

The Office of Christ

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During these early weeks of June, 1998, all of the twelve districts of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have met or will be meeting in convention. The total number of pastor, teacher and lay delegates, representing more than 1200 congregations from all 50 states, should exceed 3000. Each district will have its own theme. All districts and delegates will have a single purpose, to be about the business of our Lord Jesus Christ through worship, study, elections, discussions and resolutions. After attending my own district convention last week, it is my great pleasure to be a part of the convention of your Nebraska District.

When I was asked nearly two years ago to be the essayist at this convention, your committee was considering another topic. It would have focused our attention on the end times as we move from one millennium to another, with appropriate considerations, cautions, and encouragement. I was looking forward to the assignment.

In the meantime the Vice President of Publishing Services, Northwestern Publishing House, approached the synod president and the twelve districts with a unique proposal. In order to commemorate the 2000th anniversary of the Lord's birth he suggested that each district plan a special convention essay on some Christological topic and that a book containing all the essays be printed for presentation to all the delegates at the district conventions in the year 2000. This explains the topic for your convention today, chosen in consultation with your district president. Though the topic for this convention may seem to be quite different from the one originally planned, the considerations, cautions, and encouragement remain the same.

It should be noted before we begin that our district conventions, and our synod convention next year, stand at the threshold of not one but two momentous occasions. The one, already mentioned, is the ushering in of a new millennium. This celebration will reach far beyond the church. It is generating excitement around the world. People have been talking about it and making plans for it for years in advance. Many are planning to party and celebrate like never before. It will include celebration, I fear, that you and I want no part of. The convention essays prepared this year and to be shared at the district conventions two years from now set a far better tone for Christian thought and celebration as we reach this great event in the history of God's world.

The other momentous occasion much on our minds these days is the sesquicentennial(150th) anniversary of the founding of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This celebration will not draw world-wide attention. It will not even

receive national review. It remains to be seen how many large city newspapers will even mention the occasion. I can't even imagine other Lutherans, much less other Christian denominations, getting excited about it. But it is an event which will reach around the world, in all the countries on five continents where our Lord has enabled the WELS to proclaim the gospel. Fellow Christians in 24 countries beyond the United States and Canada will join in our celebration. Praise, thanks, and glory to God will be expressed in 36 languages.

An Ad Hoc committee is busy making preparations for the 150th anniversary to be observed in two years, and I am sure we will be hearing more about that in the course of this convention. Meanwhile the series of essays being read at the district conventions of the synod this year also afford excellent preparation for that great occasion. What better way both to look back at what the Lord has done for the past 150 years and also look ahead to being about the Father's business than a study of the Christological truths revealed to us in the sacred Scriptures. I can think of no better use of our time in this convention than to look at one facet of Christological doctrine, The Office of Christ.

Christ, Appointed to Office

On my desk is a ball point pen which was given to me by my son last Father's day. It is silver, has black ink and writes exceptionally well, even for one not known for his penmanship skills. What makes it special is the engraving on the pen. It is not something you receive as free advertisement at a hardware store, restaurant, or service station. You know the kind, name, address, telephone number, maybe a picture. That's it. This pen is different. It is as special to me as the cross, two plaques with Bible verses, a picture of my first church and parsonage painted by my wife, and a picture of classmates of my seminary graduation, all on the wall facing my desk in my study. With various print sizes and formats the pen reads: Messiah, Lord, Savior, Jesus, Son of God, Lord of Lords, Emmanuel, The Way. Resurrection and Life, Alpha and Omega. All that is written on one half the pen in clear, distinct letters. It is an inscription which bears repeating. The other half of the pen reads the same. The pen is unique. It bears a unique description.

If you were an employer seeking to fill an important office in a prestigious firm would you dare to expect anyone with such credentials? Ordinarily a detailed job description includes a list of qualifications which no single person could possibly fill. Even if a well qualified person were able to offer something in every area described, it would only be with varying degrees of expertise. Realistically the person who most nearly matches the qualifications ends up with the job. He who is Son of God, Lord of Lords, Alpha and Omega was appointed to Office, to be the Christ, the Messiah. He possesses every qualification imaginable. Emmanuel, The Way, the Resurrection and the Life only begin to describe his perfect qualifications.

God's Old Testament people had great expectations. God had promised to send a Messiah, the Anointed One. Great leaders of the Old Testament were anointed into office and served as notable types of the Messiah. They included prophets, priests and kings. There were men like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, to mention a few. All had unique qualifications for the office to which they were called, to lead and rule, teach and preach, admonish and encourage. But none was worthy of the office which he held for a brief time, much less qualified for the highest office, to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One.

None could even begin to qualify because of the nature of the work, the work of reuniting the human race with God. The fall of man into sin remains the great human tragedy in all of history. God had made man in his own image, in perfect harmony with his creator and God. Adam was entrusted with the noble task of naming all the creatures God had made. He placed the man and his wife in the beautiful Garden of Eden, to manage and take care of it. The trees and fruits of the garden were theirs to enjoy. As added measure of his favor God placed the tree of life in the middle of the garden and invited them to eat freely. Adam and Eve knew only happiness and bliss, which comes with knowing God's will and willingness to live according to it. As a special token of showing their love and obedience to him God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil near to the tree of life with the command. *You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die*(Genesis 2:16-17). What God intended only as blessing became the way to man's alienation from God. Influenced by Satan Adam and Eve abused their formal liberty. Abandoning their faith they fell into sin and under God's eternal condemnation.

With none to rescue, no one to undo what Satan had done to man and man had voluntarily done to himself, no one to reunite, the God of all grace and mercy said: *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* (Genesis 3:15). God came to the rescue. God promised to send a Messiah. He appointed his own Son to office.

From the very beginning of the promise the term office, to which God appointed himself in the person of his own Son, is to be understood as work, pure work, difficult work, demanding work, extensive work, superhuman work in the fullest sense of the term. It is the work of salvation. *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*(1 Thessalonians 5:9). The Savior himself acknowledged that appointment in his high priestly prayer on the eve of his passion: *I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do*(John 17:3). *The work is none other than redemption. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*(Galatians 4:4-5).

Jesus was appointed to office and he willingly assumed it. His willingness was stated for all to hear long in advance. *Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart"*(Psalm 40:7-8). The incarnate Christ was aware of his appointment to office at an early age. *"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"*(Luke 2:49). From the time he was baptized by John and publicly declared by John to *be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*(John 1:29), Jesus was consumed by the duties of his office. When his disciples attempted to call "time out" at Jacob's well in Samaria, Jesus, as tired and hungry as he was, replied: *My food.....is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*(John 4:34). Though the Suffering Servant called out in great agony when the guilt of the world's sins weighed heavily upon him, *My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me*, his human will remained in perfect harmony with his divine will: *Yet not as I will, but as you will*(Matthew 26:39).

The nature of the Savior's appointed work is expressed in the title Mediator, a term which is used six times in the New Testament. Paul uses this title when sharing various instructions with the young pastor Timothy: *For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all men*(1 Timothy 2:5-6). The writer to the Hebrews uses the title when speaking of the new covenant relationship God established through his Son. *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant*(Hebrews 9:15).

Until the coming of Christ, the Messiah, Moses stands as the great example of mediation. God chose Moses to lead his people out of Egypt to the land of Promise. Through Moses God gave his law at Mt. Sinai, a covenant which remained in effect for nearly 1500 years. When the people were afraid to face God and hear his voice at Mt. Sinai, they pleaded with Moses to talk to God for them. No less than seven times Moses went up to the mountain to speak to God for the people. For 40 years Moses served as mediator between God and the Israelite nation. But his mediation came to an end. The covenant God established through him also came to an end. It served only a single nation. What is more, it could not save. Christ served as mediator of a new covenant, a covenant effected for all nations, all people, a covenant which offers and freely gives eternal salvation, a covenant which has no end.

In both of the previous passages the holy writers refer to the Savior by the name which especially indicates office, the name Christ, that is, the Anointed. He is called the Anointed One already by the Psalmist: *The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.* (Psalm 2:2). John the Baptist was careful not to be confused with the one of whom the Psalmist had spoken: *And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ."*(John 1:20). On Pentecost Peter was emphatic in proclaiming

Jesus of Nazareth as the one of whom the prophets had spoken: *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”* (Acts 2:36). To Cornelius Peter went on to explain *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him* (Acts 10:38).

The anointing of which Peter speaks is only in Jesus’ human nature.

Since he was anointed with the oil of gladness, that is, with the Holy Spirit, by God the Father, so he was also called Christ. And he certainly was anointed not as God but as man; even though he administered the office to which he was anointed not only according to his human, but also according to his divine nature. For he is called anointed “above his fellows” (Psalm 45:7), but according to his divine nature he does not have “fellows” 1

Though Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist presents Jesus publicly as the promised Messiah, it is not the first anointing Jesus anointing took place from the time of his conception and birth. That is the way Isaiah foretold it: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). That is the way the angel of God proclaimed it to the shepherds: *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:11). Their testimony is confirmed by the apostle Paul: *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons* (Galatians 4:4-5). In fact, Jesus’ baptism conferred no additional spiritual power upon him. Rather, his baptism conferred the idea of unlimited imparting of the Holy Spirit upon Christ according to his human nature. It declared Jesus to be the one appointed by God to repair the damage done by Satan. *Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:15,17). It confirmed his qualifications to reunite the human race with God.

Just as Jesus’ anointing took place from the time of his conception and birth, so also his circumcision and presentation to follow were already part of his mediatorial work for the salvation of mankind. *On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived* (Luke 2:21). By his circumcision he fulfilled the law, not for himself, but for sinners. Luke declares the same for his presentation. *When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”)* (Luke 2:22-23).

He who is the Son of God, Lord of Lords, Alpha and Omega was appointed to office, to be the Christ, the Messiah. He possesses every qualification possible for this high office, Emmanuel, The Way, the Resurrection and the Life. Though some have spoken of a twofold office of Christ, Priest and King, it is customary for us to speak of a threefold office, Prophet, Priest and King.

As many as are the divisions in which it is possible to refer the names which are ascribed to the office of Christ by the mind, and the teaching of Scripture which are spoken concerning the office of Christ, so many parts stand to the office of Christ... . Because of the ignorance of the mind through the introduction of sin, we stood in need of a teacher or prophet. –Because of sin and the punishment of sin we were in need of a priest, reconciling us to God; making satisfaction for us and interceding before the tribunal of God. –Because of the infirmity of the will we were in need of a king leading and defending us. 2

The Old Testament declared him to be such. *I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him* (Deuteronomy 18:18). *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”* (Psalm 110:4). *I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.* (Psalm 2:6). The New Testament reveals him in his offices. That will comprise the remainder of this study.

Before we begin this study, we must reflect on the importance of what we have said up to this point. The office of Christ has come under direct attack over the centuries. One must expect that many will continue to oppose it in the new millennium and as we move beyond the 150 year mark of our synod’s history.

As soon as Christ had presented himself to John to be anointed publicly into office Satan was there to resist him: *If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread* (Matthew 4:3). *If you are the Son of God throw yourself down. For it is written; “He will command his angels concerning you: and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”* (Matthew 4:6). *All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me* (Matthew 4:9). Satan also knows Scripture. He knows it but does not believe it. He knows just enough about Scripture to twist it and use it for his own cunning devices. Satan’s misuse of God’s Word goes all the way back to the beginning when he said to Eve: *Did God really say, ‘you must not eat from any tree in the garden?’* (Genesis 3:1)? Eve correctly quoted God’s word concerning the trees in the garden but in such a way that Satan found an opening to proceed from a question intended to raise doubt to a bold- face lie: *You will not surely die* (Genesis 3:4), and the rest is history.

Christ, Eve's offspring promised in the garden, met Satan's temptations in the wilderness by an exemplary use of Scriptures. *It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). It is also written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7). For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10).*

Satan's attacks against the doctrine of Christ have not abated over the centuries: Arianism, Nestorianism, enthusiasm, rationalism, modernism, humanism, both ancient and present. Doubts concerning Christ's divine person, two natures, virgin birth, miracles, vicarious death and glorious resurrection and ascension persist. The church's defense against all heresies, big and small, is one: *It is written.* It is the only way to doctrinal integrity, staunch confessionalism, a united voice.

It is only by God's grace that the WELS became a truly confessional church body. It took most of two decades to rid ourselves of unionistic tendencies. Over the years it has remained a confessional Lutheran church - for 150 years. During that time it has witnessed a steady erosion of Lutheran doctrine and practice all around. It has witnessed the demise of the Synodical Conference. Two thirds of all Lutherans in the United States and Canada have compromised one doctrine after another as they seek a wider fellowship which now includes several Reformed churches and overtures to the Roman Catholic Church. Our former sister synod in the Synodical Conference has fallen into the very unionistic practices from which it helped free us in our early history.

One hundred and fifty years is a long time. It is long when we consider what has happened to most of Lutheranism in America, and throughout the world as well. One hundred and fifty years exceeds the time between the writing of the Formula of Concord (1580) and the end of the age of orthodoxy in the land of the Reformation. It nearly equals the time from the writing of the first of the Lutheran Confessions, the Augsburg Confession, to the end of the age of orthodoxy.

The battle to remain a confessional Lutheran church has not been easy. We remain a confessional church only by God's grace and with a great sacrifice of time and energy. There are a few among us today who lived through the battle to save the Synodical Conference. It virtually consumed the leadership of our church body for most of two decades. It left deep scars on families, congregations, and the synod. At the same time, contending for the truth has made us stronger and will continue to make us stronger whenever it sends us back to the Scriptures, to say with our victorious Lord: *It is written.*

It has not been easy. It won't get any easier. Satan has found the doctrine of Scripture to be the Achilles heel in the religious world today. *Sola Scriptura* is relegated to putting one's faith in a book. An inerrant Scripture is labeled unscientific. Truth is

relative. Doctrinal integrity is living in the past. Staunch confessionalism is being close-minded, arrogant, proud. It seems there has never been a time when so many within the pale of the visible church have had such a low view of Scripture. Even during the dark days before the Lutheran Reformation there was a much higher view.

The stakes are high. Doctrines under the headings of theology, anthropology, soteriology and eschatology all hang in the balance to the doctrine of Scripture. These include the church's teaching on origins, creation, angels and demons, the fall into sin, man's present state, faith, means of grace, justification, conversion, sanctification, church and ministry, fellowship, life and death, heaven and hell, and the final judgment. All, properly taught and believed, are sacred truths. None can endure in the hearts and lives of Christians without a correct doctrine of Scripture. But at greatest risk of all is the study of Christology, teachings concerning Christ, his person, office and work. Without the latter, the former have no basis.

One hundred and fifty years of being a confessional church body means nothing for the future if we do not remain committed to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. *It is written* must remain the battle cry as we step into the 21st century. I doubt that anyone would stand in this place today and predict what will be the next battle that will have to be fought in order to remain true the doctrine of Christ and all the teachings of Scripture. Even as we approach this milestone in our synod's history we continue to contend for pure teaching on church and ministry, church fellowship, and the role of man and woman, to name those which have fallen into complete disfavor and disarray in the church bodies around us and which we have re-studied intensively in recent years.

As we pass from one century and one millennium to the next and as we prepare to celebrate 150 years as a synod, may we go with firm conviction in the Savior's words: *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).* May every step of preparation and celebration be fully in tune with the words of the sainted WELS pastor, Kurt J. Eggert:

*Not unto us, not unto us be glory, Lord;
Not unto us but to your name be praise;
Not unto us but to your name all honor be giv'n
For matchless mercy, forgiveness, and grace
Christian Worship, 392:1*

Christ, the Prophet

What is the measure of a man? Is it the offices he holds, the number of offices, a certain combination of offices, or the importance of anyone of those offices? Occasionally I tune in to a television program on current, usually controversial,

political events, called One On One. The leader, John McLaughlin, regularly provides a profile of the guest or guests on his show. Without fail the profiles are long. At times the profiles seem as long as, and more impressive than, the discussion to follow. The profile does not always seem to be the true measure of the man. My listening may not last much beyond the profile.

The offices of Christ are a true measure of the man. Whether the number of offices, a combination of offices, or the importance of anyone of those offices – Christ is incomparably great on all counts. Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King. Each office was prominent among God's people. At times a man functioned in a combination of these offices. A priest, by the vary nature of his office, both sacrificed upon the altar and taught the people. Therefore one can easily combine the office of priest and prophet into a single office. David served as both king and prophet, but always with distinct limitations. Only in Christ are all three offices combined. Combination of offices aside, it is impossible to do justice to the three-fold office of Christ without looking at each office individually, though Christ filled each office routinely and perfectly at the same time.

As we had already begun to note, Christ was declared to be a prophet. *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. (Deuteronomy 18:15).* In numerous places the Old Testament Scriptures spell out the prophetic work of the Lord's anointed. We cite a couple of the more familiar ones from the prophet Isaiah. *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice(Isaiah 42:1-3). See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor(Isaiah 55:45).*

What the writers of the Old Testament foretold the New Testament Scriptures announce repeatedly. After the raising of the young man at Nain(Luke 7:16), at the Feast of the Tabernacles(John 7:40), and at the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday(Matthew 21:11) the people concluded that Jesus was a prophet. The Samaritan woman(John 4:19) and the Emmaus disciples(Luke 24:19) could come to no other conclusion but that Jesus is the Prophet whom Scripture foretold.

On almost every page of the writings of the evangelists Jesus is busy doing the work of a prophet. *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"(Matthew 4:17).* Such is the case in the instances cited above. In Judea, Samaria, and Galilee and beyond, in the cities and out in the country, on the mountain, in the temple, in their synagogues, by the side of a pool, in a Pharisee's

house, wherever he went and while he was on the way he taught the people. He chose twelve disciples in order that he might teach them, and prepare them for teaching others. When the crowd pressed down on him he taught from a boat(Luke 5:3). When they stayed with him too long and lost track of time he fed multitudes with a minimum of provisions(John 6:1ff; Matthew 15:29ff). Even an interruption of his privacy and rest became an opportunity to teach(Mark 6:31).

Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Prophet. At the synagogue of his hometown he applied to himself the well know words of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor(Luke 4:18-19).* During that week of weeks when the hour of his death was just days away he told the unbelieving Jews: *For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say(John 12:49-50).* To the glory of his Father's name and for the comfort of his disciples who were still by his side Jesus prayed to his Father in his high priestly prayer:

For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them(John 17:8, 14, 26).

Inasmuch as Jesus was anointed into office from his conception and birth, it follows that he should be called a prophet from birth. *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD(Jeremiah 1:5-8).*

Though the prophet speaks of his own prophetic office, Jesus is all the more the Prophet from birth

Unlike all the prophets who preceded his coming and pointed to him, Christ spoke with divine authority. When Jews at the Feast of the Tabernacles had challenged Jesus authority, he answered: *My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth(John 7:16-18).* The temple guards who were then ordered by the chief priests

and Pharisees to arrest Jesus returned empty handed and explained: *No one ever spoke the way this man does(John 7:46)*. On the next day Jesus continued his authoritative teaching: *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples..... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed..... I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father(John 8:32,36,38)*.

Jesus' message as Prophet did not change. From the beginning of his ministry Jesus preached: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near(Matthew 3:17)*.

Acknowledge sin and believe the good news! Jesus message was both law and gospel.

Jesus also preached law to makes sinners conscious of sin and guilt. *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;" and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live"(Luke 10:25-28)*. Jesus also preached the law as a guide for Christian living(Matthew 3-5). But always Jesus' preaching of the law was his "other" work. *But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set(John 5:45)*.

Jesus' real work was always the gospel. *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ(John 1:17)*. From his headquarters in Capernaum Jesus announced: *I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God in the other towns also, because that is why I was sent(Luke 4:33)*. Even when he speaks of "doing" the will of God and "obeying" his word Jesus is urging sinners to believe in him and live accordingly. *We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will(John 9:31)*. *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him(John 14:21)*.

The purpose of his message is to enlighten and convert sinners. *I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live(John 5:25)*. *I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life(John 8:12)*. *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand(John 10:27-28)*.

Jesus, the Prophet of Galilee, is the Prophet of the entire world. It is true, during his state of exinanition his teaching was limited to Israel. *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel(Matthew 15:24)*. He sent out his disciple with the firm instructions:

Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans(Matthew 10:5). Christ had come as a servant to the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promise made the patriarchs(Romans 15:8). Yes, Christ was a Savior first to the Jews, but never to the exclusion of the rest of the world, as Paul assured the Romans: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile(Romans 1:16)*. Even during his time of exinanition Jesus showed himself to be the Savior of Gentiles when he reached out to save a Roman centurion(Luke 7:1-10), a Canaanite woman(Matthew 15:21-28), and a Samaritan woman as Jacob's well(John 4:iff).

Not only is Jesus' message good news for a dying world, it is the only message for the entire world. *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved(Acts 4:12)*. Other religions may contain elements of truth to the extent they are based on the natural knowledge of God. But what is not of Christ is of works of man.. What is of works always leaves sinners without peace, without comfort, without hope in this world and the life to come.

The office of Christ as Prophet has lost none of its importance as we move toward another milestone in our synod's history and as we step into another millennium. Christ continues to be the Prophet. He continues to do his work. He continues to proclaim the message which is able to save. Today he does his work through his church. Two thousand years ago he said to his disciples, to believers, to his church, to us: *Go, preach, be my witnesses, baptize and teach.....into all the world, to all nations, to all creation, to the very end of the age(Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)*.

Christ's office as Prophet has urgency written all over it. It proclaims the love and mercy of a gracious God to condemned sinners. It offers and gives peace where there is complete separation(Romans 5:1), comfort where there is only distress(2 Corinthians 1:5), light where there is utter darkness(John 1:5), and hope where there is abject despair(Ephesians 2:12).

We cannot claim that the work of Christ's prophetic office is any more urgent today than it was two thousand years ago, unless we are thinking of the growing world population and the fact that judgment day is drawing closer with each passing day. The work was no less urgent when Christ gave the divine commission. Souls were no less precious to the Savior. Souls today have the same eternal value. The urgency continues.

One could build a valid case for greater urgency, however. With the turning away from God's word of truth to lofty human opinions, views on the church's mission and the building of Christ's church in today's world is changing. Sin is no longer sin. Sin

is no longer considered man's great dilemma. Sin is purely a temporal matter. Sin is more and more something that others commit against me instead of that which I commit against God. Sin is for the most part that which causes human suffering. Sin no longer has any real eternal consequences.

If sin is no longer sin, if it has no eternal consequences before a holy and just God, the gospel is no longer gospel. The moral betterment of man and society becomes the mission of the modern church. In order to realize any moral improvement the church must become more sensitive to man's felt needs, whatever the individual might perceive them to be. The person in the pew is conditioned to look to the church for anything that makes him or her feel good and offer some temporal advantage for the shorter or longer haul.

As we move from millennium to millennium, from one century to another, from one decade to another, from one district convention to another, we must recognize the urgency of our mission. We do not exist merely as a guardian of Christian doctrine. Our mission statement does not stop at the exit sign of our church parking lot or the boundary line of our property, church or home. The church's mission has not changed: **Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation**(Mark 16:15). The gospel message is intended for all of those for whom Christ died. Regardless of race, culture, nationality, social status, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes(Romans 16). True, there are many other churches with a message to share, but so many offer little more than a social gospel. There are many other churches with ambitious outreach programs, but are compromising precious truths of Scripture. That unfortunate combination only intensifies the need for us to take to heart the Lord's great commission.

We need to rid ourselves of any notion that confessionalism and mission-mindedness are somehow incompatible, or that being a confessional church body takes away some of the urgency to reach out with the gospel. Looking back in the history of our synod it may seem that there were times when love for truth and mission outreach were mutually exclusive. There was the struggle to become a confessional church body. There were battles fought, and by God's grace won, to remain true to God's Word. Mission outreach during this time, especially the first 100 years, might seem pale when compared to the last 30-40 years. But immigration of German Lutherans to the mid-west provided a genuine mission field. There were ambitious building programs to provide places for worship and the Christian training of the children. A sound system for training future workers was established. To this day we reap the harvest of this solid work. Besides, there were extenuating circumstances. The typical WELS family was far less affluent. Many were starting over in a new country. There were two world wars and a great depression.

But love for truth and love for missions were not incompatible then. They are not incompatible now. There is no better example with which to reassure ourselves of this

than the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. No one is able to question Paul's missionary zeal. Paul himself could not have realized the impact of the Lord's response on his life and the lives of others when Paul asked: *What shall I do, Lord?*(Acts 22:10). No amount of opposition and persecution were able to prevent this world's greatest missionary from preaching the gospel from city to city, country to country and finally in a prison cell. Love, love for his Savior, love for the truth of the gospel, and love for souls set him on a course which would consume his life and end in an untimely death.

It was both a love for missions and love for the truth. Paul's love for truth may be seen from the manner in which he dealt with error and false teachers. There was no compromise. False teachings were immediately condemned, as can be noted in Paul's epistles to the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Colossians. False teachers were exposed, sometimes even identified by name(2 Timothy 2:17). Paul warned believers to have nothing to do with the false teachers and to separate themselves from those who taught or tolerated false teaching(Romans 16:17; Titus 3:9-11)

Paul's love for the truth is apparent in various exhortations found in his pastoral epistles. *He(an elder) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it*(Titus 1:9). *Preach the Word: be prepared in season and out of season: correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine*(2 Timothy 4:2-3). *If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truth of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed*(1 Timothy 4:6).

We have a message to proclaim. It is a message which the world desperately needs to hear. The WELS is a community of Christians which has been richly blessed. We are spiritually blessed. A deep love for the truth of the gospel is included in the long list of spiritual blessings. And we are temporally blessed. America is a prosperous country. WELS Christians share in that wealth. Any affluence which our forefathers may have lacked has been poured out upon us. We have the means to reach out with the gospel such as no generation before us. There is no reason for hard choices between home projects and mission outreach, between thorough Christian training of the young and church planting throughout our country, between thorough training of future workers in the public ministry and world missions. The Lord has given us the means to do it all and do it well. He has given us a love for the truth. May he also give us the resolve, the will, and the eagerness to sacrifice of our time, our treasure, and our talents to share the truth which sets men free.

*O faithful love – that shepherded through faithless years;
Forgiving love – that led us to your truth;
Unyielding love – that would not let us turn from you*

Christ, the Priest

The gospel which Christ proclaims as Prophet He Himself established as Priest. His prophetic message is dependent on His priestly work. If He as Priest produced a partial salvation, He can as Prophet proclaim only a partial salvation. If He produced a conditional justification, he can as Prophet do no more than announce the condition. – As Priest He did not provide a justification which we receive only after meeting certain conditions, He provided a justification complete in every respect, which He proclaims as a ready blessing and which we receive as such through faith.” 3.

The office of Christ as Prophet is important. Our eternal salvation is linked directly to it. We will note the same for his office as King. We must insist, nevertheless, that the office of Christ as Priest is critical. Without his office as Priest, his offices as Prophet and King leave us destitute, separated from God, under wrath and judgment. It is the office of Priest which has been and continues to be most difficult for people to acknowledge and accept.

When Jesus proclaimed himself the Prophet of Galilee not everyone was ready to accept him. Many were doubtful, some even furious with him (*Luke 4:28-29*). Members of his own family thought him to be out of his mind (*Mark 3:20-21*). The opposition of the chief priests and Pharisees is well known. But the fact is that multitudes did turn out to see him, stayed with him for days at a time, and followed him from place to place (*John 6*). Granted, some did it for the wrong reasons; some were more interested in the miracles, in temporal advantages. Most turned away in the end. But many did hear and were impressed by his teaching. They were ready to say that he was a prophet, comparable to any of the great prophets of old. (*Matthew 16:13ff*).

One could make a similar claim for Jesus' office as King. The people of Jesus' day had high millennialistic hopes. They longed for a king to come and deliver them from social and political oppression. Many were waiting for Jesus to make his move and claim himself a national hero. Jesus' own disciple held to fuzzy notions concerning the nature of Jesus' kingdom and coveted and quarreled over positions of importance (*Matthew 20:20ff*). It comes as no great surprise when the crowds proclaimed him king as he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But priest, as least the kind of priest Jesus claimed to be - it was out of the question, not a matter for serious consideration. Not that the office of priest was unfamiliar. It was the most familiar from their Old Testament worship. The priesthood, with the office of the high priest, was the one constant office for them. The age of kings had

passed. Prophets came and went. The priest was usually there, in the temple, doing his assigned work. So also the high priest. He was their spiritual leader. The priest offered the daily sacrifices in the temple. He spoke the prayers, offered the incense. He presided on the festival days, and offered more sacrifices.

Jesus came as Priest, and they missed it. They missed it then and until this day people are more easily excited with the idea of a prophet or a king than they are with a priest. They missed it because Jesus had so much more to offer than any priest before him. As Priest (as also Prophet and King for that matter), Jesus is one of a kind. He is the Great High Priest. *For we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14)*. He never sacrificed a lamb or a bull, a dove or grain offering. He sacrificed himself. John the Baptist had it right: *Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)* He was both priest and lamb, sacrifice and sacrificer. These words of John at the very beginning of Jesus ministry bring immediately to mind Isaiah's description of God's Suffering Servant (*Isaiah 53*).

How difficult was it for the people to accept the idea of Christ as Priest? Jesus' own disciples had their problems. Repeatedly Jesus announced that he must suffer and die, but they could never quite accept the idea. We recall the occasion when Peter took his Lord aside and said: *Never, Lord!..... This shall never happen to you (Matthew 16:22)*. Peter earned Jesus' sternest rebuke for his well-intentioned notion: *Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men (Matthew 16:23)*. To this day it goes against man's human nature to be told that he needs such a Priest, that he must depend upon another, Christ, for his salvation. Tell him he must look within himself, be religious, prove himself worthy, do something, deny himself, and man will believe it.

We cannot stress too much the importance of Jesus' high priestly work. The importance of Jesus' office as Priest is apparent from both the names and descriptions of his office. Already the psalmist called him Priest: *You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4)*. The prophet Zechariah linked his priestly office with his office as King. *It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two (Zechariah 6:13)*. The writer to the Hebrews links it with his prophetic office. *Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess (Hebrews 3:1)*. The same writer, who speaks at length of his high priestly office, captures the uniqueness of the office when he states: *For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17)*.

Since the purpose of the priesthood is to restore communion between the sinner and the God whom he has offended, his priestly office is referred to by still other names. We noted two of these previously in passing. One is Mediator: *To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:24)*. Another is Lamb of God. *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18-19)*. This passage refers to yet another, Redeemer. *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 (Isaiah 44:6)*.

In keeping with these names, Mediator, Lamb of God, and Redeemer, priestly functions such as sacrifice, intercession, and benediction are ascribed to Jesus. He himself is the supreme sacrifice *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews 9:14,26)*. As a true priest he made intercession for his people. *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission (Hebrews 5:7)*. Blessing was his parting high priestly act *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven (Luke 24:50,51)*.

Many times the priestly office is expressed in terms of obedience. *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4-5)*. Though it was a real submission to the law it was first and foremost a submission to his Father's will. *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38)*. It was a free and full submission to the law yet all the while he remained Lord of the law. *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6,8)*.

The obedience of which Scripture speaks is active. He acted, not as a boss or a foreman standing at a distance, supervising or giving orders. He was on the job, working, sweaty, callused hands, dirty fingernails and all. *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17)*. And it is passive *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10)*.

Active or passive, it was always vicarious, not for himself, but in the place of others, as the substitute for sinners. *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:9-10, 18-19)*.

The vicarious nature of Christ's obedience is set forth in a variety of ways. It does so with the use of prepositions. *Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28)*. *You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish (John 11:50)*. It is called a sacrifice, as we have already noted under priestly functions, and a ransom, as noted in the previous passage.

Scripture holds up the high priestly work for our review when it states the blessed results of his high priestly work. Though it does not use the word satisfaction, it assures with many passages that all the demands of God's righteousness have been fully met. *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30)*. It is called a propitiation, or a covering for sin. *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2)*. Another term, which is very close to the thought of satisfaction and propitiation, is reconciliation. *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)*. Yet another term is that of peace. *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near (Ephesians 2:14,17)*. All these terms express a similar idea. All can be used interchangeably. Yet each one adds its own dimension to underscore the grand result of Christ's work.

When speaking of the blessed results of Jesus' high priestly work we must also stress the completeness of that work. It is a very popular notion within visible Christianity to think in terms of a Savior who helps man on the way to salvation. The opinion of the law (*opinio legis*) is strong within the human heart. It is the notion that man must do something to merit, earn, win, in order to be sure of his salvation. Roman Catholicism insists on it with its teaching of a free will in natural man which is able to choose the good, a justification by faith which is never alone, cooperation in conversion, sacrifice of the Mass, and sacramental system (7 sacraments). Reformed theology undermines the completeness of Christ's high priestly work with its teaching

of limited atonement (Calvinism), and emphasis on sanctification at the expense of justification. Each in its own way stresses the "Christ in us" in the place of "Christ for us."

The salvation won for us by Christ is complete in every respect. It is complete intensively. All sins have been paid for; a perfect righteousness has been procured. *But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:12-20).*

It is complete also extensively. The extent of Christ's high priestly work is as common as the word all. *Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men (Romans 5:18). For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died (2 Corinthians 5:14). And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20).* The all, the completeness, is also expressed with words such as world, people, sinners, lost, even many. *For God so love the world.... (John 3:16). So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people (Hebrews 9:28). Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.... (1 Timothy 1:15). For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10). Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom ;for many (Matthew 20:28).*

The offices of Christ are unique, not only for what Christ has done, but also for what he continues to do for his church. As Prophet Christ not only preached the everlasting gospel but he continues to equip his church for the work of the ministry. As Priest Christ offered up himself as the sacrifice for sin once and for all. *Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself (Hebrews 7:27).* Following this completed work our Great High Priest assumed again the glory which was his from eternity. Nevertheless, Christ continues to serve as our Great High Priest. At the Father's right hand he carries on his sacerdotal work by making intercession for us. *but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who*

come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Even in his state of humiliation Christ made intercession for sinners: for his enemies, *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34), for his disciples, But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:34), and for his church, My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message (John 17:20).*

Though nothing is revealed about the manner of his intercession in his state of exaltation the intercession is real. *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1).* The apostle Paul ties Christ's present work of intercession directly to his completed work of redemption. *Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us (Romans 8:34).* Christ died. Christ rose. Christ intercedes for us.

Christ's intercession compliments in every way the tender care of the third person of the Holy Trinity. On the evening before his death Christ comforted his troubled disciples: *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:16,26).* The counsel of the Holy spirit is invaluable as he testifies about Christ (*John 15:26*), searches the hearts of the saints (*Romans 8:27*), helps us in our weakness, and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (*Romans 8:26*). All the while the Holy Spirit comes to us and comforts our hearts by the gospel, Christ, according to both natures, intercedes for us from his exalted throne in heaven. His intercession will continue all the way to judgment day when his Mediatorship will have achieved its purpose. *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).* The fruits of his intercession for us will endure forever. *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25).*

We have discussed the result of Christ's high priestly work. We have noted terms used by the Scriptures and Lutheran dogmaticians to describe those results: satisfaction, propitiation, reconciliation, atonement. Granted, these words require some definition, explanation, even illustration when we use them in our preaching and teaching. But they are words which are essential when discussing and holding fast to everything which is involved and included in Christ's high priestly work. Another word that must be mentioned is justification.

Justification, more than any other, is the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. It is this doctrine, above all others, which identifies Dr. Martin Luther's reformation. Luther called this doctrine the head and cornerstone of the church and went on to say that without it the church of God cannot subsist for one hour. The dogmatic notes of sainted Prof. John P. Meyer are still used at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In them Prof. Meyer identifies justification as the central doctrine of the gospel and goes on to describe the relation of justification to other doctrines:

to Law and sin, - necessitating it.
to God, in love preparing it.
to Christ and His work, laying the foundation.
to the Church - the congregation of the justified;
to Word and sacraments, proclaiming and sealing it.
to sanctification (in all its ramifications) - the fruit;
to the salvation of man and the glory of God - its end. 4

Justification is rightly called the chief doctrine of the Lutheran Church. When someone asks, what is the difference between Lutherans and other Christian denominations, one could very well begin with a discussion of the doctrine of justification.

On this basis alone one has to say that any discussion of Christ's high priestly work would be incomplete without some discussion of the doctrine of justification. It is all the more important, even critical, for our discussion as we look ahead at this historic time in the history of the New Testament church and the milestone of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Most Lutherans today have drifted away from this important doctrine. Any departure from this doctrine severely devaluates Christ's work as Priest.

Justification is a term which takes us into the courtroom. It is a judicial, a forensic term. We speak of the courtrooms of our land, on all levels, local, state and federal, as halls of justice. In the courtroom, when all is said and done, it falls to the judge to find, declare, accused persons innocent or guilty. Whenever the innocent are declared to be innocent and set free or the guilty are declared to be guilty and punished in a manner relative to the crime committed, we would say that justice has been served. A judge who regularly does so, as far as humanly possible, is worthy of his office. A judge who fails to do so deserves impeachment.

The doctrine of justification takes us into the courtroom of God. But it is unlike any other courtroom. Sinners are the accused, and there is not an innocent one among them. **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).** God is holy and just. He must punish sin. He cannot overlook a single sin. To the amazement of everyone, God declares sinners righteous, innocent. Unbelievable!

It can't be. Sin must be punished. God's law demands it. **The soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezekiel 18:20).** But the fact is, sin has been punished. God who is gracious and merciful and does not desire the death of the sinner made him, Christ, the Great High Priest, to be sin in the sinner's place. **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).**

Which sinners did God declare righteous? When did the verdict take place? Genuine Lutherans have taught that God declared all sinners righteous. This took place at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lamb and our Priest, from the dead. **He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification (Romans 4:25).** This we call universal and/or objective justification. A couple of the key passages for the when and whom of God's act of justification have already been noted. **Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).** Because of Adam's sin a verdict of condemnation was passed upon all men. In the same way, because of our Priest's one act of righteousness a verdict of acquittal was pronounced on all men.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The word used now is not justification. It is reconciliation, but describes the very same act of God. The word speaks of a change, not in God, for God does not change, nor in man, for man remains ever the sinner. The change is in man's status before God. Again, reconciliation includes all. God reconciled the world to himself. He no longer counts men's sins against them. Again the cause for such reconciliation, for the world's justification, is clear. God made Christ to be sin for us. Suffering and death as the substitute for sinners was part of the office. It was his great high priestly work

Universal justification is objective. All cause for man's justification is found outside of man. Objective justification is universal. All, believers and unbelievers, have deserved God's wrath and eternal punishment. Christ was anointed as the substitute for all sinners. He died in the place of every sinner. When Jesus died every sinner died. When Jesus rose he rose as the substitute for every sinner. By his resurrection God declared sinners, all of them, righteous, reconciled. This is the message of the gospel. There are no words sweeter than the words: your sins are forgiven, go in peace. No conditions are tied to the message. Not even faith is a condition to be met.

Scripture promises: God does not count your sins against you. All sins are paid in full. Christ, the Great High Priest of sinners, died in your place. Such is the message of universal, objective justification.

This is the message with which Christ sent his apostles into the world. In his high priestly prayer Jesus said of his disciples: *For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me(John 17:8)*. Three days later Jesus commissioned them and his church for all time: *“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven”(John 20:21-23)*. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it(Mark 16:20).

Through this announcement objective justification becomes subjective. On the strength of God’s promises in the doctrine of justification Paul and Silas could say to the jailer at Philippi: *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household(Acts 16:31)*. Writing to the Christians at Ephesus Paul reminded them of their response when they first heard the message of reconciliation. *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory(Ephesians 1:13-14)*. Luther captures the nature of the announcement of objective justification in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles Creed:

I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.

5

Through faith in the redemptive work of Christ, the great High Priest, sinners overcome the consciousness of divine wrath. God still hates sin. The law still condemns sinners to hell. And even Christians still need to hear God’s law because of the old Adam which clings to them and always tries to get the upper hand. But the one who has faith in Christ and his righteousness is no longer under law. *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes(Romans 10:4)*. *For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace(Romans 6:14)*. Through faith in Christ’s priestly work

Christians have the full rights of sons. *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons(Galatians 4:4-5)*. The fear of law and punishment have been removed. *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord(Romans 8:31-39)*.

That is the gospel’s message. No strings attached. No conditions. By grace alone. By faith alone. It is all wrapped up in Christ’s high priestly work and the doctrine of justification. Sadly, the doctrine of justification has not fared well these latter days. The mid point of the second millennium saw a return to the doctrine of justification through the Lutheran Reformation after justification was eventually compromised during the first millennium. For most of the next two centuries there was a strong loyalty to Scripture and its teaching on justification. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries pietism, rationalism, and modernism took turns undermining one doctrine after another in the churches, including the Lutheran church. These centuries saw almost a complete loss of orthodox Lutheranism in the European churches. Today 60 percent of all Lutherans live in these European countries and almost all of them belong to the Lutheran World Federation(LWF) which from the beginning was not able to agree on the doctrine of justification. In recent years the LWF has turned away completely from any kind of doctrinal unity or integrity and committed itself entirely to outward unity and the social gospel.

Considering the state of Lutheranism in the European countries, it is a miracle of God’s grace that confessional Lutheranism was able to take root on North American soil. The early history of our synod was followed closely by the formation of the Synodical Conference which represented an unwavering commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, including the doctrine of justification. Even then, most of the Lutherans in the United States remained outside the Synodical Conference.

During the present century modernism and ecumenism have taken a heavy toll on Lutheranism in America. Two thirds of the Lutherans are represented by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America(ELCA) which is also a member of the

Lutheran World Federation. Lutherans in ELCA have never held to the doctrine of objective justification. Long ago they settled for unity with diversity, of outward unity with doctrinal diversity. Forty years ago the Synodical Conference became history. Confessional Lutheranism, never representing a majority of Lutherans in America, has dwindled to about 5% of those who confess to be Lutheran.

The purpose of this brief history is not to question the faith of those who are members of other Christian denominations, much less of other Lutherans. Nor is it to extol the virtues of the WELS. The WELS is what it is only by the grace of God. May God keep us from using this moment in history to congratulate ourselves. The purpose of these reminders to this convention is to encourage us to praise and thank our God for his grace and mercy. He alone has enabled our fathers to become and remain a confessional church body. He alone can keep us faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Also, I cite this history to impress upon ourselves the great responsibility which falls upon confessional Lutherans today. *"Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD (Jeremiah 23:28).*

Notice the two words which deserve emphasis. The one has already received attention. It bears repeating. It is the word faithfully. It directs attention first to the message. In one word the message is justification. God has declared all sinners righteous in Christ. In two words the message is law and gospel, sin and grace. Law is a vital part of every lesson to be taught, every sermon to be preached. It lays bare man's greatest need. It reveals sin and God's wrath against all who sin. It condemns sinners to hell. It works contrition. Until the law has done its work, the heart is unprepared for the gospel. The vital part of each lesson and sermon is the gospel. Once the law has done its work, the sinner needs only to hear the gospel. The gospel declares forgiveness through Christ, forgiveness of all sins, forgiveness to all who sin.

Faithfulness to this message must be the concern of every pastor and teacher, veteran or recent graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College. It must be the concern of every congregation, from the oldest and largest to the smallest and most recent mission. God's Word must be handled carefully, spoken faithfully. When handling the Scriptures we are not dealing with modern or ancient research, opinion polls, rules of logic, or human expectations. We are entrusted with a sacred text, God's inspired, infallible Word.

The other word to catch our eye is the word speak. It directs our attention to the messenger, to those who preach and teach the message. Preparation for the public ministry in the WELS requires both sound doctrine and good methodology. The WELS has a rich history of good teaching and preaching. Classroom to classroom,

pulpit to pulpit, our people have come to expect quality work. One can step into any one of approximately 1800 Christian day school classrooms and expect to hear a rich portion God's Word in the form of Bible history and/or catechism to begin each day. One can attend anyone of more than 1200 congregations in the United States and Canada on any given Sunday and expect to hear an edifying sermon based upon a sacred text. It is my firm opinion that preaching and teaching in the WELS is second to none.

Having said that, one would have to insist that nothing is done so well that it cannot be done better. It is to be expected that a new teacher in the classroom and a new pastor in the pulpit will grow immeasurably during the first years of their ministry. Each added experience has the potential to make one a better teacher, a better preacher. But that need not be true only during the early years of one's ministry. It can be, we hope that it would be, the case long after one has realized 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 years in the ministry. Thorough preparation of sermons and lessons has no substitute.

Lessons and sermons which have been prepared well deserve to be delivered to the best of one's ability. Any improvement begins with self, a desire to improve and the willingness to make the necessary effort. Improvement is no farther away than the advice or encouragement of a brother or sister in the ministry.

Both Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have an on-going continuing education program for teachers and pastors respectively. For 27 years the seminary has offered 3 week Summer Quarter courses. Pastors Institutes have been held for an even longer time. More than a 100 pastors will be on campus at Mequon the next three weeks choosing from 14 courses being offered in this year's Summer Quarter. Since its 1992-93 self-study the seminary has intensified its efforts to offer extension courses for these programs. Most of the districts have responded to the offer, including the Nebraska District. A Pastors Institute was held earlier in the year and a Summer Quarter courses will be conducted right here at Waco from July 20-24. Courses are scheduled or planned in six additional districts as more and more congregations are encouraging and enabling their pastors to take advantage of these opportunities.

A new century and a new millennium, along with a new period in our synod's history await us. Are we ready to meet all of the challenges of a changing world, to seize the opportunities as the Lord opens doors, and to counter-attack the assaults of Satan and an ungodly world? According to God's abundant grace we have the message. May God's grace grow in our hearts so that we may proclaim that message faithfully.

*Amazing grace - that chose us e'er the worlds were made;
Amazing grace - that sent your Son to save;
Amazing grace - that robed us in your righteousness
And taught our lips to sing glory and praise.*

Christ, the King

If the people of Christ's day had been given a choice, which title would they have chosen for their Messiah, Prophet, Priest, or King? They had considerable interest in a prophet. Following the midpoint of his three year ministry Jesus asked his disciples, *Who do people say the Son of Man is?*(Matthew 16:13). Without hesitation the disciples responded: *Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets*(Matthew 16;14). The idea of a prophet, a great prophet, fit comfortably into their way of thinking.

As noted earlier, the idea of a priest proved to be more remote from their idea of a Messiah, at least a priest who had come to offer up himself as a sacrifice for their sins. The Jewish leaders, along with many of the people, preferred to hear law, not gospel. Like the rich young man they wanted to hear what man must do to become right with God(Matthew 19:16ff). As long as Jesus performed miracles, healed diseases, fed thousands, even raised the dead they were for the most part content to stand back and observe, and as long as he did not do it on the Sabbath day. The idea of their Messiah forgiving sins was another matter. They demanded to know by what authority he did this(Matthew 9:1-8). Instead of rejoicing in the fact that he led sinners to repentance they openly criticized him for having any contact with tax collectors and sinners(Matthew 9:11).

Jesus' own disciples reflect the general misunderstanding in connection with Christ's office as Priest. To the question, *Who do you say that I am?*(Matthew 16:19) Peter, speaking for the disciples, made a fine confession. *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"*(Matthew 16:16). This fine confession lost some of its luster when Jesus proceeded to inform his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die and rise again(Matthew 16:21). Peter wanted to hear no more of that kind of talk and earned the Lord's stern rebuke. *Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men"*(Matthew 16:23). Peter's response, no matter how well intended, showed a lack of understanding for his Lord's high priestly office

Jesus' office as King proved to be more popular among the people. The only real objection we hear to Christ's office as King is raised early Good Friday morning. In response to Pilate's question: *Shall I crucify your king?* the people responded, *We have no king but Caesar*(John 19:15). Even then their response may say more about their frustration with Jesus' priestly office. Or at least it reflects their disappointment that Jesus did not fulfill their millennialistic dreams of a Messiah-king.

The idea of a Messiah-king was firmly rooted in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. It was frequently identified with the kingdom of David, but always a ruling which surpassed anything David or those who ruled after him had accomplished. Some of the most powerful and delightful prophecies speak of the Messiah-king. David spoke of his royal son. *The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies*(Psalm 110:2). Isaiah identified the Messiah specifically with David's throne: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this*(Isaiah 9:6-7). Jeremiah echoes the sentiments of Isaiah: *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness"*(Jeremiah 23:5-6). Following the Babylonian captivity Zechariah revived the hopes of a Messiah-king. *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*(Zechariah 9:9). The fulfillment of these words on Palm Sunday most closely identify the people's hope for a Messiah-king. When the crowds heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the Feast they wasted no time to go out and meet him and proclaim him their king.(John 12:12ff).

Though the people longed for a king their idea of a king left much to be desired. After the feeding of the five thousand on the hillside in Galilee the crowds attempted to take Jesus by force and make him a bread king (John 6). Failure to be the kind of Messiah they wished him to be accounts greatly for the fact that Jesus' popularity in Galilee dissipated almost as quickly as it had appeared(John 6:66). Though crowds were eager to acclaim him king on Palm Sunday the only crowd we find five days later is the one gathered before Pilate demanding that he be crucified(John 19). Jesus' own disciples harbored strange notions concerning the nature of Jesus' kingdom when James and John requested: *Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory*(Mark 10:37). As late as his ascension into heaven the disciples asked: *Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*(Acts 1:6).

Disappointment with Christ's office reflects a deeper misunderstanding concerning the nature of his kingdom. Before Pilate Jesus reaffirmed himself to be the king of the Jews but quickly added: *My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place*(John 18:36). For the Messiah-King kingdom means activity, the exercise of kingly authority, the carrying out of kingly prerogatives. Christ our Mediator

according to both natures governs and controls all things in heaven, on earth, and even in hell.

Christ the Prophet had done nothing to contribute to the false notions which the people held concerning his kingdom. When some of the people questioned by what authority Jesus cast out demons his response spoke of the true nature of his kingdom: *If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you*(Luke 11:18-20). On a later occasion the Pharisees came to him with questions concerning the kingdom. Jesus responded: *The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is within you*(Luke 17:20-21). On the strength of these words of the Savior the apostle Paul could say what he did of Christ's kingdom. *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power*(1 Corinthians 4:20). *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*(Romans 14:17).

This kingdom was given to Christ according to his human nature. According to his divine nature he possessed it from eternity. David spoke of his installation: *I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill*(Psalm 2:6). Daniel says the same along with a brief description of the kingdom given to him: *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*(Daniel 7:14). The exalted Christ cites the kingdom as a gift when he commissioned his disciples and his church of all times: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*(Matthew 28:18-20).

The kingdom was given to Christ from the time of his conception and birth. God's angel announced it: *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end*(Luke 1:31-33). *The infant was called a king: Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him*(Matthew 2:2).

The suffering Savior also tied his office as King directly with his birth: *"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"*(John 18:37).

The manner of Christ's ruling varies with the attitude or state of the persons to whom it extends. Therefore we are accustomed to speak of Christ's kingdom as a kingdom of power, and of grace, and of glory. Frequently Scripture calls attention to the power and authority of the Messiah's ruling. Daniel foretold the extent of it: *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him*(Daniel 7:14,27). The Savior claimed it: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*(Matthew 28:18). The apostle Paul confirmed it: *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together*(Colossians 1:16-17).

Christ's power extends freely over his enemies. *The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies*(Psalm 110:1-2). *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*(1 Corinthians 15:25).

Always Christ exercises his power in the interest of his church. He promised as much when he stated in the presence of all his disciples: *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*(Matthew 16:18). Again the inspired apostle confirms it: *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church*(Ephesians 1:22). Christians of all times, especially during evil days, times of pain or loss, trouble or persecution, have drawn endless comfort from the words of the same apostle Paul: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*(Romans 8:28). Who can count the number of times these words have been spoken in the pulpit, at the hospital bed, and in the face of the death of a loved one? One might wonder if we have overused these words. One might wonder, but only for a moment, for how could words so profound and so comforting as these ever be used too much.

Whereas Christ rules the world with his power, his kingdom of grace has an entirely different end. In this kingdom Christ conveys spiritual blessings on those who are his. *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men*(Romans 14:17-18). The means by which he exercises this kingdom is the gospel. *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*(Matthew 24:14). The precious fruit of Christ's kingdom of grace is saving

faith. *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).*

Because the fruit of Christ's kingdom of grace is faith born of the gospel (which is specifically the work of the Holy Spirit) the kingdom is known only to God. *I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (John 17:6,14,17).* For the same reason Christ's church is called invisible. Though kingdom of God and church are not identical, kingdom of God being the broader term, the two terms have been used interchangeably by the church.

The members of Christ's kingdom of grace, united to him by faith, enjoy a rich measure of spiritual gifts. *For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1 Corinthians 1:5-7).* For the building of his kingdom Christ our King also supplies special gifts. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Christ's kingdom of grace is real, It is the greatest of all realities. It unites hearts to him by faith. It confers upon believers all spiritual blessings. It blesses with spiritual gifts. It shall continued to the end of time. *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20).* It does not preclude, however, a life-long struggle against the enemies of Christ's kingdom. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:12-18).*

All millennialistic thought, past or present, with its teaching of a thousand year rule of Christ upon the earth with temporal peace and utopian existence for his church, is a travesty of Christ's kingdom of grace. It sells short the perfect redemption which Christ has won for his church. It robs from the perfect peace given through the gospel. It distracts from the priceless spiritual blessings of the kingdom which are already ours as members of his church. It raises false hopes for those who are members of the church militant. The eyes of believers are directed to look for betterment upon the earth instead of the perfect home awaiting in heaven. It leads to speculation about the day and manner of Christ's return on the last day.

When we speak of Christ, the king, we also speak of his kingdom of glory. The exalted Christ already sits at the right hand of the Father and shares the glory that is his from eternity. *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 5:12-13).*

This rule includes the resurrection and the final judgment on the last day. *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:21-23,28,29).* All who are in the grave will come out. His glory will be revealed for all to see. *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world (John 17:24).*

Only those who are members of his kingdom of grace will enjoy it and participate in his kingdom of glory. *Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).* He will wipe every tear from their eyes. *There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Revelation 21:4).* At that time Christ's church militant shall become the church triumphant. *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:30).*

*Not unto us but to your name be glory Lord
For grace so rich, so wide, so high, so free.
Abide with us till trav'ling days are over and done,
And pilgrim feet lead us home, Lord, to you.*

Conclusion

As it often is in our lives, we have spent much time during this essay looking back. We would be remiss if we did not. The entire Christian life is a time of looking back to our Lord in his office as Prophet, Priest, and King. In our worship we continually look back. We look at the Prophet of Galilee who revealed himself in word and deed to be my Savior. We look back to the Savior's perfect obedience and holy passion, to the altar of the cross where my sins were nailed and remitted. We look back to our victorious and glorified King who established the holy Christian church of which we are privileged to be a member for life, life now and in eternity. Christians are "guilty" of living in the past

We have also spent some time looking back at the history of the WELS. During the next two years I expect all of us will be doing more of this. Yes, we will remember our leaders, men faithful to their Lord, faithful to the Scriptures and faithful to those whom they were privileged to serve. But especially we will remember our Lord who gave us these leaders, who took fallible men and made them faithful to his infallible Word, weak men and made them strong to do his will, ordinary men and made them eager to use their talents and abilities in extra-ordinary ways for the preaching and teaching of the gospel and salvation of souls. Christians, and especially WELS Christians, have every right and reason and a divine obligation to live in the past. God grant that, in the sense of which we have spoken, we will continue to do so.

Christ, however, who served as our Prophet, Priest, and King in the past, continues to be Prophet, Priest, and King. These offices have no end. They continue for time and eternity. He continues to serve in his notable offices until the end of time. As much as Christians long for the end of the world, to join the church triumphant, and to live with all the saints in glory, we remain in this world. And these are momentous days, a great time to be alive. We live at the very end of the second millennium, A. D. Most of us, God willing, will step into a third millennium in a matter of months. At the very same time we will be celebrating 150 years as a church body, 150 years under God, blessed by God, and by his grace, faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Our horizon during these waning days of this century and this millennium, however, has to stretch farther, much farther, well beyond this brief time of celebration. It needs to include the opportunities God has placed before us to reach out with the gospel in order to gather in the elect. The mere mention of this brings to my mind enough thoughts for another entire essay. Allow me, in the remaining time for this essay, to touch upon two areas which are of great concern to me, and I trust, also to you.

One is manpower, especially the pastoral ministry. There is every indication that at the very time we step into the 21st century and the next half century of our synod's history we will be in the early years of a growing vacancy problem. This problem will be compounded by another, a wonderful "problem" to have, no end of opportunities to expand our home and world mission fields.

During the 150 years of our synod's history manpower problems have come and gone. So has the need for greater financial support. One constant during this entire time has been opportunities. The Lord has continued to open doors, and more doors, in order to preach the gospel to more people in more places. May we never see these opportunities as problems but as blessings from our God.

Which makes it all the more urgent that we face our real problem. The best way I know how to face it is to "*Ask the Lord of the harvest.*" Pray the Lord of the harvest to inspire young men to prepare for the pastoral ministry. Pray the Lord of the harvest that every Christian finds ways to encourage young men to prepare to become pastors, and stands ready to lend support. Our synodical schools have stepped up what has been an intensive recruitment effort. At the same time we realize that pastors and teachers, parents and grandparents, and leaders in the congregations remain the best recruiters. You may recall reading in the March 1998 issue of the Northwestern Lutheran the comment by our former seminary president that no one has more influence in encouraging a child to prepare for the ministry than the mother. Mother, father, teacher, pastor, whoever, "*Ask the Lord of the harvest.*"

With such a fervent request to our God, let us not fail to add prayers of deep gratitude to him for the workers he has given us. Other church bodies face greater problems just to fill existing pulpits than we do in filling existing pulpits and at the same time to expand our mission outreach. Another area of blessing is the quality of men enrolling year after year in our seminary. I know of no other seminary our size or larger which is so blessed. Most seminaries throughout the land have come to depend upon mostly second career candidates who have little or no training in the biblical languages, and often few models for ministry. After teaching at the seminary for sixteen years I continue to be amazed at the qualifications each class brings to the seminary. They are the product of strong Christian homes. They are equipped and ready to do independent work in the biblical languages. They have had many excellent role models for ministry in their extensive Christian training. They know what it is to be Lutheran and much about being a shepherd in a Christian congregation. Except for training in the languages of the Bible the same can be said of the young men and women who attend Martin Luther College in order to become teachers in our Christian day schools. Thank the Lord of the harvest. Pray for more of such workers.

The other area of my concern is related, but different. It is related because it also has to do with that which is dear to all the delegates at this convention, ministry. It is

different in that it is not something which changes from time to time such as manpower and funding. It is something which is constant. It is the thought which comes to mind when I see so many delegates gathered in one place, even though for a few days. It struck me as I was privileged to stand in the pulpit at the opening service of this convention. It is the thought which lingers when the work of this convention is over and each of us returns to our respective ministries. The concern, the thought, may also be expressed in the form of a prayer: Lord, keep us faithful to you and to the ministry entrusted to us.

I am not saying anything new when I suggest that the work Christ has given to his church has not gotten easier over the years. It is a challenge; it has always been a challenge; it always will be. The demands upon ministry today are great. As never before we pray that the Lord will fill our hearts with the same fire that filled our hearts when we began to serve: love for the Savior, love for the truth, love for souls, and the willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. May we return to our respective congregations committed to use our strength and our talents to the best of our abilities, never as doing our job and putting in our time, but in service to our Prophet, Priest and King. Even during those more difficult times, "bad" days, and frustrating moments in our ministry may we be able to say: "What a privilege it is to be able to do this, to serve God's people with the gospel."

Nor am I saying anything new when I suggest that behind every faithful pastor and teacher there is a supportive family and a dedicated laity which stands ready to assist. A church with a strong laity is a church richly blessed. A congregation is only as strong as the laity within it. Though it might be somewhat of an overstatement, it has been suggested that a congregation is only as strong as the weakest member within. True or not, it serves to remind us of the need on the part of called workers and laity alike to grow in faith and to be ready to encourage and strengthen one another. When I think back to my days in the parish ministry I remember fondly those brothers in the ministry nearby and the support and encouragement we were able to give one another. Next I remember dedicated lay persons who had a deep love and respect for the work of the ministry and great vision for the building of Christ's church.

The year 2000 looms just ahead, the end of the 2nd millennium. Or does it end at 2001, as some have argued? The 150th anniversary of the WELS is upon us. Should we be celebrating it on the day our fathers met to organize our fellowship, or a year later to make it a full 150 years? It really doesn't matter. Solving these questions doesn't prepare us for what is beyond. Readiness depends upon looking back and looking ahead with a proper focus. We look back daily to the cross of our Prophet, Priest, and King. That is where it all began. We look ahead to the crown of glory which awaits us. That is where it all reaches fulfillment. While we wait for the crown we eagerly search out the opportunities God gives us to serve in his kingdom. With a single voice we pray to the Lord of the harvest for workers in the harvest field. We

pray for faithful workers. We pray for dedicated leaders in our congregations and throughout our church body. In each instance, may the prayer begin with me.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER

Endnotes

- 1. Gottfried Hoffmann, Middler Dogmatic Notes, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1985 Revision, Page 169.**
- 2. Gerhard, Middler Dogmatic Notes, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1985 Revision, Page 170**
- 3. Middler Dogmatic Notes, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1985 Revision, Page 173**
- 4. Senior Dogmatic Notes, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1985 Revision, Page 117.**
- 5. Luther's Catechism(David P. Kuske Edition), Board for Parish Education, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1982, Page 188.**