

THE 

MAY 2024

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



THE FIRSTBORN



Being a firstborn.

There is more to being a firstborn than simply being the first born. Through much of history, firstborns were significant. In the biblical world, firstborn sons were given a privileged position. They were often given a double share of the family inheritance and were also looked to for leadership and provision after the death of the father.

In centuries past, crowns and titles passed through family lines, and blood was often spilled over claims to be the rightful “firstborn.” The monarchy is fading in importance in many nations, but maintaining an accurate line of succession through the firstborn children is still often important.

This is all foreign to many of us, and today we might not consider being a firstborn to be all that significant. But our unfamiliarity with an important biblical category should not color our interpretation!

The Bible has a lot to say about the firstborn. Bible passages like Jacob stealing the blessing from his elder brother Esau might confuse us, but knowing the significance of being a firstborn will help us better understand why God sometimes *didn't* choose the firstborn as he accomplished his plans through Scripture. And ultimately, our prayer is that knowing more about firstborns will help us see Jesus more clearly.

Our writers in this issue tackle the biblical category of “firstborns” from several different perspectives. Trisha Joy Nelson gives us some historical context for this topic of firstborns. She looks at what it meant to be a firstborn in the ancient world of the Old Testament and how that helps us understand God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Next, Pastor Richard Gunderson looks at the firstborn in Exodus, where God redeemed the firstborn through the final plague in Egypt and then instructed Israel to consecrate the firstborn. All the firstborns belong to God, and he offers to redeem them!

Pastor Eric Rasmussen looks at a few other stories about brothers in the Bible. God often reverses the order we expect, showing that in his eyes, the first are often last and the last first. King David is the perfect example of this reversal, Pastor David Niemela writes, with God choosing the smallest and youngest son of Jesse to be king. He writes: “Although neither the first king of Israel nor firstborn of his family, David was appointed by God to the position of firstborn.”

The New Testament gives even more clarity about how God views the firstborn. Building on themes from the rest of Scripture, Kellie Skrepetos helps us see how Jesus is the firstborn of creation and the firstborn from the dead. These terms mean that Jesus is before all things, chief of all things, and chooses to work his will as he wills.

Pastor David Handsaker wraps up this issue by showing us that *we* are all God’s firstborn, regardless of birth order. The writer of Hebrews says that we who believe are “the church of the firstborn,” made perfect by the blood of Christ with names that are written in heaven.

Don’t just shrug at confusing Bible stories. Being a firstborn is an important category to God, and by his grace, it is a role and position he offers to you today!

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland

Cover Art: “Isaac Blessing Jacob,” Govert Flinck, 1638, Rijksmuseum.



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Satan will call you a legalist when you try to regularly pray and read your Bible, then he will call you a failure when you forget to do these things. [Gretchen Ronnevik]

“

This has been arranged by God: whoever believes in Christ is saved without work and receives the forgiveness of his sins freely by faith alone.

[Ambrose of Milan]

The final heartbeat for the Christian is not the mysterious conclusion to a meaningless existence. It is, rather, the grand beginning to a life that will never end.

[James Dobson]

We are in a wrong state of mind if we are not in a thankful state of mind. [Charles Spurgeon]

It's much less demanding to think about God's will for your future than it is to ask Him what He wants you to do in the next ten minutes. [Francis Chan]

If the Gospel required the potentates of this world for its planting and preservation, God would not have committed it to fishermen. [Martin Luther]

THE PROMISE

By Tricia Nelson

We can do that,” my husband promised our second daughter, who shared the vision for her upcoming outdoor evening wedding reception on the front acreage of our family’s country home. Her dream included extensive feet of twinkly vintage lightbulbs strung across the wood farmhouse tables for guests. We were tickled that she thought we could pull it off, yet we felt the weight of making her twinkly vision turn into reality. The night before the wedding, as I stared out at the expansive yard and looked at the paper map he had thoughtfully prepared, I wasn’t so sure he could deliver on his promise.

In the ancient world, the title of “firstborn” carried great honor and privilege for the role. The title equated to a birthright, a large, if not double, portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:7), and a paternal blessing. It was preferential treatment that would cause sweat to bead on the brows of most parents today. The roles and responsibilities were “primogeniture” in nature, meaning the right of inheritance was typically assigned to the eldest male versus female, regardless of actual birth order, unless there were no males in the family.¹

Yet, with great privilege came great responsibility. The firstborn male would be expected to manage the inheritance of a family’s assets, including land, and assume the role of leadership in the home. He would care for the mother and family members as needed when the father passed away or was unable to fulfill his paternal role. This was critical in biblical times because the stability of provision centered more on the familial unit and the management of the inheritance than the outcome of a vocational trade.²

The birthright structure was a solid setup for firstborns, guarded through the design of the law (Deuteronomy 21:15–17). However, a firstborn could choose to forgo

the privilege and responsibility by selling his birthright, which happened between Jacob and Esau for a bowl of stew. The stew was presumably tantalizing and tasty in the moment, but bitter, metaphorically, in the aftertaste when Esau realized what he forfeited through tears of pleading (Hebrews 12:16–17). Birthrights could also be taken away from the firstborn due to sin, as noted in Genesis 49. Generational transitions of blessing did not always transpire without a glitch for the firstborn in those scenarios. A father’s disappointment and angst were undoubtedly palpable in those circumstances of marred opportunity, yet provision would continue through an appointed male.

The firstborn stepped into a leadership role to ensure the family would continue to be cared for and led well. Big shoulders were needed to carry such a load, but in this way, the ancient world structured provision and blessing from one generation to the next. Presumably there were times where that male, though he was called to the job, questioned the “blessing” of the arrangement as he navigated his responsibilities as a firstborn.

In a similar, stirring generational framework of blessing, Abraham is given a promise. In the span of Genesis 12 through Genesis 18, God promises to bless Abraham in multiple ways: in posterity and land, by being justified through his faith, and by carrying out the covenant for all humanity through his line with the promise of the Messiah. The promises seemed implausible to an old man with a barren wife. Yet God patiently stated, restated, and added to His promises over the course of time as Abraham aged





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(Genesis 12–18). Unlike the human structure of firstborn promise, *Yahweh*, the covenant God,³ does not rescind the blessing and promises, even in the recorded instances where Abraham and his family members fell short.⁴ God repeated and affirmed the promises to Abraham’s son, Isaac, and to Isaac’s son, Jacob. And in Exodus 3:6, God reinforced the power of this generational covenant by stating, “... I am ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Did Abraham feel a big responsibility on his shoulders through the promises being made? Perhaps. Yet even in a period of waiting for all of those promises to be fulfilled, Romans 4:20–21 notes this about Abraham: “No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.”⁵ Abraham was living in his role as firstborn in a covenantal

blessing. He demonstrated faith that God always delivers on his promises from generation to generation!

Nelson, the director of family engagement in a multi-generational family business, lives in Kandiyohi, Minn. Artwork: “Esau Selling His Birthright,” copy after Paulus Moreelse, 1609, Rijksmuseum.

Footnotes

1. biblestudytools.com/dictionary/firstborn/
2. bibleproject.com/podcast/gods-response-human-power-structures/#:~:text=In%20patriarchal%20cultures%2C%20firstborn%20sons,because%20of%20their%20birth%20order.
3. NIV Women’s Study Bible, 2018 Thomas Nelson
4. desiringgod.org/messages/the-covenant-of-abraham
5. NIV Women’s Study Bible

REDEEMING THE FIRSTBORN

By Pastor Richard Gunderson

I have had many years to ponder the biblical teaching of the firstborn.

I was the first male child born to 30-something parents toward the end of the Great Depression, yet I am old enough to remember the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I have wondered: what does “firstborn” mean? What does it mean to redeem the firstborn? Why did God choose this idea? Does it apply today? What does it mean to me?

Scripture offers some interesting and meaningful answers to several of these questions. I encourage you to read the other articles in this issue to see how they answer other questions.

W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says that “firstborn” comes from the Greek word *prototokos*, from *protos*, first, and *tikto*, to beget. The first time the word appears in the Bible is in Genesis 4:4, when Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. “Abel brought the firstborn of his flock ... and the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” God accepted Abel’s offering but rejected Cain’s offering. Right away, problems surfaced. As we know, Cain’s anger festered until he killed his brother.

The reason for God’s different responses was that Abel’s offering was the fattest firstborn from his flock, and Cain’s offering was not the first fruit of his harvest. Abel offered his first to God because he knew that God had a first claim on animals.

God also has a claim on the firstborn of man. When Moses led Israel from unbearable slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt, God instructed Moses to consecrate all the firstborns. He said, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine” (Exodus 13:2). To consecrate means to devote, dedicate, or to set apart. Here God, the creator of all of life, directs Moses to set apart for him both man and animal, because all the firstborns belong to him. Later, God repeats that command, emphasizing that all firstborns are his.

The animals were sacrificed, while on the other hand, the men were redeemed. God instituted the first Passover the night the angel of death visited Egypt. That was the night of the redemption of the firstborn!

The plague of the firstborn, the last of the plagues, required the sacrifice of a lamb without blemish whose blood was put on the two doorposts and lintels so that

the angel of death passed over that place and redeemed those within. Hebrews 11:28 says, “He (Moses) kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.” Meanwhile, the angel of death entered all other places and killed every other firstborn of man and animal.

When daylight came, Pharaoh and the Egyptians couldn’t get the Jews out of town fast enough. God had not only redeemed the firstborn but all of Israel. They were finally free to go. And they did.

A second historical event when the redemption of the firstborn happened is found in the Book of Numbers. God directed Moses, saying, “The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the first born in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the Lord” (3:12–13).

While the redemption of the firstborn at the time of the Exodus was of all males firstborn of man and beast in Israel, now God was setting apart all of the males in the tribe of Levi to be consecrated to him as the firstborn. Reading on in verses 40–51 we have the redemption of all the firstborn males in Israel; a male Levite would redeem a firstborn from the rest of the tribes of Israel. One Old Testament commentator writes: “The Levites and their cattle were to be adopted in their place and the firstborn son of Israel to be released in return.” The total number of male Levites was 22,000. The total number of firstborn males from the other tribes of Israel was 22,273. To redeem the 273 firstborn Israelites not covered by a Levite, Moses commanded the payment of five shekels for each firstborn. A total of 1,375 shekles was paid to Aaron and his sons.

What is the significance of redeeming the firstborn, according to the Bible? The answer is clear and concise! Fulfilling God’s claim that “the firstborn are mine” required sacrifice and consecration.

This redeeming work of God brings me great joy! God says, “You are mine! You have been bought with a price!” Come join me in the church of the firstborn.

Gunderson, a retired AFLC pastor, lives in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Artwork: “Sacrifice of Cain and Abel: The Epistle to the Hebrews Chapter 11,” by printmaker Pieter Jalthea Furnius, 1550, Rijksmuseum.



THE PRINCE





THE FIRSTBORN

REVERSING THE ORDER

By Pastor Eric Rasmussen

I am a firstborn. But there are many times when being the firstborn isn't always the greatest.

As my favorite comedian Nate Bargatze said in his special called "Hello World!" (2023), "Firstborns have it the hardest of all the children; we show up, our parents aren't ready for us." He explains that our parents were poor when we arrived. They were too young. They didn't have any parenting experience. I hope you all recognize that life as a firstborn can be really, really hard. As proof, I offer the following: in the two years immediately after I left home to go to Bible college, my family acquired, for the first time, a home computer, a riding lawnmower, and a dishwasher. My parents will always try to downplay these truths and will certainly have excuses, but I am relieved to finally have the means to publicly air my grievances.

But the Bible highlights and promotes the concept of the firstborn. God's chosen people, the Israelites, were his "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). Jesus was called the "firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15). In biblical times, a firstborn male child had it pretty good. He was the main heir to the family's property, receiving a double share of the inheritance. The firstborn was responsible for carrying on the family estate and lineage and was given unique rights and privileges.

In my family, we have the unique situation of having three firstborns—myself, my firstborn daughter, and my middle son, a firstborn who became part of our family through adoption. We have seen through experience that the clichés about firstborns are true. If you are unfamiliar, you can find hundreds of social media videos highlighting the differences between the oldest, middle, and youngest children. Human development experts tell us that birth order can impact personality and development. Firstborns typically have a certain type of personality; they are generally more responsible, show more leadership characteristics, and are likely to be rule-followers—all traits that can be beneficial when leading a family or working in God's kingdom.

But what do we do when God reverses the order? There are many times when this happens in Scripture. In Genesis 4 and Hebrews 11, we read that Abel, the younger brother, offered the "more acceptable sacrifice" compared to his older brother, Cain. The younger brother's favor in

God's sight led to the first recorded sibling disagreement and murder. Each generation of God's chosen family after Abraham involves God somehow changing up the birth order. Isaac over Ishmael. Jacob over Esau. Joseph received favored status over all his brothers. And less famously, when Jacob was at the end of his life, he blessed Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, in Genesis 48. Jacob adopts Joseph's two sons as his own, giving them shares of his inheritance, but then crosses his arms and puts the younger brother Ephraim ahead of his older brother Manasseh. Jacob said, "Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations."

What do we make of these reversals in birth order? Certainly, we note and trust the sovereignty of God. He is omniscient; he knows what he is doing. If he chooses a younger sibling over a firstborn, we'll have to live with it. But we also recognize Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (Matthew 19:30). Jesus taught the rich young ruler in this passage that prestige, wealth, and external characteristics are secondary in God's Kingdom. Similarly, when Jesus' disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, he said, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). God is looking for a humble, moldable, servant-hearted person for his kingdom work.

God doesn't automatically favor the firstborn, the rich, or those with status. He doesn't pick the people with the best résumé or the best pedigree. God values humility over pride. The arrogant often fall back on their self-sufficiency rather than on Christ. God values a servant heart as much as any other description of the heart. There was no higher compliment in the New Testament church than to call someone a servant. Paul, Timothy, Peter, James, Jude, and many more were called servants—a truly lofty calling. God values the weak over the strong. The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." To which Paul responds, as we should, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Corinthians 12:9–10).

God doesn't robotically pick the firstborn for his purposes; rather, he picks the humble, and the servant, and the weak.

Speaking for all firstborns, I guess it's okay that God sometimes picks a younger sibling to accomplish his purposes.

Rasmussen serves Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn. Artwork: "Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh," printmaker Reinier Venkeles, 1797, Rijksmuseum.

THE FIRSTBORN KING

By Pastor David Niemela

I have thought of taking the huge mirror down in our bathroom and replacing it with something smaller. How much do we really need to see this view of ourselves?

The first king of Israel, Saul, was too occupied with how he was viewed. The Prophet Samuel rebuked Saul after Saul's failure to totally destroy the nation of Amalek, saying, "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel" (I Samuel 15:17). The reflection Saul saw of himself was small. This was false humility.

Samuel then went to Jesse to find the new king God had chosen. As Jesse introduced his sons, we see that David wasn't even present. He was unassumingly doing his job as a shepherd out in the field. Even after he was anointed king, David returned to shepherd the sheep because that was his calling (16:19; 17:15).

At this time, Israel was paralyzed with fear of the Philistines, following in the footsteps of their fearful king, Saul. When David came from his shepherding duties to deliver food from Jesse to his three oldest brothers at the battlefield, he heard about Goliath the Philistine, who was responsible for the latest scare. Eliab, Jesse's firstborn son, rebuked David for his interest in the predicament: "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle" (17:28).

David didn't say it, but maybe he was interested in the battlefield because Israel looked like sheep without a brave shepherd. As he found a new calling here on the battlefield, we see that David's heart wasn't filled with "evil," as Eliab said. Rather, he was "a man after his [God's] own heart" (13:14).

We should note here that while Saul saw himself as "small," David *was* small. He was "the youngest" (16:11). Regardless, David had little time to look in the mirror at his little self. His focus was on the Lord. David briefly explained to Saul about being a shepherd and how the Lord rescued him from wild animals. David confidently concluded that the Lord would bring about the same outcome if he were to battle Goliath: "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from

the hand of this Philistine" (17:37).

Although he was neither the first king of Israel nor the firstborn of his family, David was appointed by God to the position of firstborn: "And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Psalm 89:27).

Let's go back to when Samuel first visited Jesse's house to find the new king. Samuel was impressed with Eliab, the firstborn of Jesse. But God warned Samuel that he didn't see the whole picture: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature ... For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (16:7). In other words, God didn't want another version of Saul, who was, like Eliab, notable in stature and appearance (9:2).

There is nothing wrong with height and looks, but they remind us of something deeper. Beauty can be "vain" (Proverbs 31:30). Sin can make beauty a superficial mask. And actually, a superficial reading of Saul's and David's lives could make Saul look better. After all, how does David look as an adulterer and murderer compared to Saul's attempts to sacrifice as a priest and seek out a medium?

David did need a mirror, and it was most obvious later in his life when the Prophet Nathan confronted him after David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, saying, "You're the man!" David confessed his sin. David did have a handsome appearance (16:12) and was strong (16:18), but that didn't matter now. He saw the true ugliness of his sin. But just like on the battlefield, he had confidence in God, who forgives. That's true humility—finding true strength and beauty in God's forgiveness.

Likewise, the Son of David, the firstborn of creation (Colossians 1:15), Jesus, was unassumingly building chairs and tables before he rose to fame. What was his calling? To save the world. And when Jesus rose to the peak of being famous—or infamous—he was beaten so badly he couldn't recognize himself in a mirror (Isaiah 52:14). He bears the ugliness of David's and our sin.

Instead of looking into a big mirror to view ourselves, we should look to Jesus.

Niemela serves United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn. Artwork: "David," by Jozef Israels, 1899, Rijksmuseum.



THE FIRSTBORN



THE FIRSTBORN

JESUS THE FIRSTBORN

By Kellie Skrepetos

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:15–18).

The theme of Jesus as the firstborn is found throughout the Bible. By using three key terms as guideposts, we can see myriad ways in Scripture in which Jesus is revealed to be the firstborn over all creation and the firstborn from among the dead. It is my hope that by exploring God’s greatness, readers will be filled with praise for our Lord and Savior.

The Amplified Bible version of Colossians 1:15b says that Jesus is “the firstborn the preeminent one, the sovereign, and the originator.” Definitions of these four terms should first be established before delving into supporting Scripture.

The term “firstborn,” according to *Strong’s Concordance Online*, means “first-born, eldest,” and “preeminent” is defined as, “first, chief, before, principal, and most important.” The definition of “sovereign” (or, sovereignty) according to *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* is, “of God, his absolute right to do all things according to his own good pleasure.” Last, “originator” is defined as “founder, leader, originator, author, prince, leader.”

Jesus’ preeminence as firstborn, especially relating to his being “before,” is best revealed in the first book of the Bible, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Additionally, John 8:58 says, “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’” Both passages reveal Jesus as God, who, as firstborn, is “before, the eldest.” Who is the eldest of all creation but the Ancient of Days? “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2).

As firstborn of the dead, we can see preeminence as “chief” and “most important” in Revelation 1:5a, “... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” As ruler of the

kings of the earth, Jesus is the chief, and most important.

Jesus’ sovereignty (“His absolute right to do all things”) as firstborn over all creation is evidenced in Romans 8:29 via predestination: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” His sovereignty as firstborn from among the dead is illustrated by his choosing to suffer for the sins of the world for the salvation of many, as is “his own good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). We see this in Acts 26:23: “... that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

Jesus as the originator and firstborn of all creation is also supported heartily throughout Scripture. Specifically in terms of “author” and “founder,” what better way to be declared the author than to be named the Word? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3).

Last, the Book of Hebrews reveals Jesus as the firstborn of the dead, the originator in being our author, prince, and leader. The author writes: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Throughout Scripture, Jesus is declared the firstborn over all creation and the firstborn from among the dead. This reveals his preeminence, sovereignty, and status as originator. Jesus himself confirms all of this in Revelation. He says, “Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (1:17b–18).

Therefore, let us worship him, for he is the “holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8b). “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

Skrepetos is a member of Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore. Artwork: “Christ,” by Ladislav Mednyánszky, 1880–1890, Slovak National Gallery.

FULLY PRIVILEGED

By Pastor David Handsaker

As a former pilot, I think one of the best privileges I ever had was being in CASS. Standing for “Cockpit Access Security System,” it meant that with my airline identification badge I could skip to the front of TSA security lines. I could get on planes for free rides, even flying in first class. If the plane was full, I could often sit in the cockpit on the jump seat. The flight attendants were nicer to me—more cardboard snacks, please—and I got real answers from the gate agents about delays—they were trying to clean the plane after the lavatory overflowed.

With an ID badge, you are one of them. With an ID badge and your name in the system, you have access to both privilege and prominence.

The term firstborn is all about prominence and privilege. God warned Pharaoh that Israel was God’s firstborn (Exodus 4:22), and in the New Testament, God calls believers the church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23). This is not a new group receiving the title of firstborn; they are the same people of faith they have always been. The people of faith have always been the apple of God’s eye, the people God loves most dearly. It is the title of believer that signifies who has been granted prominence on this earth. Believers are little prophets, priests, and kings under and because of Jesus.

The way the author of Hebrews introduces this title helps us see its significance. Hebrews is a book written to Jews who were being persecuted and pressured to give up Christianity and return to Judaism. They were pressured to abandon Jesus for the ceremony and ritual of the temple. Chapters 11 and 12 argue that having faith in Jesus is better than attempting to keep the law.

Chapter 12 contrasts Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The writer says that believers in the new covenant have not come to Mount Sinai, where man will always end up if he tries to earn salvation by perfectly keeping the law. Mount Sinai is a place of terror where all people fear the holiness of God. Instead, that writer says that those who trust in Jesus have come to Mount Zion, a city where God dwells graciously. It is here that the church of the firstborn is located, where God is the judge of all, and the spirits do not fear because they have been made righteous.

It is also important to note what the English translation loses here. The term firstborn is plural in the original language. If it were singular the idea would be that the church belongs to Jesus, the firstborn. As a plural, though, “church of the firstborn” means the church made up of firstborns. Through the work of Christ, we are all believers! There are now multitudes of firstborn ones. People of every tongue, tribe, and nation, all enjoying the privilege of being in the gracious presence of God.

When I first got hired by the airlines, I was quite reserved about exercising the privileges of my ID badge. If I wasn’t working, I would wait in the security line like everyone else. I was intimidated by the gate agents. I was unsure how to use my travel privileges. My friend and fellow pilot, Chris, was much bolder than me. After he got his ID badge, he took off to a Mexican beach on his first long weekend. He enjoyed discounted lodging, extra pretzels, and beautiful beaches because he was confident in the privilege that was his.

How often do we live our Christian lives with hearts that are too timid to use our firstborn status? Intimidated as we ask God for things. Hesitant to apply to ourselves the grace and forgiveness that characterize Mount Zion. I worked for the airline for a couple of years and never really used my ID privileges like I could have. I intend to treat my firstborn privileges differently.

The privilege of being firstborn children of God is not some kind of prosperity gospel. The church of the firstborn is defined as those “who are enrolled in heaven.” Firstborn privilege is primarily a promise of heaven and eternity. But it also affects our lives here and now. Even now, we can boldly approach the throne of grace, confident that we will receive forgiveness. We can trust that the loving eye of the Father is upon us to guide us through life to our ultimate destination. We are privileged firstborns because we are God’s children. We can boldly claim the forgiveness and grace that are ours because, in Christ, we are the church of the firstborn.

Handsaker serves St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Cloquet, Minn. Artwork: “Christ Blessing the Little Children,” Jacob de Wet, 1640–1672, Rijksmuseum.

THE FIRSTBORN



Behold.

BY PASTOR RYAN PATENAUDE

Behold, the 2025 FLY Convention theme: Behold. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word is archaic. I suppose they are right—I don't recall ever hearing someone use the word who wasn't reading Scripture.

I can understand why most modern translations still use it. After all, "Look!" doesn't have the same grandeur. But that is the idea. Some 1,100 times, God tells us to "behold." With that word, God is drawing our attention, diverting our gaze from whatever banal thing we are looking at to what he has for us.

Our theme verse is from John 11:29, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The gospel is the heart of the Bible, and by God's grace, the gospel will be at the center of the 2025 FLY Convention. Our primary goal is for students to behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

The FLY Committee has been meeting for long Saturday meetings every six to eight weeks since this past September. The nine of us enjoy praying together and wrestling with how to best serve the congregations and youth in the AFLC. This cycle, we were adamant about finding a theme that I would call objective and monergistic—a theme that does not depend at all on us but is all about who God is and what he has done. We debated dozens of ideas over two meetings, but when "Behold" was finally suggested, there was immediate unanimity. We have hundreds of decisions yet to make, but we are excited to share a couple items that have been decided.

First, we have invited Keith Ferrin to lead four morning sessions on how and why to study the Bible. Keith writes that his "passion and mission [are] helping individuals, families, and entire churches realize that the Bible isn't *only* true and relevant. It's also outstanding and enjoyable!" Everyone knows they *should* read their Bible. Keith helps people *want* to read their Bible.

Second, we are very excited about our lineup of evening preachers. Dr. Nathan Olson, Matt Monseth, Pastor Scott Stroud, Pastor Eric Westlake, and Pastor Ben Sollie will each invite the convention to behold a different biblical truth.

Will you pray? The FLY Convention relies on hundreds of volunteers. These volunteers not only take time off of work, but they also spend money to come and serve at the convention. Please pray for all of the generous souls who are being (and will be) asked to serve in this sacrificial way. We work hard to provide the best convention possible at an affordable price, and it is not easy. Every single volunteer helps to make it as affordable as possible. Pray also for the YMCA. We have yet to receive final numbers from them, which prevents us from accurately budgeting and setting registration prices. Finally, pray for the committee and our advisors. Pray that we are effective in our mission to win the lost, build the believer, and encourage student discipleship in the local congregation.

2025 FLY Convention

- **Dates:** June 30–July 5, 2025
- **Theme:** Behold
- **Verse:** John 11:29
- **Evening speakers:**
 Dr. Nathan Olson
 Matt Monseth
 Pastor Scott Stroud
 Pastor Eric Westlake
 Pastor Ben Sollie
- **Bible Study Leader:** Keith Ferrin
- **Website:** flyconvention.org

Patenaude, who serves West Praire Free Lutheran, Kindred, N.D., is the president of the 2025 FLY Committee.

Equipping teens for service.

BY ADAM McCARLSON

Teens are an important part of our congregations. God has called them to the body of Christ and has given them various vocations or callings to love and serve their neighbors both inside and outside the church. If your congregation is looking for opportunities to train and equip teens for service in the Kingdom of God, AFLC Youth Ministries invites you to consider making FLY Beyond a priority for your ministry endeavors.

This summer, FLY Beyond will be held July 14–18 at the Association Retreat Center in Osceola, Wis., with a theme of “Be Transformed” from Romans 12:1–2. FLY Beyond is designed for students in grades 7–12 and also welcomes adults and youth leaders from their congregation. FLY Beyond depends on various volunteers and staff to make our event happen. If you are interested in finding out more about the staff, dorm room leader, and small group leader positions that are available for adults at FLY Beyond, reach out to the Youth Ministries’ department.

In many ways, FLY Beyond is similar to a typical summer Bible camp experience. Students come and stay in the dorms, meet other teens, participate in various recreation opportunities, learn from different Bible teachers, and take an intentional break from the every-day routine of life to get away. In other ways, though, FLY Beyond is structured differently than a typical Bible camp. The FLY Beyond planning team intentionally focuses on opportunities for teens to be equipped and trained to live out their Christian faith both in the context of congregational life and in their community.

• APOLOGETICS TRAINING

First, at FLY Beyond, teens will encounter effective apologetics training. Tim Barnett from Stand to Reason has presented at FLY Beyond the past few cycles and is returning this summer as the primary apologetics trainer for the week. He is not only knowledgeable but also capable of equipping teens to engage in our culture with confidence. Tim began an online ministry called Red Pen Logic with Mr. B, and he has co-authored a book with Alisa Childers titled *The Deconstruction of Christianity*.

• SMALL GROUP INTERACTION

Second, teens will engage in small group discussions throughout the week. Each small group gives teens a chance to process, apply, and sharpen the training they are receiving throughout the week. The goal is that students can take the training they receive and put it into practice back home in their congregations, families, and communities.

Additional teachers, speakers, and panel discussion leaders come to FLY Beyond to shape the heads, hearts, and hands of the students. Some of those who will be part of the teaching and training this summer are Pastor Aaron Olson, Michelle Olson, Pastor Adam Osier, Pastor Dan Hurner, Brandon Fouks, and Dr. Wade Mobley.

• EQUIPPING TEENS

FLY Beyond is an intentional effort on behalf of AFLC Youth Ministries to partner with congregations to equip teens to live and share their faith. The planning team is made up of adults from across the AFLC. They meet together every four to six weeks to craft FLY Beyond to be effective for the teens who attend. Molly Barsness, a planning team member, said, “My desire is for teens to leave FLY Beyond understanding who God is, feeling more prepared to give a defense for the hope they have in Christ, and meeting other teens around the country who are also following Jesus.” We encourage pastors, parents, and youth workers to consider how FLY Beyond could be a tool to equip and train the student leaders in your congregation to love and serve their neighbors inside and outside the walls of your church.



FLY Beyond

Registration for FLY Beyond is open until June 15. To register or to donate, visit the AFLC Youth Ministries’ website.

• www.aflc.org/youth

Congregations that haven’t been to FLY Beyond in the past 10 years qualify for an extended early bird registration rate through June 15. Contact Adam McCarlson in the Youth Ministries office to get the promo code you will enter during the registration process.

• youth@aflc.org

McCarlson is the director of AFLC Youth Ministries.



Moan returns to parish.

Longtime FLBCS New Testament professor Jerry Moan has accepted a pastoral call back to his hometown of Macintosh, Minn., serving Trinity Lutheran and Mount Carmel Free Lutheran.

Pastor Jerry Moan wasn't looking for a reason to move on, he says. But "I have to say that in the back of my mind, I've always felt that serving the congregation is what God kind of created me for ... it's my first love."

After 29 years of teaching on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary, Moan and his wife, Rebecca, will return to parish ministry this summer, having taken a call to Trinity and Mount Carmel Lutheran churches in McIntosh, Minn.

Back in 1995, Moan was seven years into his first call at Bethel Free Lutheran in Minot, N.D., when he was asked to interview for a faculty position. He didn't especially want to leave parish ministry. He enjoyed walking with families through life's joys and trials. But after prayer, God changed his heart.

"There was a need for a New Testament instructor here at the schools and that was exactly the area that I would have would have chosen to teach if I could choose," he said.

There are many aspects of his tenure on campus that Moan has appreciated. First on that list is the privilege of preparing students for lives of faith. "I get excited for our church body just thinking about the pastors who are coming out of our seminary and students who are being equipped in the eternal and inerrant Word of God from our Bible college," said Moan.

He has also thrived as a student himself, studying a variety of subjects as he was tasked with teaching different classes. "What a blessing to have the time and the opportunity to study different areas and to learn and to grow," he said. And he has enjoyed watching his students, thrive in their studies, too. "I just am amazed to see how quickly my students excel way beyond me in their Greek knowledge and capability."

But much like the impetus for his love of parish ministry, the key to his love for teaching has hinged on building relationships with his students, transient though they may be. "I've developed sort of an almost fatherly relationship with several of the students," said Moan.

Moan's love for the congregation has infused his teaching at FLBCS, so it should not have been a surprise when God opened that door, once again. But Moan says he didn't see that coming, especially a call to his home congregation. He looks forward with excitement, and possibly some trepidation, to serving congregations once again.

"Can I still remember how to be a pastor? I sometimes wonder," he said. But after training pastors for nearly 30 years, he is ready for the challenge. "I kind of feel like it's a whole new adventure."

Moan also looks back with gratitude to God for his time on campus. "We think of the Great Commission and discipleship as being the heart of the mission of our churches. But it's really the heart of our schools, as well, making disciples, training them, and I'm just so glad I could be a part of that."

FLBC Updates

Prayer Requests

- Seminary graduate Scott Olson, who accepted a call to Grace Free Lutheran, Bagley, Minn.
- Senior seminarians Mikey Meester and Troy Hanson as they begin internships in Stanley and Williston, N.D., respectively.
- 35 choir members and 26 companion tour guests who will travel throughout Scandinavia in May.
- Recent graduates as they seek to serve God in their families, communities, and congregations.

Moan Interview

- flbc.edu/jerry-moan-congregational-ministry-2

Faith in the workplace.

Jon Dryburgh (Bible College class of 1993) describes his journey from a high school counselor at Park River Bible Camp to principal of Hillsboro Elementary School. Dryburgh has served as lay pastor of Skjeberg and Drayton Lutheran Churches in Drayton, N.D., since 2007. Dryburgh was recently named superintendent of the Hillsboro, N.D., School District. The following interview transcript is edited for flow and brevity.

Could you share a bit of your testimony?

When I was starting [as a camp counselor], I started thinking about something a Sunday school teacher had told me the previous year, that if you want to know God's will for your life, read the Book of Proverbs. And so I did, and I saw Proverbs 1:7, the beginning of knowledge is fear of the Lord. And I thought to myself, I don't really know that I fear God, that I have that awesome respect for him. So that was kind of the beginning of finding God in his Word.

It really took me a year and a half here at Bible school before I really started to understand the grace of God in a little different way. I think it was in one of Pastor [Phil] Haugen's classes that second year. Ephesians 2:8–9 really opened up a different understanding for me of what faith was and who I was as a believer. I started to see all kinds of verses differently.

How did you get into education?

When I graduated from Valley City State, I wanted to be a fifth grade teacher. I had a Spanish minor, and Grand Forks was looking for a Spanish teacher to work with elementary students. It was a new program, and I was in over my head. I often tell people that if it hadn't been for the flood of '97, I probably would have quit teaching. But then the school at the airbase called and asked if I would be willing to teach fifth grade. I did that and found again the thrill of teaching. I taught for seven years in Grand Forks and then I taught in Grafton for another 10 years.

Describe the transition to the principal role in Hillsboro.

As an administrator, I would say there are not two days that look the same. One day you'll get to work, and you'll have three people waiting to visit with you. And then there's three students that need to be visited because of what happened at morning recess. Parent phone calls, parent emails, and things that the state needs done. There's just a lot of putting out fires.

How do you approach the superintendent role as you look ahead?

Even two months ago, if you would have asked me, "Do you want to be the superintendent? Is that something you're interested in?" I [would have] told people, "No, I'm not." I love being a principal. But then, the more I thought about it, I thought, What do I want for my next superintendent? I want a person with moral character, with an understanding of who they are and who God is—someone I can trust and who I know is looking out for what's best for students in our school district. And so the more I thought about that, I thought, Well, maybe that's what God wants me to do.

I want our school to be the best reflection of who we are as a community. That's part of my vision for the school, that when people [ask], "What's Hillsboro like?" Somebody might be able to answer, "Come and see our schools, and you'll know exactly what our community is like."

And where does faith tie in? Faith is everywhere in our lives. The public school vision would be that it would be a safe place for students, safe for them emotionally and physically, and safe for them spiritually, so that they're not going to be derailed in their faith through anything that happens in our district.

What advice would you give to students as they prepare for the future?

Don't ever be afraid. God has a plan, and even when the plan seems to not be working out the way you want it to, he's going to see it through. There's no calling that God can call you to where he's not going to watch over you.



Dryburgh, who attended the Bible college from 1991 to 1993, is the superintendant of the Hillsboro, N.D., School District. He is pictured with his wife, Jen, who also graduated in 1993.

Listen to the full interview online:

- fbc.edu/jondryburgh



His Word does not return empty

June 12–15 • Free Lutheran Bible College & Seminary
Plymouth, Minn.

The AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 12–15 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. Registration is now open (aflc.org/about-us/conferences). Prices are \$45/single or \$75/couple. To register for meals, child, and youth activities, visit the FLBC website (flbc.edu/conference2024).

Online registration will close on May 29. Walk-up registration will be available for the conference (\$50/individual and \$80/couple), nursery, VBS, and youth.

A vacation Bible school program will be provided for children entering pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The youth track is offered to those entering seventh grade through high school. Registration includes optional afternoon activities (at a cost) on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Campus housing (\$250) is available by request by emailing events@flbc.edu or calling 763.944.9501. On campus housing includes a continental breakfast. Provide your own bedding.

For other housing options, visit the FLBC website for links to local hotels. Conference committees will meet on June 12.

Rekindle the Fire, June 11

AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship will host Rekindle the Fire, a revitalizing and equipping event, on June 11 at Hope Lutheran, Minneapolis. With the theme, “One Mission, Many Members: Empowering Lay Leaders in Your Church and Community,” the event is open to clergy and lay members. The event will include a meal and a time of worship and prayer for the Annual Conference. The event is free. Registration can be found at aflc.org/evangelism/events/rekindle-fire.

WMF Day, June 12

WMF Day will be held prior to the conference opening on June 12 in the Student Life Center with the theme, “Rejoice in the Lord Always.” The schedule begins with devotions at 9 a.m. led by Angie Lombardo, who wrote the 2024 Bible study, *Philippians—Exuberant Joy*. Workshops will be presented by Pastor Jerry Moan (Book of Philippians), Emily Raan (AFLC missionary), and Shiney Dasari Ramnarain (AFLC-India). A memorial service and business meeting will close out the day. Registration (\$25/person) can be found online at aflc.org/women/wmf-day.

Register for WMF Day meals on the FLBC webpage at flbc.edu/conference2024.

- * Incumbents
- ** Must be elected or reelected to serve on board or committee
- X Nominations not named by press deadline

ARC Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- *Thomas Asfeldt, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Tim Jordan, Ewa Beach, Hawaii
- *Naomi Paige, Dayton, Minn.

Seventeen more names needed

Home Missions Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- Pastor Jeremy Crowell, Arlington, Wash.
- **David Hein, San Antonio, Texas
- Pastor Chris Kumpula, Tioga, N.D.
- Pastor Barry Nelson, Tripp, S.D.
- Jacob O’Flanagan, Plymouth, Minn.
- **David Perkins, Arlington, Wash.
- **Hans Tanner, Plymouth, Minn.
- **Pastor Brian Westerbur, Grafton, N.D.
- Pastor Sam Willard, Shakopee, Minn.

Eleven more names needed

Schools Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- *Gwen Berge, Maple Grove, Minn.
- Kelly Emerson, St. Francis, Kan.
- *Pastor Gideon Johnson, Killdeer, N.D.
- Justin Jones, New Hope, Minn.
- Pastor Joe Larson, Pipestone, Minn.
- *Susan Parsley, Pipestone, Minn.
- Pastor J. Scott Pierson, Golden Valley, N.D.
- *Pastor Kirk Thorson, Sioux Falls, S.D.
- Tammy Vukonich, Amery, Wis.

Eleven more names needed

World Missions Corporation

(10 terms of five years each)

- **Pastor Joel Baker, Bloomington, Minn.
- Pastor Eugene Enderlein, Plymouth, Minn.
- Pastor Dean Feistner, Madison, S.D.
- Karen Hart, Fairbury, Neb.
- **Pastor David Johnson, Larimore, N.D.
- Isaiah Miller, Fargo, N.D.
- **Bill Sheldon, Ray, N.D.
- **Ken Sletten, Duluth, Minn.
- Joan Smith, Brooklyn Center, Minn.
- *Andrew Quanbeck, Moorhead, Minn.
- *Pastor Craig Wentzel, Edmore, N.D.

Nine more names needed



BOARD & COMMITTEE NOMINEES

Conference Registration
 An online registration form for the Annual Conference can be found at:
aflc.org/about-us/conferences
 Cost: \$45/individual • \$75/couple
 Online registration through May 29.
 Price at the door increases to \$50/individual and \$80/couple.

Budget Analysis Committee

- (One layman, three-year term)
 Paige Moan, Ontonagon, Mich.
 X

Benefits Board

- (One layman, five-year term)
 No nominees

Bay Broadcasting

- Voted on by corporation members*
- (One layman, three-year term)
 **David Perkins, Arlington, Wash.
 X

FLAPS Board

- Voted on by corporation members*
- (One pastor, five-year term)
 *Pastor Henry Mohagen, Reva, S.D.
 X

Parish Education

- (One pastor, five-year term)
 Pastor Erin Tormanen, Stanley, N.D.
 X

Home Missions Board of Directors

- Voted on by corporation members*
- (One pastor, two-year term)
 Pastor Luke Emerson, St. Francis, Kan.
 **Pastor Brian Westerbur, Grafton, N.D.
 - (One pastor, two-year term)
 *Pastor Jon Langness, Rapid City, S.D.
 X
 - (One layman, two-year term)
 *Dana Hagen, Sioux Falls, S.D.
 X
 - (One layman, two-year term)
 **David Hein, San Antonio, Texas
 X

World Missions Board of Directors

- Voted on by corporation members*
- (One pastor, two-year term)
 **Pastor David Johnson, Larimore, N.D.
 **Pastor Joel Baker, Bloomington, Minn.
 - (One layman, two-year term)
 *Dr. Lyle Mattson, Greenbush, Minn.
 Kaetlyn Dávalos, Plymouth, Minn.
 - (One layman, two-year term)
 *Bill Sheldon, Ray, N.D.
 X

Youth Board

- (One layman, five-year term)
 Jeremiah Bang, St. Paul, Minn.
 *Michele Smith, Brookings, S.D.

Coordinating Committee

- (One pastor, five-year term)
 Pastor David Lusk, Newville, Pa.
 X

Association Retreat Center

- Voted on by corporation members*
- (One layman, five-year term)
 *Roger Benson, Brooklyn Center, Minn.
 X

Schools Board of Trustees

- Voted on by corporation members*
- (One layman, five-year term)
 Dean Nelson, Vergas, Minn.
 X
 - (One pastor, one-year term)
 No nominees

Evangelism and Discipleship

- (One layman, five-year term)
 No nominees

PEOPLE & PLACES

Members of the AFLC Coordinating Committee approved **Ness Lutheran Church**, Mekinock, N.D., for the congregational roster.

Pastor Scott Guhl has resigned from St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran, Gifford, Ill.

Pastor Al Bedard has resigned from Sunnyside Free Lutheran, Stacy, Minn.

Members of **Christ Lutheran Church**, Shingleton, Mich., have decided to dissolve the congregation.

Pastor Nate Jore has accepted a call to serve with the International Orality Institute. Jore will start in his new role on Aug. 1, which will include stateside teaching and equipping, with the opportunity to travel internationally to encourage the work overseas. Jore and his family will finish up their work with AFLC World Missions in Uganda in July.

Pastor Brady Arneson, Honolulu, Hawaii, has accepted an appointment to an unfinished term on the AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship Board. His term expires in 2025.

Maggie Johnson, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College, has accepted a call to the position of radio manager for KAKN Radio in Naknek, Alaska. Johnson begins her role on May 10.

Madison Greven, the communications coordinator for AFLC World Missions, has been hired by the Free Lutheran Bible College. Greven will teach composition and literature for the new associate and bachelor degree programs that launch this fall.



Bible College class spends spring break on mission trip

A group of 23 students from the Free Lutheran Bible College's Cross Cultural Ministries class traveled to Tlacolula, Mexico, March 20–27 to work with Foundation For His Ministry. Students worked on several projects, including building a sand volleyball court and revamping a playground set and basketball backboards. They also built relationships with the children served by the ministry.

Lee to be honored during Annual Conference

Pastor Robert Lee, former AFLC president, FLBCS faculty, and editor, will be honored at the Annual Conference for his work on the forthcoming sixth book in the AFLC Heritage Series, *From*

Freedom to Life. Parish Education, which is publishing the book on the history of the AFLC, will host a reception Wednesday, June 12, following the evening service. All are welcome.

Support the AFLC's magazine

The Lutheran Ambassador is free for all subscribers. Our ministry is subsidized by your gifts. Thank you! Our mission continues to provide encouraging and informative content. For information on giving visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

MARCH MEMORIALS

Bible College
Ruth Claus
David Faldet

Seminary
David Faldet

Bay Broadcasting
Greg Schmitke

Lutheran Ambassador
Wendy Holm
Everett Knudsvig
Sandra Fontaine

General Fund
Barry & Marjorie Demsky

World Missions
Pastor Alvin Grothe
Dean Anderson

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-March 31, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN MARCH	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$33,314	\$130,210	28	\$109,566
Evangelism	6,549	29,774	22	32,079
Youth Ministries	9,343	38,441	25	47,111
Parish Education	8,564	66,592*	36	29,857
Seminary	17,377	81,477	28	70,567
Bible College	37,161	118,263	25	100,623
Home Missions	18,218	86,300	20	80,946
World Missions	17,534	101,793	21	103,362
Personal Support	58,398	212,555	27	196,563
TOTALS	\$206,456	\$865,406	26	\$770,645

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving
* Reflects correction to February gifts reported in the April issue.

Our healing.

BY AMY SKOGERBOE

Healing has become an increasingly complex concept the more life I have lived. Getting a clear understanding of it seems to be at once elusive and yet vitally important. The absence of healing causes deeper infection and greater damage over time, both to our physical and emotional wounds. It cannot be ignored or postponed without consequence. Those who procrastinate in seeking healing with intention most often pay a price along with those closest to them. It is an essential component of our life journey. But what is it?

In my younger years, my elementary understanding of healing was that something that hurt was removed or disappeared: a scar vanishes day by day, an illness subsides, a diagnosis is reversed. As I got older, I began to see the importance of relational healing: a fight is resolved, anger is diminished, apologies are made, friendships are restored. As an adult, the gravity of healing began to strike me differently in regard to spiritual matters: strongholds are broken, faith is renewed, forgiveness is granted, sin is vanquished. Yet along with the progressive comprehension of all of these aspects of healing came myriad new questions and a struggle to reconcile what looked like God's choice not to heal in many circumstances. If you haven't encountered that quandary yet, be guaranteed that your moment is coming.

My family has prayed for 23 years that my mother would be healed of what were initially undetermined causes that began to steal her strength and overall ability to engage life to the full. We wanted to see the unknown "wounds" within her be miraculously removed by the hand of our Father and Great Physician, knowing he is capable of it. Beyond his capacity to restore her, we also believe to our core that God loves her deeply and is for her good. So we ask ourselves sincerely, "Is God healing her? Will God heal my mom?" And that right there, my friend, is the heart of the matter.



What is his healing, and will he do it?

Listen to what Scripture says: "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isaiah 40:29). "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). And, "Lord my God, I called to You for help, and You healed me" (Psalm 30:2).

In this wrestling match of understanding God as our healer and what his healing entails, I believe he has brought me out of the complexity that my mind devolved into and back to one simple truth. Friends, as believers, our healing is the gospel. My momma's affliction has been overcome, and she *will* be restored beyond what we could ask or imagine. This healing has a name, and his name is Jesus. Two thousand years ago, God saw the need to reach my mother's deepest wounds, and he sent his Son to the cross to be the remedy for her body, mind, and soul. As a teenager, she accepted his offer of restoration, and that gift is promised to her and will be fully realized. I will see it, our family and my dad will see it, and more importantly, so will she, and we will worship.

To say this renewed understanding of

what God's healing means is affirming and reassuring to me is a vast understatement, and I pray it is for you, as well. When you received Christ, your healing was gifted to you, and it *began* then and there. It is an ongoing process of refreshing your mind with gospel promises and accepting them to your core as your reality now and in the future. This world and the brokenness that comes from being a citizen in it are breaking you daily, eroding your faith, diminishing your body, and attempting the eternal destruction and damnation of your soul. But our risen King has poured out his life-giving blood to seal your eternal healing and salvation, which cannot be taken from you. This is our truth.

Yes, there is balm in Gilead, a great physician there, For Jesus died on Calvary our sicknesses to bear; Then ask in faith believing, His promises are true, Doubt not, but come receiving, there's healing now for you.

Skogerboe is a member of St. Olaf Lutheran, Montgomery, Ill. "Balm in Gilead," African American Spiritual.

BUILDING THE BASE \ \ \ Part 3

This is most certainly true.

BY PASTOR J. CHRISTIAN ANDREWS

To the redeemed, Christ's promise is comfort. He has not revealed when he will return, but as part of the comfort of the promise, he has given us the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Trinity is nowhere explained; it is simply stated. Our confessions are a witness that we do indeed believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, we believe, works through the Church, pointing to Jesus for God's eternal purpose for us.

In both the First and Second articles of the Apostles' Creed, we confess both belief in and belief about the Father and the Son. At first glance, it might seem that while we confess our belief in the Holy Spirit in the Third Article, we don't say anything about him. However, if we consider more carefully the content of the Third Article, we come easily to the understanding that what follows, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," is descriptive of his work.

First, the Holy Spirit works through the Church. Our belief in the Church is not to be thought of as separate from the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to gather the saints into the body and feed them there through Word and sacrament. So it is that we explain his work by confessing that "He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves

it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church, He daily forgives abundantly all my sins" (Third Article explanation; *Small Catechism*).

The Holy Spirit does not work alone, nor does he draw attention to himself. Jesus said, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me" (John 15:26). This we confess with the words in the *Small Catechism*: "in union with Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit, because he is God, does the work of forgiveness, but when we confess that we believe in the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit is pointing us to Jesus. It is Jesus who died for our sins and was raised for our justification. It is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit who died. It is only the Son who died and who was raised from death so that we might be forgiven. It is to the cross and the empty tomb that the Holy Spirit sends us—the cross where Jesus suffered the consequences of our sin and the resurrection that proved his power over sin and death.

Our confession ends with the declaration that we believe in life everlasting. As with believing in the Church and in the forgiveness of sins, these words speak of the work of the Holy Spirit. The *Small Catechism* explanation words it this

way: "... and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ." It is the Holy Spirit who confirms to us God's will for us. Knowing God's peace in our lives through forgiveness is a beautiful thing; but we are reminded that the things of this life are temporary, and that God has a greater plan for us, one that has no end. This life will pass, but we will continue to exist after this life. It is the Holy Spirit, then, who calls us to repentance and grows faith in us through the hearing of the Word so that we can believe in Christ. We can then also look forward with joy and anticipation to life after this life.

The Apostles' Creed is a simple and beautiful declaration of a mystery. God the Father created. God the Son re-created us by purchasing us from slavery to sin with his blood. God the Holy Spirit confirms to us through his calling and gift of faith that what God has done is for us, that we "might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness" (Second Article explanation; *Small Catechism*).

This is most certainly true.

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