

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

DECEMBER 2016

The Promise

foretold and fulfilled





THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

BY PASTOR TOM PARRISH

Today, Christianity is in a battle around the world for its very life. Persecution of Christians is increasing. Even America is returning to all forms of paganism. So much so that this persecution is focused specifically on Jesus. In fact the hatred, ridicule, and crude jokes about Jesus are at an all-time high.

Why is that? Because Jesus is the focus of the Bible and of all creation. God has come among us in the incarnation of Jesus. He tells us life is not about us, but instead makes it clear that life is about Him. And He asks us to surrender to Him.

This is infuriating to many who still want to have the final word, who want to be their own boss, who want to be God. This battle has now come to America. Not only are there lies and a degrading of Jesus from secular progressives, the media, and the government, but also from many so-called Christian leaders who refuse to believe totally in Jesus.

The message of the Bible is not as complex as some seem to make it. The message is simple, comprehensive, and focused: It's all about Jesus.

Colossians 1:15-17 spells out this message: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

I am forever amazed when I hear someone say that Jesus never claimed to be God or that the Bible never says He was God. These verses from Colossians directly contradict those statements. Verse 15 is an especially powerful statement: that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation." The invisible God becomes visible to men in "the Son of his love" (vs. 13). We have Jesus' own words: "He that has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). And we have the Apostle John's testimony about Jesus: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

A danger that Christians face today is making up a Jesus of our imagination rather than listening to and obeying the Jesus of the Bible. This is not the will of Jesus.

Today, you and I have a choice. We can marginalize Jesus by ignoring Him, rejecting Him, refusing Him, or belittling Him. Or we can once and for all come to the realization that our purpose, our lives, and our deaths are truly all about Jesus. The heart of the message of the Bible is singular: It's all about Jesus.

Parrish, Mendota Heights, Minn., operates Stepping Into Eternity Ministries, which develops discipleship materials and seminars (toeternity.org).

Ah, Lord, who hast created all,
How hast Thou made Thee weak and small,
That Thou must choose Thy infant bed
Where ass and ox but lately fed!

—Martin Luther

After all, isn't Christmas the beginning of our hope?
It is the celebration of God becoming man and
taking on the "form of a servant" so that he could
ultimately give His life for us.

—David Jeremiah

Christmas is not just an annual holiday. It is not a
day to glorify selfishness and materialism. Christmas
is the celebration of the event that set heaven to
singing, an event that gave the stars of the night sky
a new brilliance.

—Billy Graham

... without the incarnation, Christianity isn't even a very good story, and most
sadly, it means nothing. "Be nice to one another" is not a message that can give
my life meaning, assure me of love beyond brokenness, and break open the
dark doors of death with the key of hope. ... The incarnation is an essential
part of Jesus-shaped spirituality.

—Michael Spencer

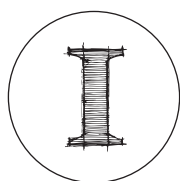
God sends his Son—here lies the only remedy. It is
not enough to give man a new philosophy or better
religion. A Man comes to men.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer



The Seed

of the woman



By Pastor Steve Berntson

In Mel Gibson's 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*, there is a startling moment in the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus prays in anguish, prostrate on the ground, a snake slithers toward Him. Jesus stands, looks at Satan (whose face betrays fear), then suddenly stomps on that snake, Jesus' heel crushing the serpent's head.

Biblically literate movie goers were transported in that moment from Gethsemane to another garden 4,000 years earlier, the Garden of Eden. There, in Genesis 3:15, this moment was prophesied by God Himself as He spoke to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." This is the first prophecy in the Bible, and it points to the coming of Christ. Here we have the earliest instance of Christmas foretold.

Prior to this, there was no need for Christmas. Our first parents walked in fellowship with the Creator, and conversed freely with God "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). Sin had not yet severed that relationship, nor had Satan taken captive our race through his deception and our disobedience. But now sin has entered, and death through sin (Romans 5:12). The Lord knew, and history reveals the enormous suffering that would come as a consequence of that sin. Yet at that very moment, God pronounced that the devil would be defeated, and that this would come about through the seed of the very woman he had deceived.

God's salvation would be delivered, not by angel armies (though they would sing God's praises that holy night), but through "your pain in childbearing" (Genesis 3:16) as Mary herself would experience that first Christmas. Through sin's curse, blessing would be born to all of us.

The Apostle Paul, in Galatians 3, writes in a similar way about the cross. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (vs. 13-14). Then, in verse 16, he makes it clear that God's promise to Abraham would be fulfilled through a singular descendant: "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one,

'and to your offspring,' who is Christ." God's promises to Eve and Abraham are fulfilled in the one and the same Savior, born to Mary and to us at Christmas, Jesus the Christ.

I John 3:8 also testifies that the initial promise made to Eve in Genesis 3:15 has been fulfilled in Jesus. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." From the crèche to the cross to the empty tomb on Easter morning, we say "Mission accomplished." Jesus has indeed "bruised his head." Yet, our defeated foe still wreaks havoc in this world. Just read any newspaper. Paul's words in Romans 8:22 still apply, "The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

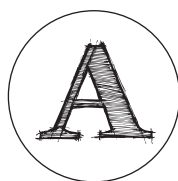
Of course, we know the story isn't over yet. Satan's head was fatally wounded at the cross, but we still await the fulfillment of Romans 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

For a unique perspective on the Christmas story, I recommend reading Revelation 12. There, John is given a vision not only of Christmas past but also of our present condition. Here we read that the same dragon who sought to destroy Jesus in his infancy makes "war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (vs. 17). This chapter also tells us that "He comes to you [earth and sea] in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short" (vs. 12).

Today, Christians around the world are killed for their faith—jihadists of various stripes are waging their war of terror; a Russian armada is churning through the Mediterranean Sea toward Syria; and here at home an increase of lawlessness is manifest in various anarchist movements. The dragon's fury is on full display, and it may be that things will yet get much worse. But from the beginning we have the promise of a Savior. The seed of Eve was born to Mary, and through her offspring, Jesus, the promises given to Abraham have come to us.

Even as we marvel at the promise of Christmas foretold and rejoice in its fulfillment as we celebrate Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, so we look forward to its final consummation when Christ shall come again, and Satan will at last be crushed underneath His feet.

Berntson serves New Hope Free Lutheran, Jamestown, N.D.



By Pastor LeRoy Petersen

As a young boy growing up and going to Sunday school, the celebration of Christmas was always a time of wonder to me. Our Christmas programs always focused on the Christ child with songs and pageantry. I even had a chance to play a wise man at one of our programs.

As I look back, I think of a baby born in the little town of Bethlehem with very poor conditions. Cattle lowing. Sheep bleating. Shepherds in the fields keeping watch. Angels singing. Wise men traveling from afar with a star to lead them.

As I have grown older, the wonder of Christmas and all that it holds has not diminished, yet I find myself asking questions like, “How did this all happen? How did it come about—this miraculous star leading this group of Gentile royalty to a Jewish King?”

The answer, of course, is by the mighty hand of our gracious, loving, and merciful God. He had set in place the plan from the very beginning, before sin entered the world and our world fell into deepest darkness.

God, through His very Word, has spoken hope through the prophets to the hearts of men who lay in darkness. There are many prophecies that foretell Christ’s coming.

To that end, God used a man named Balaam, whose eyes were opened and whose mouth spoke what the Lord spoke to him. And Balaam speaks this in Numbers 24:17: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth.”

Here the Word was proclaimed.

I wonder if this Word was also proclaimed by the Prophet Daniel when he was taken as a captive to Babylon. While there, he was eventually made ruler over the whole province and chief over the wise men (magi) in that place (Daniel 2:48). Perhaps Daniel prophesied to them of the star. However they obtained this knowledge, truly only God knows.

Perhaps it was this Word from the Lord that moved the wise men to look for the star that God spoke through Balaam. Whatever the case, God was working in the hearts of men, even Gentiles, and drawing them to Himself.

The mystery of the star is an incredible thing.

In Isaiah 60:1-2, God speaks of the future light that would rise in the darkness, and then He says: “Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising” (vs. 3).

Again, the Word of God is proclaimed. The world was in the darkness of sin, but the hope of the Light was to come to all men announced by the star over the birthplace of Jesus.

In Isaiah 55:11 God tells us this: “So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

God’s Word will not return to Him void. And we indeed see the fulfillment of that Word: “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him’” (Matthew 2:1-2).

These magi (or wise men), who were Gentiles, had followed the star and arrived at their destination. They had come seeking a Jewish king, but desired to worship Him as their King. This is a perfect reflection of God’s ultimate desire that “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

The star had led them to the place where the Savior was, this One who is the Light of the World.

So what is our response to this One who was born in a manger? We, too, are to worship Him just as the magi had come to do. We, too, are to make Him Lord of our lives and love Him with all that we are and have.

Christmas has always been a time of joy and peace and hope for me, especially as I look back and see all that God has promised which has come to be and is yet to come. The Savior has come.

Dear friends, let us also proclaim this good news of great joy to those who do not yet know Him.

The Psalmist David says in Psalm 145:1-4: “I will extol You, my God, O King, And I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts.”

This Christmas, as we celebrate the wonder of the star and the magi, may we truly see the wonder of God’s great love for us in His One and only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. To Him be the glory.

Petersen serves United Free Lutheran, Greenbush, Minn.

The Magi

and the star



Virgin Birth

*& two men
given a promise*



"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (God is with us)" (Isaiah 7:14).

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:21-23).



By Judi Westgate

We see in these verses a promise and its fulfillment. God spoke to Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14), and God spoke to Joseph through an angel in a dream (Matthew 1:21-23). Both of these men were of the line of David. Both were chosen to be in the lineage of the Promised One. Both received the message that the virgin would give birth to a Son. After that they could not be more different.

Ahaz, king of Judah, was an evil and unfaithful—but powerful—man who disdained the authority of God and despised the counsel of His servant, Isaiah. Judah was under attack from a coalition of Israeli and Syrian forces. The Lord, through Isaiah, offered His protection and His comfort. Ahaz preferred to worship false gods and entered into a treaty with Assyria for protection. Judah was reduced to a mere satellite of the more powerful Assyrians, and Ahaz was little more than a puppet king. He found his joy in material objects, and his security in the might of men.

Finally, Ahaz rejected the most precious of gifts. When God deeply wanted to give him a sign of hope, he contemptuously refused to receive the gift. As a petulant child he sneered, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord." God was offering to Ahaz any sign he desired to prove that the power and protection of the Lord would be sufficient. Ahaz would not even receive the gift. So the sign was offered anyway—but it was given to those who would receive through the eyes of faith.

Approximately 700 years later, Ahaz's descendant Joseph would react in a completely opposite way to a similar promise. Joseph was a humble man, a poor carpenter, but rich in faith. Although the words are few which describe his experience, they are sufficient to convey his torment. A man of honor, he had every reason to believe he had been dishonored. With his broken heart and shattered dreams he still sought to serve the Lord, remaining faithful to the woman he thought had been faithless to him. He could not bring himself to believe her story, but he could not subject her to the punishment he believed she deserved. When a messenger from God

convinced him of her innocence, this righteous man willingly assumed one of the greatest responsibility ever assigned to a human being. He would be husband to the mother of the Messiah, and he would be a father to this helpless child, this mighty God.

One man refused to believe the messenger of the Lord, even when offered any sign he could request, no matter how deep or how high. The other man accepted the messenger of the Lord, even when asked to believe the impossible to be true. What Ahaz heard with disbelief, Joseph must have heard with greater joy than anyone can imagine. Not only was Mary vindicated, but this ancient prophecy was at last coming true. The Messiah was coming—in fact He was already present—and Joseph would have a major part in serving Him. Joy, fear, excitement, humility, and wonder must have overwhelmed him. The greatest responsibility ever was being entrusted to him.

Ahaz rejected the salvation the Lord offered to him, not only on earth, but also eternally. Joseph offered himself to give safe harbor and protection to the Son of God. One would rather die than serve God; one would rather die than fail God.

This promise and its fulfillment constitute one of the hardest miracles to believe, the most impossible to prove, and must be totally and completely accepted on faith. Only the eyes of faith can comprehend and accept a gift of this magnitude.

As we celebrate the birth of Immanuel, let us recognize the gifts that He brings. He brings the gift of salvation. He brings the gift of faith that we may receive that salvation. He brings the gift of the testimony of the prophets and shows us their fulfillment. He brings the gift of the example of the faithful servant. Let us receive these gifts with eyes of faith that need no sign or proof, and let us rejoice that Immanuel has been born, God with us.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

*Westgate is a member of St. Matthew Lutheran,
Millerstown, Pa.*



By Heather Vogt

God rarely appears the way we expect Him to. This isn't news to me, but I need to be constantly reminded of it.

When I think of Christmas, my thoughts most often drift to Mary. It's probably because she's the leading lady, and one of the few females in the Christmas story. Her character strikes me most. I particularly like the Annunciation scene, where the angel Gabriel appears to her and declares she will be the mother of the Messiah. The Gospel of Luke says that she is "troubled" by this news, and then asks to know the basics. How does a virgin have a baby? "And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God' (Luke 1:35).

The Bible gives few details about Mary's true reaction to this. We get her final words, but we aren't shown how she really feels. I've seen several film versions of this moment, and Mary always accepts this news, then goes about her day like a deer in the headlights—dazed and confused. This is understandable, considering that her life had just been blown to smithereens.

Before Gabriel appeared, Mary had a plan. She was going to get married and live in Nazareth with her husband—tending to the shop and gardens, raising children, living life as well as one could in Roman-occupied Israel. Now she was to be the unwed mother of the Messiah, the Son of God. This change of plans would stretch far beyond her little bubble in Nazareth, because her son was to be Savior of the World.

Was this moment—this future—a gift from God? Of course it was, and Mary knew that. But even so, this was not how Mary had expected her life to turn out.

This also wasn't how she expected the Messiah to appear. It certainly was not what the rulers and priests expected, as we see when Jesus begins His ministry later in the Gospels. The people of Israel knew what their Messiah was going to be, because Isaiah had prophesied it almost 700 years before:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall

be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on the throne of his father David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

How many rabbis and kings and soldiers of Israel had held on to these words, during all the dark years since God spoke them? Through the wars, the collapse of Israel and Judah, the captivities and exiles. And now, as they lived under the stranglehold of Rome, this promise was more important than ever. They were ready for a new King, one who would destroy Rome and return them to the golden days of David. They were ready and waiting for a mighty God of zeal and justice.

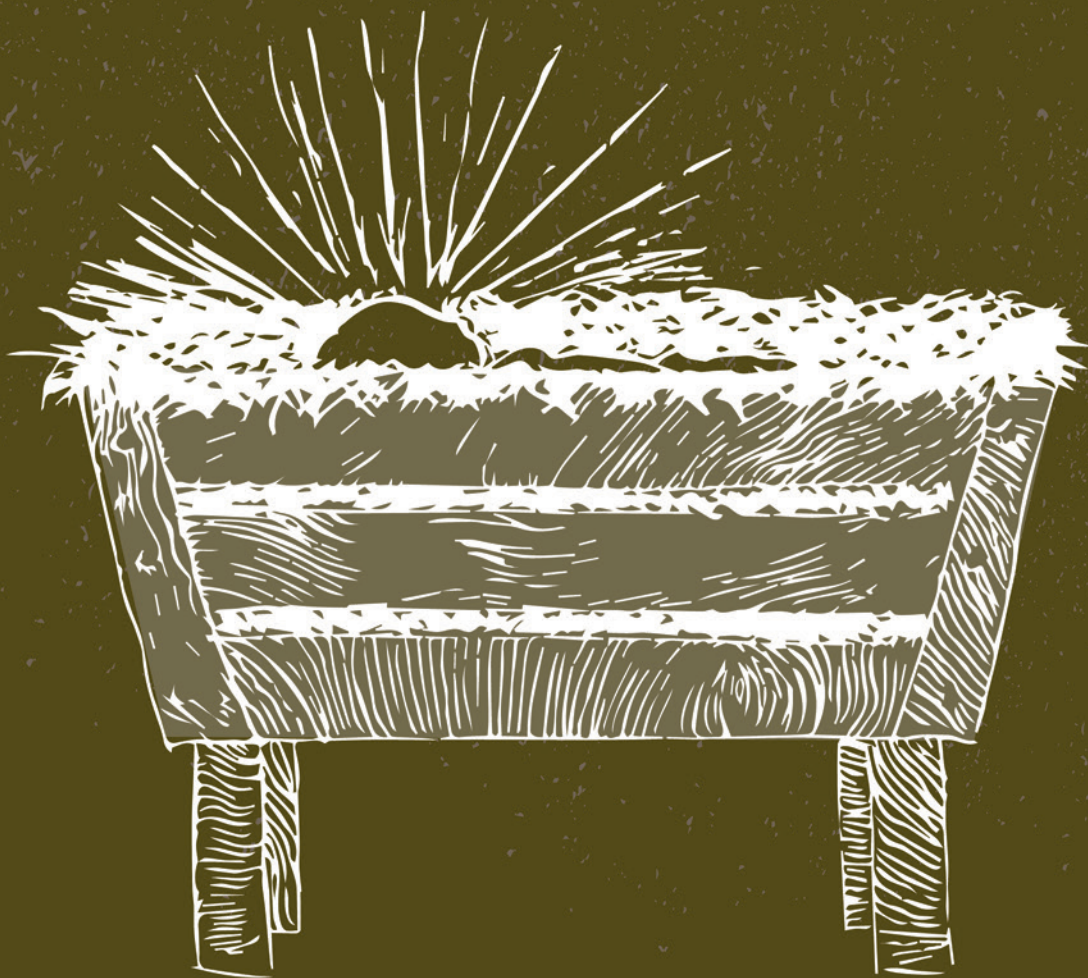
Many forgot the important parts of this promise. They were all expecting a powerful prince, and instead they were given a baby boy, born to a poor girl in a stable. This Messiah would conquer the world, but not at the head of an army, and not with the weapons of war. He would fight with love, extend grace, and though His coming did promise victory, above all it promised peace. A people oppressed may give peace lip service, but often in their hearts they want a very different kind of justice.

Jesus was not what was expected—not by his mother, not by His people Israel. Even today, Jesus is not always what He is expected to be, even to those of us who believe in Him.

So what do we do when God doesn't appear the way we want Him to? When we want to believe His plan is right and best, but we're confused and hurt and desperate for reassurance? Remember Mary's response to the angel: Listen to what God is telling you. Ask Him questions if you want to. Take a deep breath and pray, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Don't expect it to be easy—but do expect God to come through for you.

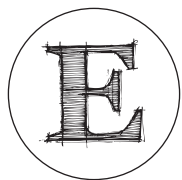
Vogt, a 2009 graduate of AFLBS, lives in Sandwich, Ill.

Unto us,
A Child



The Righteous Branch





By Erling Langness

Even before creating mankind, God, knowing that we would sin, made plans to redeem us. After Adam and Eve sinned, God's plan for redemption was already in place. God promised Abraham that through his family everyone would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-2). Later, He revealed that the Redeemer would come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 19:10), and from the family of David (I Chronicles 17:11-13). It was an amazing prophecy, given that David himself, as a young shepherd boy, was empowered through God to kill the giant Philistine Goliath. God then called David to become a great leader of his people. But like all mankind, he also was in great need of a Savior following his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. David had to face the consequences of his sins. But it was their son, Solomon, through whom Jesus came.

The prophet Jeremiah lived in a difficult time period. God commissioned him (Jeremiah 1:10) to "uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow, and build and plant." During Jeremiah's time, Judah had totally rejected God. God, in turn, allowed Judah to live with their consequences. As Jeremiah wrote from prison, the streets of Judah and Jerusalem lay desolate without people or animals, because the people had been carried away and were living in captivity (33:14).

Jeremiah first prophesied of the coming Redeemer in 23:5-6, a prophecy repeated in 33:14-16: "Out of the family of David will come a righteous branch," giving hope to a people who had long lived without hope.

Looking to the New Testament, we see God's provision in all the preparations that were needed to fulfill this prophecy. God prepared the parents of John the Baptist, He prepared Mary for the virgin birth, and He even prepared Joseph to believe in the miracle of Jesus' birth. The wise men from afar were prepared as they searched for the promised one. And at the last moment, the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem were prepared for the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jesus' birth. God took care of each minute detail, even down to the availability of the stable and the placing of the star in the sky for the wise men to follow.

What was the purpose of Jesus' coming? He came into the world to reveal the nature of God. Matthew 1:23

says, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which interpreted is "God with us." In Luke 1:32, the angel Gabriel told Mary of the purpose of Jesus' birth: "He will be a great man and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give Him the throne of his ancestor David. Your son will be the King of Jacob's people forever, and His kingdom shall never end."

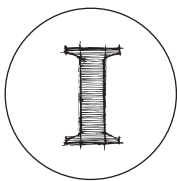
If God went to all the work of giving and fulfilling the prophecies, then what are we to do today? Let's look to the shepherds' response to seeing the Christ child in Luke 2:17: "When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child." As believers, we have a message to bring to those whom God has placed in our lives. The message of Jeremiah 33:15 needs to be told to our world, for it is a message of righteous judgment: Jesus will do what is fair and right in the land. The world is in desperate need of answers and justice. It may be that Christians in this country are soon going to be paying a price for their faith.

When tribulations and persecutions come, there will be no more lukewarm Christians. God is calling us today to be His ambassadors and represent the gospel of Christ to the world. God is calling believers to live out lives that are pleasing to Him. I John 3:9 says, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God."

Jesus came to earth to defeat sin, death, and the devil. We know that God is ultimately victorious in this battle. Christmas should be a time of thanksgiving and hope. Let's make sure that message is lived out in our spheres of influence. Just as the prophecy of Jesus' birth was fulfilled, so will the prophecy of Jesus' return to earth come to be. Are we telling others about our great God? Do our lives display His love and His power? Will there be people in heaven because we were faithful to tell them of this God who loves them, and who came down at Christmas long ago to redeem them?

Langness is a member of Hope Free Evangelical Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.

66



By Andrea Christenson

It was an unlikely place for a king to arrive.” Grandfather stirred the coals and added another log to our fire. Pulling my wool blanket closer around my shoulders I settled down to listen to one of my favorite stories.

“It was an unlikely family too. Now, I’m not talking about the first shepherd king from Bethlehem, that is quite another story. A good story, one filled with unlikely happenings and unlikely people. Some other time I will tell you about King David and how he went from raising sheep outside Bethlehem to shepherding a nation.

“But tonight, I will tell you about how God keeps His promises to us. Back when our story takes place, Bethlehem only held about 200 people, not much different from today. Just a small, backwater town outside Jerusalem, it was a very unlikely place to be the birthplace of the Shepherd King.”

Outside the glow of the fire, I saw the sheep moving restlessly, bedding down for the night. The ewes circled around their lambs and then they laid down together. A stillness crept over the hill. The fire crackled and Grandfather resumed his tale.

“God gave us a promise. To this little town, something wonderful would happen. Do you remember what the Prophet Micah proclaimed about our Bethlehem? The promise God gave to us?”

This was my cue. I stood and recited the words Grandfather helped me to memorize years before. “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity. Therefore He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth” (Micah 5:2-4).

I sat, pleased that I remembered my lines so well.

“Yes, Bethlehem is an unlikely place; should not the king be born in a palace?” Grandfather’s voice rumbled in the growing darkness. “But we believed the Lord would keep His promise. Those of us who studied the Scriptures looked for the coming of this king every day. We knew as the Psalmist did that God ‘has remembered His covenant forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations’ (Psalms 105:8).

“People wondered, would the promised king come from this family or that family? As it turned out, the family He was born into didn’t even live in Bethlehem. God moved the whole nation to fulfill this prophecy.”

A breeze lifted a corner of the blanket around my shoulders. Grandfather tucked it back in before continuing.

“When I was a young man, not much older than you, a decree went out from Caesar that the whole Roman empire needed to register themselves in their hometown. I believe Caesar wanted to fill his coffers with additional taxes. A small family from Nazareth came here to Bethlehem to register. Joseph, the husband, held the lineage of King David. His wife, Mary, was pregnant and near her time. While they were here, she delivered the child, a son.”

Grandfather’s face took on a glow at these words. “On that day, God fulfilled His promise to us. His Son was born here, in Bethlehem. God sent an angel choir to proclaim His birth to the world. They sang to us shepherds of the one who came to be our Savior. A king, who would shepherd His people.”

I looked up at the stars twinkling above and tried to picture the sky full of angels.

“My friends and I rushed to see this new baby. We went to the place where His family was sheltered. He was there, just as the angels said, wrapped in swaddling clothes. His mother and father beamed with pride. A Savior, born to a humble family, born in a humble dwelling, born in the humble unlikely town of Bethlehem.”

Grandfather stared into the fire, his eyes unfocused. I knew he was reliving that night. A smile crossed his lips and he looked at me again. “God is faithful to us. He always keeps His promises. When He sent His Son to be born in Bethlehem, He showed His great love for us. Someday I will tell you what happened to His Son and what other promises He has kept. But tonight, let’s sing of Him and His faithfulness. What song should we sing in response to Him and His love?”

I knew just the one. I raised my lyre and cleared my throat. I strummed a note and began, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Christenson is a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.

Bethlehem

an unlikely place



A photograph of a person with long brown hair, seen from behind, wearing a dark blue hooded coat and a brown knit scarf. They are standing in a forest with many tall, thin trees and green undergrowth. The lighting is soft, suggesting a misty or overcast day.

I will never forget *Lena*

By Greta Wikstrom

The first time I saw Lena was on a summer day 25 years ago. It was my very first day as a full-fledged teacher, and in the little place where I had found work there were 12 children of various ages who excitedly waited to see who the new lady teacher was.

Toward the back of the classroom sat Lena. As I looked over the large group of children, I lingered longest over Lena. There was something about her honest face that gripped me. As the days and weeks went by, I got to know Lena better. She was always alert and always interested; she was never careless as the others were. She

was serious when that was called for, but never crabby and grumpy. None of the others were like Lena, and she became my favorite student.

That fall she was beginning fourth grade, but I regarded her as the oldest and most mature of my students even though there were big boys and girls in both the fifth and sixth classes. I made a special effort to be correct and fair to all the students so that no one in the room, including Lena, had reason to believe that she was my favorite. Yet as I prepared each lesson, I found that I always thought of what Lena would get out of my teaching.

Lena was very interested in the religion classes. As for myself, I have been a Christian from early childhood, and I soon found I had a kindred spirit with my small student. She absorbed everything I presented during these important classes and demonstrated an insight into biblical truths that amazed me. Little by little, I desired to teach her more and get know

her better by inviting her to my home. There I learned that she came from a large family in the northern part of the country. From the age of 2, she made her home far from family by living with childless relatives in my district. She had it good here and remembered nothing from her birth home. Her parents had never inquired about her, but she knew that her mother was dead and her father had married again. She was very happy with her foster parents who had taught her to fold her small hands in prayer and told her about that great Friend of children.

In a confidential moment she confided to me that she would like to be a missionary, of that she was fully decided. But I was the only one she had told. Not once at home had she mentioned her plans. I asked her how she had already made such a serious decision. Well, she had been a patient in a hospital two years ago and there was a young nurse who was preparing for the call to missions. Lena had admired her and dared to ask about



one thing and another. She also knew that there were many little children, and older ones, too, who didn't know about Jesus. Sister Anna-Lisa was going to travel to Africa to help and teach, and her enthusiasm had inspired a deep desire in Lena's childlike mind.

Before Christmas I asked the children if we should prepare a public Christmas festival. Everyone was immediately interested. Of utmost importance was the decision about what eventually should be done with the profits from the fest.

Lena was the first to raise her hand. She proposed that the money should be divided among

three chronically sick persons in the community: two young people and a middle-aged, lonely lady who ought to get encouragement at Christmas. I waited for several proposals, among others that the money should be used for a school trip. But there were no other suggestions. Remarkably, it was Lena's proposal which was well received by her friends. I had more than once noticed her good influence on the others.

So I wrote a little Christmas play with a Christian message which would be practiced for the festival. The leading role of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was of first importance. I asked the children if they would suggest an older sister who would be willing to help us in exactly that role. A big boy in the upper class then said, "That's not necessary. We have Lena!"

And so it came to be. Through the many rehearsals I realized that Lena really had talent. She lived out the role in an almost startling manner. The presentation of the play was a huge success, not least because of Lena's performance.

And so time went by and Lena left school. It was empty without her and I realized that I would never have another student like her again. She visited me now and then, and one day she had news to tell. She was going to begin at the folk school in the neighboring community. Her love of reading would keep her busy and the information she received could well benefit her. I rejoiced with her and wished her well.

That Lena thrived in school was no surprise, and I got to share in her experiences. But when she had begun the second term and came home for her usual Sunday visit, I sensed that she seemed tired and pale. She complained often about a headache, and I encouraged her to see a doctor and get something to strengthen her. She was surely reading too much, I thought.

Some weeks went by and I began to be seriously restless about her. One Sunday I waited in vain for her to visit, and the following week I learned that she was sick when she came home and was now in bed. As soon as I could I went to her home. Her foster mother met me and in tears told me that Lena had an incurable blood disease—she didn't have long to live.

She said so little as she lay in bed. Everything about her had changed—everything except the look in her dark eyes. She showed a spontaneous joy as she saw me. And then to gladden her even

more I told her not only that she had been my dearest student, but also that she had helped me in my daily work, that she had influenced her schoolmates in a good way, and that I always thought of her with thankfulness. I'll never forget the glow of happiness which spread over her sunken cheeks as I talked. And when I left she asked me to come to see her often, often—

Often would never be. Lena's strength weakened noticeably each time I saw her. Among other things she asked me to tell her a little from the school, and now and then I read from the Bible, which lay on the table beside her. She became still and folded her thin hands on the bedspread.

One afternoon when I sat by her, she looked at me a long time before she said, "I know that I shall die soon. But I am not at all afraid. And neither am I sorry that I never got to be a missionary. I get to go home to Jesus instead."

"Yes, little child," I said, and stroked her cheek. I didn't know that was the last time we would speak.

Two days later as I sat correcting the children's notebooks there was a knock on the door. A girl stood outside, out of breath, as if she had run very fast. And she had. Would I come immediately, she asked, for Lena was very sick.

I entered the sick room carefully. Her foster parents both sat with heads bowed by her bed. Lena looked like she had already crossed over the divide. But she must have heard that I had come because she opened her eyes and her hands moved on the bedspread. A weak smile was on her face. Perhaps she was already looking into glory's land. Then she closed her eyes and all was quiet. Lena had moved higher up.

Just as quietly as I had come, I slipped out of the room and let her foster parents be alone in their great sorrow.

Of the many children I have taught during my long teaching career, most have been forgotten. But the picture of a few students still clearly stand out in my memory. Most living of all of them is the picture of the young girl who died so young—Lena.

Reprinted from Samenes Venn, and translated from Norwegian by Pastor Raynard Huglen, Newfolden, Minn.

AFLC Schools offer continuing educational opportunities

January Interterm

Are you interested in learning more about the AFLC, Georg Sverdrup's vision for free and living congregations, or AFLC World Missions? Do you serve with a ministry board, committee, or church council but want to make that service profitable and joyful instead of a duty? Do you feel powerless to respond to the current cultural social trends? Visit the Free Lutheran Schools this January for teaching and training designed to equip believers to biblically address many of today's cultural issues and to train for life and ministry in the local congregation and community.

Seventeen classes will be offered Jan. 3-21. Featured guest instructors include Dr. Charles Aling and Dr. Owen Strachan. Webcasts will be available for select sessions. Some topics include:

- Discover useful tools to biblically address the topic of human sexuality in a confused culture.
- Understand how to best respond to a society that denies something as basic as gender.
- Learn how to make service on a ministry board and church council effective and joyful.
- Hear about the history of the AFLC, Georg Sverdrup's vision for free and living congregations, and the impact of AFLC World Missions.
- Study the Lutheran doctrine of election and learn the essentials to interpreting Scripture.

For a full schedule or to register, please visit www.aflbs.org/jterm or call the seminary office at 763-544-9501.

Mid-winter Online Bible Conference

An inaugural Free Lutheran Schools online streaming Bible conference will be available free of charge on Jan. 21, 2017, to anyone who wants to tune in as individuals, congregations, or districts. The sessions will be available online for a limited time following the event for use at a later date.

Sessions will include:

- "God's Word Works: Doctrine of the Word" with Pastor Steve Mundfrom
 - "Luther, Calvin, and Reformation Theology in Contrast" with Pastor Bob Lee
 - "You must, you cannot, you do: The Lutheran Doctrine of Election" with Dr. Phil Haugen
 - "What Does God's Word Say? Hermeneutics" with Pastor Jerry Moan
- Visit aflbs.org for schedule information.

WATERS IN THE WILDERNESS

DECEMBER 25

"God, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Hebrews 1:2).

G

od has spoken! There are many things demanding our attention on this Christmas Day. Nothing, however, is as wonderful as that which God is saying to us. And He is saying it through His Son, whose coming we celebrate.

Jesus has been appointed heir of all things. No one can change that appointment. Regardless of what people may think, Jesus will reign forever with His own, and every knee will bow before Him. Jesus is the creator of all things good. He is eternal, and His power is eternal. He made us, and knows our needs. Through Him God speaks to us today. The message is simple and wonderful: "I know you and your needs. I love you. I have sent my Son to save you. Believe in Him and be saved."

On Christmas we gather with loved ones whenever possible. We share gifts and joys with each other. We visit and fellowship. This is good. We also have sin and guilt. We must, therefore, give heed to what God is saying. "Unto you has been born a Savior."

It is an old message, but also new. It is given to us in these "last days." It is the message we need today. Thank God, it has been given. May this message be your deepest joy this Christmas.

Pastor John Strand, now deceased, was the first president of the AFLC.

Waters in the Wilderness is a daily devotional published by the AFLC Board of Parish Education in 1971 with Dr. Iver Olson, editor. All 365 meditations were contributed by AFLC members from many walks of life. "Here, they offer each a glass of cool and refreshing water each day to thirsting souls," wrote Olson in the preface. Reprinted by permission. The volume is out of print.

WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



LIFE ON CAMPUS

BY NICOLE JOHNSON

Ten rooms in the women's dorm at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School (Plymouth, Minn.) were recently renovated with new carpet, paint, and furnishings. This was the first step in a fund-raising campaign headed by the Women's Missionary Federation to renovate all of the rooms in the women's dorm. Current furnishings date back to the 1980s, though some lofted beds have replaced the single twin beds.

Dorm life is often a highlight to the campus experience. One student, Nicole (Hatton) Johnson, reflects on her time at AFLBS.

W

hen I was asked, "What is the greatest thing you came away from Bible school with?" I would say it brought me closer to God. Bible school taught me what it means to have a relationship with God. I didn't have much of a relationship with Him before I attended Bible school. I did all the right things like go to church, Bible camp, and youth groups.

But at Bible school I learned the importance of digging deep into God's Word and understanding the powerful messages He was teaching me.

As I grew closer to God it helped me let go of all the bitterness and pain I had experienced in the past. I was able to move on with my life. I gained lifelong friendships and met my husband, Michael, there. Bible school will always have a dear place in my heart. I want to make sure that everyone is able to go to Bible school. This is such a great opportunity.

I loved the dorm life where I experienced lifelong bonding fellowship. Being surrounded by women who love God and encourage you is a great gift. I have so many memories and friendships that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Johnson, formerly Hatton, lives in Fargo, N.D. She is a 2011 graduate of AFLBS.



Pictured (top) is a renovated room that was available for viewing during AFLBS' 50th anniversary celebration July 28-30. Above is a typical unrenovated dorm room before students arrived.

#

WMF Dorm Renovation

- Projected cost for refurbishing every room in the women's dorm: \$122,400
- Donations as of Sept. 1: \$34,000
- Each room is outfitted with a twin bed that can be bunked or lofted, and a desk and chair for each student.

Donations can be sent to Deb Benson, 39694 SD Highway 44, Armour, SD 57313-5511 or to AFLBS, 3134 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Please designate for project.

CMLC ordains licensed pastor

It has been 22 years since a national pastor has been ordained by the Central Mexican Lutheran Church. On Oct. 30, Pastor Jovani Martinez Rentería was ordained, with Pastor Milton Flores (national pastor), Pastor Elden Nelson (former president of the AFLC representing AFLC World Missions), and Pastor Todd Schierkolk (AFLC missionary to Mexico) officiating.

"It may seem strange to my many friends in the AFLC that we had to wait all of these long years," wrote Pastor Flores, "but I personally thank God, for He has provided a new servant to our congregations."

Rentería earned a diploma in business administration and energy conservation at the National Technological Institute in Celaya, Mexico, in 2001. At that time, he says he felt God's call into ministry during a Reformation celebration. Rentería was led in his studies of God's Word by Flores who trained him as a lay preacher.

"We started immediately to study some subjects from the AFLTS curriculum," wrote Flores. "We started our studies of the Lutheran Confessions for two or three hours every Saturday in the afternoon."

During the annual conference of the Central Mexican Lutheran Church last July, members decided to ordain Rentería once his studies had been completed. The ordination took place in the 499th anniversary of the start of the Reformation.

Pastor Nelson, in his ordination message, emphasized the "very personal call from God" to become a minister much like the prophets Moses and Jeremiah—"a very necessary call to this wounded and dying world."

Also participating in the service were Josué Flores (a 2016 graduate of AFLBS), who translated the message into Spanish; the reading of the vita by Pastor Milton Flores; and Scripture readings by Pastor Schierkolk and Paúl Hernández, a national pastor. Pastor Nelson led the rite of ordination.

"We thank God for the opportunity to praise Him together in Gethsemane congregation in Celaya," wrote Pastor Flores. "Being aware that God's Word teaches that 'the pastor-shepherd in an under shepherd of the great Shepherd of the sheep, the Lord Jesus Christ,' as quoted by Dr. Francis Monseth, we place our hope in the Lord of the harvest to provide more workers for the harvest in the not too distant future."



Pictured (from left) are Pastor Todd Schierkolk, Pastor Elden Nelson, Pastor Milton Flores, and (kneeling) Pastor Jovani Rentería.

FLAPS hires new director

Dr. Kevin Lee has been hired to head up the Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters (FLAPS). Lee, a doctor of dentistry from Beulah, N.D., has served on the FLAPS board since 2010. He is a member of Prince of Peace Lutheran, Beulah.

Lee will take over duties part-time starting on January 1, 2017, from Lavon Bohling, who has led the department since it was formed in 1999. His duties also include the Alaska flying mission.



PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Brad Putnam was ordained Oct. 23 at his home congregation, St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran in Cloquet, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating. He serves Augustana Lutheran, rural Duluth, Minn.

Pastor Nick Dyrud has accepted a call to serve as senior pastor of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. Dyrud served as associate pastor at Emmaus since 2007 and now fills the position most recently held by Pastor Tom Gilman, who resigned this summer. Dyrud will be installed as senior pastor on Dec. 4. The congregation will move forward to call an associate pastor.

Members of **Grace Lutheran**, Buckley, Wash., have announced the closing of the congregation.

Brady Arneson has begun work as a Home Missions Parish Builder in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he lived for more than a year following his graduation from AFLBS in 2014. Arneson, from Fosston, Minn., is working to start a new Home Missions church called the Waikiki Beach Gathering. They held their first service on Waikiki Beach on Nov. 6.

Pastor Ken Thoreson has accepted a call to serve as interim pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran in Gifford, Ill. The congregation was most recently served by Pastor Steve Lombardo, who retired. Pastor and Marilyn Thoreson most recently completed an interim ministry at Peace Free Lutheran, Canal Winchester, Ohio.



"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:9-13).

In Switzerland the Christmas (or winter) decorations go up early. Many department stores and businesses change their decorations during the month of October, skipping fall decorations altogether. Snow-covered pine or birch trees covered with lights, candy canes, and other decorations replace the sunglasses, sunflowers, and swimming trunks that decorated the stores for summer. All sorts of decorations can be seen, yet the common denominator is the presence of lights. Everywhere you look there are lights. I love Christmas time! For me, "it's the most wonderful time of the year."

Some people may decorate with lights during the Christmas season because it is tradition, or possibly because the days become shorter in winter. But

for the believer there is a more important reason. We decorate with lights as a reminder of "the true light" who came into the world to "give light to everyone" (John 1:9-13).

Switzerland is a beautiful country filled with delicious chocolates, cheeses, commodities, and comforts. It is actually one of the best countries in the world, placing second on the Legatum Institute's Prosperity Index. Switzerland placed first in governance, second in economy, and third in health according to a Forbes article.¹ Despite all of this, it is considered one of the suicide capitals of the world.² According to a 2012 *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* article, Switzerland reported three times as many suicide deaths than there were deaths by traffic accidents.

"Between 15,000 and 25,000 people attempt to kill themselves in Switzerland every year, according to a new survey, confirming Switzerland's place as one of the suicide capitals of Europe," cited the article.

In post-Christian Europe many have not received Jesus and continue to walk in spiritual darkness. "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name," and to those who will by grace receive Him and believe in His name, "He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). They will experience the fullness of grace

throughout eternity. Jesus, the Light of the world, was sent into the world for the salvation of all who believe. Likewise, missionaries are sent into the darkness of our world today to let their light show the way for people to believe and be saved from their sins.

Europe is suffering in the darkness of unbelief. It is a joy and privilege for me and my wife, Ednay, to spend three months in Switzerland as we proclaim the Word that brings faith (Romans 10:17) and is the Light of Christmas—Jesus Christ.

As you enjoy the beautiful Christmas lights this year, pray for missions and reflect upon how you also can be involved in bringing eternal life to those in darkness both near and far.

¹ www.forbes.com/sites/christopherhelman/2013/10/29/the-worlds-happiest-and-saddest-countries-2013#49d9ee486055

² www.thelocal.ch/20120523/3370

Abel and his wife, Ednay, are AFLC missionaries serving in Brazil. They are currently working for three months in Switzerland.



Smith ordination

Pastor Ron Smith was ordained Oct. 30 at Singsaas Free Lutheran in Hendricks, Minn., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating. Smith completed his theological education through the Summer Institute of Theology and has accepted a call to serve Grace Lutheran, Bruce, S.D. Pictured are Korhonen, Smith, and Pastor Steve Mundfrom, faculty at the AFLC Schools, and who was Smith's pastor at his home congregation of Calvary Free Lutheran, Arlington, S.D.



In Memoriam

Pastor Victor Young, 61, of Spicer, Minn., died Oct. 13 at his home. Born Oct. 24, 1954, he was the son of David and Joyce (Powers) Young. He married Melinda Dickerson on June 21, 1986.

He attended Lyle High School, graduating in 1973. He continued his education at the Association Free Lutheran Bible School, Austin Junior College, and Mankato State University, Minn., where he earned a major in history. Upon graduation he returned home and drove truck for Young Truck Lines for three years before he bought his own truck and trailer. He left the trucking industry in 1990 and began seminary training at the Free Lutheran Seminary, graduating in 1994. They moved to Spicer, where he took a call at Green Lake Lutheran and Gausdal Lutheran, serving these congregations for 22 years.

Victor had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which was the most important thing in his life, and that living a personal faith has now become sight. Victor's number one joy was preaching the gospel of Christ and that one must be born again spiritually through repentance of one's sins and true sincere belief in Christ.

Surviving are his wife, Melinda; one son, Matthew Young; two daughters, Amber Young and Amanda Young; his parents, David and Joyce Young; two brothers, Douglas (Joelle) Young, and Jarrod Young; and one sister, Michelle Young.

The service was Oct. 18 at Green Lake Lutheran. Burial was in the church cemetery.

OCTOBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS	Helen Dalen
Andrew Papillon	Sylvia Molstre
Ruth Claus	Glorianne Swenson
Bethel Cudmore	Helen Gray
Phil Thompson	Mavis Hellerstedt
AFLTS	Agnes Hviding
Pastor Victor Young	Carol Mackey
(2)	Adeline Kvam
General Fund	John Hilleren
Layton Raaen	Youth Ministries
Journey Missions	Andrew Papillon
Bethel Cudmore	... in honor of
WMF	AFLBS
Pat Angus	Pastor Wade Mobley
Carolyn Busko	

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-Oct. 31, 2016

FUND	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$61,591	\$369,829	\$286,256
Evangelism	8,507	102,511	114,726
Youth Ministries	9,227	86,513	92,229
Parish Education	17,043	129,047	121,868
Seminary	16,003	196,722	226,330
Bible School	29,890	414,262	441,505
Home Missions	61,183	409,064	387,452
World Missions	34,637	420,846	373,069
Personal Support	52,426	485,012	466,613
TOTALS	\$290,507	\$2,613,805	\$2,510,048
Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.			

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Who do I say Jesus is? The question that Jesus addressed to Simon Peter (Matthew 16:16) still must be answered today by us all, and it's an excellent Christmas question, too. But sadly a recent survey of American church-goers identified as evangelicals suggests that more than 70 percent of them do not know the correct answer.

"Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God," was one statement in the survey, which may seem to some at first glance to give Him His proper place, but it is seriously flawed and dangerously deceptive. To label Jesus a created being, even the first and greatest, is more akin to the convictions of a Jehovah's Witness than those of a Bible-believing Christian.

Why are so many confused about this? Three hundred years after Jesus lived on earth, it was the very issue deliberated during the first Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), and the result was this simple yet profound statement of faith concerning Him:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through Him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
He came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the
virgin Mary
and became truly human.

Athanasius, the church father who would become the champion in the battle to preserve this cornerstone of the faith, was convinced that salvation was at stake. If Jesus Christ was less than fully God, then salvation is lost, for only God can save. And

He had to become man, because death is the penalty for sin and can only be paid by the death of a man. He is both the Son of God and Son of Man.

Who do we say Jesus is? The issue of what we believe about Him is not merely an historical footnote that was settled in the far distant past, but it is a looming and living challenge to the faith today, due in part to the frightening ignorance of too many church-goers. An authority on modern cults believes that the answer to this question also marks the departure of most of these false systems of belief from biblical Christianity.

Who do I say Jesus is? The Christmas season is a good time to consider my answer.

The Apostles Creed declares that Jesus was "... conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary ..." The humanity of Jesus Christ is a foundation stone of our faith. While we must be careful not to emphasize this teaching in such a way that it minimizes His deity, it is important for believers to rejoice in the truth that He genuinely took on a human body ("made in the likeness of sinful flesh," says Romans 8:3) and became man.

His birth was a real one, and we probably should not diminish the significance of it by thinking that "no crying He made," as one Christmas carols states. His birth was a miraculous one, for His mother Mary was a virgin "when with child and when nursing her child, and the birth of her omnipotent Son detracted in no way from the virginity" (Augustine).

We stand amazed with the Apostle Paul when He wrote of Christ Jesus, "who, although He existed in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7). Scripture tells us that He shared our human limitations, knowing hunger and thirst; at times He was weary and slept; He cried. And certainly the greatest evidence of the humanity of Jesus was the reality of His suffering and death on the cross. God became man.

There is no question but that our mortal minds must find it impossible to reconcile the man Jesus with the King of kings and Lord of lords, His humanity with His deity. Fortunately we are not called to do so. Instead, we bow in adoration and wonder before the One who holds both

The issue of what we believe about Him is not merely an historical footnote that was settled in the far distant past, but it is a looming and living challenge to the faith today ...

natures in perfect union. "Come hither, ye faithful, triumphantly sing! Come, see in the manger the angels' great King!" (John Francis Wade).

In the midst of our Christmas meditations, may the miracle of the incarnation enflame our routine worship. May we know the miracle of faith that empowers us to proclaim with Peter, who confessed to the man Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).



Pastor Robert Lee

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
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Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

CHRISTMAS WRAPPINGS

BY PEGGY BERGLUND

We're in the middle of the season that brings with it the wrapping and unwrapping of gifts. "And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She *wrapped* Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7, my emphasis). Mary lovingly wrapped her baby, Jesus—the gift given to reconcile the world to His Father—and held Him in her arms. Our gifts to each other are to remind us of that Gift.

Wrapping is done in other ways, too. At the end of summer it's not unusual to see boats shrink wrapped, set aside until the time when it's appropriate for them to be unwrapped, enjoyed and put to use. There is the tendency in our politically correct society to want to keep Jesus as a baby, someone small and manageable—someone who can be tucked away when

He's considered irrelevant or not useful. Babies at least stay where you put them. Some babies, that is. But not Jesus. The world wants Jesus to stay a baby and remain in the manger, but that's not why He came. He came as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. It was as if a shadow of the cross was superimposed on His manger.

Philippians 2:6-8a says of Jesus, whose birthday we are about to celebrate: "Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." God wrapped His Son in human flesh, and sent Him to a world that tries to minimize Him, but will not succeed. The world wants to celebrate His birthday—Christmas—but has taken Him off the invitation list. If they

only knew Who it is that they are ignoring.

Some presents are too big to wrap. Their contents are obvious when put under the Christmas tree. A little boy, when asked if Jesus was in his heart, responded, "If Jesus is in my heart, shouldn't He be sticking out all over?" And he's right, Jesus will not be shrink wrapped. We are celebrating the birthday of the King of kings! "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9: 6-7a). We can't even get our minds wrapped around that gift.

Berglund is a member of Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis.