

A LIVING, ACTIVE, POWERFUL CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH OF THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

Some computer folks speak in doomsday term about the year 2000. That's when they say all computers will go into shock and electronic fibrillation. Time as they were programmed to think it won't exist anymore. There will be that strange number two and all those zeroes, and computers will balk and life as we know it on the planet will come to an end.

As believers in Jesus, we are not afraid of the year 2000 for whatever reason. We just hope that it doesn't come. We hope that Jesus will come back before the zeroes of the new millennium roll over. It is not only a distinct possibility. It is what we should expect because our Savior has told us, "Yes, I am coming soon." And we take seriously what Peter said when he encouraged us, "You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming (2 Peter 3:11)." So we look forward to Jesus' coming more than we look forward to another thousand years of time passing. We say with the Apostle John, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

But the Lord in his love and patience might delay a few more years, and the next millennium might come. We have more to look forward to than the possible debacle with the computers. We can gather together this afternoon and peek through the key hole of these last months of the twentieth century and actually peer into the twenty-first century. That is the hope of the title before us: *A Living, Active, Powerful Christ for the Church of the Next Millennium.*

We can only speculate as to what the new millennium will bring for the Church in the way of changes and challenges in outward things and in its work. The twentieth century went from horseback to rocket ships, from quill pens to computers. The only web sites people knew at the turn of this century were those of spiders in their own basements. Who could even guess what the twenty-first century will bring in the way of changes to life on the planet? God only knows that. It would be pure conjecture and foolishness to try and see what physical changes or moral changes or any other kind of change like that the next millennium will bring.

But when we consider the living, active and powerful Christ for the Church of the next millennium, we are considering something that we can know. We can know exactly how Christ will be in the next millennium because he has promised us that he doesn't change. So what he is today--what he was yesterday--is what he is going to be in the new millennium. If Jesus does come before the year 2000 our work in this paper today will not have been in vain. We will have been obedient to the, command, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things (Phil 4:8)." And in thinking about Jesus being living and active and powerful and the Christ, we will have calmed our nerves and received strength to live and work and reason to look ahead.

That must be the intent of this paper: not to be a prophecy of how Christ will be in the next millennium but to be a proclamation of how he is yesterday, today and forever.

To help us deal with the topic in an orderly way, we will consider it along the lines of the following parts:

1. **Jesus is living**
2. **Jesus is active**
3. **Jesus is powerful**
4. **Jesus is still Christ, the chosen one of God**
5. **What Jesus was in the past and is in the present he will still be in the next millennium**

1. Jesus is living

There are many religious road kills along the highway of life. All the gods of mankind have, been squashed flat by the engine of time. They are dead. They haven't been able to get out of its way. Goliath pranced back and forth in front of God's people in the Valley of Elah. When the shepherd stepped forward to do battle with his sling, "the Philistine cursed David by his gods (1 Samuel 17:43)." One of those gods was dubbed Dagon. He had a temple at Ashdod and dead though he was he lived there. One day the Philistines who had captured the Ark of God carried it in triumph into Dagon's temple. And then the Scripture tells us the rest of the story, "But the, following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold: only his body remained. That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold (1 Samuel 5:4-5)." We thank God that when we enter our church to worship our living Jesus we don't have to sidestep the threshold in the narthex because that is where we saw the grisly remains of his head and his hands.

All the gods of history are dead. Buddha is dead. You can climb up into one of his lifeless statues in Kamakura, Japan and look out one of his vacant eyes at the people down below who are worshipping and praying and leaving saki in little cups and tidy piles of oranges and rice cakes. The awful god of the hammer and sickle in our world's recent experience is dead. There are still some who worship at his altar, but they will finally also be disappointed. He by his name Communism promised to share all good things with his worshipers, but it hasn't happened and it won't. Only the living Jesus we celebrate in Communion shares all good things with those who follow him and claim him and have him living with them.

The prophets of the Old Testament called idols "worthless" and "detestable" and "abominable." And their worst crime was that they were dead. Isaiah said, "They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand (Isaiah 44:18)." The plight of those who worship something dead is horrible. To stop this terrible "abominations" from happening our hands are driven deep into our pockets and our missionaries are driven in love and concern to leave their homes and familiar places to preach to those still bowing

down to dead things. And all of us say with the apostles who witnessed Easter, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20)." Jesus is alive. He will be in the new millennium too.

It seemed for a while that Jesus was dead. That was what those beaten and sad clumps of human beings moving slowly on the first Easter morning were doing: going to worship a dead and cold Jesus with that rich poverty of their collected spices and ointments and tears. The angel voices echoed in his tomb and reminded, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you (Luke 24:5)?"

We worship a living Jesus. In this twentieth century since he rose from the dead we have been worshipping a living Jesus. In the twenty-first century we will worship a living Jesus too. It won't happen in these next two years that we will gather at some heaped up hole in the ground and watch our Jesus and faith lowered slowly out of sight on green canvas belts. Reality and truth make us entertain the possibility that there will be some who are even now listening to this essay who will be members of the Church Triumphant before New Year's Eve 1999 comes. But Jesus will still be with his living and struggling believers in the Church Militant because he lives.

And all the illegitimately conceived baby gods and the philosophies and gods not yet born will quickly grow old and die, some even before the new millennium comes. The *God is Dead* philosophy of the 70's died, but Jesus is still alive. The so called *New Age* religion is really the same old attempt to convince that God is a benign being somewhere who doesn't really care and didn't really say what he said. So, *New Agers* get interested in channeling spirit guides and crystals and divination. The next millennium is billed to bring the New Age heaven on earth. It is hoped that about the year 2000 there will finally be so many people doing good that they will sway the remainder to do good too and the so called *Quantum Leap* will happen when by mutual example everyone will save himself. But it won't be a *Quantum Leap* that will happen. Things will continue toward demise and destruction. If the *New Age* lingers until the year 2000, we know that its sickness is terminal.

But Jesus will live on.

Every Sunday, every time we worship our God, we celebrate life. His! Ours! We celebrate and give thanks for being in the living Church, gathered around the Word of God that is "living and active." We of all religions are the only ones who are not doomed to holding services in man-made mortuaries. The Philistines didn't realize when they made the temple for Dagon at Ashdod that it would house the remains of their dead hopes. Dagon dead on the doorstep was entirely predictable.

Sometimes in our home mission work, WELS Lutheran churches have their beginning worship services in mortuaries and funeral chapels. The facilities are available and the are nice. There might even be the chance to use the organ with its "good" vibrato sound. But it hasn't happened yet that when the ability came to move to a church building of its own with its promise of growth and life that the mission congregation chose to stay in the mortuary. We don't like even a whiff of death to be associated with

our worship. Our Jesus is living!

To understand that Jesus is living is to understand our purpose as a church....and our privilege! We try as WELS Lutherans to get people out of the mortuaries of their dead gods. All religions without the living Jesus are doomed to mortuary worship. Pity if nothing else should fire our mission zeal. Jesus is living!

2. Jesus is active

And Jesus is active. Ozymandias, the proud "king of kings" was not. At least he is no longer active. The poet Shelly immortalized human inability to stay active when he saw the toppled statue and read the inscription lying there in the desert sand:

My Name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

There is a "King of kings" and it is not Ozymandias. We read of this King and his followers in John's Revelation, "They (God's enemies) will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers (Revelation 17:14)." Listen to this King. "This is what the Lord says--Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come--yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one (Isaiah 44:6-8)." It is the active Christ that makes this claim for his ancient and modern people and "what is yet to come."

Jesus our King is active. He is "quick." We believe in the living Christ and he proves he is alive by being active. He does things: he made all things, he preserves all things, he saved all things, he prepares a place for us according to John's promise! This is activity Jesus is involved in right now, not just with his eye on the next millennium but with it on eternity.

Jesus' love is active. He can imagine no other kind of love. You know this when you listen to his encouragement that you love him with "all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37)." Love with a soul in it is active love, love with life, love with a pulse. That is how you tell if the still person lying there on the bed is alive or not. Is there some movement? Is there warmth? Is there a pulse? If there is still a soul there, those manifestations of the soul will be there too. God's love has a soul in it. It has activity. It always will.

When Jesus encourages us to love him with our soul, he wants us to look for the evidence of that soul in our love. Is our love active like his is? Few are comfortable

with a cadaver stretched out in their living room. No one can live very long with a corpse. Mary and Martha, even though they loved their brother Lazarus, were the first to tell Jesus not to take the stone from his grave. Lazarus was "inactive." Lazarus stunk in his inactivity. God is not happy having a dead and inactive love lying in state in his parlor, even if that should be yours or mine. Any love that is inactive, that doesn't prove life by warmth and activity and action, is not God's kind of love. The Christ is active in his love, and he wants us to be that too as we consider the next millennium.

Paul's prayer for Philemon is what we want for ourselves, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ (Philemon 6)." The inspiration and the motivation for that kind of activity comes from God's love to us. It is soul love. God's love is warm and moving. We can hear its soul's strong pulse even now if we listen. We hear it in mercies new to us every morning. We hear it when we stand shoulder to shoulder at the communion rail and God says, "Depart in peace." We hear the pulse of God's active love in every benediction and every blessing from Christian friends who say, "God bless you!" We feel the heartbeat when we stand at the grave of a loved one and hear God say, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints (Psalm 116:15)." And it is a God with living and active love--and hands--we trust when we believe, "My times are in your hands (Psalm 31:5)."

This active love of Christ will be with us in the next millennium too because this Christ of God does not change and will not change.

We enter the millennium with the machine of this activity: God's Word. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12)."

With this love and with this word we know something about the Church in the next millennium. Believers are going to continue to be inspired in their love for Christ. The love of Christ is truly going to constrain them. It will propel them too. When the century dawned the Wisconsin Synod was doing mission work among the Apaches in Arizona. Solo mission work was at that time a new endeavor, only seven years old. As the century's sun sets Christ's active love has drawn our church into nineteen foreign countries. That translates into 56,049 baptized members, 61 missionaries, 64 national pastors, 99 seminary students, 489 congregations (Statistical Report of the WELS for 1997, p. 117). Just imagine the possibilities that exist for active love in mission work in the next hundred years if Christ delays his coming that long! Our century has seen God's active love motivate Christians to establish Kingdom Workers and Builders for Christ. Active love works with the aging, the hearing and seeing and mentally impaired, those in prison. Christ's active love inspires us to go beyond cultural boundaries in our own country. Christians from our midst give aid to those who suffer natural disaster, and the gifts are significant. *The People's Bible* series puts God's Word into the hands of the laity in simple and clear words. *Christ-Light* offers a whole new vista and era of coordinated Bible instruction for our children and for the members of our synod. Our educational facilities have grown and are wonderfully appointed

through the gifts of love that support them. Special gifts and special giving to do special things in ministry and mission abound. And really, most of the things described here have made their appearances in our church in this century. Just think of the optimism we should have as we contemplate the further flurry of activity in the new millennium with the active Christ and his love!

The love of many will grow cold. We are warned of this. But just as this is true, so it is also true that the love of the active Christ will never grow cold, nor will the love of those who feel themselves loved by him.

3. Jesus is powerful

Jesus is powerful. His Father chose him--anointed him--to do the most difficult of all tasks save every man, woman and child. King David, who had some power residing in his sturdy and ruddy frame, said, "One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving (Psalm 62:11-12)." And what Jesus has been is what he will continue to be for the Church in the next millennium. Powerful!

We are certain of Jesus' power because we have heard the angels sing about it in John's Revelation, "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!' (Revelation 5:11-12)" The Greek language has many words for power and strength describing different facets of the phenomenon. Virtually every word in the Greek language for power is used in these words the angels sing.

We like power. We will pay for power if we can. Ask teenage boys about power when they look for their first car. We see advertisements for it multi valved, fuel injected "rules have changed" kind of power. And we want it. We admire power in chiseled and defined bodies. We even like power in our vacuum sweepers and can openers.

We Christians are of all people most blessed when it comes to power. We sing about a powerful Christ. We recognize with David that our God is strong and that he is loving, and actually he is the one because of the other. His love for his Church is strong and it will continue on powerfully into the next millennium. Consider some of the ways

Jesus is powerful. He has a crushing handshake and grip, the bulldog tenacity to hang on to his people, those resting in the palm of his hand. "No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand (John 10:29)."

Jesus is powerful to overcome and conquer opposition against his Church. This is his dynamite power. (The Greek word used here is this very word). "They (God's enemies)

marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:8-9)." Notice the short work Jesus' power makes of the enemies of his Church of believers. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24)." As we look to the future, we need to know this power. "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion (Ephesians 1:18-21)."

Don't you see how it will be with Jesus' power in the, next millennium?

Jesus is powerful to destroy what is wrong and he will do this. This is the tidal wave of Jesus' power, to bend over flat all the parking meters in this world's parking lot. Who will be able to stand against this power? The Psalmist observed, "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One." But the Psalmist also knew of the portending power of God when he continued, "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth ... Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way (Psalm 1:2,10-12)."

Evildoers will not get away with it. The impunity of the impious will be dealt with. This is the atomic bomb kind of power, the deadly mushroom of God's judgment in the sky. "(Abraham) looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace (Genesis 19:28)." We surely don't speak with glee over the prospects, but this power stands waiting in the wings of this next millennium.

Jesus has power over the mind and actions of all, forcing even enemies to do his will. It was Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare. "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him' (Daniel 4:13-16)." The living and active Christ has power over men's minds.

The Christ has power over those philosophical giants who belly laugh when someone believes Jesus and his Word. In their awful obstinacy and as they wield their awesome influence, God still has power over them. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)."

We hear the boulders roll and churn in the flash flood of God's justice. "But let justice

roll on like a river (Amos 5:24).” And this in full view of our court system with its sometimes mockery of justice. Think of the power needed to straighten out our world of jurisprudence. The greatest and most powerful machines this world knows are made to make roads. Isaiah knew this coming power of the Christ in the twenty-first century A.D. when he said in the seventh century B.C., "The crooked roads shall become straight and the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation (Luke 3:5-6).” Jesus has power over all things crooked and perverted.

Jesus has power to crush. "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed (Matthew 21:42-43).” Isaiah 53:5 speaks of God's power to crush even his own Son. "He was crushed for our iniquities." God warns through Amos of this kind of pressure power. "Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life (Amos 2:14).”

We think of the power of the Wind of God, of his Spirit, to move where it will and level before it all the flimsy structures of man's resistance and reason. You and I cannot change people's minds about much. Try changing someone's mind even about their football team, let alone changing their lifelong cache of religious beliefs. Jesus called Nicodemus' attention to this power: "The wind blows *wherever it pleases*. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going (John 3:8).” This is the power of the Spirit of Jesus to convert, to change old men like Nicodemus into babies in faith. This wonderful change and rebirth comes only through great power, the unstoppable power of God's Spirit Wind.

Jesus has power to control the work his servants do in his Church. It takes power to keep them sometimes from doing pet projects they think are necessary to his kingdom. Such was God's power with the Apostle Paul. "When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to (Acts 16:7).” We pray Jesus to powerfully overcome our best intentions as a church in the next millennium if those intentions do not square with his wisdom and will. Because Jesus doesn't change, we can be sure that he will use his power in this way.

Jesus is powerful to save. This power is the rainbow of his mercy and salvation struck across the storm clouds. "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth (Genesis 9:16).” Mercy is a great power. The eternal mercy in God's covenant of grace and his unending commitment to that covenant calls for great and ongoing power.

Jesus is God's Son and God's Sun. He is that incredible radiation of power and light and heat which supports life itself. "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (John 1:4-5).” If you look at the footnote in the NIV you see that what is translated "understood" can also be translated "overcome." The darkness has not "overcome" the light. It can't. It doesn't have the power.

Hannah admired the power of her God and of his Anointed when she said, "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Samuel 2:10).” The ultimate evidence of this power is when God the Father empowered his Son to be this world's strongest man: all-powerful to obliterate sin, to forgive all wrong, to love all love, to carry all anxiety. Twice in her song of praise to the God who honored her with a son, Hannah spoke of this horn. The Hebrews knew the horn as a symbol of strength, the very point where the significant strength of a bull or goat was focused. God is going to "exalt the horn of his anointed” indeed! He did it. This is the Jesus of power who will be with his Church in the next millennium.

Jesus is powerful to make his people into something that they could never be by themselves. This power transformed shepherd David into Warrior David and Poet David and King David. This power made David into someone who was after God's own heart. "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power (1 Samuel 16:13).” He is going to continue to use this power to equip and empower his special leaders in the Church of the next millennium.

And in all of this we think of our God's name PANTOKRATOR (παντοκράτωρ), the all-powerful one, the one light years beyond any character in *The Space Trilogy* in strength, the very maker of the stars himself. He is the one who breathes hoarsely through fiery nostrils, striking out with the sword of his mouth and saving one and all who strike their own colors and march under his blood red banners. "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign (Revelation 11:17).”

It takes great power. It takes great power to save us. It takes great power for Jesus to overcome our sin and weakness. Our weakness is the abysmal lack of any power to do anything good. We sing about God's power -- the angels sing about God's power--in the vacuum of our power shortage and power outage. As we approach the new millennium we pray like Solomon did with our hands still empty, still upturned. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Still. And on into the future. Lord we do believe. Help our unbelief. Empower us with your power.

It takes great power. It takes power to overcome your and my objections to God. As our minds and thoughts pursue ever more sophisticated ways as they step into the next millennium, it will take power to rein them in and tame them and bring them under the control of the foolishness of preaching. It will continue to take power to overcome all man's intelligence and knowledge and give us simple and childlike faith. It will take power to keep our approach to sinners the same simple Gospel and not to rely on more "reasonable" ways to reach people. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).” The power of Jesus' Gospel and that power alone will continue to work the Nicodemus Miracle.

It takes power to raise someone from the dead to get a body up or a hope up or a faith up when it is dead. The best science is going to do in the new millennium is push back the hands a little on the clock that ticks for each person perhaps. (They hope that by the year 2025 that the average life-expectancy per resident of the globe will be

73 years. It is 66 now.) And perhaps for all the efforts to extend life, a new and deadly virus strain will strike and a new Black Death come in spite of all the hospitals and medicines. Death still gives up with terrible reluctance. It takes power to make him give up. "It is sowed in weakness, it is raised in power (1 Corinthians 15:43)." "The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:26)."

It takes power for the crushed and broken to hear and believe the Gospel, but Jesus comes with this power. "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1)." It takes power to comfort the afflicted. It also takes great power to afflict the comforted, those who don't think anything is wrong and those who have a high opinion of their own goodness. But Jesus comes with this power too as Mary acknowledged in her great song, "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts (Luke 1:51)."

In all of these ways and for all of these reasons, Jesus has power.

Batteries run out of power. Batteries die. Batteries stand useless and dead. It takes power to get the batteries to have life again. It takes power from outside the battery. Dead batteries just supply the lack of spark, the absence of current the uselessness and the hopelessness of ever doing anything on their own. But there is a source of power and if the battery stays connected to that source, after a time it comes to life again. And the longer the battery stays connected to the power the stronger its current is. And in the new millennium, if the world stands, throughout the darkness the lights will continue to go on in people's lives. In electrical terms, we will be able to say that Jesus and his Spirit will truly turn the power on.

We enter the new millennium with great optimism. Not that the world is going to get better but that our Jesus is going to be up to the challenges. He continues to have power. All things are possible.

4. Jesus is still the chosen one

Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Messiah. In whatever language you speak Jesus is the chosen one of God.

We continue to recognize the importance of the word *Christ* and *Messiah*. Those words tell us that Jesus is still the one, and if we see the arrival of the next millennium, he will be the one for that time too. He is the real thing. All the fulness of the Godhead continues to rest in him. There is no other. God still says, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased, listen to him"

Jesus still is the chosen one of God. When we step into the next millennium, he will be real. "The reality, however, is found in Christ (Colossians 2:17)." Christ is the real thing. In all of religious life, the only real real thing is Jesus. So the enjoinder of teenagers "Get real!" is not a bad reminder for our worship and our preaching as we get close to the next millennium. We still will preach Christ crucified. That will be the only thing that will continue to be real. It is a comfort to pastors and teachers to know that they can present Jesus to their people not in virtual reality but in real reality. The

blood is real. The sins died for are real sins. The Savior is not only a Savior that looks like a Savior but a Savior who feels like a Savior and speaks like a Savior and is a Savior. WELS Lutherans find great comfort in this reality in the Lord's Supper the *real* presence of Jesus' body and blood, given and shed for them.

We can still hear our Father say, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." We will still listen to the Christ of God in our Bible studies. The message will be forever relevant. The truth of it will still be objective and propositional. *Jesus Loves Me This I Know* will still be a good song to sing and to teach our children no matter how sophisticated our world becomes.

Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me (John 14:23-24)." This is our hope! And this is God's direction as to how he will truly be with his people in the future: through the words, through the teaching of those words that belong to the Father. If our WELS is going to continue to be part of God's Church of believers, if Jesus and his Father are going to continue to make their home with us, it is only going to be through the practiced study of God's word. Our leadership has put this before our eyes and must continue to do it (The *Adult Bible Study Handbook* put out by the Commission on Adult Discipleship is one example of this effort.)

The living, active, powerful Christ will be with his Church in the next millennium. That is a fact with no variables. The variable comes in who follows this fact. "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." And in view of this terrible variable, Peter said what we still want to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:66-68)"

5. What Jesus was in the past and is in the present he will still be in the future.

We started by saying that to know the living, active and powerful Christ in the next millennium is to know this same Christ in the closing years of this millennium. Some things truly don't change and won't change. Jesus will stay the same. And our worship of him will essentially stay the same.

This is the hope that we have as we live in the world teetering on the brink of the year 2000.

The passing of time affects our earthly homes. Things change and make us feel sad. But though this does happen and must happen to our earthly home, it doesn't and can't happen in our church home. The building might change. The staff might change. The hymn books might change. But the essence remains the same. And we can truly sing:

Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in whom his world rejoices,
Who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love *and still is ours today.* (CW 610, vs. 1)

In the twentieth century some things have changed in our churches. The black suit is almost extinct among Sunday worshipers. Veils and hats on our women folk have flown away. Ties have expanded and contracted through all possible measurement known to man. Women no longer sit on one side of the church and men on the other. The hymnal abbreviation is CW and not TLH. Some brave congregations may sing the Psalm responsively. Padded pews are common. (No more Puritan hardness to endure.) Some pastors stand behind freestanding altars. Very few make their narrow way up with their sermon into cloistered pulpits towering over their waiting parishioners. Some parishioners sit tethered to hearing devices and hear every word of the sermon for the first time in years. There is now a WELS web sight. And not far from the chancel of every (almost every?) church a computer lurks on a desk eager to serve with a Bible program or an E-mail or a connection to the Internet.

But even though some things have changed, we enter the next millennium counting on the fact that there will be no change in our worship of Jesus. What he was in the past and what he is in the present is what he will be in the future. And those who worship him will continue to do it in spirit and in truth.

As we come face to face with this noteworthy step in time, we can't help but sing along with the hymnist:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away.
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me. (CW 588, vs. 2)

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. He is our global positioning unit that brings us back unerringly to the very spot we need to be, in this millennium or in the next.

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