Robert Lee

Church services in most states must still observe social distancing with worshipers encouraged to wear masks. A few months ago most of us were saying that we did not know of anyone with the virus, but now there are probably few family relationships or circles of acquaintance that remain untouched.

The title of this editorial is not original, but I had to do a little research to learn why the thought of "keeping Christmas" came to mind. It was early in the 20th century that a pastor named Henry Van Dyke wrote a famous sermonette with that title. His text was the first phrase in Romans 14:6, "He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord." Observing Christmas Day is a good thing, he said, but "keeping Christmas" is a better thing, and that meant a grateful heart, thinking more of others than yourself, helping those who are in need ... "trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open ..." And if you can keep Christmas in this way for a day, then why not always?

The thoughts are good ones, and his call to encourage the best of the holiday spirit throughout the whole year certainly needs to be echoed. Yet the pastor, who

could hardly have imagined a season like Christmas 2020, failed to remind his readers of something that they (and we) needed to hear.

So how will we keep Christmas itself this year, facing obstacles different from anything any of us have ever experienced? The following are a few simple and timeworn suggestions.

First, keep Christ in Christmas. Oh, yes, we've heard that one before, too, but it may be especially important for us to remember this year. If we should be denied some of the traditions and trimmings that are important to us, it may be easier for us to see that Jesus Christ is really at the heart of what Christmas is all about. It is the day that has been chosen to celebrate the birthday of our Savior and Lord. How may we do it best?

Next, read. You have a Bible or many Bibles at home. Take one of them and read the Christmas gospel from Luke 2, even (or perhaps especially) if you are alone this year or if there are only two of you instead of a houseful of family and friends or if you are missing worship with your church family. We believe that the Spirit of God ministers to us through His Word, meeting us at our point of need.

Then, sing. Those of us who are older have hymnals in our heads, and the wonderful Christmas carols have been memorized over the years without any effort at all, simply because we have sung them so often. Also, many of us have access to Christmas music by means of compact discs and recordings, or whatever the latest technology might provide, all serving to enhance and enrich our holiday. Music is the art of the prophets and the gift of God, said Martin Luther. Enjoy.

Also, count your blessings ... name

them one by one, as the song writer suggests. Regardless of your circumstances, cultivate a spirit of gratitude. There are comforts, provisions, and people that we may be taking for granted. Instead of regretting that some are not with you, be thankful for the ones who are there. Forget what you have done for other people, Pastor Van Dyke suggested, and remember what other people have done for you. Above all, consider God's gift of salvation and all that it includes.

Last, pray. Praise God for Who He is ... Provider, Healer, Comforter, Savior ... and

*... if you can keep
Christmas in this
way for a day, then
why not always?*

thank Him for all that He has done. Bring your concerns and requests to Him. "God thereby tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father, and that we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their father" (AFLC catechism, q. 278).

*Come, Jesus, glorious heav'nly guest,
and keep your Christmas in our breast;
then David's harp-string, hushed so long,
shall swell our jubilee of song.*

Ambassador Hymnal 41, v. 6

something to share

LOVE FOREVER, GOD

BY ANGELA LOMBARDO

My favorite Bible verse is Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He died for *you*. He died for *me*. We are helpless, unregenerate, rebellious sinners, incapable of saving ourselves. There’s nothing to commend us to God, yet Christ died for us. That takes my breath away. Only God has the ability to implement such an amazing supernatural plan, fueled by His intense love for His creation. His love frees us to love Him back. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

If you want to cultivate a long-term friendship with an acquaintance or if a man and a woman desire to deepen their relationship, what needs to happen? The relationship must take priority. Will they get close to one another if they never spend time together? Quality time. Lots of time. Time to talk. Time to laugh. Time to cry. Time to get angry. Time to reconcile. If a budding relationship is important, they will

take the time to *be* with that special one and really get to know the person.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us ...”

God wants us to know Him—not in a casual way. No! In an intimate way! He wants to be our Savior, the friend who sticks closer than a brother. He wants all of us. Everything! Not a half-hearted, wishy washy, milquetoast type of relationship, but a *red hot* one, on fire for Him! What joy to know Him, to love Him, and to pursue Him (He’s been pursuing us all along). Nothing else will do.

When I was dating the husband-to-be, our separate colleges were miles apart. We communicated via letters, the snail kind. Every day I’d rush to my mailbox, hoping and praying for a letter. I’d peek in the mailbox and my heart skipped a beat when I’d spot one. I’d look to see if it was from him. I immediately recognized his neat handwriting. The letters were plump and perfectly formed. He began each letter in the usual fashion, “Dear Angie.” I distinctly

remember the first time he wrote, “Dearest Angie.” I think I read that letter a hundred times. “Dearest Angie.” It was like hearing Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony* for the first time or reading a book that blows you away, hoping the author has written more books to devour. “Dearest Angie.” I am dear to him. When, “Love, Steve,” became, “Love forever,” I was tempted to skip the day’s classes in order to study his letter.

It’s true, God has written a love letter to you. “Dearest ones, But God demonstrates His own love towards us ... Love forever, God.”

God doesn’t care if you’re the most unlovable, ornery person in town. His nail-scarred hands stretch out to you in love. Love crucified for you.

“But God demonstrates ... Love, forever, God.”

Lombardo is a member of Helmar Lutheran, Newark, Ill.