

LUTHERAN



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 REV FREDERIC H NITZ
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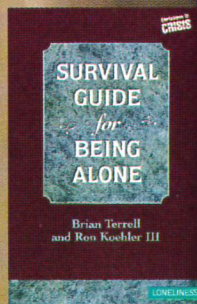
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Glad when Christmas comes?

The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10,11

Richard E. Lauersdorf

Is it hard for us to get cranked up for another Christmas? After all, we know what's going to happen even before we head to church for that Christmas Eve service. We know what songs will be sung, what the pastor will talk about, what the children will recite. Besides that, we know what life will be like when Christmas is past once again.

Then it's back to reality. Back to hanging onto our jobs, making it through school, enduring our pains, living with our problems. Yes, we'll sing those words about being so glad when Christmas comes. But?

Look not for angels

Almost, one could envy those shepherds of Bethlehem. Wouldn't it be something if, as they did the first Christmas, we could see and hear the angels? If only the altar area in our church would glow with their heavenly light this Christmas Eve! If only our eyes would be dazzled by their glory and our ears tingle at the sound of their voices! Then we'd all sing with all our heart, "I am so glad when Christmas comes." Then we'd leave our church service floating on air and filled with wonder.

Or would we? To recapture the joy of Christmas we need something better than looking for angels. We need to listen to their



message. Christmas is not about angels in the sky, but about a baby in a manger. It's not about a dazzling display of heavenly glory, but about God's Son leaving that glory to lie in a manger. It's not about an eternal God castled in the heavens, but instead cribbed in our flesh, carrying our sins, canceling our debt forever. Or to put it another way, Christmas is the message of God's amazing love.

Look for God's love

Think about that scene in Bethlehem's manger for a moment. Analyze the miracle of love behind it. God's own Son was born bloody and wriggling and laid in a manger so he could die bloody and

writhing, lifted up on a cross. Between those two events, he ate with reviled prostitutes and argued with respected teachers. He rubbed shoulders with rough fishermen and revered synagogue rulers. He showed love to weak widows and powerful army officers. He knew feasting and hunger, laughter and tears, acceptance and rejection.

Most important and most amazing of all, he experienced sin, but not the way we do when we so easily and repeatedly break God's holy will and fear his eternal punishment. Instead, the sinless Son of God shouldered

the sins of a broken world and suffered hell to become the only way to a better world, the heavenly one.

When the message of Christmas hits home, when God's love dazzles our eyes and tingles in our ears, then it can hardly be, "Another Christmas, so what?" Rather, thank God it's, "I am so glad when Christmas comes, the night of Jesus' birth."

Cranked up for Christmas? We can hardly wait!

Richard E. Lauersdorf is the synod's vice president for mission and ministry.



◆ We live in a hurried, harried world. So at Christmas, it's natural to look for ways to bring quiet reflection to the holiday. But in a quest to be peaceful, don't forget to be joyful. This is, after all, a season to celebrate. To share the true joy we have, we've included a number of Christmas articles. Be sure to check them out.

- ✓ "Glad when Christmas comes?" (p. 3)
- ✓ "I'll be home for Christmas" (p. 6)
- ✓ "How does Santa Claus fit with Christmas?" (p. 12)
- ✓ "Camels in the living room" (p. 36)

◆ The name James P. Schaefer is familiar to most of our readers—for 12 years he served as NL's editor. Now, four years after Jeb's retirement and two years after his death, Morton Schroeder talks about Jeb's dedication to serving the Lord. You can read more about former editor Schaefer, who led by faith, on page 8.

◆ This month, Wayne Laitinen ends his series on the Apostles' Creed. We thank him for his timely message based on this timeless creed.

◆ Also this month, Victor Prange ends his service as a contributing editor, which started in December 1983. We thank him for his 14 years of insights and wish him God's blessings in his ministry.

◆ Thanks to Melissa Homan who served as NL's graphic designer since 1995 and to Suzanne Giese who headed the Subscription Services since 1989.

◆ And from the NL staff, we pray that true joy and gladness fills your hearts this Christmas. We'll see you next year.

—LRB

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Photography**

NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN

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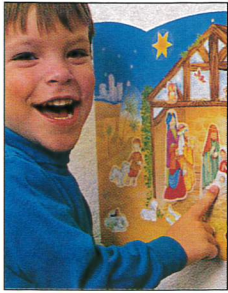
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I'll be home

Unlike our tales of Christmas past
is more than a sentimental

Wayne A

Iremember Christmas in Connecticut during the early '60s. Our Cape Cod house was nestled among tall pines at the edge of a field. Usually by the third week in December, a mantle of snow covered the countryside.

Fond Christmas memories

Inside, Dad set up a freshly-cut tree from the old homestead. We children were so excited we would scurry across the cold attic floor in bare feet to pull out boxes of ornaments. It seemed to take forever to unravel those Christmas tree lights with the big, fat bulbs. Occasionally, the stairway banister was wrapped with boughs of soft, white pine.

As we hung silver tinsel on the tree, Dad spun stories of his childhood Christmases . . . how Great-Grandpa had real candles on his tree and how Uncle Jack dressed up as Santa Claus and banged the ladder against the roof to make it sound convincing.

Christmas Eve afternoon found four pairs of freshly polished shoes all lined up on the fireplace hearth. In a few hours we would be snug in our church coats, crunching through the snow, as we huddled down the front walk into the old, black '49 Dodge.

During the half-hour ride to church, every child was rehearsing the Luke 2 account of Jesus' birth. Our nervous-

ness was offset by the consolation that if we got stage fright, there were probably a half dozen other kids who could pull us out.

A longing to go back

Every year about this time, I weave the same spell about Christmas past.

*Every year about this
time, I weave the
same spell about
Christmas past. And
when I do, I long to
go back home for
Christmas.*

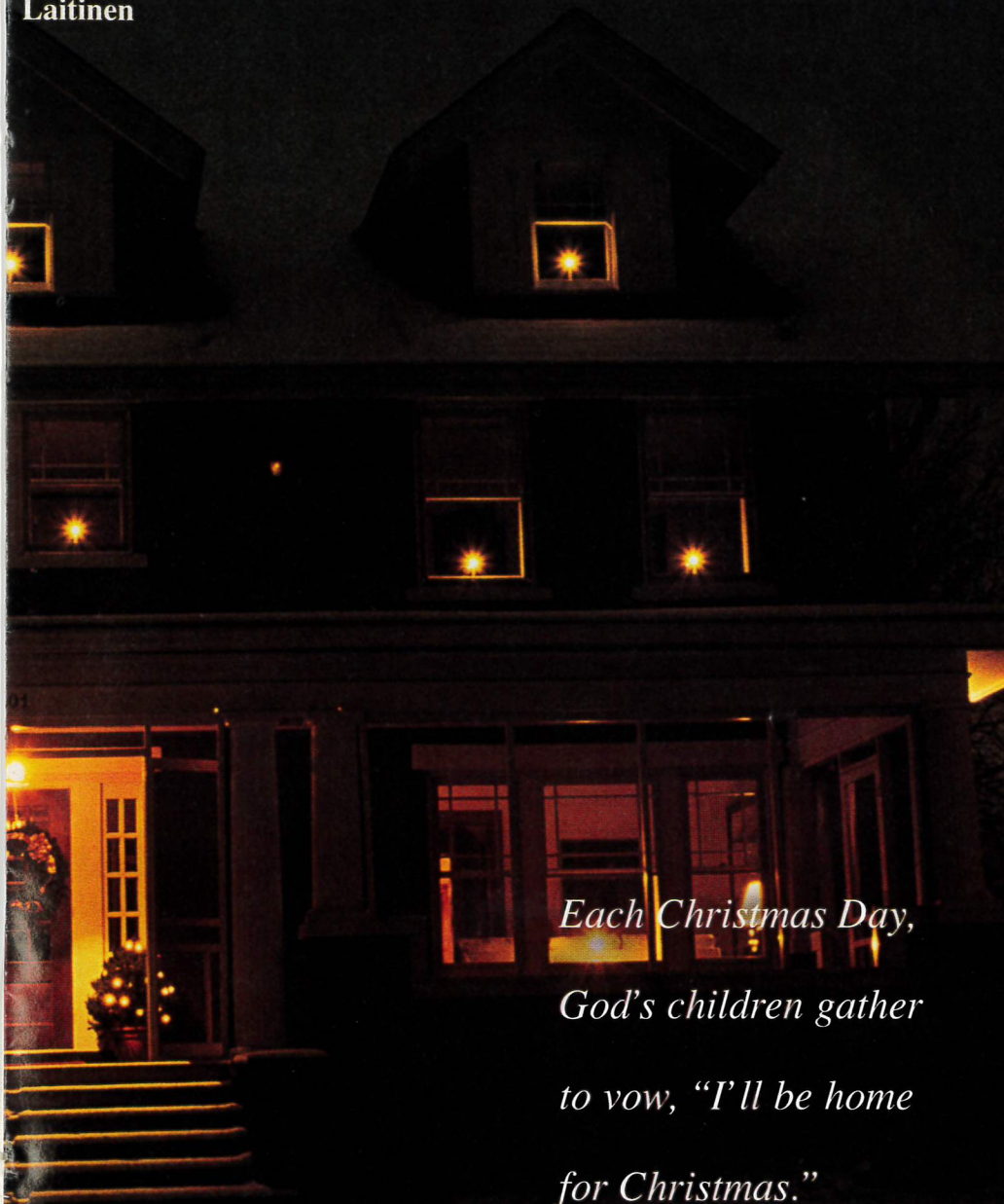
And when I do, I long to go back home for Christmas. Do you ever feel that way? You might even begin to hum that old, sentimental Perry Como tune, "I'll Be Home For Christmas." Someone told me that song was outlawed among American soldiers overseas. It created such a powerful



for Christmas

the high festival of our Lord's birth journey. It is a homecoming.

Laitinen



*Each Christmas Day,
God's children gather
to vow, "I'll be home
for Christmas."*

longing to go home for Christmas, which, for them, was impossible. And, come to think of it, I can never go home, either. People and places have changed—forever. And if I really could go back, I fear I would be disappointed. My memory has been too kind. I remember the good times,

but I've blocked out much of the pain and heartache of Christmas past.

The continuing home for Christmas

Perhaps this longing to take a sentimental journey back home is God's way of giving us an earthly token of the warmth and fellowship of heaven.

And the impossibility of going home reminds us that, try as we may, heaven isn't anything we can find here on earth. As the apostle wrote, "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

Each Advent we go back so we might get a taste of what lies ahead.

We are warmed by the song of the expectant Virgin who praises the Lord for her Savior-Son. But in heaven we will fully appreciate what "great things the mighty One has done" for us.

With the angels we glorify God because he has given mankind peace through the Child wrapped in swaddling-clothes. Only in heaven will we experience complete peace of body and soul.

With Simeon's arms, we embrace the baby Jesus and declare that we can depart this life in peace. In heaven we will know him even as we are known by him now.

The Bethlehem that lies behind whets our appetites for the Bethlehem that lies ahead. Unlike our tales of Christmas past, the high festival of our Lord's birth is more than a sentimental journey. It is a homecoming. Each Christmas Day, God's children gather to vow, "I'll be home for Christmas."

And all God's children know what that means.

Wayne Laitinen is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Pen mightier than sword

James Palmer (Jeb) Schaefer had a zeal to lead by faith, often in areas of ministry foreign to synodical precedent.

Morton A. Schroeder

Born too early to be a Christmas present for his family, he was a gift from God to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, which he served faithfully and well—for 20 years as parish pastor and 26 as synod official.

Born on Christmas to serve Christ

The birth of James Palmer (Jeb) Schaefer was like this: 75 years ago this month, Pastor William J. Schaefer hurried home from Zion church, the children's Christmas eve service finished for another year. The doctor met him with good news: Your wife has delivered a healthy boy. Throughout his entire life, this bairn groaned about sharing his birth day with Jesus. But when the day came, and he received double gifts, he forgot his nonsense.

The names Child Schaefer was given and the one Teen Schaefer assumed merit comment: *James*, identified in Galatians 1:19 as "the Lord's brother," spread the Savior's news with word and zeal in the early church. His namesake would do the same 20 centuries later. *Palmer*, the mother's maiden name, obliged the custom of the time.

Jeb is its own story. When Schaefer discovered a tenuous relationship with *James Ewell Brown Stuart*, the Civil War cavalry general of Scottish descent, he adopted the *nom de plume*. School friends, seeing in Schaefer some of the general's puckish humor, were happy to go along with their comrade's epiphany.

When James was six, his father was called to organize a mission on

Milwaukee's northwest side. Except for school- and synod-related absences, Schaefer spent the rest of his life in his adopted city. It was good to and for him. It gave him a venue to carry out God's work, access to synod officials, and a university in which he would earn advanced degrees in history and philosophy.

Son followed father into the ministry—to Atonement Lutheran Church where for two decades he served as teacher, principal, and assistant and associate pastor, and to the editorship of *The Northwestern Lutheran*. When son cut "The," the magazine assumed its present name.

Challenged to meet new challenges

At certain critical junctures, the son's drummer beat a different tattoo. Then his direction, pace, and stride, all elements of his zeal to lead by faith, assumed the identity needed to meet challenges. Often he appeared to be that legendary man on a mission who, like the general on his horse, had too little time to do what had to be done.

Schaefer worked hard, and he willingly accepted duties and responsibilities the church gave him. They were sometimes more than met his eye, simply because they were foreign to synodical precedent. He had no stars to steer by, no bushes to hide behind. Like the general, Schaefer had new battles to fight, and snipers had clear shots.

Missio Dei, the first WELS lay-led fund-raising effort, is a case in point. Schaefer, given a leave of absence from

Atonement, surprised the gainsayers and helped the members of synod surpass the goal of four million dollars by raising the then-staggering \$5,400,000.

The office of director of public relations, a position that required providing answers to questions asked by synod insiders and outsiders, is another. When Schaefer, quoted in a national news magazine, made "The Isolated Synod" look less forbidding by suggesting some members were known to drink martinis and occasionally say "(expletive)," those who opposed the office felt their position justified.

This was not the first time Schaefer had been on a hot spot. His sister remembers the night he was born. When she and her brother returned



Never one to skip his daily, five-mile bike ride, James Schaefer found an old bike, bought a new seat, and pumped up the tires so he could go riding while on vacation in Florida in March 1993.

home from the members' house where they had been while their sibling made an appearance, the bundled newborn was lying on the open oven door of the wood-burning stove. He seemed to enjoy the heat. Schaefer continued to try to soften the synod's image, his critics notwithstanding.

According to a former principal of Atonement, "Pastor James" was a firm friend of Christian education. He supported the faculty, boasting that it "was the best in the entire Milwaukee area!" He let the principal administrate and the teachers teach. All of them appreciated his "thoughtful insights," which helped them grow and the school improve.

Schaefer changed *Northwestern Lutheran* dramatically. His dream, which undergirded all of his decisions: get all WELSpeople to read the magazine. A professional journalist said of him, "He had a natural aptitude for the position of editor." Another, who admired what he was doing, wrote a personal letter: "Thanks for bringing the magazine into the 20th century."

Not everyone agreed. Introducing a Letters to the Editor column met with undisguised hostility. Some branded the magazine *The WELS Ladies' Home Journal*. But Schaefer persisted, and the readership increased from 41,000 to 65,000 during his editorship.

Schaefer was fussy with words. Sentences that confused "ladies" with "women" were redlined, and writers who "presumed" when they were to "assume" were summarily corrected.

A man for all seasons

Schaefer met Ruth Eggert, whom he called "the captor of my heart," at Northwestern. Eggert was a 10th-grader, Schaefer a college sophomore. Eggert's brother Kurt introduced them; a seven-year courtship and 48-year marriage followed.

Schaefer's work often took him from

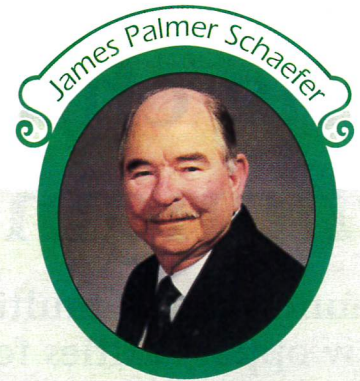
home, something his wife and their six children accepted with empathy. When he was home, he was available. One child recalls Dad playing catch with him and attending school baseball games. Another remembers being sung to. Others have memories of fly fishing, spin casting, building fires, and cooking at the lake. Other memories form a picture: doing crossword puzzles; taking a daily, five-mile, almost-ritual bike ride; playing solitaire on the PC; and always reading.

The printed word was important to Schaefer. Over the years, he reviewed hundreds of books for Northwestern Publishing House editors, providing succinct blurbs for their catalogs and pithy critiques for this magazine. Schaefer was different from the usual *aficionado*. Many serious readers keep forever books they buy. Schaefer pruned his library as life changed; books relevant to new situations replaced old favorites. He had several constants; one was the dog-eared Greek New Testament, which lay on his bedside table.

Seventeen years ago, a newspaper columnist said of Schaefer: "Within the synod he is widely considered one of its cherished unsung heroes." He could have called him "a gift from the Lord," one who regarded the written word more powerful than the sword, one who knew that General Jeb was fantasy but Pastor-Administrator-Editor James P. Schaefer was reality.

NL

Morton Schroeder, a retired DMLC professor, lives in Appleton, Wisconsin.



- Dec. 24, 1922, born to Pastor William J. and Mrs. Pency Palmer Schaefer, Colome, S.D.
- 1944, graduated from Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis.
- 1947, graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.
- Nov. 2, 1947, married Ruth Marie Eggert
- 1947-50, teacher, principal, and assistant pastor, Atonement school and church
- 1950, called to be associate pastor with his father
- 1955-95, member and chairman, Committee on Constitutional Matters
- 1963-93, director, WELS public relations
- 1965-66, executive director, Missio Dei offering
- 1965-69, chairman, first administration survey commission for WELS
- 1967-81, first stewardship counselor for WELS
- 1967-82, member, Coordinating Council
- 1971-82, executive secretary, stewardship board
- 1982-93, editor, *(The) Northwestern Lutheran*
- 1983-90, first editor, WELS Historical Institute Journal
- 1984-92, board member, AAL
- May 13, 1995, awarded honorary doctorate by Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee
- Nov. 21, 1995, died, Milwaukee

The changeless gospel in a changing congregation

Changing to a multi-cultural exploratory created new challenges and new opportunities for Grace, Seattle.

Julie K. Tessmer

Many people fear change. There is a comfort in sameness, predictability, and even monotony.

But many times we must change in order to prosper, grow, and even survive.

Two groups of people in Seattle—members of Grace Lutheran Church and the many immigrants to the city—learned this lesson in more ways than one.

Change means giving up some things

Grace became a multi-cultural mission in July. Located where 25 different languages are spoken in a five-block radius, the church has a prime location for spreading the Word among area immigrants.

But the church had to change in order to do this work.

Started in 1943, Grace was an established self-supporting congregation. Yet membership was declining, and money was scarce. In order to survive, Grace became an exploratory congregation under the Board for Home Missions.

"We had to give up a lot and start over," said Thomas Gumm, pastor at Grace.

But, he adds, so did many immigrants to Seattle.

Besnick Diko came to Seattle from Albania in May 1996. His wife, Engjllushe, followed in June. To come to the United States, they gave

up Besnick's job as mayor of an Albanian city, friends and relatives, and their two daughters, ages 9 and 6.

But they didn't regret their decision. "Here is best country because people can do what they dream," said Engjllushe.

Many times that wasn't so in Albania.

"You (people of Albania) have one dream. You for 50 years dream that they will change the government and it will be better. Finally this day came. The government changed and became democratic government. And people so happy because the government they dreamed about was true. But go to frustrate very soon. They dream too high and go down very soon. The government didn't do what they promised the people."

The Diko's dreams, however, won't

be complete until Christmas, when their children will probably be able to join them.

"We will start our life when our children come here. We will enjoy everything then," said Besnick.

Friends of the Dikos brought them to Grace, where they are taking English classes. Soon they will also start Bible instruction classes.

Each immigrant Grace is reaching out to has a different story about his past. All, however, need to hear the words that will give them a future.

"There are lots of people the church [WELS] isn't reaching out to that we should be," said Carol Gumm, the pastor's wife. "We see the front line of immigrants in Seattle. The Word of God is for everybody, whether they understand it in English or not. We need to reach the mission field that is in our backyard."



Besnick and Engjllushe Diko and Flutra and Vladimir Kuka are immigrants from Albania who settled in Seattle. All four are attending ESL classes at Grace and soon will be taking Bible instruction classes.

Change means new challenges

But to spread the Word to immigrants from Albania, Mexico, Peru, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Morocco, Russia—without speaking any of their languages—Gumm and his congregation had to find new ways of reaching them.

“Forty-two percent of my neighbors are non-white or non-English speaking. How can I be a central draw?” said Pastor Gumm. “The only way I can pull together this vast array is by giving them things they have in common: learning English, learning who their God is, and taking care of their kids.”

Grace offers English as a Second Language (ESL) classes twice a week to those who want to improve their English. At least a dozen adults attend.

Most students have a basic English knowledge so Carol Gumm, their instructor, is able to communicate with them. But Portuguese, Russian, Moroccan, French, Spanish, Albanian, and Chinese words fly around until students are reminded that this is “English” class.

When she first started, Carol had to use an English picture dictionary and point at pictures in order to communicate with one student.

“We smiled, we tried to let her know we were her friends, that we wanted to help her, and that we were trying to communicate with her,” said Carol. “She was in tears.”

Carol teaches the adults vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, conversation, and writing skills while the Gumm’s children teach and tutor the immigrants’ children.

“But I was always at a loss of how to incorporate what our church teaches,” said Carol. “I don’t want to just teach English without teaching them the most important message.

To incorporate Bible teachings into the classes’ reading material, Carol uses



Carol Gumm teaching an English as a Second Language class in Grace, Seattle, Wash. Besides teaching immigrants about grammar and pronunciation, Carol teaches them about God by incorporating a simple Bible study.

a simple Bible study that was written for WELS ESL classes in Bulgaria.

And she uses her Christian actions: “I like my witness to be me. If they are interested in the God that I believe in, teach about, and live my life according to, they will ask,” said Carol. “At this point my actions will speak louder than my words, especially if they don’t understand my words.”

Change means new opportunities

Teaching English brought many adults to Grace. Starting next year, Grace wants to attract parents and their children by opening a Christian daycare center. This will give Grace opportunities to work with children and gain new adult prospects.

Before this can happen, more change needs to take place. The church needs remodeling. Grace also has to find state-certified teachers.

One woman in the church has gone back to school to be one of those teachers.

“It was crucial for me to keep Grace going,” said Heidi Prochnow Linder, a Wisconsin native. “I miss my family immensely, and so the people here at Grace have become my family.”

She continues: “Before I felt lost with no purpose. To do this gives me a great opportunity. I can see the

importance of working with these children.”

Others in the congregation also see the importance of the multi-cultural work at Grace.

“We appreciate the long-term members of Grace that have supported us and have dedicated so many years to the church and community,” said Pastor Gumm.

One Sunday a month, several members join Pastor Gumm in canvassing. In the narthex, tracts in different languages share the saving work of Jesus. More Christian reading material in various languages will be added soon. Pastor Gumm also wants to hang a world map with pins showing what countries church visitors are from so the congregation can understand just how far-reaching their work is.

All these changes, with time, will help Grace share the one thing that will never change—God’s Word.

“It takes time. Bringing people to Christ—you don’t do it in a week or even a year. It’s something they learn and grow in in God’s time, not your own,” said Carol.

“All you have to do is spread the Word.”

NL

Julie Tessmer is the communications assistant for Northwestern Lutheran and WELS Communication Services.

How does Santa Claus fit with Christmas?

Armed with the background of Santa Claus, we can use the true story of St. Nicholas to help support the Christian aspects of Christmas.

John L. Eich

What is happening to December 25? Today's Christmas is an event that has parents holding over-spent credit cards, pastors dealing with a subject that's lost its first surprise, children

clutching sticky candy canes, people seeing

Christmas as a "holiday"—Christians lamenting that the birth of Jesus is eclipsed by nutcrackers, Santa Claus, and a wish list.

Perhaps for Christian parents one of the most difficult issues with the way Christmas is celebrated is what to do with Santa Claus. Opinions range from allowing the children to believe in the jolly old elf who drops presents down chimneys to not even mentioning him.

While there is always a danger in teaching children to believe in a story that later they find out is untrue, no matter where they look, no matter what TV shows they watch,

Santa Claus will be mentioned. There is no way to shield them completely. Perhaps, armed with the background of Santa Claus, we can use the true story of St. Nicholas and the myth to help support the Christian aspects of Christmas.

A lesson from history

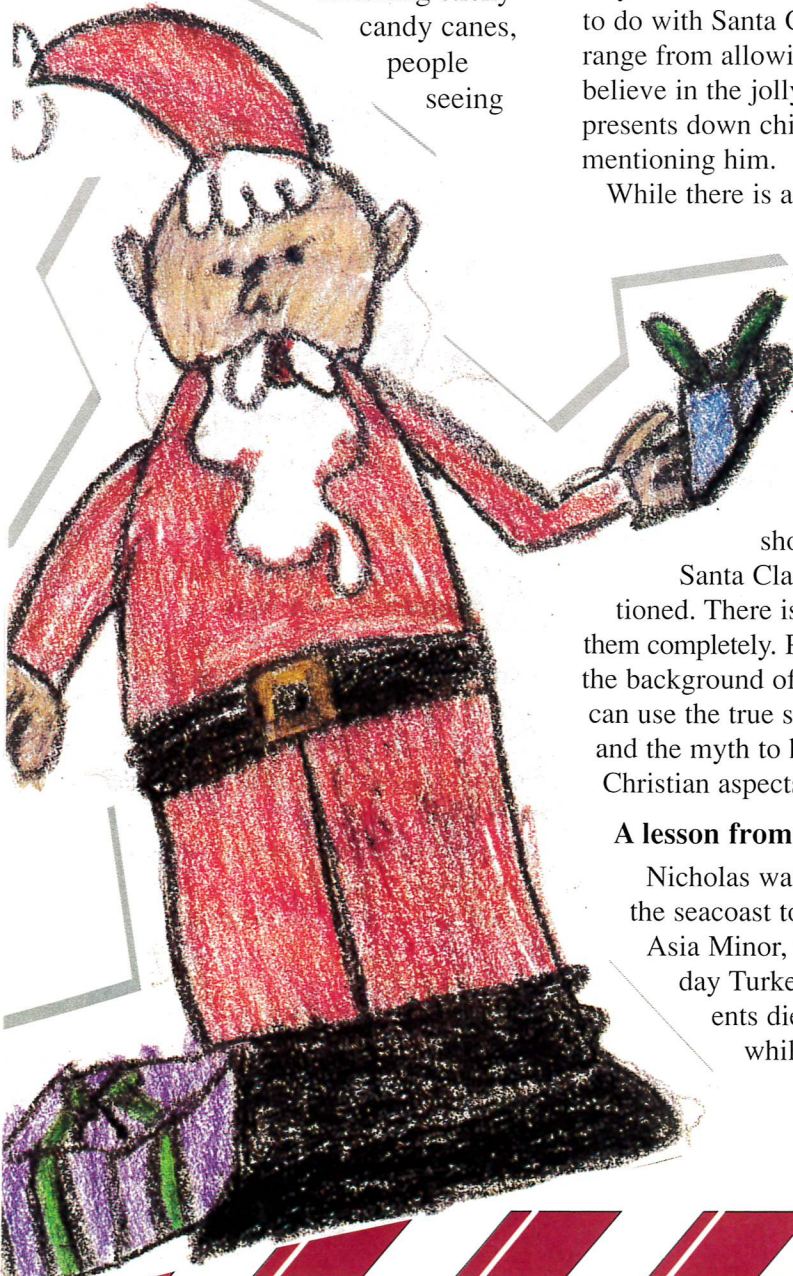
Nicholas was born in AD 270 in the seacoast town of Patara in Asia Minor, which is present day Turkey. His wealthy parents died in a plague while he was little. As

he grew older, he traveled and enjoyed using his money to help people. When he was nearly 50 he decided to become a pastor. This is when his story really begins.

Today doctors wear green, nurses wear white, and football players wear pads, jerseys, and helmets. Ministers at the time of Nicholas wore a uniform too. They wore a long red coat to remind people that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. The stole around the collar was a symbol of the yoke of Jesus, a simple reminder we are all his servants. The hat wasn't a stocking cap, but a miter symbolizing the helmet of salvation.

For 22 years Nicholas watched over his church. He loved having children sit on his lap while he told them stories about Jesus. One of his other joys was gift giving. Once a man in his church went bankrupt. In order to pay his bills, the man was going to sell his three beautiful daughters into slavery, a common practice in those days. When Nicholas heard about, it he collected an offering and in the dead of night tossed the bag of gold into an open window in the man's house. In other cases, if the windows or doors were locked, he would drop the gift down the chimney, which often had stockings hanging nearby to dry from washing.

Nicholas died in AD 342 on Dec. 6. By then he was well known in the



area. Many Christians began to follow his example in Christ and gave gifts to the poor. It became popular to hold a feast and worship service in his memory on Dec. 6. People would dress up like him, hold children on their laps, and give them gifts.

Nicholas soon became a patron saint, like a sports hero. In Holland the Dutch pronounced his name as Saint Nicklaus. As they came to America and spoke quickly, to the untrained ear it sounded like they were saying “Santa Claus.” The Germans, because of the Lutheran Reformation, focused their attention on the Christ child. In German the baby Jesus is called the “Kris Kindel.” Again spoken quickly this would sound like “Kris Kringle,” which later was applied to the Santa Claus legend because Christmas was celebrated near the time of St. Nicholas’ day.

The Puritans, however, made it illegal to mention any saint’s name. During the 1600s it was forbidden to light a candle, exchange a gift, or sing carols. Still, people will celebrate what they want. If we don’t teach them how to sing and feast and pretend to the glory of God, then the world will teach them how to do it without glorifying God. That’s what happened to St. Nicholas.

In 1820 a dentist named Clement Moore wrote a poem for his sick child to cheer him up. Called “Twas the night before Christmas,” the poem told children that St. Nicholas lived at the North Pole, drove a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer, and had a

tummy that shook like a bowl full of jelly. (Actually he was probably thin from fasting.) Forty years later Thomas Nast drew a cartoon picture showing St. Nicholas with a long white beard (probably true), rosy cheeks (probably not), dressed in red (true), and with a sack of toys on his back (probably not, since the people needed money and food more).

Some people love Santa Claus so much that they forget about Jesus. Some churches burn the present day Santa Claus in effigy. Both extremes are too much.

A lesson for today

Parents should be aware that fostering a belief in the Santa Claus of today may backfire later. A child looks to parents to furnish everything—food, comfort, courage, and truth. When a parent says, “Yes, there really is a Santa Claus, and his reindeer can really fly,” he is no longer playing a game. That parent is lending his personal authority as a parent to the myth, giving it the ring of truth.

What happens later to a parent’s credibility when the child finds out that the story isn’t true? Maybe the other things a parent has said about safety, moral values, right or wrong aren’t true either.

If you once believed in a man who knew what you were doing, who had amazing abilities, and who gave you nice things, and he turned out to be a fake, why should you believe in another man who knows what you are doing, has amazing abilities, gives you nice things—Jesus Christ? If you get burned once, why get burned the second time? Wouldn’t it be better to be honest with our children right from the start, and teach them the difference between truth and make-believe?

Some people love Santa Claus so much that they forget about Jesus. Some churches burn the present day Santa Claus in effigy. Both extremes are too much. It’s better to remember the real Nicholas, who can serve as an example of how to really keep Christmas.

Don’t think “Look what the world is coming to.” Rather think “Look who’s coming into the world!”

A little girl was once asked, “What is a saint?” Thinking of the heroes of faith who are pictured in stained glass windows she answered, “A saint is someone who lets the light in.” That’s how we best perhaps can use the myths about Santa Claus. Let’s use them to let the “light in,” Jesus Christ the light of the world. Let’s keep Santa Claus always kneeling at the manger of his Savior and ours.

NL

John Eich is pastor at Grace, Alma, Michigan.





I believe in life everlasting

Even if heaven was empty, our highest joy would be to live forever in the presence of our Savior-God

Wayne A. Laitinen

From conception, we have fallen so far from God that we prefer the plain east of Eden to the garden itself. Our judgment is so perverted that we call alienation from God "freedom." Communion with God is "slavery." Obedience is onerous. Rebellion is pure joy. "Question Authority" is the motto by which we live and move and have our being. In our stubborn pride, we are prepared to endure the pain of our position. In short, we prefer hell to heaven.

Through faith God gives us Eden

It would serve us right if the holy and just God gave us what we wanted. But—grace beyond our wildest imagination!—while we were still his enemies, he sent his Son into the flesh to do what we were powerless to do. Our Savior found freedom and joy in obeying his Father's law on our behalf. He offered himself as a slave to pain and death in our place under his Father's justice.

By embracing his Father's will, he brought glory to himself and to all the children of Adam.

By water and the Word, the Holy Spirit brought the joy of Christ's obedience into our hearts. Ever since, we have been renewed in that longing to live in the perfect obedience for which we were created. We yearn for the joy of complete communion with our heavenly Father. We are prepared to suffer any pain, forgo any pleasure, and yield any earthly freedom that stands in the way of heavenly glory.

This is why Christ's Bride says, "I believe in . . . life everlasting." She would not live outside the garden for-

out why they would want to go in.

Life east of Eden is all they know and all they care to know. There's a lot of pain and heartache out here. They sweat to eat and fear to sleep. One never knows if he'll wake up tomorrow. If he doesn't, he has a strong suspicion which side of God's justice he'll be on. But that's a subject for another day. Meanwhile there are thistles to pull and thorns to hack. "Life on the plain is all we've got," each assures his brother, "so we'll just have to make the best of it."

Two men leaning on their scythes stare off into the distance at Eden's open gate. One mops his brow and speculates, "They say when you go through that gate, you can lay down your tools."

"They also say the people in there are forever smilin' and singin' songs and behavin'."

"Can't think of anything more boring, can you?"

"Nope."

Thus far the collective wisdom of those who are perishing.

Even in his fallen state, Adam did not want to leave Paradise. How could he forget the rapture of living in harmony with his Creator and all creation? His longing for that garden home was so strong that the Lord literally had to drive him out. An angelic guard and a flaming sword were needed to keep him and his descendants from storming the gates.

The Second Adam, our Lord Jesus, changed all that. Through Christ's redemptive work, man is at one with his Creator again. The gate of Paradise is open. Heaven is ours. The cherubim and the sword are gone.

Life east of Eden

Unfortunately, so is Adam's memory. It seems his children can't muster enough imagination anymore to figure

ever.

In her heart, she lives beyond those open gates.

But soon, very soon, she wants to live there—body and soul. With the Apostle Paul she says, “I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far . . .” (Philippians 1:23). This is not a death-wish. It is the hope of glory.

Even if heaven was empty, our highest joy would be to live forever in the presence of our Savior-God. St. John writes, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Now we see him through his Word, but then face to face. Now we know him in part. Then we will know him even as we are known by him.

Life in Eden

It's hard to comprehend our heavenly home. Our problem is that we are bound by time, space, and other earthly limitations. In 2 Corinthians 12, St. Paul mentions his vision of heaven. All he could say is that he heard “inexpressible things, things that a man is not permitted to tell.” He means that heavenly language is so glorious that our vocal chords are not able to reproduce its sounds. All the experiences of heaven transcend anything our earthbound senses can grasp or imitate.

To help us begin to comprehend the glories of heaven, the holy writers use concrete, earthly images: streets of gold; a strong, walled city; precious stones; a lovely garden.

We know our earthly bodies will be

changed so they will be like Jesus' body after he rose from the dead. They will be immune to the infections Adam's sin brought upon us. Our new bodies will be spiritual bodies that will not be subject to death and decay. Since the war between flesh and spirit is ended, our bodies will never again be used for Satan's purposes. The saint within will inhabit every corner of our being.

For now, we stand outside the garden gate. Here we swing the scythe and labor and sweat. But every so often we stop to put our hand into our vest pocket to remember the earnest-money, the deposit, the

guarantee that our real citizenship lies elsewhere. Soon, very soon, we will see the King's bright countenance and hear him say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

Wayne Laitinen is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Loving the straying

The goal of discipline is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is to bring the sinning brother back.

John M. Parlow

“We have no business getting involved. It’s his life, his decision, and his responsibility. He’s accountable to God, and what he does is only between the Lord and him.”

Ever hear that? It sounds loving but actually is one of the most unloving things a person could say. The ideas that every person’s privacy is to be protected and that each is responsible only for himself have not only engulfed our society but much of the church as well. As a result, in the church we often have this ungodly notion of “Live and let live.” It is not surprising that loving church discipline is rare.

But that is not what Jesus wants for his church or his children. The Lord has always disciplined his people and instructed his people to discipline themselves. Just as human fathers discipline their children out of love in order to make them better, so God does with his children. The Lord loves each of his children dearly and wants to regain the straying. Jesus tells us how to do that and why to love them.

Who are the straying?

“If your brother sins against you.”

The person to be disciplined is a brother who sins. The phrase “your brother” is absolutely inclusive, allowing for no exceptions. Every child of God—young or old, male or female, educated or uneducated,

wealthy or poor, leader or follower—is to be lovingly confronted when he or she lives in sin. The implication here is that this is an unrepentant lifestyle. That is a key. We are not talking about struggling with a pet sin. We are talking about living in a sin.

**Love that winks
at sin . . . is not
God’s kind of love.
Love that tolerates
sin is not love at all.**

Confronting a sinning brother should be done as soon as the sin is known in order to turn the believer from his sin as soon as possible. The longer sin continues, the more difficult it becomes to leave. Bad habits die hard. A sinning brother also needs to be confronted as soon as possible because his unrepentant sin will have a corrupting influence on fellow believers and the church. The apostle Paul reminds us, “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?” (1 Corinthians 5:6). If you let someone get away with sin, it will lead others into sin and ruin the testimony of your church.

A man once told me he invited his friend who was a banker to church. When he told his friend the church’s

name, the friend said, “I’d never go there. That’s where the most crooked banker in the city attends.” This man’s sin indirectly affected everyone in that congregation and tarnished the cause of Christ.

Who initiates action?

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you.” Did you notice the words “you” and “your”? You are responsible for this loving action. The person responsible for initiating discipline is any believer who is aware of another believer’s sin. “But Pastor that is why we hired you. You are supposed to do this.” No. First, you didn’t hire your pastor. You called him. Second, the Bible teaches that his responsibility is to train fellow Christians to serve and care for one another. Church discipline is not simply the responsibility of the pastor or the board of elders; it is foremost the responsibility of every member.

The first confrontation of a sinning brother must be private—one on one. If the sinning person confesses and repents, no further discipline is necessary, and no one else need be brought into the matter. And if he does repent, a unique and marvelous bond of is established between the two believers, indicated by the phrase “you have won your brother over.”



Not every believer is given the gift of preaching or teaching or evangelism. But every believer is given the command to lovingly rebuke a fellow believer who is living in unrepentant sin. That is part of God's work, and it is a ministry as valuable as any other. Yet it is a much needed and much-neglected ministry. The absence of it may well be the most severe problem in many churches today (Revelation 2,3).

Why get involved?

"If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."

In the eyes of the world and even of many immature believers, church discipline is considered unloving, mean, bigoted. But discipline given in the right way expresses the deepest kind of love. Love that winks at sin or that is more concerned about "not making waves in the church or making sure we don't upset this family" is not God's kind of love. Love that tolerates sin is not love at all.

Parents, don't think you show love

and compassion by allowing your child to remain delinquent from church or allowing him to live with his girlfriend. That is one of the most unloving things you can do. The most loving thing you can do is confront your son out of love for his soul. If he doesn't listen to you, go to your church leaders and they will try to regain him.

The purpose of discipline is the spiritual rescue of the straying. The goal of discipline is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is to bring the sinning brother back. It is like a slap in the face. You are trying to wake him up from his sin.

If a doctor discovered you had cancer in the early stages but did nothing until it was too late, would you think the doctor was loving and concerned for your health? Of course not! Such a doctor would lose his license. The Bible describes sin as spiritual cancer

that will destroy both body and soul in hell. If we say or do nothing when a fellow Christian is living in a sin, we are no more loving than that doctor.

"We have no business getting involved. It's his life, his decision, and his responsibility. He's accountable to God, and what he does is only between the Lord and him." That is not the sound of love.

Let me remind you what love sounds like. "Tom, we need to talk to our son. He knows better, and what he is doing is destroying his faith." "Susan, we have to talk to Cindy right now. She is living a horrible lifestyle, and I'm afraid she is falling away from God."

The cry of an infant piercing the damp darkness of a still Bethlehem night. This is the sound of love for the straying.

John Parlow is pastor at St. Mark, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

NL

Symbols for your life

Christian symbols are a part of our heritage passed through generations and to be passed to future generations.

Larry S. Collyard

If you are like me, you pray when you enter church. Then you spend a few minutes looking around. You might greet a friend or two, open the hymnal to the liturgy page, and check out the altar flowers. I enjoy exploring the walls, windows, and ceilings—especially in churches I’m visiting for the first time. I’m searching for Christian symbols like those in the stained-glass windows below.

Symbols help me focus my thoughts. But I’m afraid that the use of Christian symbolism is dying out for two different but related reasons.

First, modern design and construction expense make church building committees reluctant to use many symbols. In 1970 when my wife and I were married, her church had three beautiful symbols on the wall above the altar depicting the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Every time I worshiped there, these symbols helped direct my thoughts heavenward. Ten years later when the congregation refurbished the church, they didn’t

replace the symbols—too difficult and expensive.

Second, Christian symbolism may be dying out because members aren’t learning the meaning of the symbols. Because they consider the symbols merely expensive decorations, they don’t see their worth when building or refurbishing. Knowing the meaning is essential to understanding the importance of Christian symbolism.

Friends adopted a five-year-old girl who never had contact with religion. When she arrived at her new home, she was naturally curious. She spent much time exploring room to room. One of her first questions was, “Why are all the ‘T’s hanging on the wall?” To her the cross of Christ meant nothing more than an alphabet letter and a nice decoration.

Are the symbols on the walls, windows, and ceilings of your church nothing more than decorations to you? Or do they help you with your worship and faith life? They can help only if you know what they mean.

Future issues of *Northwestern Lutheran* will highlight Christian

symbols in brief summaries that will discuss the symbol’s meaning and its relationship to scriptural truth, to your worship, and to your faith life. But first, here are some things you should know.

What is a symbol?

A symbol is a familiar object used to express an idea. We can’t experience an idea with our five senses because an idea—like love, fear, hate, or freedom—is abstract. So a symbol is a “concrete” picture used to express an “abstract” idea. Think of company logos that are immediately recognizable—golden arches, Nike swoosh. Some Christian symbols like the Latin Cross are also immediately recognizable, if not understood.

Where did we get these symbols?

Some symbols come right from Scripture. God uses various pictures to show us his grace. Jesus uses pictures to teach us Christian living.

Some came out of the Age of Persecution (AD 33-313). During this tragic era, Romans gained Christians’



property when they turned them in to the government. The Christians would be executed. Christians didn't know whom to trust, so they used signs and symbols as passwords to identify other Christians and to designate places of worship. Christians often worshiped in the Roman catacombs, tunnels under the city used for graves. One symbol that came from the Age of Persecution is the fish. Christians would draw a fish in the sand, on the wall of their house, or in a catacomb chamber. Non-Christians would think it was just doodling or graffiti, but Christians knew it identified their brothers and sisters in faith, or places of secret Christian worship.

Most symbols came out of the Middle Ages (AD 500-1500). Many people at that time couldn't read or write, so they used pictures to express their faith. Medieval European Christians designed symbols to decorate the beautiful cathedrals they built. Several of these buildings with their rich Christian symbolism still stand today.

Today Christians still design symbols to use in worship as pictures of scriptural truths. The latest trend is to use them on Christian Internet sites.

What is the value of Christian symbols?

Christian symbols beautify our worship. Colorful, elaborate symbols enrich our worship.

Christian symbols remind us of biblical truths that help strengthen our faith. They help focus our thoughts on God.

Christian symbols are a precious part of our heritage passed to us through generations and to be passed to future generations.

**Symbols can be used
to witness to others.**

**You may be able to tell others
about your
faith and beliefs
with symbols.**

Why learn about Christian symbols?

Some day you may be part of a church building committee. You should know what symbols to include. Not knowing meanings can be embarrassing and expensive. Reportedly, a Roman Catholic church

once put a beautiful Luther's Seal in their huge rose window over the altar, and a Lutheran church once used the flag of the pope in one of its stained glass windows.

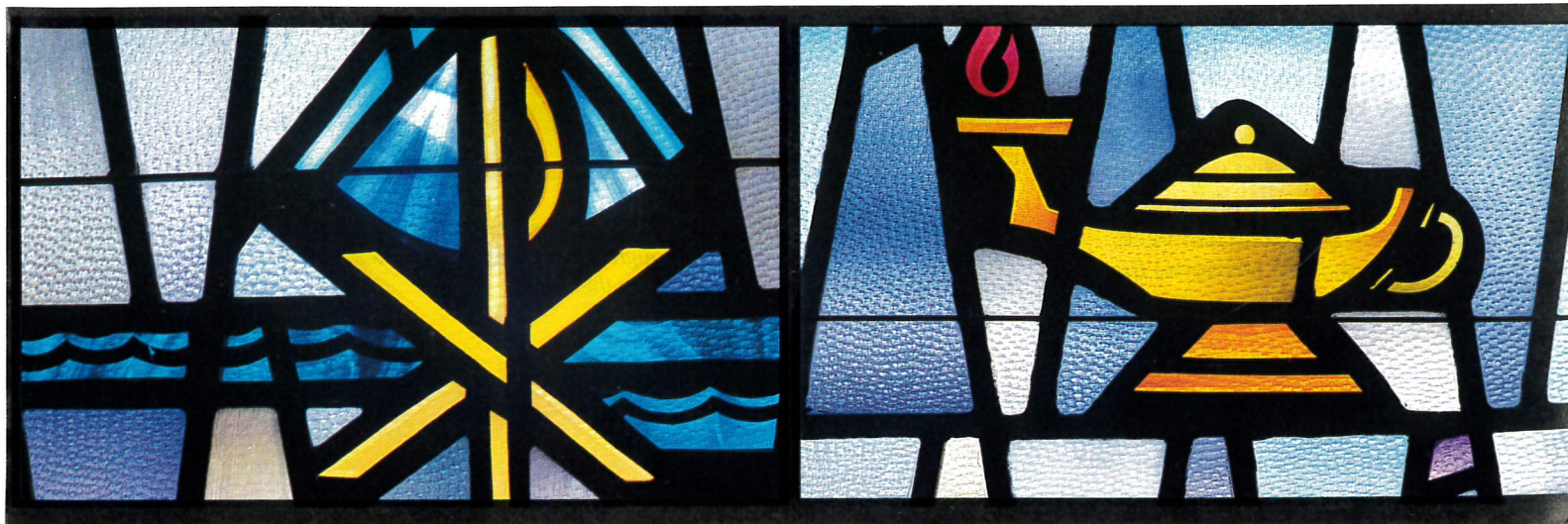
Christ's story is precious and never to be forgotten. Most symbols focus on Jesus and his work for us. The symbols help keep our thoughts on him.

Symbols can be used to witness to others. You may be able to tell others about your faith and beliefs with symbols (e.g., cross necklace or earrings). A former student of mine, who had taken my Christian symbols course as an eighth-grader, brought his non-Lutheran girlfriend to church during his high school years. When she asked him what a certain symbol meant, he failed to witness. I overheard their conversation and was deeply saddened. What an opportunity to let his light shine and to tell a loved one about Jesus. Don't let that happen to you.

Next time you enter your church or visit another, pay special attention to the symbols around you. Ask about their meanings. And watch *Northwestern Lutheran* in future months for "Symbols for your life."

NL

Larry Collyard is a teacher at St. John, Watertown, Wisconsin.





We are all one in mission

From across the land they came, all one in mission. For two and a half days 160 members of various boards, committees, and commissions of the synod met together in Milwaukee.

The purpose was to transfer information to the Synodical Council, the new governing board of the synod approved by the July synod convention. The meeting also offered opportunity for these leaders to interact and learn from others.

Those who lead listen to the Word. Bible study each day reminded leaders that they need to be men of faith who live in the Word and are guided by the Word. They also need

to be aware of and committed to the mission of the church, that divine assignment of reaching the lost and nurturing the saved through the power of God's gospel. As they are powered by that Word themselves, leaders humbly, sacrificially, confidently dedicate their efforts to that mission.

Those who lead learn from the past. Members of the former Board of Trustees and the Coordinating Council shared what has been done and what needs to be done. From 25 discussion groups came input as to what blessings and strengths God has given WELS, what challenges face

us, and what strategies might help us march with the gospel into the 21st century. The discussion was lively, and the information will be helpful.

Those who lead need our prayers. A number of times the 21 members of the Synodical Council heard the assurance that God's people were praying for them and their important work. We ask all WELS members to join in those prayers.

Richard E. Lauersdorf

Truck geography

The first- through fourth-graders at Christ, Oakley, Mich., have been learning about the United States through the eyes of a truck driver.

Through the Trucker Buddy program, classrooms and truckers are matched. The trucker sends postcards from the states that he travels through and offers facts about the state. When the students receive the letters, they post them on a map with a string attached to the state that the letters came from. This gives the children a practical lesson in geography.

But the trucker isn't the only one who shares his life. The children write back to the trucker and share their lives—and their faith.

"At Easter, without prodding, they put in passages and drew pictures of what they believe," said their teacher Kim Pilz.

This spring the students met their trucker. He spent the afternoon and talked about places he had been, what he hauls, and answered the children's questions.



The children from Christ, Oakley, Mich. The children correspond with a trucker who travels around the country. Through letters the trucker teaches the children about U.S. geography, and they in turn share their faith.

Helps for adult Bible study

Only 13 percent of WELS communicant members attend a weekly Bible class.

Does that statistic surprise you? Sadden you?

The WELS Commission on Adult Discipleship wants to help congregations encourage adult Bible study attendance so more members can grow stronger in faith.

One way they did this is by developing the *Adult Bible Study Handbook*, which provides information to help congregational leaders develop, promote, and expand adult

Bible study.

The handbook covers topics such as curriculum planning, lesson development, Bible study formats, recruitment, promotion, and individual Bible study. A 10-minute video interviews people about what Bible study means for their lives.

"This is not a solution manual," said Bruce Becker, adult discipleship administrator. "But it will help spur discussion, ideas, and possibilities."

The commission sent this free handbook to all congregations.

rē·li·giōn

Defining religion

keys to the kingdom: The authority, right, and duty given by Jesus to his church (all believers) to forgive the sins of the penitent and to refuse to forgive the sins of the impenitent (Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:15-20, John 20:22,23).

OWLS attend Martin Luther College

Twenty-eight senior citizens expanded their cultural background, grew in their Christian faith, and enjoyed fellowship at the 12th annual Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) Hostel at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., in July.

Attendees from Texas, Washington, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Michigan, and Wisconsin enjoyed classes that explored topics ranging from mathematics to missions. A pipe organ safari took seniors to five different churches where they heard the same recital on five different organs.

Other highlights included New Ulm's Heritage Fest, a tour of the new buildings at Bethany College in Mankato, and presentations on Africa and Antarctica.

Those attending the hostel stayed on campus and ate meals in the MLC cafeteria with grade school handbell choirs, Lutheran high school football players, summer college students, and pastors attending seminars. One ongoing program of the OWLS is "Crossing Generations"—they certainly did at this hostel.

Larry Carlovsky



Bringing it home

Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) just completed a test printing of one set of student lessons, copy masters, and a teacher's guide of Christ-Light®, the synod's coordinated religion curriculum. The materials were delivered in October.

The materials were only one set of three for third and fourth grade. They, along with New Testament lessons for pre-kindergarten to sixth grade and four topical courses for seventh and eighth grade, will be available for the 1998-99 school year. The rest of the curriculum, which includes materials for cradle roll through 12th grade, will be available to congregations over a three-year period, with completion in 2001.

NPH has been working with the Commission on Youth Discipleship since 1994 to prepare this material for Sunday schools and elementary schools.

Ed's note: Order forms for *Christ-Light* will be available in April 1998.



Owen Dorn, youth curriculum editor of Christ-Light, shows a test print of one of the Christ-Light lessons.



NPH enlarges store

Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) has doubled the size of its Christian Books and Gifts store.

"We had so many nice products, but our store was filled to capacity. Everything was so crowded," said Jane Riege, store manager. "Now there's a more open feeling and lots more space."

The store offers the same products it offered before but with some additions: a hospitality room, music listening stations, an expanded sacred music area, reading areas, a customer service room, and a larger children's area with videos for kids to watch while their parents shop.

Besides adding space, the store added events for its customers and the community. A children's story hour is offered twice a month. The store is also planning senior and teen nights and guest lectures.

The store's grand opening was in



A view of the NPH Christian Books and Gifts store. The store, which doubled in size, had its grand opening in September.

September. NPH started talking about enlarging the store in 1994. But office space was also limited. To make room for both store and office expansion, the NPH editing, production, design services, and part of the marketing department moved to new offices at 2949 N. Mayfair Rd.

Construction started in February 1997. The store remained open throughout construction.

NPH Christian Books and Gifts store is located at 1250 N. 113th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

Singing praises from Japan to U.S.

Yoko Omine, a Japanese opera singer, sang in several WELS churches and synodical schools in September and October.

Omine traveled to the States to record Japanese hymns at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn. They will be used on a Christian radio program and for shut-ins in Japan. "I want to use my talent for God and to help other members," she said.

Omine studied Christianity under Missionary Kermit Habben and was baptized and confirmed in 1979 by

Missionary Harold Johne.

This was her first trip to the United States. "The people here are very friendly, but everything is so big!" she remarked.



Yoko Omine

Wonderful Wednesday

Another unbelievable day for the Lutheran Church in Bulgaria. The official document that states we can legally worship in our building finally came through and referred to the "multi-purpose building" as an actual "Lutheran church"! This means we can put a Christian cross on the roof, put our name on the front, and gather regularly for worship—not in an "assembly hall" but in our Lutheran church.

The same day, a half-hour program of our dedication was broadcast throughout Sofia. It showed someone driving to our church while our church's name and address were highlighted on the screen. They cut to a photo of Luther and an open Bible and explained briefly the history of the Lutheran church.

Then they filmed our multi-purpose building. They explained the mosaic symbols and even the beautiful banner ("Growing In God's Word") our vacation Bible school children made.

Next, they showed highlights from the two hour service, which had about 150 people in an area made for 100.

They also taped the positive comments of Mr. Mladenov, Director of Religious Affairs of Bulgaria. It was no small tribute to have him there, especially since it was both "Sofia Day," a legal holiday, and Mr. Mladenov's "Name" day (everyone with the same first name celebrates on a certain day each year. It's more important to Bulgarians than one's "birth" day.)

The tape ended with a picture of Luther, the open Bible and the front of our new church. What a great half hour! The Lord is truly in charge here.

*Connie Bey
Sofia, Bulgaria*

Sewing seeds of fellowship

Sometimes fellowship comes through unlikely events. When the Bethlehem Quilters from Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis., decided to make a state quilt, they also decided to reach out to fellow WELS members.

As their yearly project, the quilters looked at patterns for a state quilt. But they decided that wasn't enough. They wrote a WELS congregation in each state and asked members to participate. Each church was asked to find someone to complete the block and send it back for the women from Bethlehem to piece together.

Altogether, congregations from 37 states participated. From start to finish it took the quilters two years, which included 138 hours of hand quilting. Each participating congrega-

tion received a thank you note and a picture of the finished product.

When the congregations from the various states completed the blocks, they enclosed letters of encouragement, from short notes to three-page letters.

"It was an expression of Christian fellowship," says Chris Jeske, a member at Bethlehem.

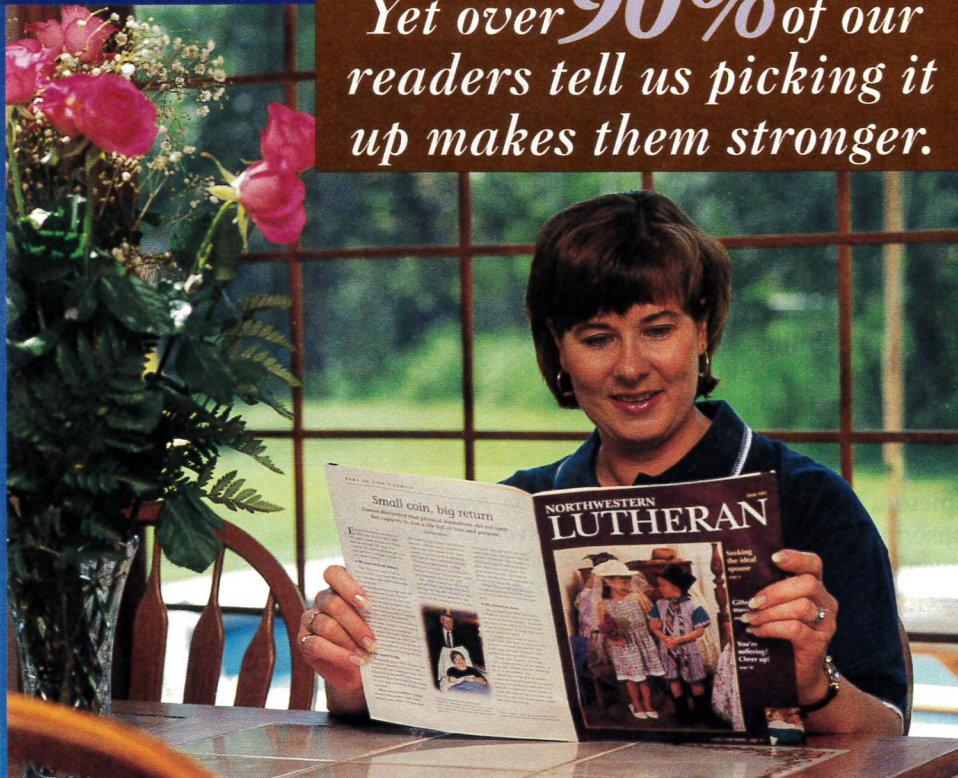
This tangible expression of Christian fellowship will not stay at Bethlehem, however. It will be hung at WELS churches, schools, and offices throughout the country.



The Bethlehem Quilters work on their state quilt. These quilters, from Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis., wrote to a WELS congregation in each state and asked them to complete their state block. The quilt, with pieces contributed from 37 congregations, took two years to finish.

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District news

North Atlantic

King of Kings, Clifton Park, N.Y., celebrated its 25th anniversary on Nov. 9. . . . On Sept. 28 members of Good Shepherd, South Attleboro, Mass., surprised their pastor, **Jeff Wegner**, with a pastor appreciation Sunday honoring his 10 years in the ministry. . . . The eighth grade confirmation class at **Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, Canada**, will be attending monthly meetings of church boards, committees, and organizations in order to learn how the church functions and operates. They will give a report to the class at the end of the year.

Kevin Schultz

News brief

WELS was given grants to benefit a variety of programs and ministries offered by ministerial education, parish services, and world missions. Recipients of the grants included

- a preaching initiative to help pastors sharpen their preaching skills;
- an initiative to increase the number of worship services available to the deaf and hearing impaired, to encourage people to learn sign language, and to promote outreach to the hearing impaired;
- a retreat for pastoral ministry students in June.
- In addition, funds are being made available for synod-wide technology workshops for educational leaders.

The grants were given by Aid Association for Lutherans.

South Atlantic



Members of the Gulf Coast Circuit held a pastors' retreat at Dauphin Island in Alabama. Pastors and their families and friends were able to attend. All enjoyed good food, fellowship, and a group devotion.

The children attending **St. John's Lutheran School on the island of Antigua** have never enjoyed a "snow day" off from school. This past September, though, they experienced the next best thing. Because of volcanic activity on the nearby island of Montserrat and breezes from that direction, the government closed all the schools and St. John's called an "ash day" off from classes. . . . After four

Northern Wisconsin

St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis., celebrated its 135th anniversary on Sept. 14. . . . The **Manitowoc Conference**, made up of 26 congregations, celebrated its 75th anniversary this fall. . . . **Our Savior, Phillips, Wis.**, celebrated its 10th anniversary and dedicated its new worship facility on Oct. 26. . . . **Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis.**, is sponsoring its first area women's retreat on March 20-22, 1998.

Joel Lillo

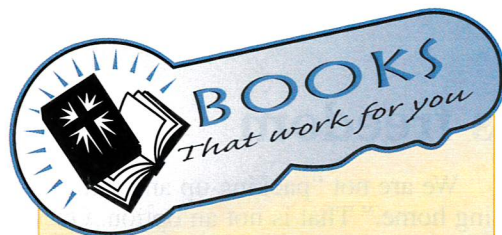
and a half years of planning, **Abiding Love, Cape Coral, Fla.** dedicated their 160 seat chapel in mid-October. Next fall the congregation plans to open a preschool. . . . A **Caribbean Lutheran Lay Leaders' Seminar** was hosted by Trinity, St. Lucia, during the Reformation weekend. Participants came from the Dominican

Republic, Puerto Rico, Antigua, Grenada, and St. Lucia. . . . The members of **Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla.**, did extensive work on their church building and grounds, then mailed out thousands of letters to the community, inviting them to a "Grand Opening" on Oct. 5. Forty new visitors came to worship the Savior that Sunday.

Paul E. Zell



On Sept. 21, St. Peter, Sturgeon Bay, Wis., thanked Sarah Olson for serving as organist for 50 years. She began playing for funerals in fifth grade. Here, St. Peter president, Robert Schlicht, presents Sarah with a plaque in honor of her anniversary



Have you seen the books Northwestern Publishing House has published for you recently? Now is a good time to look. They offer substance for everyone. Check the following:

The People's Bible: These Bible commentaries for lay Christians might still be the best buy available from Northwestern Publishing House. The latest volumes are

Revelation, Wayne Mueller, 229 pp., \$10.99, 15N0577.

Galatians, Ephesians, Armin J. Panning, 222 pp., \$10.99, 15N0579.

John, Gary P. Baumler, 281 pp., \$11.99, 15N0578.

People's Bible Teachings: The ideal companion set to The People's Bible, this set of books presents major Bible teachings and how they affect us, in words the laity will understand. Softcover, the latest volumes are

Church Fellowship: Working Together for the Truth, John F. Brug, 185 pp., \$8.99, 15N0602.

Law and Gospel: Bad News—Good News, Leroy A. Dobberstein, 181 pp., \$8.99, 15N0603.

God's Providence: He Cares for You, Mark J. Lenz, 146 pp., \$8.99, 15N0604.

Angels and Demons: Have Wings—Will Travel, John D. Schuetze, 135 pp., \$8.99, 15N0605.

Holy Spirit: the Giver of Life, John F. Vogt, 153 pp., \$8.99, 15N0606.

Predestination: Chosen in Christ, John A. Molstad Jr., 125 pp., \$8.99, 15N0607.

IN THE NEWS

The Lutheran Home Association (TLHA), based in Belle Plaine, Minn., appointed **Michael R. Klatt** as the Chief Executive Officer of their agency. He replaces Louis Lieske, who retired this June.

TLHA, a service agency owned and operated by 195 WELS congregations, owns or manages 13 facilities in Minnesota and Wisconsin.



Michael R. Klatt

rē·li·gi·ōn

Defining religion

gospel: The good news that God sent his Son Jesus to take away the sins of the world, or one of the first four books of the New Testament that recount the words, life, suffering, death, and resurrection of our Savior. The word gospel is sometimes used in a broad sense to include all the teachings of the Bible.

Grand Canyon—Monument to the Flood (Code 8337), 1997, 55 min., color, SCA

Guides at the Grand Canyon are trained to speak of erosion that took place over millions of years (to impress uninformed tourists). Creationist scientists have found evidence that shows that the canyon could not have been formed that way. Rather the evidence indicates that the canyon was formed when water from the Flood, trapped over the Great Plains, suddenly broke through on its way to the Pacific, and washed out the canyon in a matter of days.

Mt. St. Helen's—Explosive Evidence for Catastrophe (Code 8336), 1997, 58 min., color, SCA
Evolutionists claim that the surface of

the earth was shaped slowly over millions and billions of years, based on the slow changes that are taking place today. But the Bible

tells of a great flood that would have changed the earth in six months. The destruction caused by the eruption of Mt. St. Helen's in 1980 caused sudden changes that look like the results of long periods of time, giving support to the idea that the Flood, not billions of years, produced the shape of the earth today.

These videos are available for rental for \$7.50 by congregations, schools, and church groups. Subscribers to the library may order them for the cost of return postage from Audiovisual Library Services, Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 414/475-6600; 1-800-662-6093.





Russia passes law restricting religious freedom

Last summer the Russian legislature—the DUMA (equivalent to the U.S. House of Representatives) and the Federation Council (equivalent to the U.S. Senate)—overwhelmingly passed a law restricting the free exercise of religion in Russia and giving priority status to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Because of pressure from outside and from Christian groups within Russia, President Yeltsin sent the law back for reconsideration.

When the DUMA and Federation Council reconvened after summer recess, they introduced the bill again, and it quickly passed. President Yeltsin signed this version into law.

The law's basic provisions distinguish between religious groups and religious organizations. A religious group will not be able to purchase property, worship in public buildings, or publish religious materials. They also cannot invite foreign missionaries to assist them. A religious group cannot become a religious organization until it has been in existence for 15 years. At that time the organization will be subject to yearly re-registration with local authorities, but will be able to practice and work openly.

The law divides religions into three tiers. The Russian Orthodox Church is given preferential treatment. On the second tier are Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. All other religions are on the third tier because they are not part of Russia's culture and tradition.

WELS entered Russia as a new mission field in 1993. However, Lutherans were active in Russia from 1576 to 1938, when disbanded by the communist government. Even with the long tradition, Lutherans are relegated to the third tier of legislation. Here, Missionary Roger Zehms from

Novosibirsk, Russia, explains how this new law may affect the missionaries' work. The information is current as of November 1.

It is not clear how the law will effect religious organizations already working in Russia. If there will be a "grandfather" clause or not is subject to debate. WELS is presently not registered in Russia. We are attempting to register as a foreign non-profit corporation operating in Russia, but that registration has not yet been filed.

There is one WELS-affiliated Russian congregation organized in Akademgorodok which is registered with the regional authorities. WELS also has a contractual agreement with the Christian Information Confession, a Christian humanitarian aid group within our fellowship.

Until recently, missionaries and families received visas through U-TRI, the language institute of Novosibirsk State University. Five staff members still have their visas through U-TRI as language students. The other 13 have letters of invitation and visas through the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church, the one WELS-affiliated congregation.

What effect the new law will have on visa renewal for those invited by the church is unclear. If the law is interpreted in its strictest sense, we would not be able to renew through the church. Because all of the missionaries are still involved in intense language study, we believe we would be able to get our visas renewed through U-TRI should that become necessary. In addition, because some staff teach conversational English at a local state communications college, the college has offered assistance if necessary. One church member works at the Institute of Economics and has also offered assistance.

We are not "packing up and returning home." That is not an option. Our work is just beginning to take hold. We will work in whatever legal ways we can to maintain our presence.

We continue our work, including opening our fourth Christian Information Center this fall. We serve the existing Russian congregation, two preaching stations, and three Christian Information Centers, and teach seven students at our seminary and Bible Institute. We also provide humanitarian aid to the people of Central Siberia and offer assistance in life issues.

We ask for your continued prayers. Talk to your U.S. Representatives and Senators and encourage them to speak in favor of religious freedom in Russia.

Update:

A Lutheran congregation in southern Siberia may be the first victim of the Russian law that seeks to regulate religion in that country. Authorities in the Republic of Khakassia, a Russian "province," have canceled the registration of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission of Khakassia (ELMK) located in the village of Touim.

There is a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) connection to the congregation. Novosibirsk-based LCMS missionary Jeffrey Thormodson mentors Russian deacon Pavel Zayakin, who serves the congregation. However, the congregation is entirely indigenous Russian.

Teachers no longer need to teach in vans

Since 1985, public school teachers have tutored children in vans parked outside parochial schools.

This was because a 1985 Supreme Court ruling stated that public school teachers could help parochial school students under a federal remedial aid program. However, the teachers could not tutor inside the parochial school building because it would excessively entangle religion and government.

New York estimated that since 1985 the extra costs associated with the strict separation cost the state \$100 million.

The Supreme Court overturned that decision in June and said it is now constitutionally permissible for public school teachers to offer remedial aid at church-run schools.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's opinion stated the program did not run afoul of the court's three-pronged test for judging whether government programs advance religion because it did not result in government indoctrination, did not define recipients by reference to religion, or create an excessive entanglement between religion and government.

Missionaries allowed to enter United States

Congress renewed a provision of American immigration law allowing foreign religious workers to enter and remain in the United States for extended periods of time, but the lawmakers refused to make the provision permanent.

Under the Immigration Act of 1990, as many as 5,000 visa slots were opened for people to work in this country at the request of U.S. based religious organizations.

On Oct. 1, just as the provision was expiring, the Senate acted to extend the law allowing up to 10,000 religious workers to enter the United States every year to work in such ministries as soup kitchens, shelters, AIDS hospices, and other charities run by religious organizations.

But despite support in the Senate, religious workers lost their request to make the provision permanent. Under a sunset clause, members of the House voted to require the bill to be renewed every three years.

Under the law, 5,000 ministerial workers and 5,000 non-ministerial workers may enter the United States every year and receive permanent resident status. It also provides for temporary visas for workers at churches and charities.

In brief

• For the second time, **President Bill Clinton vetoed a bill that would have outlawed a controversial late-term abortion procedure.** The procedure, known by abortion foes as partial-birth abortion, has been at the top of the pro-life movement's legislative concerns for the past three years.

Opponents of legal abortion say President Clinton's veto in October will only intensify their efforts to ban the procedure. Last year, Congress was unable to muster the votes to override the veto.

• **British Anglican Church officials will attempt to deter overcrowding on Sundays in Canterbury Cathedral by charging an entrance fee.**

Cathedral authorities said their concerns were prompted by safety and not economics, according to Reuters, which did not report what the fee might be. Officials want to avoid what was described as "disruptive and dangerous crowding" in the cathedral, one of the most famous landmarks in the world. It attracts more than 1.7 million visitors annually.



I was a little apprehensive when a freshman transfer came into Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, with only a month of the school year left. He was from another country; his attire included dress pants and some unusual green

leather dress shoes.

The first day he walked alone. A day later, I glimpsed a classmate talking to him as they passed between classes. Next, I saw a girl sit next to him at chapel, share her hymnal, and chat.

By the time two weeks were up

he was looking more comfortable in the customary blue jeans and flannel shirt plus the usual athletic shoes. However, I knew he was really "in" the day I saw a sophomore wearing a pair of borrowed green leather dress shoes.

*Beverly Bornschlegl
Waco, Nebraska*

Bulletin BOARD & NOTICES

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3231; FAX, 414/256-3899; <n@sab.wels.net> Deadline is six weeks before publication date.

CHANGE IN MINISTRY

Pastors:

Bader, Randy D., from St. John, Vesta, Minn., to St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.

Beckendorf, Wilbur L., to St. Luke, Pickwick, Minn.

Behringer, James M., from Hope, Penryn, Calif., to Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis.

Carmichael, Scott M. from Bethany/St. Matthew, Renville, Minn., to St. John, Lake City, Minn.

Johnston, Mark J., from Lord and Savior, Waunakee, Wis., to Beautiful Savior, Spooner, Wis.

Johnston, Timothy L., from Mountain View, Great Falls, Mont., to St. Paul, Beverly Hills-2N, Fla.

Luetke, Daniel P., from Ascension, Harrisburg, Penn., to NW West Bend Exp., West Bend, Wis.

Paustian, Philip K., from Trinity, Terry, Mont., to St. Paul, Gladstone/St. Martin, Rapid River, Mich.

Seiltz, James V., from Trinity, Wabeno, Wis., to Salem, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Tragasz, Richard P., to Peace, Owensville, Mo. (additional call)

The synod administration building will close:

Dec. 24 (noon)-Dec. 26 and Jan. 1-2.

Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888; FAX, 414/256-3899.

ANNIVERSARIES

Muskego, Wis.—St. Paul (140). Dec. 7—thanks and praise Sunday. Sunday services, 7:45 and 10:30 AM; Monday, 7 PM. S66 W14325 Janesville Rd, Muskego WI 53150; 414/422-0320.

Campbellsport, Wis.—Immanuel (75). Jan. 18, 1998—service, 2 PM; meal follows. July 12, 1998—service, 10:15 am, dinner and church picnic follows. Oct. 25, 1998—service, 10:15 AM, dinner and church picnic follows. Call ahead to attend dinners. JoAnn Maedke, 920/477-2806.

Greenfield, Wis.—St. Jacobi (125). Jan. 25, 26; Feb. 22, 23; Mar. 29, 30; and April 19, 20. Sunday services, 8:15 and 10:45 AM, Monday, 7 PM. 8605 W Forest Home Ave, Greenfield WI 53228; 414/425-3030.

COMING EVENTS

Family open house—for Martin Luther College. Dec. 14, 11 AM-2 PM; Feb. 7, 1998, 8:30-11:30 AM; April 24, 1998, 3-6 PM. For information or reservations, contact MLC, 1995 Luther Ct, New Ulm MN 56073; 507/354-8221; FAX, 507/354-8225; <mlcadmit@mlc-wels.edu>

Women's retreat—WELS/ELS Ladies Retreat. Jan. 9-11, 1998. Woodland's Lutheran Retreat Village, Monteverde, Fla. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591 or pager, 941/750-1061.

Focus on Ministry weekend—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Mar. 19-21, 1998. For 10th- to 12th-graders interested in learning about studying to be a pastor, teacher, or staff minister. MLC, 1995 Luther Ct, New Ulm MN 56073; 507/354-8221; FAX, 507/354-8225; <mlcadmit@mlc-wels.edu>

Women's retreat—Christian Women Today retreat. Mar. 20-22, 1998. Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Brochures mailed by mid January. Jan Kneser, 414/781-1955.

Women's retreat—March 20-22, 1998. Holiday Inn, Manitowoc, Wis. Hosted by Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis. Karen McVey, 920/749-2823.

Women's retreat—Spiritual renewal weekend for women. Apr. 17-19, 1998. Rochester, Minn. Bev, 507/931-1866.

Handbell festivals—Northeast region—Apr. 18-19, 1998 at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.; Southeast region—Apr. 18-19, 1998 at Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis.; Western region—Mar. 28-29, 1998 at West LHS, Plymouth, Minn. Cheryl Diener, 223 W Badger St, Waupaca WI 54981; 715/258-7203.

WELS national Choral Festival—Apr. 17-19, 1998. Hosted by Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix. Students from 20 area Lutheran high schools will present two concerts: pops concert, 7 PM, April 17 (location tba), sacred concert, 3 PM, April 19 at ALA gymnasium/auditorium. Peter Sordahl, 602/268-8686; <PASordahl@aol.com>

Alcoholic awareness retreat—15th annual retreat for recovering alcoholics and family members. Apr. 24-26, 1998. Includes keynote speakers, workshops, support meetings, and Christian worship. Wonderland Camp and Conference Center, Wis. (about 30 miles south of Milwaukee). John Cook, Wisconsin Lutheran Christian Counseling, 6800 N 76 St, Milwaukee WI 53223; 414/353-5005, <wlcs@execpc.com>

Student Holy Land tour—A 12-14 day tour of Israel and Jordan designed for high school students in WELS. Parents and grandparents welcome. Early June 1998. \$2,000 to \$2,300 from Chicago. Hosted by Rev. James Aderman, Rev. David Putz, and Mr. Tom Niedfeldt. Registration deadline: Jan. 1, 1998. Tom Niedfeldt, 252 E Cotton St, Fond du Lac WI 54935; 1-800-656-7745; FAX, 414/921-3036.

NAMES WANTED

Carmel/Westfield/Zionsville/Noblesville/Fishers/NW Indianapolis, Ind.—Pastor George Ferch, 13461 Shakamac Dr, Carmel IN 46032; 317/571-0204; <gferch@in-motion.net>

Cary/Apex/Holly Springs/Garner/Durham/South Raleigh, N.C.—Pastor Michael Geiger, 1011-E Fox Hunt Ln, Raleigh NC 27615; 919/870-1082; <geigmich@aol.com>

Minot, N.D.—Students and Air Force personnel. Grace. Meets at New Hope Christian Center, 220 5 Ave NW, Minot ND 58703; 701/838-4280.

Chino Valley, Ariz.—Dave Karow, Hope Church, 1010 North Rd 1 E, Chino Valley AZ 86323; 520/636-2796 or 520/708-0729; <cdjkarow@northlink.com>

Savannah, Ga.—James Borgwardt, 138 Mariner's Way, Savannah GA 31419; 912/920-0843.

W. Des Moines, Iowa—Beautiful Savior. Pastor John Quandt, 3635 E P True Pkwy, W Des Moines IA 50265; 515/226-0670; FAX, 515/225-4392.

Kodiak/Valdez/S.E. Alaska/Sitka/Skagway/Ketchikan, Alaska—Pastor Fred Voss, 11600 Elmore Rd, Anchorage AK 99516-2119; 907/345-6129; <fvoss@juno.com>

Boise, Idaho—Amazing Grace exp. Pastor Tom Spiegelberg, 5751 S Hollyhock Pl, Boise Idaho 83716; 208/331-3062; <AGRACEWELS@aol.com>

Benton Harbor, Mich.—Names of choir members for anniversary choir concert on Feb. 22 for 100th anniversary of St. Matthew. Myrth Kremer, 6390 Territorial Rd. Benton Harbor MI 49022; 616/468-4078 or Aneita Mumma, 2266 Riverview Ct, Benton Harbor MI 49022; 616/925-5550.

AVAILABLE

Organs—Conn electric organ, 2 manual, full pedal and Wurlitzer electric organ, 2 manual, 8 pedal. Both need work. Free for cost of shipping. Our Savior, Phillips, Wis. 715/339-6753.

Altar, pulpit—Large, medium to dark stain, need some repair. Free for cost of shipping. Our Savior, Phillips, Wis. 715/339-6753.

Video—*There is a Place*. About Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Loan or purchase (\$10). 507/354-8221; FAX, 507/354-8225; <mlcadmit@mlc-wels.edu>

Course catalog—from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 1995 Luther Ct, New Ulm MN 56073; 507/354-8221; FAX, 507/354-8225; <mlcadmit@mlc-wels.edu>

Note cards—Five cards featuring original African designs by artist Teri Jo Hedmann: baskets, purple zebra, gold giraffe, waiting for clinic, huts of Lumano village. Order in lots of 25 at \$1 per card (\$3 for shipping, \$5 for 100 or more). Make checks payable to: Faith Lutheran Women's Guild. All proceeds go to the Central Africa Medical Mission. Darlene Zollman, 2411 Legacy Dr, Anchorage AK 99516; 907/345-0589

Choir robes—40 black robes with reversible collars and stoles. Robert Wagner, c/o Grace, 913 Nebraska St, Oshkosh WI 54901; 920/231-8957; FAX, 920/231-8552.

Desks—12 folding style with writing table attached, 20 regular with storage under seat. Cost negotiable. St. Peter, Theresa, Wis. 920/488-4784.

NEEDED

Communion ware—communion tray for individual cups, tray cover, and bread plate. For small preaching station. Ascension, New Bern, N.C.; Tadd Fellers, 910/937-0022.

Textbooks—for homeschooling parents. Send information on old textbooks to be posted on the unofficial WELS homeschool page <<http://home.thequest.net/users/kellyjo/welshomeschoolpg.htm>>. Interested homeschoolers would pay for shipping cost of student text(s) and Teacher Edition(s) in good shape. Kelly Salzwedel, 6102-G Sunflake Cir, Grand Forks A.F.B. N.D. 58204; <kellyjo@thequest.net>

Dividers—for Sunday School classrooms. Resurrection, Maumee, Ohio. Jim Lynch, 419/872-0198; <jmlynch@accessoledo.com>

Campbell's soup and product labels—for WELS school needing equipment, games, and teaching tools. Good Shepherd school, 2900 42nd St NE, Cedar Rapids Iowa 52402; 319/393-5656.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Jacksonville, N.C.—Ascension, 910/937-0022. Mail: 115 Tanglewood Dr, Jacksonville NC 28540.

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”

Karl R. Gurgel

One of the familiar carols of the Christmas season calls the angels who announced the Savior’s birth, the “herald angels.” The Bible does not give them that descriptive title. Yet we can call them the herald angels, considering what a herald did in those ancient times.

When the Roman army was intent upon capturing a city, it is reported, they would march around the city much like the children of Israel did at Jericho. On parade they would display the huge weapons of war that were capable of surmounting or crushing any protective wall. Then the mighty Roman legions would put on a bold show of impressive power. And after this display of force, a Roman herald would advance through the army, stand before the encircled wall of the city, and, in a loud voice, read the conditions of peace.

They didn’t have to battle. The Romans viewed the war as already won by them. And, if the people of the surrounded city agreed, there could be peace according to the terms the herald had announced.

The herald’s role was not as a negotiator. On behalf of Rome, he merely heralded, that is, announced, the terms of peace.

The angels the night of Jesus’ birth did the same. They had been sent to herald God’s terms of peace. There was nothing to negotiate. As God saw it, the battle had already been won; his Son would win it. The angels simply announced it—heralded—God’s saving message: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

The world today seems infatuated with talk about angels. Books have been writ-

ten. Artistic representations of angels are produced, purchased, and presented as gifts. Perceptive people who persist in helping others are often called “angels of mercy.” But, recently, have you heard anyone referred to as a “herald angel”?

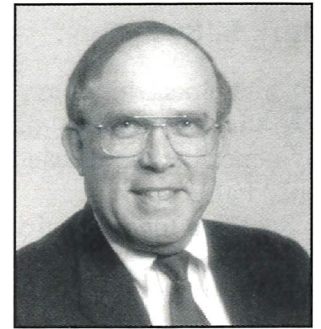
It’s true, God once employed real angels as heralds of his truth. The Christmas and Easter angels are the best known among them. However, since the time when God announced the fulfillment of his gracious promises through angels, the task of heralding it as been left up to ordinary human beings, to you and me.

Can you be a “herald angel” for someone this Christmas? What about using the Christmas cards you buy and send? Might a simple, personal note that heralds what Christmas means to you be what the Spirit uses to bring someone the real spirit of Christmas?

It doesn’t have to be long or sound scholarly. The herald angels’ first announcement wasn’t. All that needs to be told is why the Savior came and what he accomplished by it. He came to rescue us from our losses, from sin and death. He won for us, by his life and death, forgiveness and eternal life.

Why not be a “herald angel” for someone this Christmas? By the power of the Spirit in the words you use, maybe you, just like the herald angels, will see someone going to Bethlehem with you to “see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

Wouldn’t that be better than giving another angel this Christmas? Wouldn’t you like to be a “herald angel” for someone?



Karl R. Gurgel is the president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

**God once
employed
angels as
his heralds.
Now he
uses us.**

Taming the tongue

As with the rest of our body parts, we don't always use our tongues for what God designed them to do.

Mark E. Braun

Some old sayings aren't true. **S**“Sticks and stones may break my bones/but words can never hurt me”? False.

Soothing tones can dry a toddler's tears, but “You're stupid!” or “You'll never amount to anything,” scar little souls forever. Words can stir a nation: “Ask not what your country can do for you, . . .” “I have a dream!” But words also can poison friendships and destroy a marriage.

Dozens of Hebrew Proverbs address the wise and unwise ways to use the tongue, and James does too.

Careless words

A bit is a small thing—hidden in a horse's mouth, but managed properly that piece of steel can control a 2,000 pound steed. A rudder is a little thing—submerged below the waterline, but a seasoned captain can use it to steer a ship loaded with crew, cargo, and passengers. A match is a tiny thing—tucked away in one's pocket, but handled with care a spark can light a fire to warm campers and cook supper.

But a beginning rider loses control of his mount. A lax captain runs his ship aground. And, as Smokey used to remind us, one careless

match can start a forest fire.

A tongue is like that—harmless-looking little slab of wet flesh, mostly out of sight.

“But it makes great boasts,” James said. Like fire, a tongue can become **“a world of evil among the parts of the body”** (3:5,6).

Real faith knows when to hold its tongue.

Deadly words

It's not just a careless tongue that's dangerous. A wicked tongue **“corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”** It is **“a restless evil, full of deadly poison”** (3:6,8). Like the rest of our body parts, we don't use our tongues for what God designed them to do. **“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be”** (3:10).

We do this, James said. We churchgoers and upright citizens, who may scarcely entertain an adulterous thought, who would never harm a flea, who pay every dime the IRS demands—we wound the ones we love with sarcasm, ridicule,

gossip, evil suggestions, and praise for evil deeds. It is the besetting sin of “good people.”

Gracious words

One of our hymns describes Jesus as one whose lips expressed “gracious words.” Here are some gracious words: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you” (Luke 2:11). And: “When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law” (Galatians 4:4,5).

Real faith uses the Spirit's power in words to build others up, to speak the truth in love, to compliment, forgive, and comfort. And, as James wrote earlier, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (1:19,20). Real faith knows when to hold its tongue.

Do your words more often help than hurt? Do they reveal your true self, or do they conceal you from others? Do they hide God, or do they praise him? Do you say the same words when someone is present as when he's absent? Are you more likely to wield your tongue as a weapon of your flesh, or employ it as an instrument of the Spirit?

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but loving words can heal me.

Mark Braun is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

real faith for real life
james

The remedy for child abuse

Victor H. Prange

Little three-year-old Frank was found drowned in a bathtub. His mother Veronica has been charged with his murder.

Social workers were troubled. They asked themselves some hard questions. One said: "When I read about [Frank], I sat and thought, what methods are we using? How are we looking at the mom? A horrible case like this has to change something."

Just a few months prior to Frank's death, a progress report stated that the "biomother has an extremely loving and nurturing relationship with her son." Another therapist concluded that Frank would "receive good nurturing, age-appropriate discipline, and protective supervision in his mother's custody."

But something went wrong. A child died. And there will be more abused children, more deaths.

Almost half of the 1.4 million victims of suspected violence treated in hospital emergency rooms in 1994 were hurt by someone they knew, according to a Justice Department report. Many of these were children, abused by a father, mother, or other relative.

What is the remedy for child abuse? Before anything else, one must go to the manger. One must see the miracle: the eternal Word takes on our flesh and blood, is born an infant. What a wonder: the Almighty becomes fully human. So much God loves us!

Human reason balks at believing such a thing is possible. Gianni Versace was himself the victim of violence. Before his death an interviewer asked whether he was "religious."

His answer, "Yes, I believe in God, but I'm not the kind of religious person who goes to church, who believes in the fairy tale of Jesus born in the stable with the donkey. That, no—I'm not stupid. I can't believe that God, with all the power that he has, had to have himself born in a stable. *Non sarebbe stato comodo*—it wouldn't have been comfortable!"

God did what is not comfortable for God to do: he became one with us sinners. In dealing with children, we adults must often do what is not comfortable for us to do. We must put up with what may be a nuisance for us. We must humble ourselves to be one with a child. We must know the needs of a child even as God knows our needs.

King Herod abused the children of Bethlehem because he was not willing to join the Magi in kneeling before a young child. That would have been below his dignity. Herod's goal was to be rid of this nuisance to his reign as quickly as possible.

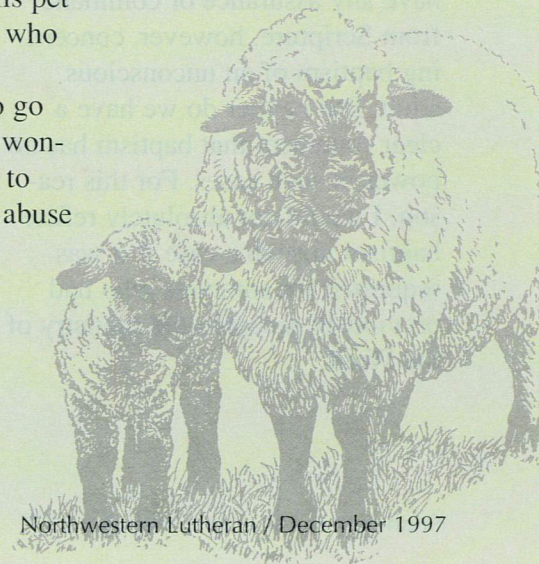
Jesus loved children. He blessed them. He held them up as examples of faith. He spoke dire threats to anyone who would lead a little child into sin. His pet name for disciples was "little ones who believe in me."

The remedy for child abuse is to go with the shepherds and behold the wonder in the manger. To love Jesus is to love a child. To abuse a child is to abuse Jesus.

Victor Prange is pastor at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

*What is the
remedy for
child abuse?*

*Before anything
else, one must go
to the manger.*



Valid baptisms

John F. Brug

Can an unconscious person be baptized since baptism works as a means of grace for babies, seemingly without their consent or awareness? I am thinking of a case in which an unbaptized teenager who was attending church and instruction class fell into a coma as a result of an accident. His parents asked that he be baptized before he died.



This is a very hard question, since there is no direct answer in Scripture.

We do not baptize adults without their confession of faith. We would not baptize a comatose person who had despised the ministry of the Word. In this case, however, the young man's regular church attendance and participation in membership class is evidence of faith, especially if baptism had already been discussed in the class, and he was planning to be baptized.

Baptism works as a means of grace, which depends only on the power of God's Word, not on any power in the recipient. We do not have any assurance or command from Scripture, however, concerning baptism of an unconscious adult. But neither do we have a clear statement that baptism has no power in such cases. For this reason, I would not absolutely refuse baptism in such a case if it was requested for someone who had previously accepted the ministry of the Word.

If I performed such a baptism, it would be in the hope the person was still hearing me just as we read and pray with those who appear to be comatose.

We know such people sometimes hear. I would tell the parents that it was not our normal practice to baptize an unconscious person and that we could base our hope for their son on his willing hearing of God's Word. If, however, they pleaded for baptism, I probably would not refuse it.

There are reasonable arguments against such a baptism, but apparently no clear command against it. Roman Catholicism, with its belief that a sacrament works simply because it is performed by a priest, has no problem with such baptisms and performs them frequently. This runs the danger of treating baptism as a magic rite.

Since this is a doubtful matter, we couldn't pass judgment on a pastor whether he did or did not baptize a person in such a case. In my funeral sermon following such a case I would emphasize the person's willing hearing of the Word before the accident.

Do we accept the baptism of the Mormons since they baptize and use the Trinitarian name? Does a Mormon who joins the Lutheran church need to be rebaptized?

Though the Mormons use the Trinitarian name, their teachings are a repudiation of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. They do not uphold the true deity of Christ nor the personality of the Holy Spirit. They also allow people to become "gods." A true baptism requires more than the use of the words "Father, Son, and Spirit." It must be based on a confession of the Triune God as revealed in the Bible. (Baptism does not, however, depend on the sincerity of the personal faith of the baptizer.)

Since the Mormons do not believe in the Trinity, their baptism is not a Christian baptism. For this reason Mormons who join the Lutheran church should be baptized, since they have never really been baptized.

The same would be true of converts from other non-Trinitarian sects that have some form of baptism. Christian churches that substitute some other formula for the words given by Scripture cast doubt on the validity of the baptism they perform.

*Send questions to
Your question, please,
Northwestern Lutheran,
2929 N Mayfair Rd,
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398;
e-mail, nl@sab.wels.net*

John Brug is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

Through special ministries, volunteers are able to become a pen pal to someone in prison.

You may have questions about what it's like to share in this manner of witnessing about the Savior. It is the prisoner's choice to tell you why he is there. Many do not volunteer that information. Whatever the reason, it does not place you above the prisoners in God's eyes. They have been guilty of law-breaking that has put them in prison. We have been guilty of law-breaking that, without Jesus' forgiveness, would put us in hell. In witnessing to them you keep yourself on the same level—a sinner in need of God's forgiveness.

Temptations within prison continue. There is pressure to join gangs. Drugs can be obtained in prison. Some prisoners are hostile, and fights break out. Some have no hope. A prisoner reading religious materials may be harassed. Loneliness and depression are prevalent.

What do you say to a prisoner? I have been a pen pal to several prisoners, and it is like writing to a friend. You talk about weather, sports, vocation, hobbies, family, reading interests, current news, and places you have traveled. Always give a witness to your faith, extend God's invitation to them, and let them know they are in your prayers.

You do not always experience success. One prisoner wrote, "I love life. I got busted for drugs. But the day I get out of here, I'm going to get my friends together and we're going to party hard." I wrote him a careful letter of warning, but never heard from him again.

But another prisoner wrote, "I was introduced to drugs at age 13 and have been battling addiction every since. My cousin Bill led me to the Lord. I can only prepare for the future with the help of the Holy Spirit." He has been reading the Bible, attending in-prison Bible class, and has been receptive to our witness.

It is a joy to witness to these people whose souls are precious to God. There is a long waiting list of prisoners who want pen pals. Many prisoners are reaching out for hope. Won't you respond? Contact Mr. Harold Runke, P.O. Box 452, New Ulm MN 56073. You will receive a packet of guidelines and instructions to get you started.

Grace Suckow

I am in my third year at Luther Preparatory School (Watertown, Wis.). I have been playing the violin since I was 10. The band programs in our Lutheran schools have been around for many years. The school day sometimes even involves a band class.

What about having children learn how to play stringed instruments? People enjoy hearing the graceful sounds of the violin, viola, cello, and bass. Here at LPS, our small string program has grown. Our string quartet is asked to play at church meetings and parties in Watertown and other communities.

I think that stringed instruments are becoming more recognized, but right now in our synod we only have band programs. It would be good to have opportunities for children to play a stringed instrument just like they have opportunities to play a band instrument. We should open the doors for more ways to make music to our Lord.

Molly Schumann

*Through my Bible
in 3 years*

January 1998

1. Revelation 3:1-6
2. Rev. 3:7-13
3. Rev. 3:14-22
4. Rev. 4
5. Rev. 5
6. Rev. 6
7. Rev. 7
8. Rev. 8
9. Rev. 9
10. Rev. 10
11. Rev. 11:1-14
12. Rev. 11:15-19
13. Rev. 12:1-9
14. Rev. 12:10—13:1
15. Rev. 13:2-10
16. Rev. 13:11-18
17. Rev. 14:1-5
18. Rev. 14:6-13
19. Rev. 14:14-20
20. Rev. 15
21. Rev. 16
22. Rev. 17
23. Rev. 18:1-20
24. Rev. 18:21—19:10
25. Rev. 19:11-21
26. Rev. 20:1-10
27. Rev. 20:11-15
28. Rev. 21:1-8
29. Rev. 21:9-21
30. Rev. 21:22—22:5
31. Rev. 22:6-21

Peter the Barber once asked Martin Luther how he, an ordinary kind of guy, could read the Bible and benefit from it.

Luther answered:

Ask yourself:

1. What does God tell me here?
2. What makes me glad?
3. What makes me sad?
4. What do I want to pray for?

Try it in your Bible reading.

Blessed Mary or mother of myths?



Gary P. Baumler is editor of Northwestern Lutheran and WELS Director of Communications.

When we allow anything or anyone to draw attention away from Jesus, we miss the point of Christmas altogether.

Elizabeth was right. Mary was, and still is, “blessed among women.” And Mary was right to say, “From now on all generations will call me blessed.” No other woman can ever say, as Mary could, that she is the virgin mother of the Son of God. No other woman was so favored of God.

Mary! We can all learn some things from her. She was humble and declared herself God’s “servant.” She knew her sinful condition and rejoiced in “God my Savior.” She gave all glory to God in “his mercy.” She treasured up the truths about her baby Jesus and “pondered them in her heart.” (Cf. Luke 1&2)

It is enough to say, “Go, and do like her,” and breathe a prayer of thanks that God chose her to give birth to the Savior of the world.

Or is it enough? Over four million signatures from 157 countries are asking the Roman Catholic pope for more—supporting a petition to proclaim Mary as “Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces, and Advocate for the People of God.” And that’s only the latest proposal in elevating Mary’s status and making her equal with the Son of God himself.

It started in AD 431 when the Council of Ephesus declared that Mary was to be honored as Theotokos, the God-bearer or Mother of God. And we can understand that correctly, since Jesus is, in one person, both man and God. However, the term carried more than a small hint that something inherent in Mary made her enough like God to bear his Son.

Next the Catholic Church declared that Mary was conceived without original sin (Immaculate Conception) and later that she was taken up bodily into heaven immediately upon her death (Assumption). And through the years, the poor, humble virgin mother has been called Immaculate Heart, Virgin of the Golden Heart, Virgin of the Poor, Lady of All Nations, Mother of the World, Queen of Peace—even, though not yet officially, Co-Redemptrix.

How unlike the Mary of Scripture we remembered earlier. Wouldn’t she be embarrassed at the adoration and the myth making? If the next step is taken to officially declare her Co-Redemptrix, there will be no hiding the idolatry behind all the extrabiblical attributes assigned to her.

Will some in that church even know who the “other” Redeemer is supposed to be? Will it matter? Will Christmas become more of a Marymas?

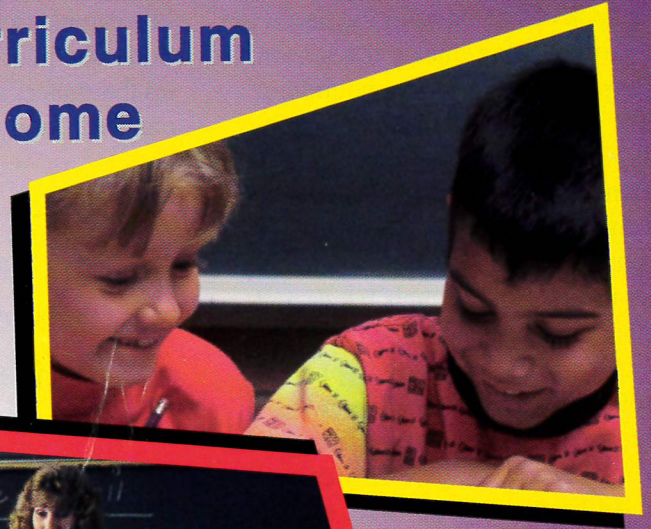
You don’t have to know much Scripture to see what’s wrong here. Consider: When the angels appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem, they proclaimed the birth of the Savior and not a word about his mother. After the shepherds saw Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, they spread the word about “the child,” not his mother. And the Magi from the east came to worship the infant King, not his mother.





Clearly, when we allow anything or anyone to draw attention away from Jesus, we miss the point of Christmas altogether. Remember for your Christmas: Mary was forever blessed. Jesus is forever the Blessor.

Gary P. Baumler

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-  The first components of the Christ-Light® coordinated religion curriculum are almost here.
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For information, contact Gerald F. Kastens, Youth Discipleship Administrator
(414/256-3224 or gkcyd@sab.wels.net).

Camels in the living room

Can we ever be sad enough to discover the true meaning of Christmas?

David Danford

We have a piano in our living room. Starting in November, a big book of Christmas music sits on top.

Any evening during the season, I can sit at the piano and pound out “We Three Kings,” and something very strange will happen. Our three youngest children will drop whatever they are doing, come running from all corners of the house to the living room, go to their hands and knees, and pretend to be camels.

Our camels will slowly plod around the room, one step to the measure, in time with the heavy beat of “We Three Kings.” This can go on for four verses or more, and they laugh hysterically each time a new verse starts because it means they get to be camels for a few more minutes.

I don’t recall how this tradition got started, and I recognize the connection between camels in our living room and the celebration of our Savior’s birth is remote at best.

Those of us too old to be camels in the living room also make merry this time of year in ways only indirectly associated with Jesus. Office parties, special clothes,

big dinners, gifts, revelry, fa-la-la-la-la, and all that. In a way, we’re all just camels in the living room. Someone puts up decorations, cranks up the music, and we’re ready to march around and laugh.

In a way,
we’re all just camels
in the living room.

It is a December tradition for churches to decry the seasonal merrymaking and say that the true meaning of Christmas is lost in all the frivolity. We are tempted to assume a somber countenance so as to be above the accusation of missing the true meaning of Christmas for the sake of celebration. But can we ever be sad enough to discover the true meaning of Christmas?

There would be reason for sadness if the camels who prowl my living room did not know their salvation comes from the Lord, for then their joy would be temporal and artificial. Happiness would vanish as soon as the music stopped, and the camels would be left searching desperately, wondering where to look in this life for another good time.

Praise God this is not so. By the gift of the Savior Jesus Christ, their joy is real and eternal.

There would be reason for sadness as I prowl the Christmas scene if I did not know my salvation was secure in the Lord. My joy would be artificial and temporal, passing away when the last bowl of party dip runs out. But, my joy is real and eternal, a gift from my Father in heaven, which I remember especially this time every year.

This puts me in the mood to celebrate. When I go home tonight I think I’ll play “We Three Kings” on the piano. Maybe the camels will come out.

David Danford is a member at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Nebraska.

