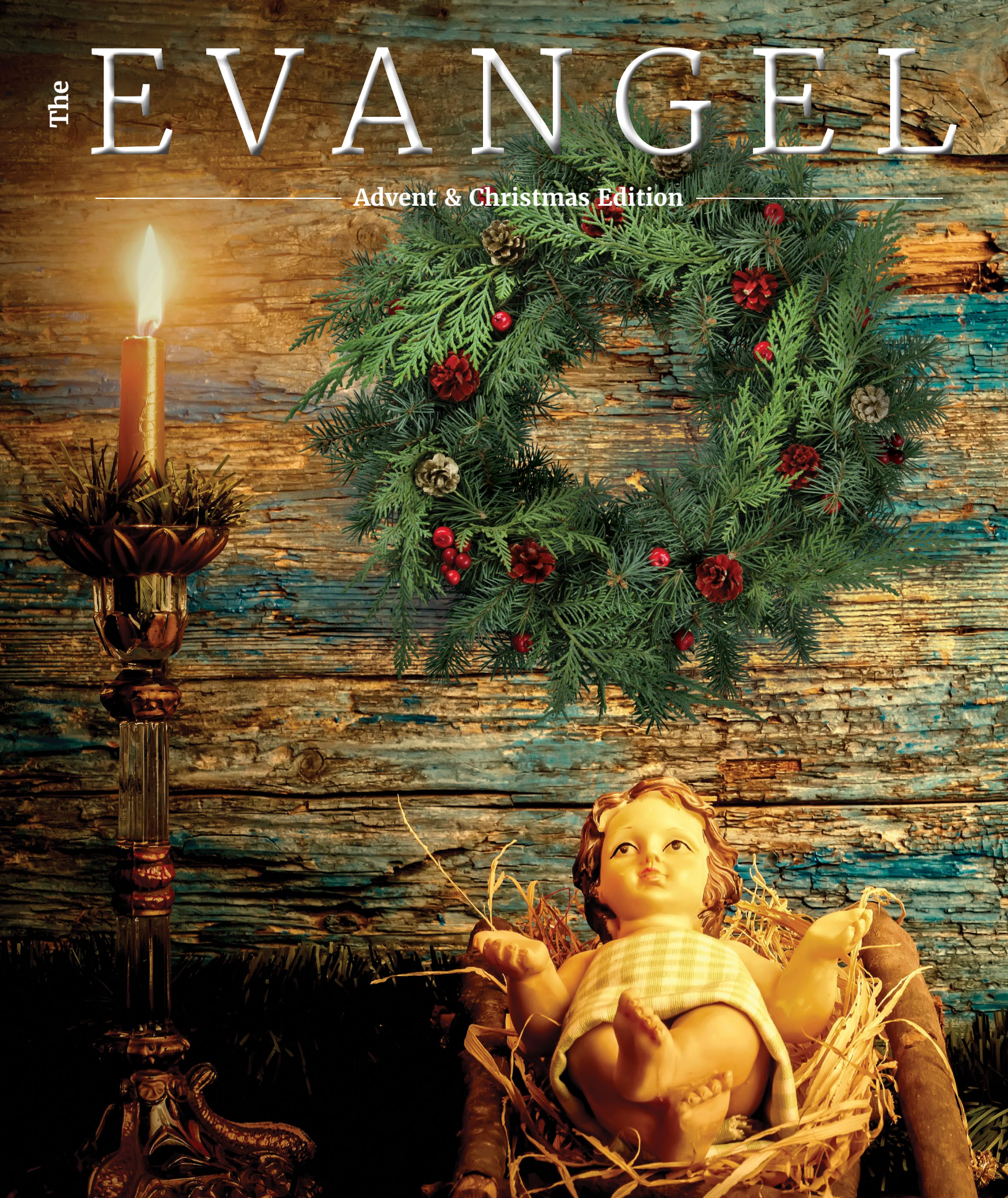


The

EVANGEL

Advent & Christmas Edition





From the Editor

Greetings as we near the Advent and Christmas season!

The theme for this issue is Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled. The articles take a look at just a handful of the verses in the Old Testament (OT) where God gave specific details about Jesus: The Savior to come. It's quite amazing to think that each of these details came true in the person of Jesus!

Why do these ancient prophecies matter? They show over and over that God can be trusted. What God says is true.

A book I read recently used the word "reliable" to describe God; how fitting to think of that here. When God promises to do something, He does it. He doesn't say something and then not do it; if that were true, where would any of us be? What hope would we have? But no, we have this certainty from God's own Word: we can rely on Him to do what He says.

When God said He would send a Savior: He did it. When God says He will forgive: He does. When He promises to be with us in our trials: He is there. Every time we open our Bibles, God is showing us over and over the proof that He keeps His promises. He will not fail.

What a comfort!

This Advent and Christmas, as you hear and read the Scriptures about Jesus: consider the God who is big enough to plan His coming and show us details along the way—a plan that extends across centuries...wow!

From there, ponder how God's reliability impacts your salvation. How does that affect your reading of His Word? How does His reliability bring comfort to your current circumstances?

Then, contemplate how we as Christians stand poised and ready with the powerful, unchanging Word of God: to offer the good news of our Savior Jesus to a world desperately in need.

God's peace be with you,

Gretchen Baker

Gretchen Baker
The Editor

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Editor: Gretchen Baker
Layout & Design: Karen Young



Jesus: FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISES OF GOD

By *The Rev. Dr. Cary Larson*

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isa 7:10-14)

This season seems to be the intersection of memories of the past and hopes for a brighter future, colliding with the present. Yet, as God would ordain it, at this junction is where we encounter His Son, Christ Jesus.

More than memories but promises, God spoke directly to and through His prophets of old. He promised that in one fixed point, all things would come together. Beginning with the promise of Genesis chapter three to the "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," (v.14) of Isaiah chapter seven and more.

This fixed point is not a datum on a navigation chart, a point on a map, nor a star in the night sky, but in the person of the one who is called "Immanuel," Jesus, Son of God yet son of man. In Him is the fixed point of past, present, and future (Heb 13:8). In Him and through Him, all things are made and sustained (John 1:1-5). He alone is the source and completion of our saving faith (Heb 12:2). He alone is the true light and the true love of God that illuminates and redeems a dark and shame-filled world (John 1:9).

I remember reading somewhere but have long forgotten the source that if Christ Jesus had not fulfilled every one of the promises of the Old Testament, He would not be Messiah. Even if He fulfilled all the ancient prophecies except one, He would still not be Immanuel. But He has done all things well (Ps 22:31)! With the humility of His incarnation (Ps 2:7-9), His perfect submission to the perfect Law

of God (Is 42:5-9), His excruciating passion, and cursed death on the tree (Is 53; Deu 21:23), and His glorious resurrection (Ps 16:9-10), He is the fulfillment of the entire promises of God (2 Cor 1:20)!

In the beloved "O Little Town of Bethlehem," The Rev. Phillips Brooks wrote how God's Christ, who humbly came to humanity in the quiet watch of the night, is the intersection of our "hopes and fears of all the years¹." Examining the past, we can pivot on a dime and look to the future with no fear and the Godly hope which does not disappoint (Rom 5:5). There is no need to look into tomorrow or next year with anxiety or in trepidation as Christ Jesus is already there! The incarnate and eternal Jesus, God in the flesh, has promised you the Kingdom of God through His vicarious and atoning death on Calvary's cross and His glorious resurrection. You can live in the present knowing that He sustains your faith through His means of grace, the inerrant and infallible Word and His Holy Sacrament, promising that you **already have** eternal life.

And, as you know, Christ Jesus is on the record for keeping all of God's promises!

The national office of The American Association of Lutheran Churches and myself bid you God's eternal peace and joy in Christ Jesus our Lord as we prepare and celebrate the promises of God made good in the incarnation of His Son, our Lord, Christ Jesus.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel! Amen. Blessed Christmas to all! †

The Rev. Dr. Cary Larson is the Presiding Pastor of The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC).

[1] Phillips Brooks, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," *Lutheran Service Book* (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2006), #361.



Martin Luther's Theology of Christ
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

By Rev. Jon Holst



So, following Luther's typology, we see, in the creation of Adam from dust that hadn't yet been corrupted by the entrance of sin, a type of Christ who was incarnate in the womb of Mary who was a spotless virgin.

It has been said that Martin Luther “read the Bible through Christocentric glasses, claiming that the whole Bible – including the OT – taught about Christ ...”¹ With that in mind, I thought I’d share with you some Old Testament passages with examples of the Christ-centered way that Luther understood them (generally laid out in the chronology of Incarnation to Ascension) in the hope that it might be edifying for your own reading and understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.

“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness ... And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (Gen 1:26–2:7)

While on the face of this historical narrative it’s easy to see the miraculous creative act that God performs, Luther also sees here a type of Christ in the creation of Adam. He writes: “... because [Adam] was created in the image of the invisible God, this statement is a dim intimation, as we shall hear, that God was to reveal Himself to the world in the man Christ.”² So, following Luther’s typology, we see, in the creation of Adam from dust that hadn’t yet been corrupted by the entrance of sin, a type of Christ who was incarnate in the womb of Mary who was a spotless virgin.

“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting ... and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” (Ex 40:34–35) “Then the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD ... into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the Most Holy Place ... the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.” (1 Ki 8:6–11)

The pillar of fire and cloud marked the location of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple. This was a sign to the Israelites that God would and did fulfill His covenant promise of leading them into the Promised Land. Christologically, Luther sees the place of God’s presence for His people in this way:

[Christ’s] body was the true temple where God would henceforth be and reside; all other temples belonged to this temple, that is, to the humanity of Christ, assumed from the Virgin Mary ... [u]ntil now God had restricted His presence to the temple in Jerusalem ... God has established another temple for His residence: the precious humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ ... whoever wants to call upon God, ... must turn his face heavenward to Christ and thus come to God through Christ, the real and true temple. For Christ is the proper mercy seat ...³

When John’s Gospel speaks of Christ the Word becoming flesh, this, for Luther, is the fulfillment of God’s presence above the Mercy Seat which was simply an Old Testament type of Jesus’ incarnation.

“Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” (Gen 3:21)

God conveys the truth of His covenant promises in many ways. In this narrative, Adam and Eve are clothed with animal skins: skins that were sacrificed for the purposes of covering them. The profound nature of this reality is explained Christologically by Luther:

... in the third chapter, we called attention to the garments of skin which clothed the naked human beings as a sign that [God] wanted to protect, defend, and preserve them ... that just as the skin of a dead sheep warms the body, so Christ, after He has died, warms us with His Spirit and on the Last Day will raise and revive us ... There was need for them to have a sign of life, from which they could learn God’s blessing and good will.⁴

The skins here are seen by Luther as a type of Christ, namely, the fulfillment of God’s Gospel promises in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

“... and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” (Gen 4:8)

The crucifixion of our Lord is seen by Luther through Christological eyes in the account of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel: “The same thing happened to righteous Abel and also to our Lord Christ, who was not a priest or a king in Jerusalem but was driven to the cross by the priests and rulers.”⁵ In other words, Abel is a type of Christ. Just as Cain killed his brother Abel, Jesus was killed by His own Israelite Brothers.

“So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son ...” (Gen 22:6)

The Christological imagery in the historical account of the sacrifice of Isaac is treated extensively by Luther. Consider the following passage: “... all the narratives of the Old Testament point so nicely and beautifully to Christ and confess Him ... Isaac was sacrificed by his father and yet remained alive, being replaced by a ram ... This signifies Christ, the Son of God. He is in all respects like a mortal human being who died on the cross ...”⁶ In addition to elucidating the typology of substitutionary atonement, Luther also notes specifically the venue for this

Martin Luther continued...

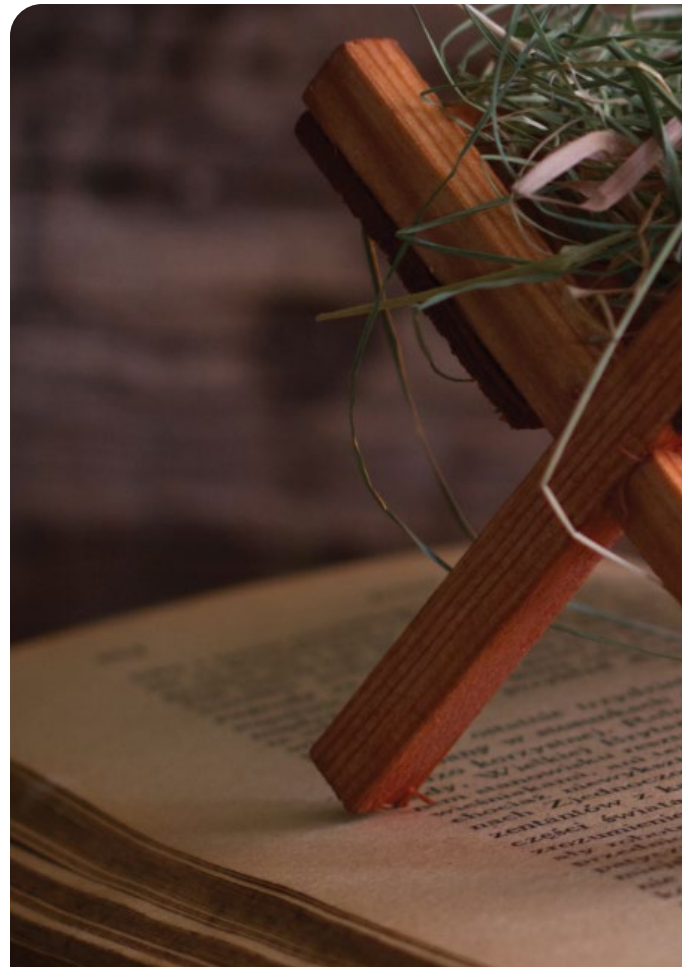
saving act: the cross. By this reference, Luther is noting the relationship between Jesus carrying His own cross and Isaac, a type of Christ, carrying the wood for the burnt offering.

“Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering ...” (Lev 16)

The Old Testament is, of course, replete with sacrificial narrative and imagery. Luther sees Aaron, the prototypical high priest of Israel, as a type of Christ: “If you would interpret [Leviticus] well and confidently, set Christ before you, for He is the man to whom all of it applied, every bit of it. Make the High Priest Aaron, then to be nobody but Christ alone ...”⁷ Luther elaborates on this typological understanding by comparing the parallel between Aaron’s sacrificial activity and Christ’s sacrificial activity: “‘And Aaron shall take upon himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering which the people of Israel hallow.’ This definitely prefigured that Christ, the High Priest, would bear the sins of all who bring offerings, that is, who believe.”⁸ When Christ entered the Most Holy Place of his heavenly kingdom to intercede for us, He did so according to His priestly office whereby He has taken the sins of the whole world upon Himself as prefigured in Leviticus and elsewhere.

These are just a few examples of how Luther interpreted the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. Note that Luther doesn’t turn these Old Testament historical narratives into allegories. Indeed, he knew them to be historical accounts, recorded in the divinely inspired Scriptures, so that we might come to understand the overarching theme and purpose of God’s Word: His faithfulness in keeping His promises and saving His people. By following the example of Luther when we read the Old Testament, we are better able to see the point of all of those narratives in that, while not allegorical, they nonetheless point to the fulfillment of God’s saving work in the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross.†

Rev. Jon Holst serves St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church, Jurupa Valley, CA.



The pillar of fire and cloud marked the location of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and temple. This was a sign to the Israelites that God would and did fulfill His covenant promise of leading them into the Promised Land.

[1] Klein, William W., Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Introduction to Biblical Interpretation (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 47.

[2] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 1, Lectures on Genesis, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 87.

[3] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 22, Sermons on the Gospel of John, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 248-49.

[4] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 2, Lectures on Genesis, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 144.

[5] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 1, Lectures on Genesis, 252.

[6] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 52, The Gospel for the Sunday After Christmas, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 126.

[7] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 35, Preface to the Old Testament, 247.

[8] Luther, Martin, Luther’s Works, vol, 29, Lectures on Hebrews, 168.



OT Prophecies



Jesus: The Supreme Sacrifice

By Sgt. Gabriel Hallock

One of the most well-known prophecies regarding Christ in Holy Scripture is Isaiah 53. This text is used annually as the Old Testament reading for Good Friday, which gives us a glimpse into the foreshadows of Christ as the sacrifice prophesied across the Old Testament.

Isaiah presents two images that dominate the text: Christ as the suffering sacrifice, and Christ as the one who is crucified with sinners, which will be fulfilled in the Gospels and become the heart of the Christian message regarding God's salvation for humanity.

Isaiah gives a rather close look into what God is planning for the salvation of his people: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." (Isa 53:4-5)

God through the Prophet Isaiah gives a foretaste of what is to come, which is the sending of his Son into the world to be crucified and be the sacrifice that atones for all of mankind's sins. The description of what Christ is going to do for his people is detailed. Here Christ not only is going to die for sins, but he is going to bear the griefs of mankind, be stricken and smitten by God, pierced and tortured for our transgressions, and crushed by the weight of the cross of suffering.

Essentially, the point Isaiah is getting across is that Christ is going to become man to bear our dysfunction, our grief, our sin, and our brokenness and die on a cross so that by his wounds we may be healed of our spiritual condition: our spiritual death. To further this point of Christ identifying with sinners and becoming sin so that we may be right with God, Isaiah also writes, "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors." (Isa 53:12)

This verse gets to the real meat of what Isaiah is prophesying, which is Christ is identifying with sinners. Christ associates himself as a sinner, though he is without sin. In order for sin to be vanquished, something has to take its place. And here Christ is taking the place of the sinners in order that the sinner may be counted righteous in the sight of God.

The key question that springs into mind is: how does this apply to me? What can I take away from this text? That Christ suffered for you. That Christ identified himself with your despair, your dysfunction, your sinfulness, and your struggles. Christ died for sinners and suffered for every single one of them, no matter how far gone they might be. When we examine the New Testament Gospels, Jesus dies on the cross next to sinners, men actually deserving of death for their crimes committed. God becomes man, innocence becomes corrupt for the sake of humanity. Saint Paul addresses this too when he says in his second epistle to the Corinthians: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This is called the Great Exchange. Christ exchanges his righteousness for your unrighteousness and through his glorious means of grace, his righteousness becomes yours. In the waters of baptism, we hear this promise become ours. Through daily repentance, as we know as Lutherans, God drowns our Old Adam, and we are reminded that our unrighteousness has died with Christ on the cross for all time.

Isaiah presents these two images of Christ: Christ as the sacrifice who suffers for sinners and Christ as the spotless one crucified with sinners. In fulfillment of these two prophetic images, Christ is made man and dies upon a cross next to sinners and bearing the sins of all for you and for his whole people. In this we can take comfort knowing that Christ bore it all for us on the cross, and now we can live in the joy of being redeemed. †

Sgt. Gabriel J. Hallock is a Religious Affairs Specialist in the US Army National Guard. He is a member of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Louisville, KY, pastored by his father, Rev. John Hallock (AALC).



OT Prophecy Fulfilled

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

By Rev. Ray Lorthoir

What on earth might the virgin birth of Jesus Christ have to do with Cain and Abel? We've got to remember that Adam and Eve were given the very first gospel promise on the day they sinned. This promise came in a strange way. It was part of God's judgment upon the serpent who had deceived Eve. We read in Genesis 3:14-15, "So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.'" (NIV)

Years ago, there was a young man in our neighborhood who owned an old-world python. Sometimes he would walk through the church property with the snake draped around his neck. One day we got to talking, and he showed me that some old-world snakes have what are called vestigial legs on their bodies. They looked like two frog legs. I immediately thought of Genesis 3:14, and said to myself, those legs aren't "vestigial." They're evidence that Scripture is true. On the day God judged the serpent, He changed serpents that walked on legs into snakes that slither.



Anyway, it's verse 15 that concerns us. In the middle of the judgment upon the serpent, God spoke a promise in Adam and Eve's hearing. The word "offspring" is not plural but singular, meaning one offspring. It's also clear from God's word that this offspring would be a male. Now, if we understand the serpent to be Satan, then this male offspring of the woman was prophesied to crush Satan's head, while he would endure a deadly bite from the rebel angel.

Apparently, Adam and Eve understood this promise. For we read in Genesis 4:1, "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.'" It's also possible to translate Eve's words as the man. Therefore, was Eve hoping that Cain was the promised offspring prophesied in Genesis 3:15? That's quite possible. For this reason, we're going to look at Cain.

In Genesis 4 we're given the account of Cain with his younger brother Abel. As adults, both made offerings to the Lord. Therefore, we pick up the narrative in Genesis 4:4-5, "The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast." It's obvious that Cain was suffering from probably the most dangerous emotion a human being can have — self-pity. Self-pity can result in suicide or murder.

Noting Cain's emotional state, God interacted with Cain as we read in Genesis 4:6-7, "Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.'"

The word translated "to master" means literally to rule or have dominion over something. Cain was being told to rule over sin — to master it. I can't think of anyone else in the Old Testament to whom God gave this particular command. For that reason, I think God meant for us to contrast Cain with the real Messiah — Jesus.

So, how did Cain do "mastering" sin? We know from the Genesis narrative that Cain succumbed to his self-pity and murdered his brother, Abel. This was the first murder on earth. And, it was because God favored Abel. In this respect, Abel is a type and shadow of Jesus.

The very first man born on earth could not master sin. Therefore, through Cain's failure to master sin, God demonstrated for all time that no one conceived and born of Adam and Eve's line in the normal fashion could be Messiah. Born in the normal human way, we all inherit original sin. And for that reason, we cannot master sin, but sin masters us.

Therefore, the man promised in Genesis 3:15 had to be born in some other way, some way free of original sin. Consequently, as we're told in Matthew and Luke, Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of a *virgin* — Mary of Nazareth.

Drawn from Scripture, the creeds catechize us to believe that Jesus, the Son of God is of one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The one true living God is a Trinitarian being. However, one person of the true God became a human being for our sake. In some way beyond our comprehension, God the Son took on human flesh from His mother, Mary, and became one indivisible being. This is the great mystery of Messiah's Incarnation that is at the center of our Christmas celebration.

Jesus' birth from a virgin conclusively demonstrates that He was **not** conceived in the normal way. Therefore, in no way did He inherit original sin. Consequently, Jesus had the power to do what Cain could not. He had the power to master sin, doing so by fulfilling Isaiah 53 and the many other prophecies of His sacrificial death.

Jesus crushed the head of Satan by remaining faithful unto death, even death on a cross. (See Philippians 2:5-11) The bite of the serpent looked like it had overcome Jesus. But because of Jesus' perfect faithfulness, God raised Him from the dead, giving Him the Name above every name. Ultimately, then, the bite of the serpent was not fatal to Jesus — could not be fatal. (See Acts 2:22-33) He was raised from the dead in the first wholly righteous and immortal human body.

But, from the cross Jesus applied a crush to the head of Satan that was and will be fatal. For when the Lord returns from the right hand of the Father, He will crush His enemies under His feet once and for all. (See Psalm 110:1) Every source of sin will be rooted out of the creation. (See Matthew 13:41) All the dead will be resurrected in immortal bodies.

Those resurrected in Christ will be given bodies totally free from sin, filled with our Creator's righteousness, and in perfect union with our Creator God. The rest will be left outside forever, stripped of righteousness and left in the darkness of total evil.

Because in Jesus we have a sinless King of the human race, in the resurrection we'll never sin again. And, we will be gathered into God's Kingdom once and for all. It's this wonderful future that every Christian looks forward to by God-given faith in Jesus Christ. It's all possible through the forgiveness of our sins won for us by Jesus on the cross.

However, without the virgin birth, this glorious future would be impossible. For if Jesus had been conceived and born in the normal way, He would have been just another failure like Cain and like all the rest of us born in original sin. We would all be lost forever.

But, the virgin birth signifies God's enormous grace toward us. One was born of woman who could save. For, born without original sin, Jesus had the freedom to master sin. †

Rev. Ray Lorthoir serves Trinity Lutheran Church in West Hempstead, NY.



OT Prophecies



Jesus' Ministry in Galilee

Rev. Joe Christina

Isaiah contains so much gospel-related prophecy that I will often refer to it as the “Gospel of Isaiah” when it makes an appearance in the lectionary. It testifies to so many things from the Virgin Birth to the passion of our Lord. Perhaps one of the overlooked prophecies of Isaiah refers to the specific geographical location of much of the Savior’s earthly ministry. “In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan — The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” (9:1–2). Matthew refers to this particular prophecy of Isaiah early on in his gospel after Jesus begins the work of his public ministry. The Light of the World would break forth on the people northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Many would be quickened in their unbelief and made to see such a brilliant Light. Yet, as the Evangelist John tells us, still many more would not recognize the Light of the World.

So much of the Savior’s acts would take place in this region. Healing, preaching, the Sermon on the Mount, the calling of the disciples, and so much more. This was a uniquely blessed population who got to witness with their own eyes and listen with their own ears the miracles and teaching of Immanuel. Crowds would flock to him when news spread that he was in a particular town or location. He was a popular guy and he made his home base in this location fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. Yet as popular as he had become, was everyone quick

to believe who he really was? Hardly. In fact, Jesus himself chides Capernaum — his home base of operations — for not recognizing the Light that he is despite the many miracles that were performed there. I often give thanks to the Lord for my own existence during this time in history with the benefit of hindsight. I’m not so sure I wouldn’t be among those in this region who did not recognize the Light of the World or worse — among the crowd screaming, “CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY!”

But with the blessing of hindsight as those who have been brought to faith through the lifegiving waters of Holy Baptism, we see the Light that had dawned on this region of Palestine. We know who it was that walked among these peoples performing miracles and preaching and teaching. And we know this by means of the Word of God: Both in prophecy and in prophecy fulfilled in the Gospel of Saint Matthew.

Our Lord is simply not in the business of breaking his promises. And we are grateful for those promises that we, as Christians in 2022, are able to see fulfilled. Knowing with Spirit given confidence that his promises of forgiveness and life eternal are just as assured through the saving work of the Light of the World. †

Rev. Joe Christina is the Home Missions Developer for The AALC and serves Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, NC.

But with the blessing of hindsight as those who have been brought to faith through the lifegiving waters of Holy Baptism, we see the Light that had dawned on this region of Palestine.



OT Prophecies



Jesus: Light in the Darkness

Rev. Nigel Brown

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...”
(Isa 9:2)

Isaiah called God’s people to repentance and announced the coming judgment. But his prophecies also provide comfort in their assurance of redemption that is to come in the Messiah. In this brief passage, Isaiah prophesies a people living in darkness when suddenly they see a great light.

Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in His incarnation and earthly ministry. He said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

A proper understanding of this fulfillment of prophecy requires understanding of the light/darkness paradigm.

In the context of 21st century North America, we may look at the culture and see sexual immorality, decadence, denial of God, lawlessness, and other grotesque violations of God’s law and determine that we are also walking in darkness as we reside within this sinful society. In this case, the light of Christ would be seen as his moral instructions. Thus, Christ’s light is the key to moral improvement and a better society for our children and grandchildren to inherit. We imagine: “if everyone would just follow God’s law, then the world would be a better place.”

I am very much in favor of moral living and in favor of keeping God’s law. However, if we focus on the morality aspect of the light/darkness paradigm, we might miss something far greater. Darkness is not defined simply as sinful living. The darkness in which people have walked, ever since the fall of humanity, is the denial of God’s grace. People who walk in darkness can be outwardly sinful people (prostitutes, tax collectors, etc.). But they can also be people striving legalistically to uphold the law (such as Pharisees). What keeps them in the darkness is not their sinfulness, but their failure to see the light of the Savior. For we confess that all are sinful and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). On many occasions the Pharisees did not see the light of

Christ because they did not see clearly their own sin and thus their need for a savior.

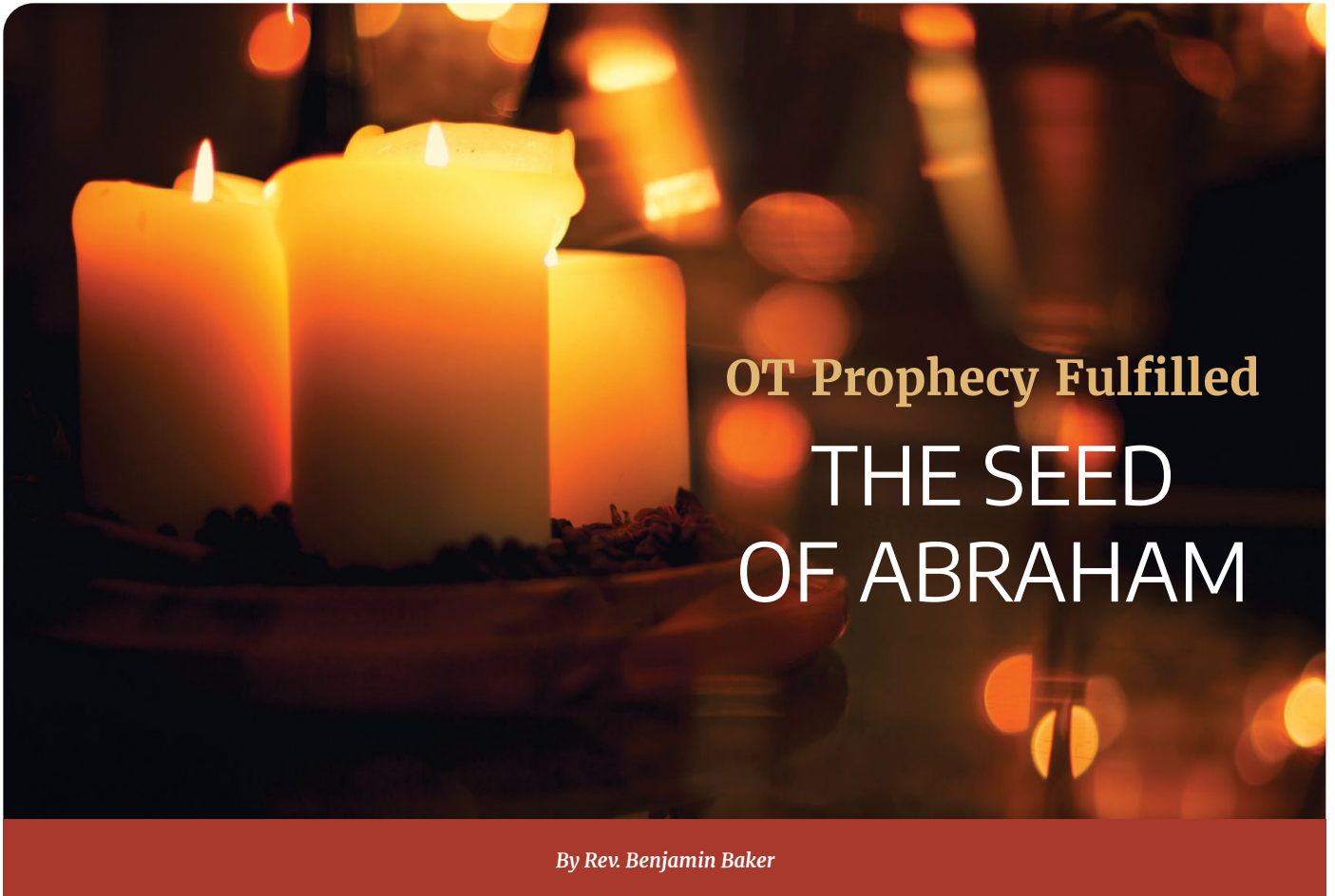
Consider Luke 18:9-14. A Pharisee and a tax collector both went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” In other words, the Pharisee thanked God that he was able to keep the law. In so doing, he did not confess his sin and even worse, he essentially denied that he was in need of a savior. His self-righteousness meant a rejection of Christ’s righteousness. He was in darkness and did not see the great light.

“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” The tax collector despaired of any righteousness of his own. Shame clung to him, and with humility he simply asked for mercy. He was in darkness and had seen a great light. Jesus tells us that between these two men, it is only the tax collector who went away forgiven.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” This prophecy was fulfilled by Christ 2000 years ago, but the fulfillment has not ended. It is ongoing. Every time a person sees their sinful condition in the mirror of God’s law and receives the good news, that Jesus Christ has died for their sins, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

What a joy it is for Christians to bear the light of the gospel to a world that is in need. I do not give thanks for moral depravity, reckless living, or any social ill that leads to degradation, pain, and suffering, but I am thankful that God can work through pain and suffering to bring about repentance and forgiveness which lead to eternal life in Christ. Psalm 51:17 gives insight to God’s disposition toward the repentant: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” †

The Rev. Nigel Brown pastors Hope Lutheran Church, Hampton, VA.



OT Prophecy Fulfilled

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM

By Rev. Benjamin Baker

Intricately woven into the storyline of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic work, *The Lord of the Rings*, is a prophecy of a coming king from a line of kings that appeared to have been lost who would make things right again. In the lore behind the story, we learn of Arnor and Gondor, kingdoms of the ancient Númenorians in Middle-earth. Three kings are of particular importance: Elendil, his eldest son Isildur, and his younger son Anárion. In time, Elendil dies and the high throne passes to Isildur, who also meets an untimely death. Arnor falls into ruin and Gondor wanes and becomes a shadow of its former glory. Eventually even Anárion's line comes to an end, and the line of kings from Elendil appears to have failed. All that is left is a prophecy of a coming king who would be the true heir to the high throne of his father, Elendil. This "seed" or "offspring" we find out is Aragorn II, who returns to Gondor and is crowned High King after his forebears, Elendil and Isildur. The line is restored and things are made right again.

It is not surprising, given Tolkien's Christian faith, that this storyline and the lore behind it bears striking similarities to what we find in Holy Scripture when it comes to the promise of the Messiah. Much in the same way that the Men of Númenor were waiting for the promised king from Elendil's line to come, so the people of Israel in the Old Testament were waiting for the Promised One—the Messiah who was to be the Seed of Abraham. This theme of promise is essential for understanding the Old Testament rightly.

God made a promise to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after the Fall that he would send a Savior to make things right again (Gen 3:15). This promise was passed down through the generations until it came to a man named Abram. In giving this promise as an inheritance to Abram, God added some more specifics. God promises Abram that all peoples will be blessed in him. (Gen 12:1-3) In Genesis 12:7 God says, "To your offspring (seed) I will give this land." In Genesis 17:1-8, God changes Abram's name to Abraham, and tells Abraham that he will be the father of a "multitude of nations." Note that: a *multitude of nations*, not simply *one nation*.

Abraham initially had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac, we are told, is the child of promise (Gen 15:4; Heb 11:17-19). He is the next step in the line of the Seed. Isaac has two sons, Esau the older, and Jacob the younger. Jacob is the child of promise, not Esau (Gen 25:22-23). Pump the brakes here. We need to observe something vitally important: Ishmael, as well as the other children of Abraham (Gen 24:1-6), were just as much descendants of Abraham *physically*. So why Isaac? He is the child of promise, the one God chose to be the bearer of the Messianic promise (Ro 9:6-8; Heb 11:17-18). Likewise, Esau is just as much as Jacob a descendant of Isaac *physically*. So why Jacob? He, like his father Isaac, and grandfather Abraham, was the one God chose to be the bearer of the Messianic promise (Heb 11:8-9). In Genesis 32:28, God changes Jacob's name to Israel, and so in this way Israel is a designation of the promise, and a true Israelite is one who trusts in that promise (see e.g., John 1:47).

Seed of Abraham continued...

In the Scriptures God often introduces himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (e.g., Ex 3:6, 15-17; 4:4-5; 6:2-3), or connects that sequence of names to his covenant and promises (e.g., Ex 6:8; 33:1; Dt 9:26-29; 2 Ki 13:23; Jer 33:25-26), and Jesus makes that same connection in Matthew 22:31-32. That sequence, *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob*, means that the nation of Israel was created by promise, and they were the people of the promise. In other words, this whole business with Abraham and his seed is not really about bloodline but about promise (the bloodline is there for a purpose, as we will see, but we need to have it straight in our minds that the bloodline is the result, and the promise the cause, not the other way around).

Jump ahead to Genesis 49, where an aged Jacob prophesies over his children. Though his children are collectively also children of promise, Judah is singled out as the tribe from whom Messiah will come. Jacob says, "Judah is a lion's cub...The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs (Heb. Shiloh), and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." (Gen 49:9a, 10) From here we get the association of the Seed of Abraham with the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5), and also the Seed as the Ruler of the nations, whose rule the tribe of Judah would image with their kings until the one true King (Shiloh) would come for the scepter.

Fast forward to the most prominent descendant of Judah in the Old Testament: King David. In 2 Samuel 7, God promises David that he will build a house for David, one that is everlasting: "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:11b-13, 16). David and his descendants are now the bearer of the Messianic promise.

But we run into a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in the Old Testament: the downfall and exile of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Because of the continual apostasy of the people, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah came to an end. With the downfall of Judah, the line of Davidic kings also fell into ruin. For all the world it looked like the Davidic line was done and the Messianic hopes dashed. Isaiah saw this from afar and describes the house of David as a "stump" (Is 11:1).

Though it appears to human eyes and reason that the end has come, there is yet hope for God keeps his promises. Isaiah also says that from this stump will come forth a shoot, and a branch from David's roots shall bear fruit. (Is 11:1) This shoot is a divine figure, as verses 2-10 indicate. After seventy years in exile some of the Judeans return to Judah, and among them is a descendant of David and heir to the throne: Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2; Mt 1:12). St. Matthew teaches us that Zerubbabel is an ancestor of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus (Mt 1:12-16). St. Luke tells us that Mary, mother of Jesus, is also descended from the house of David (Lk 3:23-38). St. Paul says the same in Romans 1:3. This is why



they both go to Bethlehem, the City of David, to register for the Roman census (Lk 2:1-7). Indeed, Mary sings of the fulfillment of this promise in her *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) with these words in particular: "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." (Lk 1:54-55)

The long-awaited Seed has come! Jesus fits all that was predicted concerning God's Messiah. He is the Seed of Eve who would crush the head of the serpent, he is the Seed of Abraham who will bless the whole world, the Lion of Judah, Shiloh, the Root of David, the branch bearing fruit, heir to David's throne, and descendant of David according to the flesh. On the cross, Jesus crushed the head of the serpent, Satan, and with his innocent suffering and death and precious blood he paid for the sins of all people. By his resurrection Jesus defeated death and was vindicated as God's Messiah. At his ascension this Seed of Abraham was coronated as King over all the world. Indeed the one to whom the scepter belongs has come. In Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, all the nations of the world are truly blessed as he gathers sinners to himself from every tribe, nation, language, and tongue.

In Jesus the promise to Abraham concerning numerous descendants and becoming the father of nations comes to fruition. In Jesus, Abraham's Seed, Abraham finds his true descendants from every nation on earth: those who share his faith in Christ (e.g., Gal 3:1-28; 4:21-31; Ro 9:1-11:36; 15:8-13).

When our Lord returns, he will bring with him Abraham and all who have trusted the promise of God from Adam and Eve onward, and together with those of us still alive at his coming will receive our full inheritance and enter into the new heavens and earth forever (Heb 11:39-40; Rev 21:1-22:21).

From Genesis 3 to Revelation 22—and everything in-between—God kept his promises and, as St. Paul tells us, "In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son..." and this Son is indeed the promised Seed of Abraham. Simply stunning. All glory, honor, and praise be to our God, Keeper of Promises, and to his Christ, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Seed of Abraham! Amen. †

Rev. Benjamin Baker serves the congregations of St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Traer, IA, and St. Paul Lutheran Congregation, Tripoli, IA.



Clergy Roster



The Rev. Gary Koutsopoulos and his wife Lori. Submitted photos.

Reverend Gary Koutsopoulos

“The grass withers and the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass. The grass withers the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” (Isa 40:7-8)

I was born in Lorraine, OH, but spent most of my growing up years in Santa Monica, CA. I was baptized at First Lutheran in Venice, CA, then grew up attending Mt Olive Lutheran Church, where I was confirmed. From an early age, I had a passion and longing to serve the Lord and study His Word. It was the Lord through important people in my life, that directed me into going to Bible School, and from there into seminary, graduating from Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in 1993.

My church calls have led me up and down the West Coast, primarily in Washington, Oregon, and California. I am grateful to

live in the beautiful Pacific Northwest and call this place home. I love being outdoors and around water; I guess it brings out my inner Boy Scout. I enjoy fishing, canoeing, walking/hiking, tennis, watching sporting events, and seeing new places.

I have a deep love for faith and family. I am happily married to my wife Lori, and between us have seven beautiful children, two wonderful grandchildren and a third on the way. They are the best blessings that God has given me. My faith is a gift from God, and God has never failed me. I desire to serve Him all the days of my life, teaching and preaching the Word of God wherever He allows me to. †

The Rev. Gary Koutsopoulos was accepted onto The AALC Clergy Roster at The AALC General Convention, June 2022.

~ Special Request ~

PRAY FOR THE SEMINARY

As *The Evangel* was in layout stages, the seminary requested prayer for some exciting news: a growing student body.

As of mid-September, there were 32 students registered with the American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS) for the fall quarter.

Of the 32 students:

- 13 new students
- 22 in the M. Div. program
- Additionally: 7 students auditing classes

Please keep these students and the instructors in your prayers!



American Lutheran
Theological Seminary



Women of L.I.F.E.

To the Ends of the Earth

By Lea Eldred

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

God calls us to go to our neighbors, our countrymen, and “to the ends of the earth” with the Gospel of salvation. Romans 10 tells us, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” The Women of L.I.F.E. (WOL) take this seriously and we have supported and are supporting a number of ministries, both in America and abroad, with our prayers, support, and our finances.

As the new chair for the WOL Mission Committee, I will be in monthly contact with each of our missionaries. I plan to feature one of our missionaries in upcoming issues of The Evangel. I realized personally, that even though WOL supported us through our missionary service in Turkey, I did not know the scope of their support or who the other missionaries were who are being supported. Therefore, this first month, I would like to give you an overview of the benevolence of WOL.

Friends of Madagascar: Steve Lellelid

Steve works in the southern part of Madagascar in the Ambovombe-Androy Synod of the Malagasy Lutheran Church within the Evangelism Department. For 16 years, Steve worked to translate the Bible into the dialect of the Tandroy people. These Bibles are now being distributed among the people! Steve has also begun working with several Christian non-profits to repair village wells and supply wells to needy communities. This enables him to bring

the Gospel into new regions of the country via the preached Word, testimony, and the new Tandroy Bibles. Even 10 years ago, most people could not read but, due to a literary project, there is hardly a village where there is not at least one person who can read. Pray for the Word of God to pierce the hearts of the people and bring them to salvation in Christ. madagascarmission.org

God’s Hidden Treasures: Ukraine

God’s Hidden Treasures is a wonderful ministry that reaches into the nation of Ukraine with a threefold ministry: Medical Aid, Wheelchairs, and a Youth & Orphan Ministry. This is from their September 11, 2022, update: “Today we met a man from the army who is leaving tomorrow for one of the combat areas. We sent him off with 10 sleeping bags, 4 sets of thermal underwear, 40 pairs of warm socks and more for the men in his unit. We were able to lay hands on him and pray God’s protection over him...” With war throughout the nation, there are more orphans, more refugees, more medical needs, more needs for wheelchairs, and more hurting people than ever before. Pray for those trying to meet all of these needs. godshiddentreasures.org

Joy 4 Ukraine: Rev. Scott & Lena Yount

Pastor Scott and Lena are working within the organization of Spiritual Orphans Network (SON), formerly Eastern European Missions Network (EEMN). Before the war, Scott served people in Eila Tserkva, Ukraine, who were vulnerable, those with physical disabilities, and with the youth. He served as the pastor of Church of Hope. Like many other missionaries, Pastor Scott and Lena were forced to flee to Slovakia for safety and have been ministering to Ukrainians who are fleeing the nation of Ukraine. They are extremely busy and the needs are overwhelming but they are serving with good spirits and with the power of the Holy Spirit. Things are changing daily, but you can keep up with their prayer needs on Facebook (Scott Yount) or through the SON website.

Ends of the Earth continued...



Left to Right: God's Hidden Treasures brings supplies to those in war torn Ukraine. Rev. Scott and Lena Yount celebrate 31 years of Ukrainian independence, in Slovakia, on August 24, 2022. Rev. Dave Spotts brings pastoral care to three college campuses in Missouri. Submitted photos.

The Sending Place

The Sending Place is a wonderful organization that trains Lutherans in missions and focuses on sending out short term teams. We were thrilled to host their teams when we were in Turkey but they have truly been 'round the world: to Ghana, Russia, Equator, Thailand, Ukraine, and many other nations sharing the love of God. The founder of The Sending Place is Rev. Darrel Deuel (AALC) and their home-base is Galt, California. Coronavirus has put a damper on their ministry, but they were able to put on a Pastor's Conference in Ghana via ZOOM. Pray for The Sending Place as they keep in contact with the people they serve and "get their feet under them" again with training and sending short term teams. thesendingplace.com

Lutherans For Life

Their mission is "equipping Lutherans and their neighbors to be Gospel-motivated voices for Life." This right to life is from cradle to grave, in a goal to end both abortion and euthanasia. Their vision: "Every Lutheran, both individually, and in community, upholding the God-given value of human life and influencing society to do the same" and their Philosophy is: "Lutherans For Life believes that the Church is compelled by God's Word to speak and act on behalf of those who are vulnerable and defenseless."

They are rejoicing at the overturning of Roe vs. Wade but know their work is far from finished. Pray that LFL will have a part of ending abortion in our lifetime. lutheransforlife.org

Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry: Rev. Dave Spotts

Rev. Dave Spotts provides face-to-face pastoral care to the students, faculty, and staff at the University of Missouri, Stephens College, and Columbia College. He uses many means to reach his communities with the Gospel: visiting the sick, holding dinners, reaching fraternity leaders and members, and filling in where needed within the community. In September, Pastor Spotts said he was busy with the beginning of the fall terms at the schools and meeting the new staff and students but also traveling to promote and support the ministry. He is working to visit many of The AALC churches as he is able. So many universities are becoming more liberal: further from Christ and His precepts. Pray for Pastor Dave as he reaches those who influence the future of so many! You can keep up with Rev. Dave Spotts on Facebook or at wittenbergcomo.com. †

Lea Eldred became the Missions Coordinator for the WOL at the General Convention in June; she served on the mission field in Turkey for many years.

God calls us to go to our neighbors, our countrymen, and "to the ends of the earth" with the Gospel of salvation. Romans 10 tells us, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?"



God Loves a Cheerful Giver

By Mary Koeberl Rechenberg



St. John's Lutheran Church hosted a benefit to raise funds for a family in need; the Whitewater Bluegrass Band donated their talents to the event. Photo by Rev. Dave Spotts.

“Could something good come from tragedy?” You might be tempted to answer “No.” The members of St. John’s Lutheran Church in the small town of Pocahontas, Missouri, would most likely have a different answer.

St. John’s Lutheran Church’s history dates back to 1868 when the church was founded. The Mission Evangelism Committee of St. John’s decided a few years ago to try and revive the old-time church community picnic that had been part of their history until sometime in the 1970’s, raising money for the church. We decided that instead of raising money for the church, we would raise money for benevolence. Raising money for Lutheran organizations had been our focus the past three years. This year we decided to try and raise money for an individual or family.

The daughter-in-law of one of our members, Catie Leimer, was struggling with an aggressive form of breast cancer, which involved chemo treatments, surgeries and radiation. Her husband, who was baptized and confirmed at St. John’s, often missed work to stay with Catie and their two-year-old daughter, Josie. Trips to and from St. Louis were expensive, and more treatments and surgeries were in Catie’s future. We all agreed helping Catie and her family was the right thing to do. We formed a plan and set to work.

A flier was designed with information about the event. One member volunteered to donate a quilt and have it quilted for a quilt raffle. Once word got around, with the help of church members, three newspapers, two radio stations, and Facebook, things really got interesting.

St. John’s Facebook page was shared over 81 times, committee members visited businesses asking for donations, members of the congregation sold raffle tickets and donated auction items. People started sending checks, calling to have donations picked up and offering to help. Every one of these people expressed their concern for Catie and how happy they were to be able to help.

We saw God’s love everywhere. We heard from so many people who, before had never even heard of St. John’s, much less knew where it was located. It was all about helping this sweet family. Listening to the news gives you a false sense of what kind of people are in the world. We heard from people who probably needed help themselves, but were anxious to give to someone else.

continued on page 18

1. Prayer of Thanksgiving for all the saints who have gone before
2. Rev. Leon L. Knitt
3. Unity in the church
4. National Mediation Board
5. Poplar Lake Lutheran Church Fosston, MN
6. New congregations
7. Carlene Kamradt, Bookkeeper
8. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Evansdale, IA
9. Commission for American Missions
10. Gretchen Baker, Evangel Editor
11. Redeemer Lutheran Church West Union, IA
12. Rev. Bruce Ritter
13. Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church Frazier Park, CA
14. Rev. Rich A. Eddy
15. Wittenberg Door Campus Ministry
16. National and Local Governments
17. Rev. Carl Bengtson
18. Seminary professors
19. Western Region
20. For law enforcement officers
21. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church Sidney, MT
22. Holiday travels
23. For paramedics and firefighters
24. Rev. Orlando K. Hash
25. Sonland Lutheran Church Casa Grande, AZ
26. Rev. Carl Groh
27. St. John’s Lutheran Church Pocahontas, MO
28. St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church Jurupa Valley, CA
29. Seminararians
30. Rev. LeRoy Holmes



December 2022

PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Rev. Richard G. Hueter
2. For the sick
3. Rev. Wayne Wilken
4. American Lutheran Church Mandan, ND
5. Rev. Richard T. Day
6. Ascension Lutheran Church Ames, IA
7. Commission for Evangelism
8. Christ Lutheran Church of Chetek Chetek, WI
9. For the Youth
10. Commission for Youth Activities
11. Protection for the unborn
12. St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church Traer, IA
13. For missionaries serving overseas
14. St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church Augusta, KY
15. Rev. Robert Ross
16. St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church Otis, CO
17. For pastors and their families
18. Commission for Women
19. St. Peter's Lutheran Church Elk Grove, CA
20. Rev. Robert Salge
21. St. Paul Lutheran Congregation Tripoli, IA
22. Board of Directors of The AALC Foundation
23. Rev. William H. Van Duzer
24. The Barn Again Lutheran Church Cedar Crest, NM
25. Rev. Steven Wadle
26. Our nation's leaders
27. Clergy Commission
28. For Call Committees
29. St. Paul's Lutheran Church Napoleon, OH
30. Lutherans For Life
31. Protection for our military

God Loves continued...



Around 200 people attended the benefit, plus many donated items for a silent auction or supplies for the meal and events. Photo by Rev. Dave Spotts. Catie and Austin Leimer with daughter Josie. Photo courtesy of Amanda Huber Photography.

A couple, probably in their eighties, drove all the way from Kelso, Missouri, to donate a mini fireplace for the silent auction. The wife was carrying her portable oxygen pack. She could barely walk, so they sat down in the parish hall to rest and visit. She told me she needed a lung transplant, so she and her husband never went anywhere. "I told my husband we need to go and take this for the auction," she said. "This will be our vacation." It was obvious that helping someone else in need gave them joy and distracted them from their own problems.

An elderly gentleman from Perryville, Missouri called and offered his new bicycle for the auction. He said he was too shaky to ride it. When I went to pick it up, it was easy to see he probably needed assistance, as he was nearly deaf and lived in a tiny one room apartment. His smile lit up his face as I thanked him for his generosity.

An elderly farmer from Friedheim, Missouri, called and offered to get donations and money. He was so touched by Catie's needs that he went to all his friends and businesses, in various towns, asking for money and donations for the auction. He raised over \$1000, collected numerous auction items and donated 125 lb. of ground beef for hamburgers. When I asked him about his family, he told me his wife couldn't come because she has Alzheimer's disease.

Working on this benefit has opened our eyes to the fact that there are so many kind, caring people, willing to go out of their way to help others, in spite of having tremendous needs of their own. The Bible tells us, "A generous man will prosper, he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." (Prov 11:25)

In spite of the temperature being in the high 90's, the Catie Leimer benefit picnic was an amazing success. Approximately 200 people attended. Many people stopped in just to give a donation on their way to another destination. Our large tent was donated, the Whitewater Bluegrass Band donated their time, the ice cream was donated, the church women donated dozens of cookies and brownies, and two church members brought their grills and grilled hamburgers and hotdogs.

A total of 73 items were donated for the silent auction. To our surprise, a total just shy of \$15,000 was raised for the Leimer family. We had never done anything quite like this before, and have been overwhelmed by the response. People gave out of hope and love, with joy in their hearts. Knowing that your time, talents and money have given someone else happiness is a great reward. To God be the glory!

"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor 9:7)

Mary Koeberl Rechenberg is a retired teacher and the author of four children's books, numerous articles, essays and poem. She lives near Pocahontas, MO.

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY: A Ministry of Love and Service

By Martha Spotts

The word “hospitality” conjures fear in the heart of many Christians. In the Bible we read verses such as, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet 4:9) and “Seek to show hospitality” (Rom 12:13), and we know we have failed. We want to do better, but we list all the reasons why we can’t: “My house is too small.” “I’m not a good enough cook.” “My children are too ill-behaved.” Yet, there it is, in black and white, a clear command from God’s Word: “Show hospitality”—and without complaining about it either!

The context for the hospitality mentioned in the passages above is love and service. When we seek to show these to our guests, the desire to impress them shrinks. Making our guests feel welcomed and loved takes the pressure off. When we seek to love and serve in Christ’s name, our attention is focused on others and not on ourselves and the impression we are making. We decrease and He increases (John 3:30). And isn’t that what we want: to show the love of Jesus to others and through our actions to remind them of His mercy? That is the key to Christian hospitality.

It’s important to remember that hospitality doesn’t have to be complicated. When all the neighborhood kids congregate in your yard for an afternoon of hide and seek, make some popcorn and lemonade and serve it to them on the patio. Invite the new couple from church over for coffee and dessert. Take a simple meal to the family with the new baby. Offer the crew mowing your yard tall glasses of iced tea on a hot day. After awhile, you will become practiced and comfortable enough to try something bigger—say, a hot chocolate and cookie party for your friends and neighbors or even Thanksgiving dinner for extended family members. Whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord and with the goal of showing Christian love, and it will be a success.

Be sure to look outside your circle of Christian friends and family when opening your home. While it is commendable to extend hospitality to Christians, it’s also an excellent thing to reach out to non-Christians. Some who would never attend a church service may be willing or even eager to accept an invitation from you for a casual backyard BBQ. Pray beforehand that God will make their hearts good soil where seeds of the gospel will be planted, grow, and come to fruition (Matt 13:1–9).

Because it’s important to reach out to those who don’t know the Lord, you may find yourself inviting people from other religions to your home. Be sensitive to any dietary restrictions they may have. It’s okay to ask beforehand or to have menu options for them to pick and choose from. They will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Also include the lonely and overlooked. The couple with the child with a disability, the widow whose family lives out of town, the college student who can’t go home for Easter—they would probably be thrilled to receive an invitation from you. Look around for people who are excluded, far from home, or otherwise isolated. You will be blessed as you bless them in Jesus’ name.

As you prepare for guests, pray for them. Ask God to direct your time together and to help you forget yourself and your worries. Pray that your guests will be refreshed and that God’s Spirit will work His will in them. This house blessing is usually prayed at Epiphany, but it’s also excellent before having guests over:

O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need charity and companionship, narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride, and strife. Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block to children, nor to straying feet, but rugged and strong enough to turn back the Tempter’s power.

*O God, make the door of this house a gateway to Thine eternal kingdom through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*¹

We receive Christ’s own hospitality when He invites us to His table and feeds us with His true body, the bread of heaven, and the cup of the New Covenant in His blood that quenches our thirst for eternity. So let us gladly open our homes and hearts to those who belong to God and those who don’t, demonstrating His love and kindness by offering them humble companionship, conversation, and a cup of coffee. †

Martha Spotts is a pastor’s wife in Columbia, MO, where she homeschools her grandchildren and helps her husband host large dinner gatherings of university students, faculty, and staff every two weeks in their home.

[1] Based on a traditional Epiphany home blessing.

The American Association of Lutheran Churches

921 East Dupont Road, #920

Fort Wayne, IN 46825-1551

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(260) 755-9401
theaalc@taalc.org



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UPCOMING EDITIONS...

Please be in prayer for and consider contributing to these upcoming editions:

Jan/Feb 2023: **The Divine Service** (*deadline Nov. 1*)

Mar/Apr 2023: **Missions – Local and International** (*deadline Jan. 1*)

May/June 2023: **Congregational Life** (*deadline March 1*)

July/Aug 2023: **Holy Scripture** (*deadline May 1*)

Sep/Oct 2023: **Youth Edition** (*deadline July 1*)

Nov/Dec 2023: **Advent and Christmas** (*deadline Sept. 1*)

Church News:

The Evangel welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: theevangel@taalc.org

Or mail: St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Attn: Gretchen Baker
207 Taylor St., Traer, IA 50675