

THE 

JANUARY 2024

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

WHO GOD IS • WHAT GOD IS • WHAT GOD IS TOWARD US • WHY WE CAN TRUST GOD • HOW GOD HELPS US LIVE • OUR REASON FOR HOPE

## The Attributes of God



# God's attributes.

**H**appy New Year! Our astute readers might notice that this issue looks different from last month.

We moved some things around in our pages to help us focus on the goal of informing, encouraging, and equipping our *Lutheran Ambassador* readers.

Several pages in each issue will be filled with updates from the various ministries of the AFLC. You will be able to see what projects they are working on, how God is working through their ministry, and what areas could use your prayer and support. We hope these updates will keep readers informed about what is happening in the AFLC and keep you connected with our ministries.

The *Lutheran Ambassador* also has a strong history of devotional writings. Each issue this year will contain a couple of encouraging columns that will grow and strengthen your faith. Be sure to check out next month's issue for a brand-new column entitled "In the Word"

Finally, each of our issues will have a theme that is carried across a handful of articles. This "Editor's Note" space will introduce the topic and frame the articles for you each month. These themes and topics were prayerfully chosen to educate and equip you as you live out your vocations.

This month, the first of the new year, we are focusing on the "Attributes of God." You will be blessed by the articles in this issue!

Don't trust what the world tells you about God. Don't even trust your own feelings or emotions. The world lies, and our hearts deceive. Scripture tells us who God is, and the cross clearly shows us how he relates to us.

Pastor Kyle Smith opens this issue by helping us see who God is. Looking to Scripture, he teaches us that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. Larry Walker shows us that the holiness of God gives us a "Kingdom lens" that shifts our gaze from down and in to up and out.

Michele Mobley and Joan Culler apply these attributes of God to our lives. Toward those of us who trust in Him, God is loving and merciful. His promises are true and can be trusted because God is faithful and sovereign.

Pointing again to Scripture, Lisa Arneson writes that God is also able to help us live our normal, everyday lives because He is wise and good. And Pastor Dennis Norby finishes the issue by pointing to our reason for hope: the promises of our eternal and glorious God. We don't understand "forever," but our God does. And our eternal God invites us to share eternal life with him.

The "attributes of God" is a broad topic. Actually, it is, by definition, the broadest topic we could study. But even though God is unimaginably infinite and incomprehensibly almighty, he chose to reveal himself through the pages of Scripture and through the life, death, and resurrection of his son, Jesus.

We don't need endless academic degrees to learn about who God is, though learning through study is not a bad thing. We don't need to empty our minds in meditation to discover how God relates to us. Instead, Scripture plainly tells us who God is, and the cross clearly shows us how he loves us. The holy and immeasurable Creator loves us and mercifully died for us, giving us iron-clad and eternal hope in his promises. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (II Corinthians 1:20).

Let's look to God as our calendars flip to 2024. The world lies and our hearts deceive, but the Word of the Lord stands true forever.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



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God seldom calls us to an easier life, but always calls us to know more of him and drink more deeply of his sustaining grace. [John Piper]

“

Admitting we are not God—not in control, not running anything, not responsible for everyone’s well-being, not the solution for everything and everyone, not at the center of all things—doesn’t belittle us; it frees us.

[Louie Giglio]

I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess. [Martin Luther]

Faith does not eliminate questions, but faith knows where to take them. [Elisabeth Elliot]

For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace. [Irenaeus]

The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. [A.W. Tozer]

# Omnipotent Omniscient Omnipresent

BY PASTOR KYLE SMITH

**T**oday, many people want to decide for themselves who God is. It is easy, and even preferable in our culture, to pick and choose what to believe about who God is or isn't. This approach ultimately doesn't lead people to who God truly is. Rather, it leads us to fashion a god or gods of our own invention and our own liking. And yet, there is no excuse for making our own god or gods, as we see in Romans 1:20: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." This is referred to as "natural revelation." This leads us to ask, "How can we learn more about who God is beyond natural revelation?" What has been revealed to us by way of natural revelation should ultimately point us to God's special revelation, his Word.

Thankfully, God's Word tells us much more about who he is. In Isaiah 40:28–29, we read, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength." There's quite a bit to unpack in these verses about who God is, but perhaps a good place to start would be the three "omnis" of God: omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, or all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present.

Last November, my family and I went to Sea Life at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn. At Sea Life, there are literally thousands of animals to see in more than one million gallons of water! As you walk through the exhibit, you'll be amazed not only at the number of animals but also at the variety and how God has made so many animals so different from each other. As we consider sea creatures—or any of creation all around us—God's omnipotence, his being all-powerful, is truly breathtaking.

God is also omniscient, as in, all-knowing. Not only has God created the world and everything in it, but he also knows everything there is to know about his creation. I can't imagine trying to know the names and facts about every sea creature at Sea Life, let alone all the land animals, birds, and plants. God knows about those parts of his creation; he also knows about us. Jesus says in Matthew 10:30 that even the hairs on our heads are all numbered.

But God knows much more about us than our physical features. He truly knows us—our thoughts, our intentions, our hopes, and



WHO GOD IS • WHO GOD IS • WHO GOD IS • WHO GOD IS



our dreams—even better than we know them. He knows when we're happy, when we're excited, when we're frustrated, and when we're in despair. No matter what emotion we're feeling or what we're going through in life, God knows. God knows, and he is with us and will never leave us nor forsake us.

This leads us to consider God's omnipresence, his being everywhere present. We read in Psalm 139:7–8, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!" As King David wrote this Psalm, there was no question in his mind that the LORD knew him and was with him. What a comfort to know that God is present everywhere we go.

Of course, God is also present with us as we gather together as the body of Christ every week. God promises to be present as we hear the pronouncement that our sins are forgiven in the absolution, as we partake in the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins in Holy Communion, as we witness and celebrate the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism, and most of all, as God's Word is preached. He is there, and his Holy Spirit is working in us.

What a blessing it is that God has revealed who he is to us. When we want to know who God is, we look to Scripture and see his attributes, among which we see his being all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. We can thank and praise God that he is the creator of all things, that he knows his creation, and that he is present with his creation and desires us to be present with him for all of eternity.

*Smith serves First Lutheran, Ellendale, Minn. Artwork: Design for a window in St. Martin's Cathedral of Utrecht, by Richard Holst, 1934, Rijksmuseum.*

HE IS ALL-POWERFUL

HE KNOWS EVERYTHING

HE IS EVERYWHERE PRESENT





attributes

# Holy Holy Holy

WHAT GOD IS • WHAT GOD IS • WHAT GOD IS



“And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’”

—Isaiah 6:5-7, ESV

BY LARRY WALKER

When the prophet Isaiah experienced an intense vision of Almighty God in His temple, his first response was conviction of his sin, and God graciously sent an angel to cleanse him. It was a wake-up call for Isaiah, certainly, and it ought to remind us all of our natural unworthiness to stand in the presence of a holy God.

But look what follows—the cleansing was followed by a call to mission: “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me.’ And he said, ‘Go, and say to this people ...’” (vv. 8-9).

As I recall from my own reading of Scripture, a vision of God like this usually leads to some kind of mission. Moses with the burning bush. Ezekiel (like Isaiah) in prophecy. Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

I’ve been thinking and reading about the Norwegian lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge recently. His ministry began when he was converted while plowing his father’s field. He wrote (my translation), “... my mind was so lifted up to God that I was unable to perceive, nor to express, what happened then in my soul. For I was transported outside myself, and as soon as I came to my senses, then I was convinced that I had not served the God who is beloved and good above all things, and that I now thought nothing in this world worthy of esteem, that my soul was feeling something supernatural, divine, and blessed; that there was a glory that no tongue can express.” Then he goes on to say, “I desired now to serve God, [and] begged him to reveal to me what I ought to do.



The answer echoed within me: ‘You shall confess my Name before men, exhort them to repent and seek me while I may be found, call upon me while I am near and am touching their hearts, so that they may turn away from darkness to light.’”

Why would God give a person a vision of his holiness before calling them to ministry? Wouldn’t it make more sense to give them a vision of the world in need?

I think we need to re-think what it actually means to see God’s holiness. We imagine that vision as a blinding light, as something that makes us feel small, dirty, and insignificant. But that kind of vision *by itself* wouldn’t be enough to motivate us to mission, I think. Smallness, dirtiness, and insignificance turn us inward, not outward.

Studying Hauge’s life, I came to a realization. His vision of God’s holiness didn’t leave him feeling small, dirty, or insignificant. It made him *happy*. If you study Hauge’s life, it’s clear that he was a happy man, sharing the gospel out of the overflow of a joyful heart. His happiness was infectious. It drew people to him, and they listened to his message.

I think people who truly see God’s holiness and let it do its work in them become happy. They lose their focus on themselves (nothing is more depressing than thinking about ourselves). They get their perspectives altered so that they see God’s greatness. The challenges and sufferings of this world become less important to them.

I remember when I got my first pair of glasses in junior high. I’d forgotten what it was like to see sharp lines and bright, distinct colors. The whole world changed for me.

I think that’s what happened to Hauge. I think that’s what happened to Isaiah and Ezekiel, to Moses, and to Peter, James, and John. From that point on, they saw the world through Kingdom lenses. From that point on, they were spiritually prepared for ministry. From that point on, they were prepared to live or die for the Holy God. They now saw things as they were, through an eternal perspective.

“Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed” (Psalm 34:5).

*Walker is a member of Hope Lutheran Church, North Minneapolis. Artwork: Design for a window in St. Martin’s Cathedral of Utrecht, by Richard Holst, 1934, Rijksmuseum.*



BY MICHELE MOBLEY

“Don’t worry about it, seriously!” “It’s no big deal. Everyone will understand.” Recognize these phrases? I have both said and received these sentiments. They are meant to be merciful. Yet, once the relief they bring fades, the facts that prompted them remain, and mercy appears to be a fleeting emotion. Maybe this is why I struggle to understand the mercy of God. I view mercy as sentimental but not transformational.

In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul upends my poor understanding of mercy with a transformational truth, “But God” (v. 4). The Creator of the heavens and earth is rich in mercy. The source of God’s mercy is His love; the objects of God’s mercy are those dead in trespasses; and the result of God’s mercy is that the dead receive new life.

The source of God’s mercy is His love. Paul writes to the saints in Ephesus that God is rich in mercy “because of the great love with which he loved us” (2:4). Paul is writing this proclamation to a church set right in the midst of one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. Ephesus, too, was rich. The source of her riches sprung from the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis. Her temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, resided in Ephesus. Tourism flowed to the temple of Artemis, and the citizens of Ephesus made their living by selling her wares and serving her worshipers. Even the daughters of Ephesus engaged freely in prostitution under the shadow of Artemis’s temple—the patroness of sex. When God created man and woman, he placed them in paradise, and they rebelled against his good order. The church in Ephesus was planted in the mire of mankind’s continuing rebellion.

Today, we all live in Ephesus. Mankind rejects God’s kingdom in exchange for his own. And God withholds his rejection of his image-bearers because of his great love. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ...” (John 3:16). God is rich in mercy.

The objects of God’s mercy are those dead in their trespasses. Paul reminds the saints in Ephesus that they, too, “were dead in the trespasses and sins in which (they) once walked” (2:1–2). They had been followers of the “course of this world” and followers of the “spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2). When the saints had been dead in their trespasses, they lived amongst the sons of disobedience in the “passions of [their] flesh,

carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (2:3). Paul proclaims to the saints that their God is rich in mercy by reminding them that they had been “rich” in the wages and practices of death. These words are meant not only for the saints in Ephesus. They are for you, dear reader, and me. We are each born into this world dead in our trespasses and sins. No mere sentiment can lighten the burden of death. But God has not despised the dead in trespasses and sins. He remembers them. God is rich in mercy.

The result of God’s mercy is that the dead receive life. Here, we come to understand that the mercy of God is transformational. “For the wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 6:23). Each and every soul is born into death. The death brought about by our trespasses and sins is the wage we justly deserve. We all are, or have been, idol-temple wage earners. We deserved death. But God met us in the riches of his mercy and love, and “together with Christ” (Romans 8:17) the dead have been made alive! God satisfied the punishment of our sins through the blood of Christ. The perfect, sinless Son of God has conquered death. We are saved by grace. God is rich in mercy.

I confess that the Creator of the heavens and earth is rich in mercy, and I am not. God is rich in mercy because he loves us. I am stingy with mercy toward others because I really love myself. I was the object of God’s mercy even when I was dead, but I make others the object of my mercy when I think they’ve earned it. The result of God’s mercy is that the dead receive life. The result of my mere sentiment is condemnation, leading people back to their own deadness of flesh.

Is it the same for you? Has the transformational mercy of God become an empty sentiment? If so, I invite you to join me in confessing the first stanza of the hymn *A Debtor to Mercy*. Then go forth and “be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

*A debtor to mercy alone, Of covenant mercy I sing.  
I come with Your righteousness on, My humble offering to bring.  
The judgments of Your holy law, With me can have nothing to do.  
My Savior’s obedience and blood, Hide all my transgressions from view.*

–August M. Toplady

*Mobley is a member of Solid Rock Free Lutheran, Anoka, Minn. Artwork: Design for a window in St. Martin’s Cathedral of Utrecht, by Richard Holst, 1934, Rijksmuseum. Scripture and historical background on Ephesus taken from The New Inductive Study Bible (ESV), Precept Ministries International, 2017.*



The background of the page is a vertical strip of stained glass. The left side features a figure with a beard and closed eyes, wearing a red and blue garment. The right side shows two hands, one reaching out, set against a pattern of geometric shapes in shades of brown and gold. The text 'God is Rich in Mercy' is overlaid on the right side of the strip.

# God is Rich in Mercy







“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.”

–Deuteronomy 32:4



BY JOAN CULLER

Can I trust God? If we’re honest, we must admit that at times we ask ourselves this question. When the plans we thought were surely godly are going awry, when we feel overwhelmed or depressed, when our faith life seems dry, we wonder—where is God and why doesn’t he step in to rescue me? Thinking this way isn’t anything new. Read through the Psalms, and you will find David and others wrestling with the same issue.

What can we do when this happens? How can we remind ourselves that God is faithful? One way is to think about the people in our lives who are faithful. The Bible tells us: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

This means that we humans share or reflect some of God’s attributes, although in an incomplete and imperfect way. These are called “communicable” because we share in them. So, who do you trust, and what is it about them that makes them trustworthy?

Most of us would start that list with some family members. We usually trust our spouse, our parents, our siblings, and so on. Then we’d add close friends, especially those we’ve known for a long time. We trust these people because we have a relationship with them. They know us inside and out. They’re aware of our flaws, but they still accept us. We trust them because they love us and desire the best for us. Our history together has proven it.





In the same way, as Christians, we have a long-standing relationship with God. The God we worship is not remote and inaccessible. He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8); he spoke with Moses “face to face as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11); he sent dreams to Joseph (Genesis 37:5–11) and visions to Isaiah (Isaiah 6). He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—and Joan! We can commune with him in prayer. We can read his love letter to us in the Holy Scriptures. We can see him in the faces of those who worship with us every Sunday. In our baptism, he regenerates us and makes us part of his body, the Church.

God knows us intimately because he created us, and he has a plan for our lives. As David writes in Psalm 139, “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me” (v. 6).

God also loves us. He loves us so completely that he sent Jesus to atone for our sins, reconcile us with him, and assure us of eternal life. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

In addition to the qualities we share with God, he has attributes that are his alone. God is all-knowing (omniscient), all-powerful (omnipotent), and sovereign over everything. Isaiah records these words of God: “... that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I made well-being and I create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things” (45:6–7).

All the people we trust will sometimes let us down, even if they have good intentions. Although they know and love us, they don’t know everything, and they can’t control everything. They sin. They make mistakes. If we continue to trust these flawed human beings, can we not trust God, who is perfect? We cannot foretell our future, but God already knows it. What seems painful to us today may result in the ultimate good. As the Apostle Paul puts it, “... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3–5).

Later in chapter 8, he says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (v. 28).

Yes, we can trust God. He created us, he knows us, he loves us, and he has proved it to us over and over. When times are tough, we can rest in that knowledge.

*Culler is a member of St. Paul’s Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md. Artwork: Design for a window in St. Martin’s Cathedral of Utrecht, by Richard Holst, 1934, Rijksmuseum.*



attributes



God's  
Wisdom &  
Goodness





BY LISA ARNESON

**M**y husband recently officiated at a funeral for a 98-year-old woman. It was a full church, and half the attendees were her family—a beautiful testimony to a life well lived following Jesus and serving her family and others.

About five years ago, he officiated at the funeral of a young woman in her 30s from our church who was also our neighbor. Her six elementary-aged children standing around her casket saying goodbye to their momma is one of the saddest sights I've ever seen.

A couple I know had been married for more than 50 years. But it was an unhappy marriage. The wife was a faithful servant at church, but people would tell me that he would walk behind her and spit at her.

My husband's grandparents were blessed with 60 years of marriage. They were just humble farm folks, so kind to others. To this day, their grandchildren speak of the spiritual lessons they learned from conversations with their grandparents.

Hopefully, we can all say that we've had times where we have felt so thankful to God for how good he has been to us. The showers of blessings are evident. God has granted us the answers to our prayers.

But what about the times when life takes a turn that you didn't expect? Perhaps you are in a difficult marriage or have experienced deep loss. Your feelings of grief, worry, or anger preoccupy you. Or maybe physical pain reminds you that God didn't grant you your heart's desire.

Is God—who was so good to give good gifts to you and so wise to answer your prayers just the way you had asked—still good when he watches, allows, or directs the steps in our lives that bring sadness, distress, and grief?

Here's what we need to remember during those times: Our world might turn upside down in a day, but God never changes. The familiar verse in Hebrews 13:8 reminds us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever."

And the Bible says that God is wise. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'" (Romans 11:33–34). God didn't gain wisdom through trial and error like humans. He created this world and all that is in it, and he is able to comprehend and

know more than we can fathom, as Isaiah 55:9 tells us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Wisdom is part of the essence of who God is.

And the Bible says that God is good. Jesus declared, "No one is good except God alone" (Luke 18:19). Every human God created has sinned. Only God is without sin. He has no evil in him. Everything he does is right. He can only do good things. The psalmist declared, "For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 100:5). We see evidence of his goodness in the creation he made and in the plan he shaped to save us from our state of sinfulness. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change," wrote James (1:17).

When the world around us looks dire, unfair, or painful, we can trust God's Word, which says that he is wise and good in everything he does. It's okay to ask God why difficult things happen, but we don't always need to know the answer to that question. We do, however, need to know the one who knows the answer. He is wise, and he is good.

During times of both blessings and challenges, we need God's wisdom. In Christ, we have access to his vast storehouses. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Don't neglect the phrase, "Let him ask of God." We actually need to ask for wisdom!

Experiencing blessings and challenges gives us the opportunity to "walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). There is surrender in trusting a wise and good God. In that surrender, we can let the Holy Spirit guide us, speak to us, and show us our sin. The result of walking by the Spirit is a life that produces the fruit of the Spirit, which "is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

Let's praise him today because he is wise and good.

*Arneson is a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis. Artwork: Design for a window in St. Martin's Cathedral of Utrecht, by Richard Holst, 1934, Rijksmuseum.*

BY PASTOR DENNIS NORBY

**T**hrough the last number of years, my family has often taken long trips driving from our home to other locations like Texas and Illinois. On these trips, we have heard the questions you've likely heard, as well: "Are we there yet?" and "How much longer?" The younger ones in our family have not had enough experience in life to understand the time it takes to travel so far. They cannot distinguish between a trip that is going to be 20 miles or 200. They cannot comprehend the difference between a 10-minute drive and an entire day of travel.

The longer I consider the idea of "eternity," the more I think we are just like little children. We cannot fully comprehend what we are being told. However, for all of us who believe in God, the promise of Scripture is that eternal life has been given to us as a gift. We will be together with the Lord in eternity. So, it is not a foolish mental exercise to consider eternity.

Eternity, which has only been described in part for us, is meant for our enjoyment. When we enter eternity, we will be like little children, laughing and enjoying something, calling out to our mom and dad, "How much longer?" and jumping up and down when we hear, "You have more time; keep going." We will always be able to enjoy more and more and more of heaven.

"This can't last." "It won't last." These statements might be the pessimistic words of someone who thinks the good things that they have received are going to slip through their fingers. Or they might be the optimistic words of someone thinking that their troubles will soon fade away. I would suggest that we simply be realistic and look at the teachings of the Word of God.

The Word of God makes it clear that some things do last. Some things are, in fact, eternal, though there are not many. Some things that are described as eternal can be described as such only in a modified way. For example, God has created people to continue forever without end, but people have beginnings. So, we talk about eternal life in a modified sense. However, God, as described in the Scriptures, has no beginning. As we see in Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you

had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." God is also revealed to be without end, as we read, "They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end" (Psalm 102:26–27). God alone can be described as eternal in an unqualified, absolute way.

In a unique way, the Scripture even says God "inhabits eternity." We read in Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'" This makes it clear that God does not only exist forever; he rules forever, too. We also come to understand from Scripture that his Word (Isaiah 40:8) and his kingdom (I Peter 5:10–11) are also eternal.

This eternal nature of God means his divine attributes will shine forth forever and ever. His glory will not fade. His power will not wane. His mercy will not fail. If the Lord was not eternal, he would not be able to offer us eternal life. But because he is eternal, we can rest in his promises through even the most difficult of situations. We can confess, like Paul, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (II Corinthians 4:17; also note Romans 8:18).

Our understanding of time, and then of eternity, is just like a little child unsure of how long it will take until we get to Grandma's house or until we get to celebrate a birthday or Christmas. We know when we get there we will be filled with joy and excitement, for when we arrive in eternity, we will be with the Lord, who has paid the price so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life.

The glory of God is seen in His gracious care for us. We who believe are welcomed into His glorious kingdom. So, you do not need to be pessimistic or optimistic. If you are realistic—that is, if you look at the reality described in the Bible—you will be filled with peace as you rest in the promises of the eternal and glorious God. We pray, as the Apostle Peter wrote, that the Lord might cause us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen" (II Peter 3:18).

*Norby serves Grace Free Lutheran and Zion Free Lutheran, Valley City, N.D. Artwork: Design for a window in St. Martin's Cathedral of Utrecht, by Richard Holst, 1934, Rijksmuseum.*



God  
is from  
Eternity







# North to Alaska.

BY PASTOR JEFF SWANSON

A young man from southern California bows his head and asks Jesus to forgive his sins and save his soul. Vacation Bible school students ask how they can go to heaven. They later ask if they can pray for their family members to go to heaven, too. These are a couple of snapshots of ministry this past year in Alaska.

I'm thankful for the open door God has given us for effective ministry through the Alaska Mission in Bristol Bay, Alaska, a remote corner of the world. I'm thankful for the faithful ministry of Pastor Bob Lee and his wife Margaret at KAKN radio and in the public school. I'm thankful for Heather Hansen, as she works with children and youth and also in the public school. I'm thankful for Josh Fish, who oversees maintenance but has also become very involved with leading Bible studies and worship services and overseeing the aviation ministry.

Last summer was another busy time in the Alaska Mission. We had a full VBS team and shared God's Word with children in a number of villages. In the village of Ekwok, there was an unusual openness in response to the gospel. Praise God. Our coffeehouse summer outreach, the NET, was also in full swing, with volunteers from many AFLC congregations sharing the love of Christ in word and deed with people from all over the world. Because of the fishing industry, the world comes to the remote village of Naknek, which gives us the opportunity to share Jesus with people from so many backgrounds.

This fall, our regular ministries continued with services in three communities as the weather permits flying. We have weekly Bible studies in two villages, and our radio ministry is on the air 24/7, broadcasting the gospel of Jesus Christ through word and music. We were also blessed this fall with a visit from Pastor Marlon Harris from Mora, Minn., who spent seven weeks here preaching, teaching, visiting, and doing catechization with some of the young people. We welcome other pastors and laymen who might want to be involved in short-term ministry. Rod Scheel and a friend from Fergus Falls, Minn., also worked on expanding the ministry of KAKN radio, a vital outreach to underserved communities in remote rural Alaska.

There are already teams scheduled to do volunteer work at the NET this summer, as well as work projects. God willing, there will also be a VBS team sharing God's Word in a number of villages, too. Please pray for God's clear leading and provision for these future ministries.

Our biggest prayer request is for staffing. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). This fall, Pastor Jeremy and Lacey Crowell and their son, Malachi, left the Alaska Mission. In their years in Naknek, Jeremy was involved in aviation, preaching, teaching, and helping out with radio ministry. Lacey taught Sunday school

and did a lot of the summer organizational work. Their absence is felt. Pastor Bob Lee, our station manager, has been dealing with long-term COVID effects and has not been able to preach. Please pray earnestly with us for a pastor/missionary for the work in Bristol Bay. We are also seeking a helper for the radio station.

It has been said that God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply. Please continue to pray for the Alaska Mission, that God will use it for his glory and for the good of souls in bush Alaska.

## Alaska Mission ministries

The Alaska Mission includes several ministry aspects.

- FLAPS: operating three planes out of Naknek, reaching remote villages.
- Bay Broadcasting: operating KAKN Radio, reaching the Bristol Bay area.
- The NET: A coffeehouse run during the summer fishing season.
- Vacation Bible school: Reaching ten remote villages with the gospel.

Interested in working /volunteering with the Alaska Mission? Contact Pastor Jeff Swanson, coordinator, by email at [jeffswanson@afcl.org](mailto:jeffswanson@afcl.org).

Visit the Alaska Mission webpage at: [afclchomemissions.org/alaska](http://afclchomemissions.org/alaska)

*Swanson, of Axtell, Kan., is the coordinator for the Alaska Mission.*

# Culture creation.

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE

In the AFLC, we believe that the congregation is where the kingdom of God is manifested and joyfully experienced through God's Word, Spirit, and sacrament. It's a gift. If this is true, then planting more of these gifts to reach lost and needy people is a rather obvious step. Our heart in Home Missions is to make church planting the norm in the AFLC. We want every nook and cranny of the AFLC to exude a passion for planting free, living, and Lutheran congregations. Yet, this doesn't just happen overnight. To accomplish this great goal, we must foster a culture of planting, which takes great intentionality and time.

Culture refers to attitudes and patterns of behavior in a given group. Something that is deeply embedded in a culture is simply something people accept as usual and normal. And so, fostering a culture of church planting means that it isn't a rare ministry. Instead, it's the norm. It's what we talk about, pray about, learn about, prepare for, prioritize, give to, and celebrate. We believe that if we help foster this culture, it will re-mission our current congregations and will organically lead to the planting of more congregations that the Lord will use to reach and form new believers in Christ. We have several systems in place to create culture.

## • THE LUTHERAN CHURCH PLANTER PODCAST

Podcasting is about the most user-friendly and efficient way to shape people. Almost everyone is able to access podcasts through specific platforms (Google, iTunes, etc.), or online ([thelutheranchurchplanter.com](http://thelutheranchurchplanter.com)). This podcast isn't merely designed to help people learn about the theology, philosophy, and practice of planting Lutheran congregations. It's primarily about culture creation. Up to this point, every episode that we have released is designed for every person in our fellowship. Our desire is to help people think about the nature of the congregation and how mission and the church are deeply connected. We release an episode every two weeks, roughly 25 episodes per year. As we continue, there will be a very strong information deposit from which new and old listeners can grow.

## • HOME MISSIONS RESOURCE BLOG

Our blog is a weekly resource that seeks to efficiently present an issue as it relates to ministry in a congregation. Our intentionally chosen writers come from across our AFLC fellowship and beyond, providing a great opportunity to learn from different voices.

Category topics include church planting, leadership, theology, philosophy, outreach, systems, formation, culture, and practical ideas.

We are excited that Dr. Marty Horn has agreed to write a series of 12 articles over the next year on the "theology of the congregation." Our hope is to have roughly 50 articles each year, which will provide a robust library to learn from for people in our congregations.

## • IN-PERSON TEACHING

As I travel to district retreats, congregations, the AFLC schools, and conferences, my main goal is to teach and help people grow in their understanding of the theology, philosophy, and practice of the congregation. I see this as my primary role as director. It's culture creation. It is so fun to see people chew on how our identity should organically foster more congregations.

So, what can you do? Listen, read, pray, and participate. We believe that as we continue to intentionally dive into the heart of God and what he has made in the congregation, the Lord will radically alter our hearts and affect great cultural change for his glory.



AFLC Home Mission's podcast, *The Lutheran Church Planter*, can be found on the Apple Podcast app, Google Play, and Spotify.

## HM Resource Blog

The AFLC Home Missions Resource Blog can be found online at [aflchomemissions.org/blog](http://aflchomemissions.org/blog)

Topics include:

- How to start a church plant group within your congregation.
- Why a welcome team system is important.
- A simple guide to building relationships.
- 4 C's of a Church Planter (Calling, Character, Chemistry, Competency)

*Coyle, who serves Shiloh Lutheran, Blackhawk, S.D., is the director of Home Missions.*





# Why call it a federation?

BY KAREN FLOAN

At times I have wondered if it might have been easier to explain the WMF to others if its legal name had been something like *Women's Missionary Fellowship*. However, after doing some research on what a federation is, it is clear to me that the women who started the WMF in 1962 had great wisdom and insight.

Throughout history, federations have provided a model under which groups and even countries could organize themselves toward common purposes and goals. One simple *Oxford Dictionary* definition of a federation is “an organization or group within which smaller divisions have some degree of internal autonomy (or freedoms).” Examples of federations can be seen in components of countries, states, unions, clubs, and more. Our United States is considered a federal government where the individual states fall under the same governing authority and constitution but have their own freedoms.

This is very much the set-up of our AFLC national church body as well as our national WMF. Each church and women's group are individual fellowships but work together with other fellowships as an association (or federation) toward common purposes and goals. “The Lutheran Free Church was organized as an association of autonomous congregations working together in common endeavors such as missions, schools, and educational publications” (*Roots of Freedom*, p. 6).

Perhaps your AFLC women's group or women's ministry may not be officially called a WMF; however, each is viewed as being a part of the national WMF.

On Oct. 27, 1962, the first WMF national convention took place in Thief River Falls, Minn., with about 30 women in attendance. These women dedicated themselves to the Great Commission that Jesus gave: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). They elected officers and organized districts with the purpose of strengthening the women in their various local groups and working together nationally to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Women gathered in their local churches for fellowship and raised support for AFLC mission projects. They also met together during the year in their districts for gatherings or rallies, where they focused on strengthening one another and hearing about mission needs.

What zeal and heart for the work of the Lord these women had! Do we have that zeal and the same urgency for missions as did the AFLC women of 1962? As a current officer of the national WMF, I have been challenged by the words the Apostle Paul wrote about our work for the Lord (see inset at left). It is exciting and overwhelming to consider that God prepares good works for us to do in advance and that he has marked out appointed times and places of the work for his kingdom.

As women, let us consider if we are doing the work God has prepared and planned for us in our churches, in our neighborhoods, in our families, and in our women's fellowships. May we be looking for his return, and may he find us faithfully serving him together in the work of the Great Commission as a federation of women.

## Encouragement from Paul

“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26).

*Floan, a member of Grace Free Lutheran, Maple Grove, Minn., is the recording secretary for the Women's Missionary Federation.*

• MIRIAM HOME, CAMPO MOURÃO, BRAZIL

# It takes time.

BY JONNI SLIVER

I am old enough to remember telephones with cords and mail coming from the post office, but I have lived in this current age long enough to get used to phones that follow you wherever you are and messages that are sent and received in the blink of an eye. It makes us impatient—"I sent that WhatsApp message 10 minutes ago and STILL no answer!" We want everything right now. But there are times when we simply have to wait, and if we are wise, we will wait on the Lord.

I met Elisangela nine years ago. Her three children had come to the Miriam Home, and she had entered a recuperation program to stop drinking, a requirement to get her children back. She worked hard, and in nine months, she was clean and sober. Sadly, in less than a year in her old environment, she had gone back to those old habits. But a couple of things had happened. First, her children—Lucas, Helena, and Mariana—had lived in the Miriam Home for nine months and had heard the Word of the Lord. One of my favorite verses found its way into Lucas' heart. "I know the plans I have for you. Plans for good and not for evil, for a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). He gave his heart to Jesus and asked God to work out His plans for his life.

The second good thing that happened was that we became tied to Elisangela's family. When the children returned to their mother, we continued visiting them, helping them with special needs, counseling, and praying. When we saw Elisangela returning to those old habits, we counseled her and encouraged her to make good decisions, and we prayed. Soon, Lucas came to talk to us. He was in a teen work program, and he wanted to help his family. But he no longer felt secure putting the money he earned in his mom's hands. He loved his family, but he did not want to live the life they were living. He soon moved out and lived with an aunt, but he continued working and bringing groceries to his family. He began going to the church his aunt's family went to—it isn't AFLC, but it is a good, healthy evangelical church. And he continued to grow.

Twice more Helena and Mariana lived with us, for shorter times. Neither of the girls had strong experiences with God, but seeds were planted day by day. And we continued to visit, counsel, and pray for this family even though it seemed like just one seed had sprouted. But sometimes you have to wait.

This past year has been spring for Elisangela and her family. She has not been drinking for more than a year, and even better, she has begun going to church. Lucas had begun dating the pastor's daughter and eventually married her. Elisangela began visiting the church because of Lucas, and she gave her heart to the Lord.

Though Helena is still watching from afar, Mariana has been going to church with her mother, and we continue to pray for the transformation of the whole family.

That is our heart desire for all of the families of the Miriam Home children: we want our children to be blessed, but we also know that God desires to restore not just their lives but those of their families, too. I want to thank many of you who have helped us continue to reach out to these families after the children leave the Miriam Home through the Follow Them Home Project. It is wonderful to see God continue to work in their homes.



*Elisangela (center) is baptized.*

## Follow Them Home

Follow Them Home is an approved special project of AFLC World Missions. Funds given to this project support children who have spent time at the Miriam Home in Campo Mourão, Brazil. When a child leaves the home, either back to his or her family or to an adoptive family, these funds are designated to a nearby AFLC-Brazil congregation. The congregation then supports that child by offering help, like transportation to church events. The continued contact with the child means he or she will never be without helpful support.

If your Sunday school or other church group is interested in supporting this project, contact AFLC World Missions by email at [worldmis@afc.org](mailto:worldmis@afc.org). Or call 763.545.5631.

*Sliver is an AFLC missionary serving at the Miriam Home in Campo Mourão, Brazil.*





## Bible College & Seminary host weekend of Christmas concerts



The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted three Christmas concerts Dec. 1–3 under the theme, “Full of Grace, Full of Truth.” Led by music director Andrew Hanson, the concerts in Hauge Chapel featured the Concert Choir, Proclaim Choir, Seminary Chorus, Symphonic Wind Ensemble, and Handbell Ensemble. FLBC Dean Pastor Adam Osier (opposite page, top left) gave a short meditation.





# Upcoming events on FLBCS campus

## Seminary Symposium

A Seminary Symposium is scheduled for Jan. 17–19 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Seminary in Plymouth, Minn., with the theme “Ethics.”

Guest instructors will include Dr. Joel Biermann (professor of systematic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), who will teach a session on “The Three Estates and the Christian Life” and “Virtue Ethics and the Church.” Pastor Micah Klemme, Starbuck, Minn., will teach on “Technology and the Christian Life.” Pastor Nick Schultz of Chamberlain, S.D., will teach on “The Psalms and Christian Ethics.” And Dr. Nathan Olson, faculty, will teach on “The Rise and Fall of Lutheran Pietism.”

A dinner reception and opening session led by Dr. Wade Mobley, FLBCS president, will open the symposium on Wednesday evening.

The symposium will conclude on Jan. 19 with the Georg Sverdrup Society Forum. Presenters will include Pastor Terry Olson, Grafton, N.D.; Loiell Dyrud, Thief River Falls, Minn.; and Pastor Steve Mundfrom, faculty. Registration is available on the FLBC website, with options for sessions and meals to purchase.

• [flbc.edu/symposium-2024](http://flbc.edu/symposium-2024)

## Spotlight: Missions

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will host the Spotlight: Missions conference Jan. 30 through Feb. 1. Pastor Nate and Rhoda Jore, AFLC missionaries to Uganda, are the featured speakers for the conference.

## Homecoming

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary will host its first homecoming event Feb. 2–3. Events will include cheering on the men’s and women’s basketball teams, brunch, and pep band and alumni choir performance.

Opposite page, clockwise from top: Members of the combined choirs open the concert with a selection of songs. Asher Cheek sings a solo in the Proclaim Choir’s “All Glory is Yours.” Members of the Proclaim Choir sing “This Is My Word.” The congregation joined the choirs for several Advent carols. This page, clockwise from top right: Ava Talley plays violin with the Symphonic Wind Ensemble. Alumni and friends joined the choirs during Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.” The combined choirs sang “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.” Members of the Seminary Chorus sang “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”



PEOPLE & PLACES

Two congregations were recently welcomed onto the AFLC congregational roster by members of the Coordinating Committee.

• **Trinity San Antonio**, located in the northern suburbs of San Antonio, Texas, is a church plant served by Pastor Matthew Ballmann. The congregation submitted their request for affiliation after incorporating and ratifying their constitution and by-laws. The congregation is a plant work of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.

• **St. Peter Lutheran**, Benson, Ill., was formerly affiliated with the North American Lutheran Church. Founded in the 1860s, the congregation is currently without a pastor.

Support the AFLC's magazine

The AFLC's monthly magazine, *The Lutheran Ambassador*, is free for all subscribers. The ministry is subsidized by your gifts. We praise God for the many gifts given to support our ministry in 2023. Our mission continues to provide encouraging and informative content. Contact [lasubscriptions@afcl.org](mailto:lasubscriptions@afcl.org) for more information on giving to our ministry. Or, visit our website at [afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador](http://afcl.org/lutheran-ambassador).

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

**Bible College**

Ruth Claus  
Chris Rocker  
Darrell Gilbertson  
Phyllis Johnson  
BG Copes

**FLAPS**

Pastor Paul Nash

**General Fund**

Ann Hutchinson

**Parish Education**

Betty Christopherson  
Pastor Rodney Stueland

**World Missions**

Pastor Jerome Elness  
Norman Nelson  
Jay VanHorn  
Ervin Johnson  
Valborg Huglen

**Seminary**

Chris Rocker  
Pastor Rodney Stueland

**WMF**

Lila Lalim  
Maynard Iverson  
Arloine Goodfellow  
Roland Anderson  
Leroy Nelson  
Neil Ribstein

... in honor of

**Lutheran Ambassador**

Pastor Robert and Gloria Lee

**Bible College**

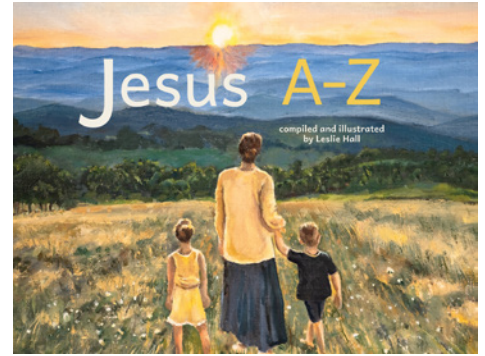
Pastor Adam Osier  
Pastor Mark and Lori Molstre

Parish Ed publishes children's book

*Jesus A-Z* was illustrated and compiled by Leslie Hall

A new children's book from Ambassador Publications, the publishing arm of AFLC Parish Education, helps children to know Jesus, understand his love for them, and trust in his promises. *Jesus A-Z* was compiled and illustrated by Leslie Hall, who attends Peace Free Lutheran, Canal Winchester, Ohio. The new book will be highlighted in the March issue of *The Lutheran Ambassador*.

Available for \$15, the book can be ordered by phone (763.545.5631), email ([parished@afcl.org](mailto:parished@afcl.org)), or in the online



bookstore ([ambassadorpublications.org](http://ambassadorpublications.org)). It is also available in the Plymouth, Minn., campus bookstores. A companion coloring book will be published in the future.

Youth Worker Weekend training Jan. 12-14

AFLC Youth Ministries will host the annual Youth Workers Weekend Jan. 12-14 at the Association Retreat Center near Osceola, Wis. The featured trainer will be Daniel Keinanen, the FLY Convention coordinator.

The event will begin with a welcome at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 12, followed by the first training session at 8 p.m. Three training sessions will be offered at 9, 10, and 11 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 13. Coaching sessions will follow in the early afternoon, with a break time for activities. The evening session will begin at 6 p.m. Two sessions will be offered on Sunday morning, closing the weekend retreat. For more information, visit the Youth Ministries website at [afcl.org/youth](http://afcl.org/youth).



**Event**

Youth Worker Weekends

**Dates**

January 12-14, 2024

**Location:**

Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis.

**Registration**

[afcl.org/youth](http://afcl.org/youth)

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-November 30, 2023

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$29,780	\$380,981	\$396,301
Evangelism	9,175	102,231	110,009
Youth Ministries	14,470	123,097	139,011
Parish Education	9,275	133,471	162,439
Seminary	25,648	245,520	211,028
Bible College	34,514	358,206	426,055
Home Missions	25,754	286,029	360,347
World Missions	25,649	353,637	430,249
WM Personal Support	81,960	701,163	669,150
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$256,960</b>	<b>\$2,684,334</b>	<b>\$2,904,589</b>

For additional financial information for each department, go to [www.afcl.org/giving](http://www.afcl.org/giving)



# In Jesus, you can.

BY AMY SKOGERBOE

**I**n my 29 years of marriage, I've seen my husband have one real panic attack. I am prone to feelings of anxiety and overwhelming stress, but seeing him close to breathing from a paper sack was highly unusual and therefore disconcerting.

"Aim, this could be forever. Like *forever* forever. Can we really do this?"

This fear was sincere and well-founded. Self-doubt can suffocate. God often calls believers into the great unknown in tandem with a serious deviation from their own life plan. This was not how we had foreseen it.

As we head into this new year, what is God asking of you? Can you do it?

For the first two decades of my life, the stories that inspired me most were those where the heroes, confident in their own capability to conquer, stepped forward quickly and with bold determination to take on whatever daunting task or giant was presented to them, and then proceeded to demonstrate a definitive victory. Natural gifting and strength of character and body inspired me and caused me to speculate what future mountains I may mightily ascend, to the wild admiration of others. This was not how God had foreseen it.

In the next two decades of my life, I came to realize that the narratives that truly change me and more deeply impact my faith and character are those of resiliency, sacrifice, and painful encounters with limitations—where God's sovereignty shines out of and in spite of the broken vessels with jagged cracks and scars that he uses for his glory. These are real accounts of fallibility and weakness. Brothers and sisters in Christ who have been diagnosed with sickness inexplicably live lives of profound praise and joy. A mother gathers her sons close and exhorts them to look up as they face the possible conviction of their innocent father. A ministry is born out of the stillbirth of a tiny, beautiful daughter. Ten siblings grieve the loss of their mom to addiction and go forward to reestablish a sense of home and family. A father loses his 17-year-old son in a tragic car accident and responds by attending two years of

school events, games, and a graduation to support and celebrate his son's classmates in honor of his boy. I can hardly breathe sometimes, considering the depth of pain I've witnessed.

Friends, what has most eternally changed you? Was it invited into your life, or did it crash the plan and the party? Likely, this was not how you had foreseen it.

As a ministry family, we joke often about the one answer that every Sunday school child offers up under pressure: Jesus! As much humor as we have found in that quick response, I realize in reflection how prolific the response "God" is in attempting to explain how we rise out of the ashes of our own humanity and fallen world to face another day with both ongoing and new challenges. I find myself answering myriad questions of "how in the world" or "why in the world" with simply "God." God sustains the lonely and provides for the poor. God raises the dead and heals the broken. God rescues and gives strength in the measure that is required for each day. His power overwhelms our weakness and pain and shouts a resounding "YES, IN ME YOU CAN," when our timid response was "No, I can't."

I looked at my husband as he

experienced that panic attack, and I spoke the only words that kept flooding my mind as we struggled with God's call to do what we believed we could not do. This calling would change our home and family. It would involve parenting babies and toddlers into our 50s and teenagers in our 60s. "In God," I said, and "today."

In him, can we say yes to what he asks of us today? In him, do we have what we need to tackle this call today? Is he enough when we clearly are not? Is his grace sufficient when we fail, and will his forgiveness restore our hope and confidence?

Ask me these questions, and I have complete certainty in my answers. Don't ask me what I can do for Christ; I have no adequate response. But ask me what I believe he can do through me and if he is up to the task, and I will respond, "Yes, he is, and yes, he does, and yes, he will!" God is our answer for every today we are gifted in 2024, and because of him, we will see victory in our families, marriages, ministries, and callings. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

*Skogerboe is a member of St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill.*

ENCOURAGING  
**WORD**



BUILDING THE BASE \ \ Part 1

# Pointed to the Seed.

BY PASTOR J. CHRISTIAN ANDREWS

**S**tep outside on a cold day when you can “see” your breath. Exhale. Watch as a mist forms in the air. Imagine that every particle you see is a galaxy, a whirling collection of stars. Wonder for a moment what kind of being it would take to breathe the universe into being. A psalmist declared, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Psalm 33:6). God revealed himself to the psalmist through inspired words. He has revealed himself to us through that same inspired Word. With those words, we form our confession: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in God. What kind of being breathed the universe into existence? According to Romans 1:20, it is possible to know God’s “invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature” by observing all he created. But to know God more fully, we need his Word. It is there that God teaches us about himself. In his Word, he names for us those invisible attributes, so we learn that he is eternal, unchanging, and spirit. We learn that he is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. God is holy. We are also taught of his more personable traits, characteristics that are still his divine nature but which make God approachable. God is just and faithful. He

is loving, merciful, and gracious. When we confess that we believe in God, we are confessing the God who has shown himself to us in Scripture.

I believe God is the almighty Father. To confess that God is almighty is to declare belief in his eternal power and divine nature. To confess that he is our Father is to declare that he desires to be in fellowship with us. Those attributes we call “invisible” help us understand that he is almighty. Those attributes that show he is personable help us understand that God knows us and wants to be known by us. God uses both words, *almighty* and *Father*, for himself when he teaches us about himself. He wants us to know him as the Almighty. He wants us to call him Father. From God’s Word, we learn that God is both almighty and Father, in perfect balance at the same time.

I believe that God made the heavens and the earth. At the very beginning of God’s revelation about himself, he explained in beautiful detail the process he used when he brought into being everything that is. As the psalmist later declared, the LORD spoke, the LORD breathed. God said, “Let there be light.” Then, day by day for six days, he spoke again and again. On the last of those days, he took what he had made—the dust of the earth—and formed man and breathed. He

gave the man life with His very own breath. He made for the man a woman, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone. He walked every day with the man, Adam, and the woman, Eve, and had fellowship with them. God the Father Almighty shared his image with them, told them to fill the earth with that image, and gave them everything they needed for faith and life. And God rested on the seventh day to teach them and us to rest in all that he has given us.

We don’t know how long they lived in Eden, the garden into which they were placed. That detail is not part of the revelation. We don’t really know why they decided—believed even—that what God had given them was not enough. They listened to the deceiver, and “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21). The fellowship with God Almighty was broken. Creation was tainted. Death came. The account, however, does not end there. We are pointed to the woman’s Seed and the love of God the Father, who then sent the Son ...

*Andrews, who authored the Ambassador Publications confirmation curriculum, serves Immanuel Lutheran, Springfield, Mo.*