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MATTHEW'S



GOSPEL





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ENCOURAGING WORD

HIS POWER IN WEAKNESS

BY CHRISTINA OSTHUS

I can't speak for everyone, but I have to admit that the older I get the more fear and anxiety I experience. I am sure I figured as a kid that I would be braver as an adult. Of course it doesn't work like that, for one because courage is earned and fought for. Like wisdom, it really doesn't come automatically with age. I have so much stress that I sometimes feel paralyzed (and yes, "stress paralysis" is a thing according to *Mom's Night Out*). I don't always keep control of my emotions like I should. In the last month, I have experienced deeper pain than any before in my life. In short, I feel weak.

How do I express my feelings of weakness honestly, constructively, and in a way that glorifies God? Christian music is accused of being shallow, and probably a part of it is because of this difficult balance. I have a play list on my laptop called "Music to Cry With." As I peruse it, I see 130 songs—a few that might cheer me up, some that would soothe me, and some that I could sing along to, weakly and brokenly at the worst moments of my life. Some appeal to loss of a person or a relationship, while others relate to confusion and fatigue. There are songs by Jeremy Erickson, Chris Rice, Relient K, Superchick, Mary Beth Carlson, and Switchfoot. I am listening to them as I write this article, and I am not crying yet but I am feeling God's comfort washing over me. I would assume that the songs that speak to me the most genuinely are the ones written by others who have suffered.

Is it arrogant to imply that not everyone has suffered? Everyone in this world has had trials,

as no one would deny. Then again, there are depths of grief that some people never reach, either because they have insulated themselves from hurt or because they have been extremely blessed, I suppose. This makes me think of Aslan's statement to Digory in *The Magician's Nephew*, in the context of Digory's grief as his critically ill mother lies near death: "My son, my son ... I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this world know that yet. Let us be good to one another." Okay, now I am crying.

Do you know who sets forth his pain better than just about anyone in history? King David. When I find the lyrics in my play list a little lacking, I turn to him. Sometimes I think he is a little overly dramatic, but nothing compared to the confessional poets. Regardless, he displays an impressive range of emotions. So does Paul. Many times Paul paints an unflattering picture of himself, but I think that is by design, both on God's part and Paul's: after all, God tells Paul in II Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," and Paul says in response, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." So I am okay with my weaknesses, because I expect that God's healing, restoration, and empowerment will be life-giving, and will be infinitely better than I could be in my own strength.

Osthus, a 2006 graduate of AFLBS, works in youth and family ministry on the Cheyenne River Reservation, Eagle Butte, S.D.

The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.

—J.I. Packer

Once in our world, a stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.

—C.S. Lewis

Why, this is the most stupendous and astonishing wonder which could ever engross the human mind—that the eternal, infinite Creator of the universe should enter our human life, and assume our human nature, by being born as a baby of a human mother!

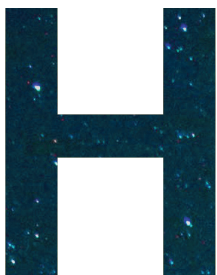
—J. Sidlow Baxter

Jesus was God and man in one person, that God and man might be happy together again.

—George Whitefield

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the Incarnate Deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel.

—Charles Wesley



By Janelle Mellgren

How might a list of names, written by a former tax collector, become an opportunity to deepen our life of faith today? As is the answer with so many details that God saw fit to place in His Scriptures, in many ways. The first chapter of Matthew opens by stating that it is a book of genealogy. This doesn't exactly sound like scintillating reading. Pause for a moment, however, and reread the chapter. You will begin to see how it helps paint a picture of the beauty of God's faithfulness.

God often reminds us of His faithfulness by pointing us back to history. The very structure of the genealogy in chapter one is a reminder of the act of His creation. Three sections of 14 generations are laid out up until the birth of Jesus. It is easy to see the pattern of creation embedded in these sections. Seven is the number which reminds us of creation, God's first act of pure love. These sections are obviously important because Matthew takes the time to point it out in verse 17. Much like the content recorded in many of the Psalms, God directs our focus to the past as a way to remind us of His faithful love in the present. He reminds us of His status as our Creator.

In Genesis, God made a promise to Abraham that through his line would come deliverance for His people. Begin in Matthew verse 2 and read through verse 16. Here we encounter the list of names from that line. Some names are familiar to us, others less so. Each name, however, is a testament to the faithfulness of God. Each of these people were used by Him to bring about the promised salvation for us all. Each name is like a generational bullet point—Salmon, Boaz, Rahab, Jesse, David, Jacob, Joseph. In each generation God faithfully preserved Abraham's line to ensure that not only would salvation be brought to earth in the form of the Son of Man, but also that God would keep His promise exactly as He said He would.

Look a little closer at the list of names; there are exactly four women mentioned, three by name. Why was it important for us to know their names? Likely there are many reasons, but there are two which serve as reminders of God's great love and tenacious faithfulness on behalf of His children. The names of these women and the things

we read about them in other chapters in the Bible serve to remind us that God's promises are not hindered by man's sinfulness or life's circumstances.

The first woman mentioned by name is Tamar. Genesis 38 gives us some insight into her life. Her son Perez was chosen to continue Abraham's line. He was born out of a situation of deception and sin. She was promised a husband, but when that promise was not fulfilled she deceived the promise breaker. It was out of these circumstances that God continued His faithfulness. Does this mean that God condoned the sins? We know that He did not, but neither was He limited by man. His relentless love and promise keeping are evident.

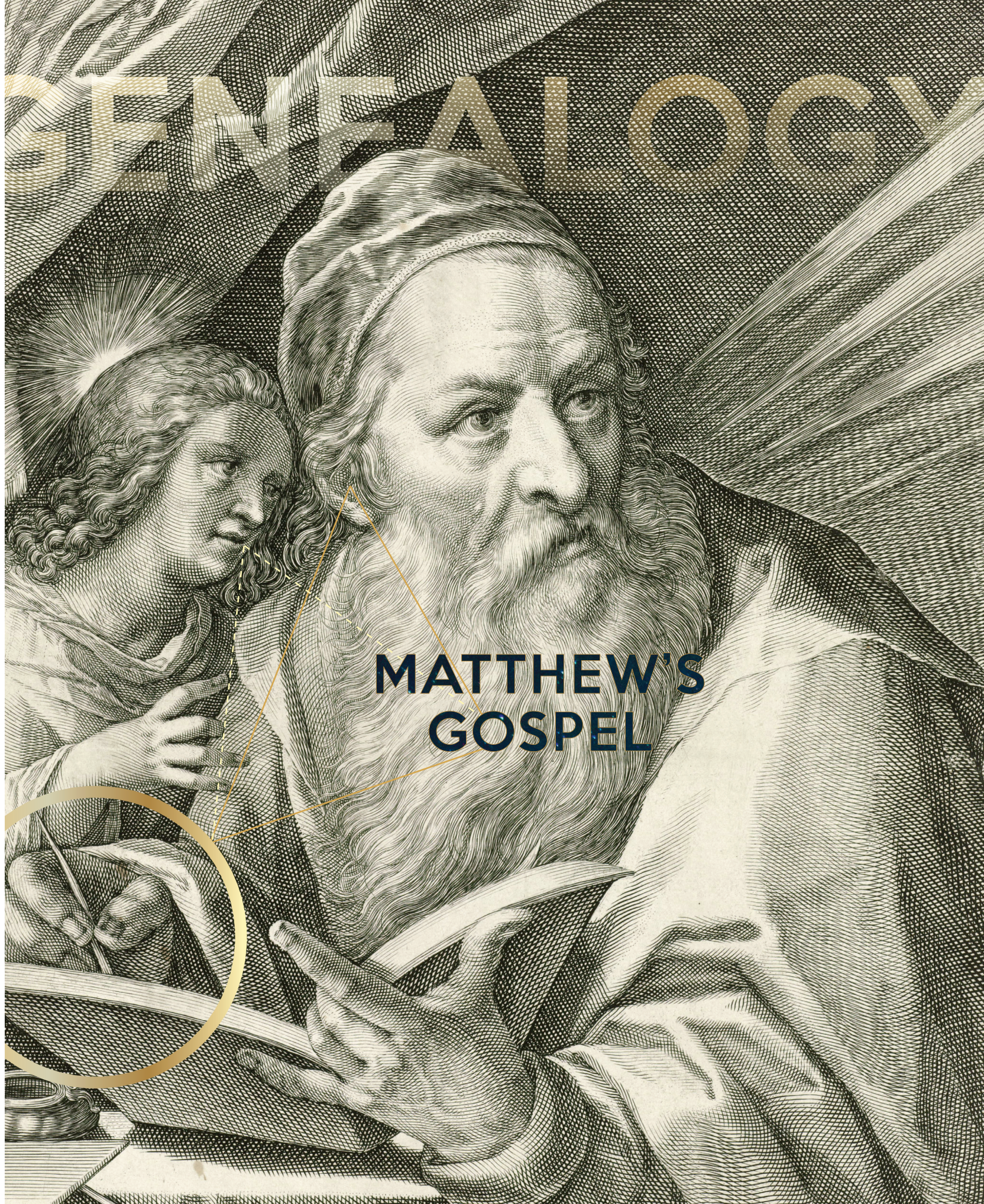
The next woman mentioned is Rahab, a foreign woman who was a harlot. Nevertheless, we learn in Joshua that she had heard of the God of Israel and His great acts on behalf of His people. Rahab acted on that faith and risked the lives of herself and her family to rescue the men sent as forerunners to the conquering of Jericho. She is mentioned by name later in both James and Hebrews. God chose to use her to continue His promise making.

Another foreign woman, removed from God's people by tragedy but bound to one by great love and loyalty, was also chosen by God. Ruth, the Moabitess, was redeemed from sorrow and destitution as she acted in obedience and faith, and she became the great-grandmother of King David.

The last woman mentioned before Mary is not named but called the wife of another man, Uriah. Again, despite the sin of man, this time in the form of adultery and murder, God continued His faithful promise keeping.

And so, as we read the first chapter of Matthew, we see how God, time and again, keeps His promises. He can do nothing else. This list of names is a beautiful reminder to us that God's sovereignty is not compromised by human depravity. Rather, this first chapter of Matthew reminds us of the beauty He continually brings us through the power of His redemptive love.

Mellgren, Bloomington, Minn., is a 1992 graduate of AFLBS. "De evangelist Matteüs," 1607, by Crispijn van de Passe.



PROPHECIES FULFILLED



JOSEPH



By Jessica McCarlson

quintessential family Christmas for me involves music—lots and lots of music. Somber carols sung in nursing home hallways, “*Jeg Er Så glad Hver Julekveld*” sung loud enough so Grandpa can join in, Ella Fitzgerald singing jazz during laid back afternoons at home, and voices converging in harmonies as the congregation sings about the birth of our Savior: memories of music stretching from childhood to more recent Christmases.

Another cherished memory is of my brother, recently a new father, singing from the perspective of Joseph, asking, “Father show me how I fit into this plan of yours; how can a man be father to the Son of God?” I remember being stirred by the ideas in the song, specifically the mystery and beauty of Joseph being brought intimately into God’s great plan to save the world. Joseph’s role as husband to Mary and father to the Messiah is not an insignificant one, as is clear from Scripture. His actions, inspired by the direction of the Lord via a series of dreams, move the plot along and ultimately ensure prophecy is fulfilled.

Between Matthew 1:18 and 2:23, God intervened in Joseph’s path, giving him four significant dreams—significant not because they are bizarre or fantastic, not when compared to dreams and visions given others throughout Scripture. These dreams gave Joseph simple instructions, but they were significant instructions because of the messages they bore.

The first dream came after Joseph made up his mind to break his betrothal with Mary. Matthew described this decision as a “righteous” one (v. 19, NASB). He considered Mary’s wellbeing, not wanting her to be disgraced. Despite this good and kind decision, God intervened, telling of a different path for Joseph. “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream” (v. 20). The angel told Joseph not to separate from Mary; she would bear a Child conceived by the Holy Spirit. Oh, and name Him Jesus because “He will save His people from their sins.” For those of us living post-crucifixion, we may recognize the significance of this amazing message in terms of God’s big picture plan. Matthew tells us these instructions were to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 7. Whether or not Joseph understood his role in God’s plan, he listened to God’s words, exchanging his plan for God’s.

The second dream, in chapter 2 of Matthew, happened after the Magi came and went. Again, an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream. The message was even simpler:

go to Egypt (v. 13). Yet again, Joseph listened. And just like last time, Joseph’s obedience was linked with fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, this time Hosea.

The message of the third dream, like the first and second, was also given through an angel of the Lord. This was the all clear, telling Joseph it was safe to return (v. 20). And Joseph listened. But this time, Joseph, using his agency, didn’t return to the exact region in Israel from which they had come. Judea, once ruled by Herod the Great, was now ruled by his son, Herod Archelaus. Matthew doesn’t tell us why Joseph was afraid to return to Judea. But historical records of the time seem to say Archelaus was a wicked ruler. Whether or not Joseph knew this, his fourth and final dream in chapter two of Matthew confirms his decision.

This dream was unlike the others. Matthew does not say whether an angel of the Lord appeared, but only that Joseph was “warned by God in a dream” (v. 22). Joseph settled his family in Nazareth, within the region of Galilee, further north from Judea. As before, Matthew tells us the word of the prophets was fulfilled. This time, though, he isn’t directly quoting an Old Testament prophet. Some scholars believe Matthew refers to the Hebrew word *netzer* in verse 23 (“that he would be called a Nazerene”), where the lovely branch, shoot, and sprout imagery comes from in the Old Testament. Matthew is perhaps confirming Jesus is the branch, the Messiah, come to save Israel from their sins.

Like all Bible stories, Joseph’s story is really Jesus’ story. Considered “a righteous man,” Joseph was merely a vessel of God’s goodness. This is not to say Joseph is insignificant, but that Joseph’s significance comes from God—God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son, who, by mystery and in beauty, is also Joseph’s son. The question that the songwriter Michael Card puts into Joseph’s mouth, “How can a man be father to the Son of God?” very accurately describes the mystery and beauty of how God uses His people. How can Joseph be the father of Jesus, God’s Son? How can amazing, impossible things happen? How can sinners be made righteous to be used by a good God for His good purposes?

Just like Joseph’s story, our story is really Jesus’ story. We are made righteous and used by a good God for His good purposes through Jesus, the Messiah, who the angel foretold “will save His people from their sins.”

McCarlson, Reedsburg, Wis., is a 2010 graduate of AFLBS.



HEARTLESS RULER


By Pastor Richard Erickson

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatian church, reminded them that “in the fullness of time” Jesus was born (4:4). Many Jews had waited for the hour to arrive, but few knew when the moment actually came for God’s salvation plan to be launched. It was God’s timing in world history, but it was not a moment of safety and security.

In the time when Christ was born, the Roman legions had conquered vast territories throughout the Mediterranean, Europe and Africa, including Israel. And the man Rome authorized as Israel’s king was Herod the Great, the first of a four-generation dynasty that bore the name Herod. Herod the Great, who ruled Israel from 37 to 4 B.C., proved himself a mentally unbalanced and paranoid individual. During the course of his reign, he had many close associates and even family members executed

as usurpers to his throne. He was crafty and he was heartless. His purpose was to ingratiate himself to Rome by building public works across the region and naming them after Caesar. These projects were financed by taxing his subjects. He would not look kindly on the appearance of another king within his realm.

During Herod the Great’s reign, the Magi—or wise men—from the east arrived in Jerusalem, causing quite a stir. They had studied the night sky and had seen an unusual star or celestial configuration, and their sources convinced them that it announced the birth of a child who would be the king of the Jews. They traveled to Judea to pay homage to the newly born king. What they didn’t know was where in Israel the future king would be born, so they decided to go to the principal city, Jerusalem, and ask authorities there.



The authority they consulted was none other than Herod the Great, who promptly asked Jewish scholars where their Messiah was to be born. They told him of the prophecy in Micah 5:2, indicating that the future descendant of King David would be born in David's birthplace, Bethlehem. Perhaps the Magi considered that Herod would be as excited to welcome the birth of the Messiah as they were. Maybe Herod would take the child under his protection and tutelage, for He wouldn't be ready to rule until He was of age.

Indeed, Herod feigned a positive interest in the child, asking the Magi to go to Bethlehem and confirm the birth, and report back to him. But after finding the holy family, the Magi were providentially warned not to return to Herod, and departed to their own country by a different route. This made Herod furious, for it revealed that the

magi had discerned his real intentions toward the child—not benevolence but malevolence.

It seems inconceivable to us that a mature adult, himself a father of three sons, should be so small minded, power hungry, and paranoid as to do what Herod the Great did next. He sent soldiers to Bethlehem to search out and kill every boy child younger than the age of 2 to eliminate any future competitor to his throne. Threatened by a baby! But God was one step ahead of Herod; He had dispatched an angel to warn Joseph and Mary and the baby to flee to Egypt.

Ironically, Herod the Great died and would never see Jesus Christ. His son, Herod Antipas, and grandsons, who inherited his realms, did play their roles in the stories of Jesus and His apostles.

This story of intrigue and infanticide is reminiscent of another scriptural image of the birth of Jesus and a monster ready to kill Him. Revelation 12 describes a woman clothed with the sun crying out in the pains of childbirth. A great dragon stands before the woman as she is about to give birth, intent on devouring the male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. But the child is caught up to God and to His throne. The great dragon is cast down to the earth to accuse the brethren (that's us), but verse 11 says, "they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony."

This apocalyptic image is a reminder that our world has seen many heartless rulers who have killed and imprisoned innumerable followers of Jesus. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. Fear not, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The world was not a welcoming place for Jesus, and in those days Christians were such a small and persecuted minority. In our days, as well, atheism is on the rise and other worldviews are in fierce competition with our biblical worldview. But Satan has not conquered our Lord Jesus. Rather, Jesus conquered him by suffering on the cross and rising from the grave. Through His blood, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Satan and his minions are under our feet (Romans 16:20). Who remembers Herod the Great now? Very few, and most only because he was part of Jesus' story. Who remembers Jesus? Millions and millions. "Fear not, I have overcome the world."

Erickson, Brooklyn Park, Minn., is serving as interim pastor of Mt. Zion Lutheran, Kasson, Minn., and Zion Lutheran, Dexter, Minn.



By Hannah Hurner

As the story of Jesus' birth is told, reenacted, and depicted, often included as a significant part of the scene are the characters of the Magi. While their presence is well known, an effort to closely examine these visitors from the east seems to yield more questions than answers.

In the single account of the visit of the Magi, as given by Matthew (2:1-12), there are few details provided about who they were and just where they came from. We know they traveled from the east, but from where exactly? How many of them were there? Why would scholars from another land come to worship a Jewish king? What caused them to travel such a great distance with such extravagant gifts? Their answer: they saw a star.

This answer raises even more questions. Did the star appear to anyone else? How is it that a star could guide and point the Magi to such a specific location upon their arrival in Bethlehem? Was the star in existence for just these two moments recorded in Matthew 2:2, 9? While Scripture may not answer these questions directly, it is certainly complete and useful for all teaching (II Timothy 3:16). Therefore, the information is in hand to learn something from this brief, even mysterious account.

Our focus, rather, could be on one word, one theme, one appeal: worship.

Matthew records that the Magi knew from the sight of the star that a king had been born. These were men who devoted their time to studying the skies, and this was a star unlike anything they had ever seen. Throughout the account of Jesus' birth God sent specific signs to specific people—an angel of the Lord is sent with a message to Joseph (Matthew 1:20), Mary (Luke 1:26) and the Shepherds (Luke 2:9). This star, then, was a sign, a message that the Magi would understand. It was a message that compelled them to bring their adoration to the king who had been born. It was so compelling that, in a sense, they offered up their very lives. They set out to cross a considerable distance, traveling for what could have been up to two years, bearing their most treasured possessions. They journeyed until they found the one they were seeking.

Upon their arrival, as a sign and a confirmation, the star again appeared to them. Scripture tells us they were

“overjoyed.” Whether doubts or dismay burdened them along the way, they knew their journey was not in vain. They were able to carry out their purpose: they bowed down in worship and presented their treasured gifts for the King. They returned to their own country, yet surely their worship continued, now filled with the joy and hope of the Savior. In all of its mystery, we are given an example of worship in its purest form through the account of the Magi.

The Jews had been waiting, longing, for a king. They had hope and expectation for a Messiah to come and rescue them. Yet for all who were watching and waiting, the birth of Jesus seemingly went unnoticed. Many overlooked who Jesus really was. They had it in their minds just how this king would come, who he would be, and what he would do. The Magi however, never questioned who Jesus was. They saw, they believed, and they worshiped Him for who He really was. Foreigners, having what would seem to be no relevance to Israel or its history, were given a sign, an invitation to come worship the King. This gives authority to who Jesus is. He did not come to just be the king of the Jews, but King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the gospel for all to hear. For those who seek him will surely find him (Matthew 7:7-8).

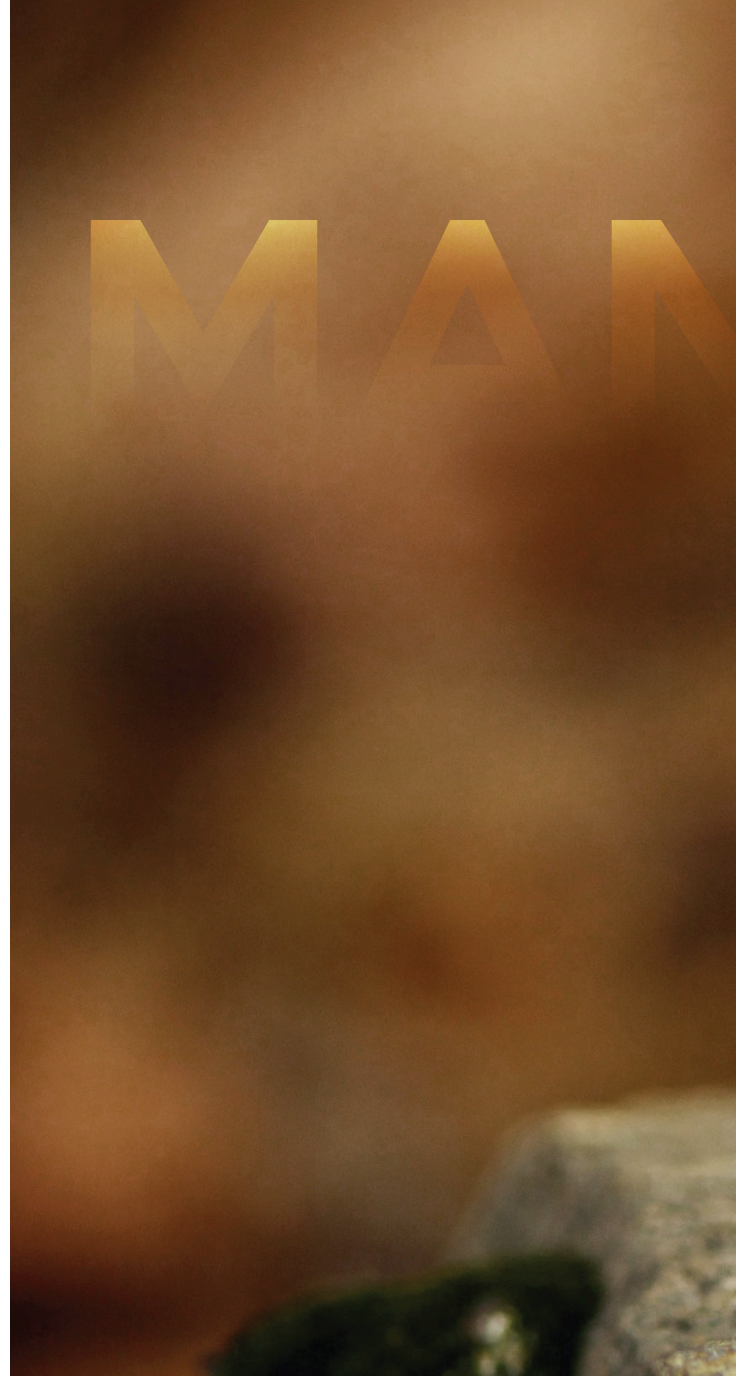
We, too, have been given an invitation and a directive: a call to come worship the King and a commission to spread the good news. We are compelled to lay down our lives and follow, not a star, but the Light of the world. At times the light before us is clear and we are filled with great hope and anticipation. At times, because of our own struggle with sin, the light may seem to grow dim. We may doubt the steps we take, question if the journey is worth it, grow weary at the unknown, become stagnant or even turn back. Yet should we continue to seek, should we choose to worship amidst any struggle, we know the day will come when we will be in the very presence of the King. His light will shine for all eternity, removing all fear and doubt, and we will indeed be overjoyed. We, too, will then fulfill our purpose: we will bow down and forever worship the King.

Hurner, a member of the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, Dalton, Minn., is a 2009 graduate of AFLBS.

MAGNIFICENT

WORSHIP





By Pastor Jarrod Hylden

In Matthew 2:3-6 (ESV), we read: “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Herod seems to have been a powerful man. And yet Herod the Great (as he is often called) was really just a pawn of the devil, his true master. Revelation 12 portrays the devil as the great dragon standing before the woman as she’s about to give birth in order to destroy the Christ-child. Therefore, in Matthew 2 it must be that Satan is holding the reins as Herod the king seeks to destroy the child born king of the Jews. Herod was a pawn of the devil.

The chief priests and scribes, in turn, were pawns of King Herod. He wanted to know where the Christ was to be born. The chief priests and the scribes were assembled in order to serve Herod’s purpose of destroying the Christ,

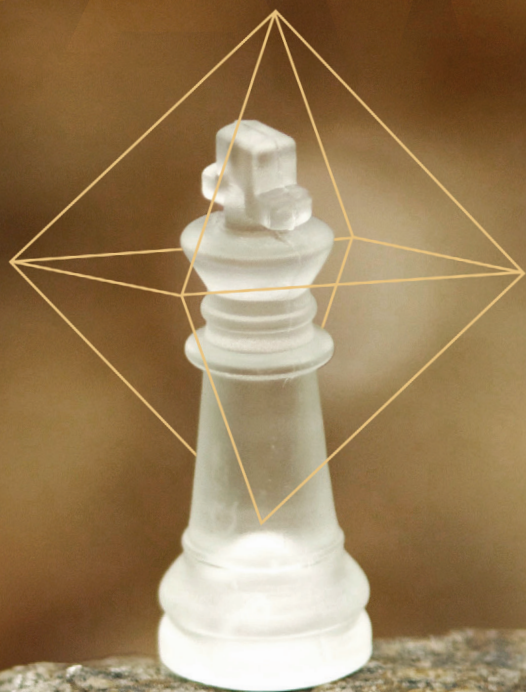
although they didn’t know this was his purpose. If they had known they likely would not have helped him. But they were the unwitting pawns of Herod, a pawn of the devil.

They gave him the information he needed. Micah 5:2 contains a straightforward prophecy that the ruler of God’s people will come from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Unlike the wicked rulers of Israel in Micah’s time, it is promised that this king will “shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD ... and they shall dwell secure ... and he shall be their peace” (5:4-5). This shepherd will be the Christ, the true king coming from the line of David.

Above I wrote that if the chief priests and scribes knew that Herod meant to destroy the Christ they likely would not have helped him. That was before they got to know who this child would grow up to be. Suffice it to say that by the end of Matthew’s Gospel they *knowingly* gathered and “plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him” (26:4). In retrospect we see that their initial gathering in chapter 2 was a preview of their gather-

MY PAWNS

ONE



KING

ing in chapter 26 to carry out Herod's original purpose, to destroy the Christ. Of course they didn't actually think Jesus was the Christ. They thought they were about to do a great service to God by killing a blasphemer. But they were deceived. They, too, were pawns of the devil.

In chapter 2, Herod needs help from the chief priests and the scribes to carry out his plan. By chapter 27 it's the chief priests and the scribes who need help from Herod! By this time, though, Herod the Great was dead. A Roman official, Pontius Pilate, would have to do. He had the power to order Jesus' execution but found no basis for doing so. Thus, the chief priests and the elders incited the crowd to demand His crucifixion. Pilate caved to the riotous mob and consented to the will of the chief priests. He turned out to be an effective pawn in their hands.

While Jesus hung on the cross, the chief priests and the scribes mocked him: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in

God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:42-43).

In their glee, they thought everything had gone according to plan. Jesus is crucified. "Checkmate," they thought. Yet while they stood on top of Mount Calvary mocking Jesus, Psalm 2:4-6 declares that,

He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

You see, all the other characters in this story—Herod, the chief priests, the scribes, Pilate, and the devil himself—were pawns. Only Jesus is King.

Hylden serves Skrefsrud Lutheran, rural Beresford, S.D.

HOLY
SPIRIT

FOR ME



By Pastor J. Christian Andrews

It forms one clause in Matthew's gospel: "She was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit." And one phrase in the Apostles' Creed: "Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit ..." And then one line in the Nicene Creed: "And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary ..." Three simple statements point us to one of the great mysteries of the faith. Jesus, the God-man, was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary. By His intervention in history, the Holy Spirit brought about the incarnation of the Christ and "called me through the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith" (*Luther's Small Catechism*).

The Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel. As we consider the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit in Mary, we ought to first think of God's greater plan. This work of the Holy Spirit, this coming upon Mary, this overshadowing of the Most High (Luke 1:32), was predicted almost from the beginning. The prophecy first comes to us as the promise and solution for our sin. In Genesis 3:15, the words of judgment to the serpent were,

"And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Though it was a curse for the serpent, it is good news for us. The seed of the woman, the Christ conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary, became the final and perfect sacrifice to take away our sin. It is this good news, the gospel, through which the Holy Spirit calls us. The Holy Spirit proclaims the good news of forgiveness of sin.

The Holy Spirit has enlightened me with His gifts. God chose Mary, and it seems Mary had no choice in the matter. In the same way, God chooses us. Just as it was the work of the Holy Spirit to make incarnate the Christ in Mary's womb, so also it is the work of the Holy Spirit to make incarnate the Christ for us. The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said it this way: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works,

so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). John wrote, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth ... For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (1:14, 16-17). The word in our Catechism is "enlightened." The Holy Spirit, by conceiving Jesus in Mary, carried out His work as a gift giver. We have been saved not by our works or merits, but as a gift by grace through faith in the incarnate Christ. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit lifts us out of the darkness of our sin by giving us the gift of the incarnate Jesus.

The Holy Spirit has sanctified me and preserved me in the true faith. It seems Joseph was a righteous man, a kind man. He could have had Mary stoned for adultery. In his own choosing, however, he decided to put her away, to divorce her quietly. God had other plans, though. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and revealed to him that the child in Mary was of the Holy Spirit. Because the pregnancy was of the Holy Spirit, it was holy. And because the pregnancy was of the Holy Spirit, the marriage was preserved. There was no sin or need for repentance and forgiveness in Mary's situation. The Holy Spirit also intervenes for us. Having called us by the gospel and enlightened us with His gifts, the Holy Spirit continues His work in us by calling us holy, by setting us apart for service, and by holding us tenaciously in relationship with Himself.

And so we have the words of the angel to Joseph: "... do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). What God did in coming to us is a great mystery of the faith. Why God did it is not. The whole purpose of the incarnation was the work of the Holy Spirit to call me by the gospel, to enlighten me with His gifts, and to make me holy and keep me in the true faith. The Child was conceived of the Holy Spirit for me.

Andrews is serving as interim pastor of Hope Lutheran, Enderlin, N.D.



A SAILOR'S WIFE

BY EDITH TRONVIK

I think most of us who are wives of seamen didn't fully understand what it would mean to be a sailor's bride until we became one. We thought everything was glorious! Think of how great it was to have a husband with a special aura from the seven seas—think how great it would be to sail out with him (sometimes) into the wide world.

We didn't think about the fact that there would be many losses, both for them and for us. Not the least of which were after the children came. The great responsibility of having to be both mother and father for them is a task so large that every day one must pray for wisdom to manage successfully.

When we had our twins, my husband's boat was just then ordered to the dry dock for a checkup. He was given permission from the doctor to be in the delivery room, where he stood in a very short white frock, peeped at the two small little ones, and congratulated me. Goodness for a joyful day! It was a proud papa who sent telegrams east and west: "Two boys have come; all is well."

We had a short but happy time together as a family before the order came that the boat was ready to sail, and we had to bid him farewell. It seemed like the clouds had blacked out the sun, and I stood helpless. This was during World War II. We didn't know where his convoy went, or whether we would see each other again. Ships were sunk every day, and men found their end in watery graves. My friends lost their men out there—when would my turn come? But my husband had received an answer from God, David's ninety-first Psalm, where among other things it

reads, "A thousand shall fall by thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee; only with thine eyes shalt thou behold ..." He said that it was as if all fear had been dashed from him at once. So he rejoiced and was glad every time he went along as part of a convoy.

Our boys learned early to pray for Papa. I took them along to church on Sundays and it became a natural thing for them to sit there and attend Sunday school. We had devotions morning and evening. Oh, what good it did me to see their small child hands folded while they both prayed, "Dear Jesus, be so kind to watch over Papa on the boat and on the sea." And so their confidence was revealed.

Being a seaman's wife means losing out on many things. But we have, of course, a home and children to be glad in. What does the wife have? For a long while I haven't thought in the same way as I did when we were newly married—of how much greater the men's losses are, and how much they have given up in life because they so seldom get to be home with loved ones. To be sure we have all they that they long for and hold dear. They only have our letters, but I can say for certain that our letters are absolutely a very important lifeline for a sailor. That is what he lives for: the letter which tells him what is happening



back home, of the children, the first tooth, the first step, and the first word. The first was “mama,” but then they also thought about “papa.” What great happiness for the father when he was remembered!

There are other letters. The letter which tells him how much we miss him, pray for him, and count the months, weeks, and days until he shall again pack his duffel bag and come home. When the first self-written letters from the children, with large letters, reach father, then rays of sunshine and joy stream into his lonely life aboard ship. Letters are the most important, yes, the primary contact between him and home.

Most people think that to write a letter is a terrible chore. We say, “No, I have to get myself together.” But we who are sailors’ wives are committed to corresponding. Have you ever thought about that? It is our responsibility to write letters on the run whether we are in good humor or not—there must be a letter ready to send when the mailman arrives. Then everyone stands and watches him as he sorts the mail,

wondering if there is anything for them. Four, five, six days after we have sent an aerogram, we begin to look for a reply ...

• • •

When the children are grown the possibility is greater for them to go on board and see the distant shores and nations, and to walk on land with people. It has been a really good experience to celebrate Easter, Pentecost and Syttende Mai (May 17, Norwegian Independence) aboard ship. ...

Christmas Eve on the Red Sea is a glorious memory which included a steward who did not spare himself in preparing a true feast aboard ship. To see all the men in white shirts was a beautiful picture. The captain wished everyone well in both English and Norwegian. He bade everyone to be “the boy in the man” and to sing, “How glad I am each Christmas Eve for then Jesus was born.” The Christmas gospel story was read, and he tied together some reflections on the theme. It was a singular experience to hear “Glade

Jul” (Silent Night) sung in different languages, where the sound carried into the tropic night through the open port holes, not so far from where Jesus was born on Christmas night.

• • •

I wish all seamen a blessed Christmas. Find the boy in the man and sing Christmas carols joyfully for the Christmas gift we all have a share in, reminding us of the blessed Christmas night.

*Abridged from
Sjomannensmisjonens Julehefte.
Translated from Norwegian
by Pastor Raynard Huglen,
Newfolden, Minn.*

AFLC Schools now fully accredited

Benefits include financial stability, transferability of credits for graduates

The AFLC Schools reached a major milestone on Oct. 30, gaining full accreditation through the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS).

Seminary Dean Dr. James Molstre shared the news with students and staff received from AFLC Schools President Wade Mobley and Dr. Mark Olson, vice president of academic affairs. Both appeared before the TRACS Commission in Dallas.

"We thank God for this momentous day," said Mobley. "Accreditation provides external accountability to make us do what we have promised our students, alumni, and supporters. TRACS includes a strong statement on the inerrancy of Scripture and has encouraged us to do what we have been doing for more than 50 years: Establish students in the eternal and inerrant Word of God."

The accreditation process has sharpened the focus of the AFLC Schools by helping evaluate current performance and identify ways to better serve students and congregations. This step of accreditation joins the AFLC Schools with 75 other institutions of Christian higher education in mutual support and encouragement. It also helps the AFLC Schools develop academic rigor and integrity, financial stability and accountability, and transferability of credits for our graduates.

The AFLC Schools are accredited as a Category III Institution with TRACS.



ABOVE: Pastor Gary Jorgenson dedicates the hall at Skrefsrud Lutheran, rural Beresford, S.D. BELOW: Pastor Dick Gilman, former pastor, speaks during the dedication service.

Skrefsrud dedicates fellowship hall



On Sept. 23, members and friends of Skrefsrud Lutheran Church of rural Beresford, S.D., gathered in the newly constructed fellowship hall. Pastor Gary Jorgenson, assistant to the president of the AFLC, led the rite of dedication and the speaker was Pastor Dick Gilman, a beloved former pastor of the congregation. Before the addition, the fellowship area was in the small basement beneath the sanctuary. This made it hard for the elderly to join in the fellowship. Space was also limited for events like funerals and it was a challenge to find room for different Sunday school classes. The new fellowship hall is an answer to prayer. It includes a spacious kitchen, a nursery, a pastor's study, and bathrooms. God be praised!



Calvary celebrates 50 years

On October 27 and 28, members and friends of Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., gathered together to celebrate 50 years of God's faithfulness. A casual evening of fellowship kicked off the anniversary event, with dinner followed by an open mic time of sharing memories and gratitude.

The celebration worship service on Sunday focused on three ideas: Foundation, Growth, and the Living Word. Throughout the worship hour, the congregation heard meditations on these topics from many pastors, both current and former, as well as two sons of the congregation. Special music numbers performed by several talented musicians rounded out the service. Afterward, a dinner was enjoyed by all attending. Praise God for His faithfulness.

Pictured are, from left, Pastors Eric Rasmussen, Eric Christenson, Brent Olson, David Rinden, Jim Johnson, Jason Holt, and Rodger Olson.

'Y

ou're off to great places! You're off and away!" This quote from a children's book by Dr. Seuss titled *Oh the Places You'll Go!* is descriptive of my life. The author

reminds readers of the difficulties along the way, including what he calls "a useless place where everyone is waiting."

"Waiting for a train to go
or a bus to come, or a plane to go
or the mail to come, or the rain to go
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
or waiting around for a Yes or a No
or waiting for their hair to grow."

Such a place is indeed useless if we misunderstand patience. True patience is not passive inertia, rather, an active virtue. Merriam Webster defines patience as "bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint; manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain; not hasty or impetuous; steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity; able or willing to bear."

When everything is going our way, patience is unnecessary. The true test of patience comes when our rights are violated or our desires are blocked. Some people think it is their right to get upset in the face of irritations and trials. The Bible, however, praises patience as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) that should be produced in all followers of Christ. Patience reveals active faith in God's timing, omnipotence, and love.

Although patience is often considered a passive waiting or gentle tolerance, most of the Greek words that are translated as patience in the New Testament are active, robust words. Consider Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore since we also are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Does one run a race by passively waiting for slowpokes or gently tolerating cheaters? Certainly not! In the Bible, patience is persevering toward a goal, enduring trials, or expectantly waiting for a promise to be fulfilled.

The people of Israel had been waiting for the promised Messiah. Some, like Simeon and Anna in Luke 2, were patiently and expectantly waiting. In the fullness of time God sent his Son born of a virgin (Galatians 4:4). Even after His birth it would be decades before the redemption and deliverance of Jesus would be complete at Calvary.

I am still trying to learn about patience. When I graduated from high school, I knew that God was calling me into missions. That was more than 10 years ago, and I am still in the process of



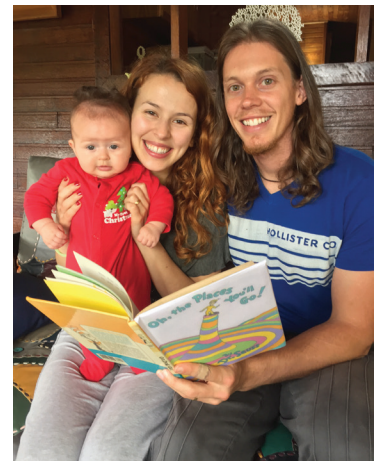
TRUE PATIENCE

BY MATTHEW ABEL

getting to the field. I know that my missionary calling is to go to a new field like the Apostle Paul in Romans 15:20: "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation."

As the day for our move to Paraguay approaches (January 2019), I realize that patience is a necessity. We will need to actively wait patiently as we learn Paraguayan culture and language (Guarani), build relationships, and ascertain the specifics of where and how to minister. We will continue to practice patience as we preach the gospel boldly while waiting for the spiritual harvest that the Lord will bring.

Patience is not passive inertia; patience is persevering toward a goal, enduring trials, and expectantly waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. As Dr. Seuss would say, "You're off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So ... get on your way!"



Abel is an AFLC missionary co-commissioned to begin a new work in Paraguay. He is pictured with his wife, Ednay, and daughter, Zoey.

2018 SEMINARY GRADUATES

CHRISTOPHER KUMPULA

Elk River, Minn.

I was born on Nov. 26, 1988, to Thomas and Renee Kumpula. I enjoyed a Christian family throughout my childhood. After several moves while my dad was still serving as a pastor, we were blessed to find Grace Free Lutheran Church. God used the time spent in the youth group to forge friendships and a connection to the AFLC that has strengthened.



The next season of life was snowed-in with politics. I was a full-blown workaholic, managing more campaigns than I could track, writing more than anyone cared to publish, and investing more than it could ever be worth. Meanwhile, I earned my bachelor's degree at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., arriving at graduation in burnout.

Thanks be to God, I met Becca Hjermstad, and after a sustained lobbying effort, she agreed to marry me. I dare say we are both the happier for at least that successful campaign. After a season of rest, I finally went to seminary.

Pastoral ministry touches all of life, and classes were correspondingly thorough. Time and again, God challenged me. It got hard. But it was good. It was edifying in the true sense of the word, "instructive or informative in a way that improves the mind or character." The Bible does tend to do that, after all. But I am certainly grateful to God for the dedication of teachers and pastors who invest in seminarians like me. The Holy Spirit used their concern for my spiritual life.

After four years, Becca and I are turning over a new leaf as we close our year long internship at Abiding Savior Free Lutheran in Sioux Falls, SD. Our third child will join our family in December, our daughter Abigail is already 1, and our son Theodore will turn 3 in December. Life certainly looks different this side of seminary, and we are still counting the blessings.

Annual Conference housing and meal registration now available online

Housing and meal registration is now open for those planning to attend the 2019 annual conference, scheduled for June 11-14 at Spruce Lake Retreat Center in Canadensis, Pa. A comprehensive list of facilities is available on the camp website at sprucelake.org. To reserve a room and pay for meals, call the camp at 800-822-7505.

The conference will be hosted by the Eastern District of the AFLC under the theme taken from Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

Conference committees will meet beginning the morning of June 11, and conference business begins on June 12 and will conclude on June 14.

RYAN PATENAUDE

Canal Winchester, Ohio

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9)

I was born on Aug. 6, 1982, to Robert and Deanna Patenaude of Crookston, Minn., but due to complications I was born in Grand Forks, N.D. According to my mom, the doctors were surprised I made it—at least without any brain damage. My grandpa used to say the jury was still out on that one. We were decent Catholics until a variety of circumstances shook our family up, eventually leading all of us to saving faith. My brother Eric and I, both saved through the ministry of Camp Lebanon, were pioneers in leaving the Catholic church and we quickly found Resurrection Free Lutheran Church in Beltrami, Minn. It quickly became home.



I was nurtured well by the saints in that church and became familiar with the Association Free Lutheran Bible School through summer teams that aided our vacation Bible school. I attended AFLBS after high school, and through my travels on summer teams got offered a job as a parish worker in Canal Winchester, Ohio, where I lived for the next decade. While in Ohio, I earned a Bachelor of Arts in religion at Ohio Christian University, met my beautiful bride Stephanie (Hall), bought my first house, had four kids (Thor 10; Solomon 8; Iris 5; Louisa 4), and learned to love living in a small town.

I sensed a call to seminary, and before we knew it, we had moved onto campus in December 2014. Seminary was a special time for us, incubating in God's Word and the close fellowship of student housing. We followed the crowd and had another child while there too (Felicity 1). We have been interning at St. Paul's Free Lutheran Church in Fargo, N.D., which has been a well-rounded delight.

I have accepted a call to serve as the pastor of West Prairie Free Lutheran Church of Kindred, N.D., and the whole family is beyond excited. God's providence, through His church, has been a wonder to experience and we look forward to the future!

AFLC Schools announce capital campaign

Members of the AFLC Schools Board of Trustees voted at their November meeting to initiate a public capital campaign for the construction of the new Student Life Center on their campus in Plymouth, Minn. Materials will be mailed to alumni and friends of the schools, along with the AFLC at large, by early December, with a mid-January response target. As funds allow, construction will begin in later winter for occupancy sometime during the 2019-2020 school year.

The Student Life Center will contain a college-sized basketball court, two large classrooms, six offices, and ample gathering space for events and student activities. The estimated cost is approximately \$8 million when completely finished, furnished, and equipped. Nearly \$3 million has been raised in a private campaign focused on a handful of donors who had expressed interest in the building, plus donations from members of the Schools Corporation, faculty, staff, and administration. An additional \$1.5 million in gifts and \$1 million in 3-year commitments is needed before construction can begin.



WMF

WOMEN'S
MISSIONARY
FEDERATION



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nly 50 percent of our churches have a local WMF group, a statistic which holds true

in our AFLC congregations in Kalispell, Mont. And it's a good thing we don't have term limits because we have had the same officers at Stillwater Free Lutheran for years. Only our cradle roll secretary has changed.

A typical WMF meeting in our congregation looks like this: Women arrive to a warm welcome, hugs, coffee, and a time to chat. The meeting begins with devotions and prayer and then the business portion is conducted. Time is spent in Bible study with various women leading throughout the year. Then we spend time in prayer, give our offerings, eat lunch, chat, and then give hugs goodbye.

The group often meets in the church now, but in the old days it was hosted in different women's homes. As a stay-at-home mom at the time, I have fond memories of my babies being passed around or crawling on the floor during a meeting. My boys remember that when it was my turn to host, I would put down a tape line and clean my way from the front door to

BY LAVONNE WEST

their room. The idea was to keep their toys picked up because company was coming. My mother-in-law loves to tell the story of the time when one of the ladies was celebrating her birthday. "I told the boys (ages 4 and 5) to make her a cake while we had the meeting and Bible study." It turned out great.

I must confess that I am unable to join our women for their monthly meetings these days. Occasionally I take a day off from work because I miss that sweet fellowship. As a teacher I could attend in the summer, but as a certified nursing assistant, it isn't always possible. At other times there will be an evening meeting, baby shower or wedding shower that I can attend. Nevertheless, I still prepare my lesson for the month.

To meet the challenge of waning attendance, our WMF group has tried meeting at various times over the years. A day meeting one month, an evening meeting the next. Alas, many of the members do not want to drive at night, and often the younger working women didn't come anyway.

In September we had our women's retreat, meeting from Friday evening to Saturday

afternoon. This event brought our younger women out. District rallies are also a sweet time for connecting and fellowship. WMF Day at annual conference has always been a highlight of my summer. Osceola, Wis., is close to my home in Minnesota, so those events held at the Association Retreat Center were always on my radar when planning vacation.

I am looking forward to hearing your stories in the coming months. Thirteen presidents have gone before me—wonderful women of faith—who have had 56 years to share in the Great Commission (Mark 16:15). Thank you for your legacy. Thank you for your service.

The WMF's theme this year was hope. It is my hope and prayer that the WMF will continue to "unite all the women of the AFLC into deeper fellowship of consecrated service" (WMF purpose statement). And as we do, let's turn the tables on the statistics.

West, of Stillwater Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont., is the president of the WMF.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Clayton Wilfer was installed Oct. 28 at Joy Christian Community Church, Fountain Hills, Ariz., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor Gerald Peterson has resigned as pastor of First Lutheran Church, Oklahoma City, Okla., after serving the congregation for nearly 32 years. Peterson's last service was Nov. 4, and he will take time to rest before considering a new call to ministry.

Pastor Brad Hoefs has resigned as pastor of Community of Grace Evangelical Lutheran, Elkhorn, Neb., and will begin working as executive director of Fresh Hope for Mental Health. Hoefs founded the ministry in 2009. Members of Community of Grace are considering options for future ministry.

Pastor Richard Gunderson will be installed at Spencer Creek Lutheran, Eugene, Ore., on Dec. 9, with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Pastor J. Christian Andrews was installed Nov. 4 as interim pastor at Hope Lutheran, Enderlin, N.D., with Pastor Gary Jorgenson officiating.

Pastor Joel Walde has resigned as pastor of the Butte Gathering, Butte, Mont.

Members of the 2019 FLY Committee have announced evening speakers for the 2019 **FLY Convention**. They include: Jordan Langness (Monday), Pastor Andy Coyle (Tuesday), Tim Herset (Wednesday), Pastor Steve Jensen (Thursday), and Pastor Jason Holt (Friday). The FLY Convention will be held July 1-5, 2019. For more information and to register, visit flyconvention.org.

OCTOBER MEMORIALS

AFLBS

Ruth Claus
Mabel Johnson
Tammy Amoako
Wayne Deubner

AFLT

Brian Flaa
Merle & Goldie
Berven Gray
Arnold & Alice
Horgen Rhokke

Evangelism

Alyce Olson

General Fund

Elsa Reagan

Parish Ed

Mabel Johnson

Vision

Wayne Deubner

World Missions

Pastor Richard
Dahlin
Mildred Marks
Roy Hilde

**Pastor John Sterling**

Pastor John Alton Sterling, 87, of Alabama, died Oct. 22 at home. Born in Dec. 6, 1930, in El Dorado, Ark., he was the son of James and Ouida Sterling. He married Joy Lenker in 1951.

His first eight years were spent in Mississippi before the family moved to eastern Nebraska. After graduating from Weeping Water High School, Weeping Water, Neb., he enlisted in the US Navy and served aboard aircraft carriers in the Sea of Japan, where he received a call to ministry. After marriage, they had five children and were foster parents to many children spanning a 28-year period. He was honorably discharged in 1954, and enrolled in Phillips University in Enid, Okla., earning a bachelor's degree. He then completed a graduate degree in theology and ministerial studies in 1962. He served as an ordained minister for the next 65 years, pastoring churches in Kansas and Alabama, including Zion Lutheran, Silverhill, Ala.

Surviving are his wife; four children, John (Melanie) Sterling, Chattanooga, Tenn., James (Betty) Sterling, College Station, Texas, Joel (Tonya) Sterling, Silverhill, Ala., and Jeanne Hampton, Oklahoma City, Okla.; a foster son, Carl Buck, Pensacola, Fla.; one sister, Daleene Ossenkop, Lincoln, Neb.; 10 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Oct. 27 at Silverhill First Baptist Church in Silverhill, Ala.

**Durant celebrates 20 years**

Members of Faith Lutheran, Durant, Okla., celebrated the congregation's 20th anniversary on Oct. 28. Present were former pastors who have served the congregation, including Pastor Paul Nash, outgoing director of AFLC Home Missions, Pastor Jerry Peterson, chairman of the Home Missions Committee, Pastor Craig Scavo, Kalispell, Mont., and Pastor Gary Jorgenson, assistant to the president of the AFLC.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES October 1-31, 2018

FUND	REC'D IN OCTOBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$29,497	\$330,787	\$335,311
Evangelism	8,038	93,627	111,927
Youth Ministries	11,480	120,467	111,967
Parish Education	7,803	146,001	145,496
Seminary	27,177	231,872	223,870
Bible School	36,881	449,141	461,288
Home Missions	25,790	344,669	378,428
World Missions	32,925	322,014	364,852
Personal Support	62,598	559,202	499,485
TOTALS	\$242,189	\$2,597,781	\$2,632,623

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

THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM: WHO DO YOU SAY HE IS?

One day Jesus asked two questions of His disciples (Matthew 16:13ff): Who do people say that the Son of Man is? Who do you say that I am? It was only Peter who answered, perhaps speaking for the others as well as himself: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (v. 16).

It is good to ask this question of ourselves during the Christmas season as we ponder again the familiar gospel story. Who do I say the Babe of Bethlehem is?



Pastor Robert Lee

LifeWay Research conducted an extensive survey on the state of theology in America, and the results were deeply disturbing. Though most people profess to believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead, they undermine it by thinking that our convictions are a matter of personal opinion rather than objective truth. Those surveyed say that they believe in the Trinity, one true God in three persons. Yet there is confusion about the Holy Spirit, who is described as a force instead of a personal being (59%), and confusion about Jesus, seen merely as the first and greatest being created by God the Father (78%) ... a teaching of one of the major cults!

The history of Christianity has been the main subject of my teaching for many years, and I have sought to emphasize how a major theological challenge faced by the early Church was the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” Our enemy is well aware of the centrality of this foundational faith issue, and the confusion of believers has always been his goal. An Egyptian monk named Arius was one of the first to publicize the view that Jesus—though the first and greatest to be created

by God—was not equal to the Father, rather, a created being who did not share the Father’s essence.

The story of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) tells how this challenge was initially met. I recall my pastor telling us in confirmation class about “the battle of the iota,” how at one point it seemed that the only difference between the two sides was the small Greek letter, whether the Church would proclaim that Jesus was of the “same” substance as the Father or of “similar” substance. But Athanasius and other heroes of the faith held their ground, convinced that our salvation was at stake if Jesus was not true God as well as true man. Unless He was truly God, believers would lose the hope that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God (II Corinthians 5:21). The issue was (and still is today) not only who Jesus is in His person, but also who He is in the work of salvation.

The battles did not end at Nicaea, and for a time the theological struggle became tangled with politics and personal issues. Other defenders of the faith took courageous stands for biblical Christology. Other councils met and eventually completed the task of providing us the rich heritage of our creeds, the Nicene and the Athanasian.

It may be that Christmas creates a special challenge to our thinking about Jesus. It is not easy to grasp that a helpless baby born of an ordinary woman could be, as Isaiah foretold, “Immanuel” (7:14), God with us, the “Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6), whose nativity was heralded by hosts of angels (Luke 2:13-14). Reason cannot comprehend that God

became man, especially in the form of an infant, and yet this is what the Bible teaches and what Christians confess.

Perhaps a Christmas devotional time for us all would be to clarify what we believe about Jesus by meditating on the words of time-honored statements of faith that our creeds provide. “So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God” (Athanasian Creed). Jesus Christ is “very God of very God,” He was “of one substance with the Father,” “begotten, not made,” and He became human “for us men, and for our salvation” (Nicene Creed). “He is God, begotten before the ages of the substance of the Father, and He is man, born in the world of the substance of His mother, perfect

Our enemy is well aware of the centrality of this foundational faith issue, and the confusion of believers has always been his goal.

God and perfect man, with reasonable soul and human flesh, equal to the Father with respect to His Godhead and inferior to the Father with respect to His manhood” (Athanasian Creed). Is it any wonder that these are things into which angels long to look (I Peter 1:12)?

Best wishes to all of our readers for a Christmas season filled with the true knowledge of who Jesus was and is and always will be!

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR
3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55441

Periodicals

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

something to share

THE JOY OF ANTICIPATION

BY AILA FOLTZ

My mother told me of a time while she was living in southern Finland when she was exhausted and had the desire to travel far from her own environment and daily duties. She persuaded her sister to accompany her to a region in northeastern Finland just below the Arctic Circle which is described as being “renowned for its natural beauty, a region of fells and forests in an almost untouched wilderness adorned by lakes, rivers, and rapids.” An additional benefit was that they could drop in to see Helen, an old friend from her student days. This is what happened, in her own words:

“We took off without considering [that] we should make reservations for lodging. As we were looking into available hotels, we decided to phone Helen, who was married to the local pastor. Cheerful as always, my

friend insisted that we forget about getting lodging and go direct to her house. As the taxi turned into the parsonage driveway, she ran to greet us with open arms. After embracing us, she scolded: ‘Why didn’t you let me know about your plans to come? You deprived me of the joy of anticipation.’

“Her words continue to speak to me. Over twenty years have passed, and I still remember that lesson. I enjoy company, and in my experience the anticipation of their coming increases the joy. What would it be like if Christmas were to arrive suddenly without making preparations? Wouldn’t we have missed a large part of the enjoyment of the celebration?

“Israel earnestly awaited the coming of Messiah, and the Jewish people continue to anticipate that event. What joy Christian believers experience in the knowledge that Messiah has already come and has dwelt

among us. Some day He will welcome us to our heavenly home! In that anticipation we can live our lives and rejoice.”

Consider the words of Charles Wesley’s hymn, *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*:

“Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee. Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art; dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

“Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.

“By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.”

Foltz, Plymouth, Minn., is the daughter of Uuras Saarnivaara, former AFLTS instructor.