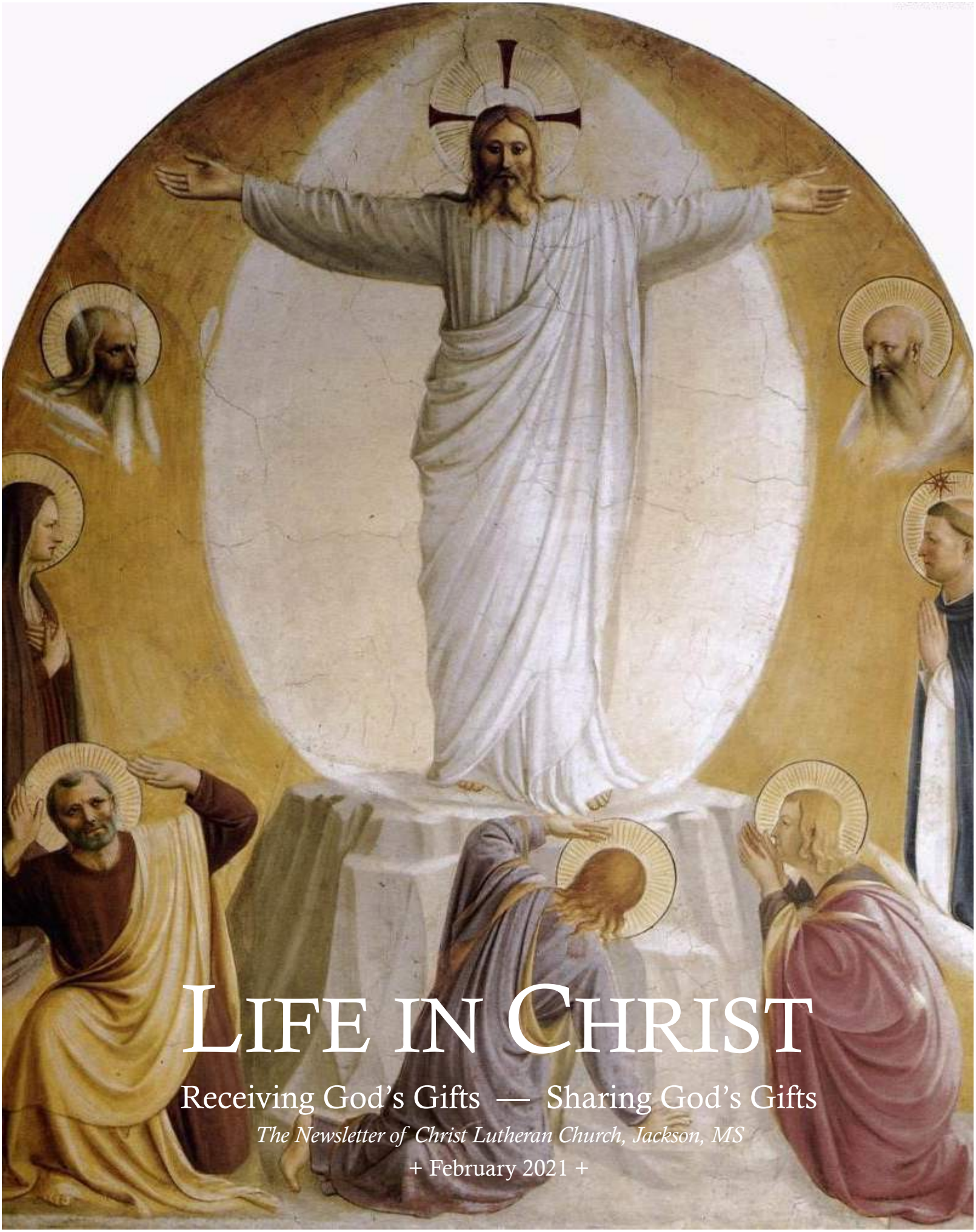

Life in Christ

Receiving God's Gifts — Sharing God's Gifts

The Newsletter of Christ Lutheran Church, Jackson, MS

+ February 2021 +

About the Cover:

The Transfiguration

Fra Angelico

1440-1442

Painted by the famous maker of frescos, Fra Angelico, this work depicting the Transfiguration of Christ is famous throughout Christendom. Interestingly, the painting was not put on the wall of a great church or cathedral, but in the cell of monastery that would be inhabited by a simple monk or priest. This was not strange for Angelico, as most of his works were in the cells and prayer rooms of monastic communities that would not be in any way famous if it were not for the fact that Fra Angelico had put his art in them. To put it simply, he made wondrous art for not merely simple people, but a single, simple person, who would spend their days praying and studying in an otherwise barely furnished room.

The depiction of the Transfiguration is, for the most part, 'orthodox', in that it depicts what any painting would: Jesus in glory, Moses and Elijah speaking to Him, and His glory standing upon the Mount of Tabor. What is perhaps notably is the three kinds of terror depicted in the three disciples. The first, on the left, turning his head away, and seemingly about to cover his ears, as if he cannot bear to hear the great Word of God. The second hiding his eyes, knowing that *no man can see God and live.* The third with his hands out in posture of begging, as if he is pleading for mercy before Him who is Mercy.

To the far left and right of Christ are St. Mary, the Mother of God, and St. Dominic, the founder of the monastic order that Fra Angelico was a member of. St. Dominic, who formed the Dominican order, created a more moderate form of monasticism than previously existed, one that emphasized prayer, study, and education over severe asceticism and separation from other people. Fra Angelico depicts St. Dominic in a meditative stance before the Lord, whereas Mary has her hands over her heart, a reference to both her love for her Son, and to the pain she will experience in her heart at His coming Crucifixion, prophesied in the Gospel of Luke. ■

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Rev. George Fields
Sr. Sara Fields

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we shall see him

as he is

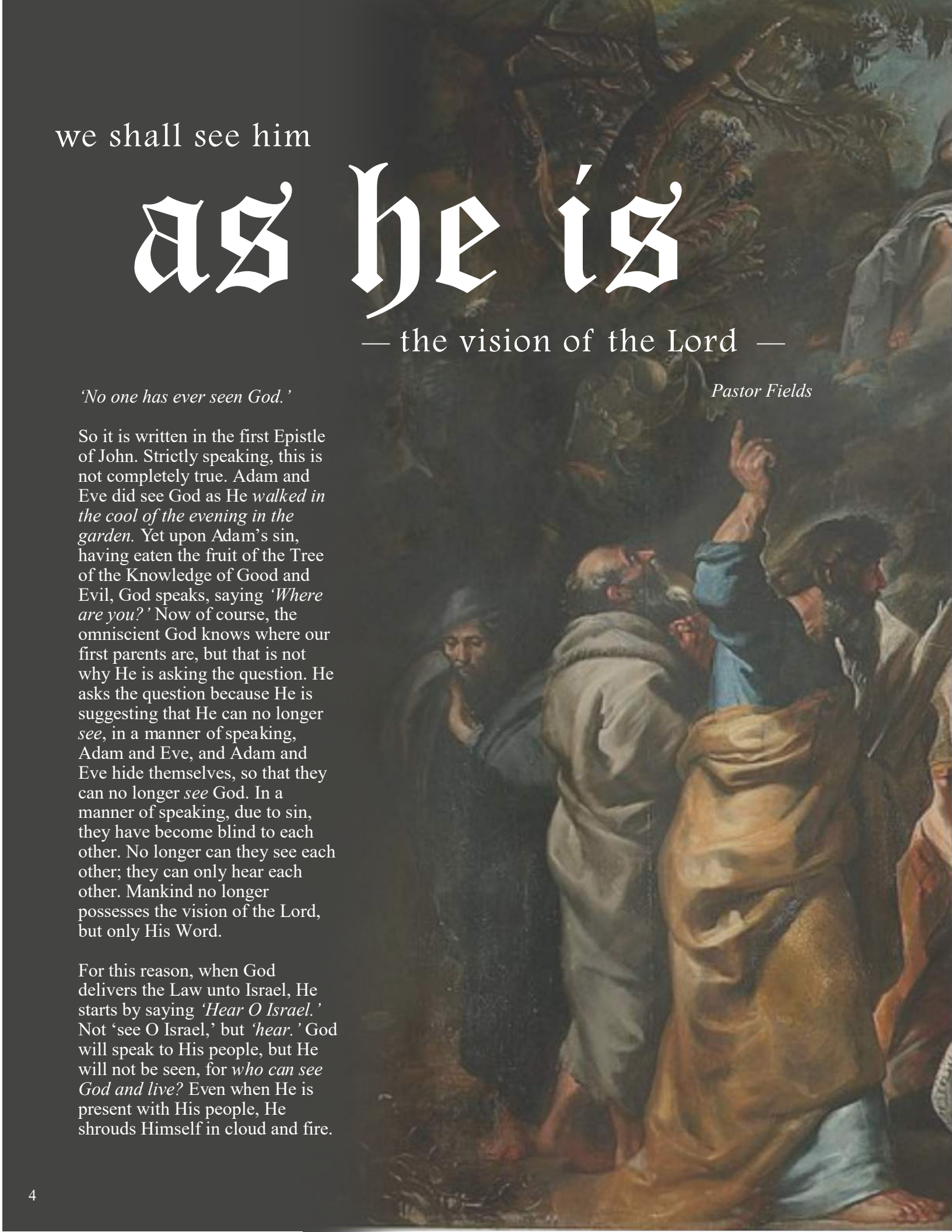
— the vision of the Lord —

Pastor Fields

'No one has ever seen God.'

So it is written in the first Epistle of John. Strictly speaking, this is not completely true. Adam and Eve did see God as He *walked in the cool of the evening in the garden.* Yet upon Adam's sin, having eaten the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God speaks, saying *'Where are you?'* Now of course, the omniscient God knows where our first parents are, but that is not why He is asking the question. He asks the question because He is suggesting that He can no longer *see*, in a manner of speaking, Adam and Eve, and Adam and Eve hide themselves, so that they can no longer *see* God. In a manner of speaking, due to sin, they have become blind to each other. No longer can they see each other; they can only hear each other. Mankind no longer possesses the vision of the Lord, but only His Word.

For this reason, when God delivers the Law unto Israel, He starts by saying *'Hear O Israel.'* Not 'see O Israel,' but *'hear.'* God will speak to His people, but He will not be seen, for *who can see God and live?* Even when He is present with His people, He shrouds Himself in cloud and fire.



Even when Moses asks to see His face, God refuses, saying that He can only see His backside as He passes by, which is a Hebrew idiom of saying that Moses can only see God's works after the fact, but not God himself.

But St. John, in his Gospel, writes that this Word, which the Israelites once *heard* has now been *made flesh, and dwelt among us,* that we might *see Him, full of grace and truth.* The blindness caused by our Original Sin is undone. Now, once again, as our first parents could in Garden, we can *see* God in Christ.

This is ultimately the meaning of the Transfiguration, that the Apostles saw God; and not just God, but God incarnate and made man, for they saw Jesus, and yet they saw Jesus shining with all the radiance of God's infinite glory, so much so that they hid themselves, and desired to make tents for Christ and His prophets to dwell in, just as Israel made a tabernacle for God who dwelt amongst them in which to hide His perfect glory.

Transfiguration Sunday is rightly set as the last day of the season of Epiphany, for in it, we not only hear God's Word, but see God's Word, *full of grace and truth.* For such is the gift that has been given us in the Lord's incarnation, that we may *see God*, and live; that we may *'see Him as He is.'* ■

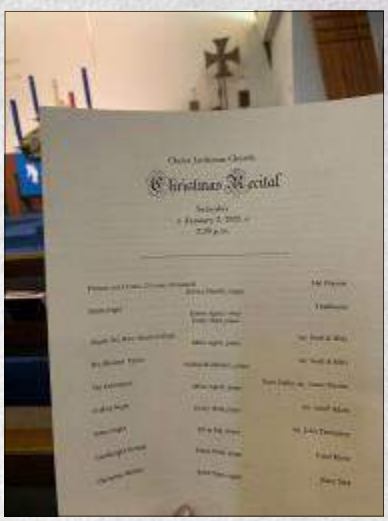
Christmas Recital

— Christ Lutheran Church —

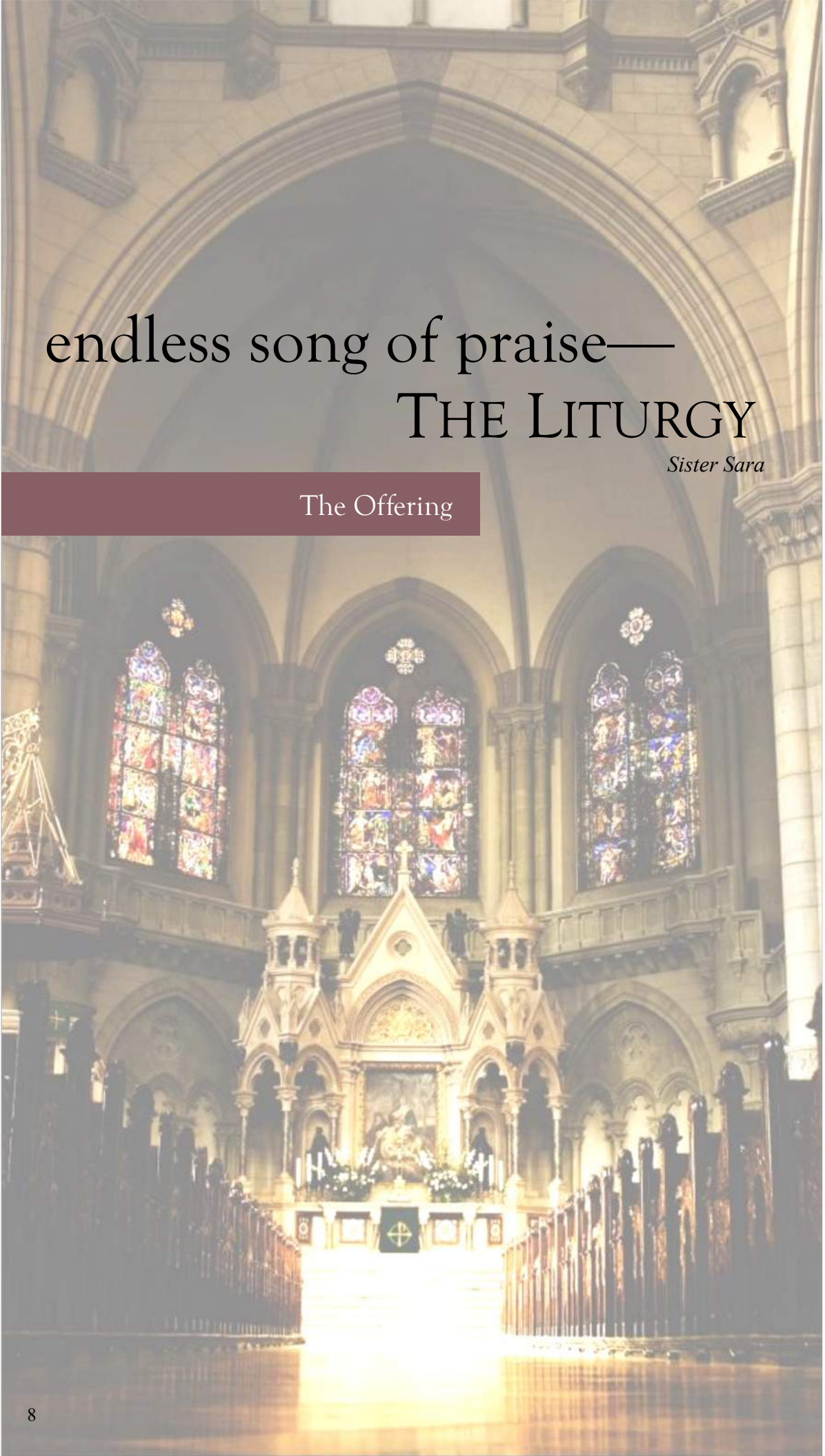
On January 2, 2021, Christ Lutheran ushered in the new year on a good "note," as it held its second annual Christmas Recital! The past year was replete with blessings, despite all its adversities, and that was demonstrated amply in the young musicians who shared their God-given talents with us last month. The program featured pieces performed by Emma Agent, Miles Agent, Nathan Burkhalter, Emily Held, Silvia Ma, Kristen Shavlik, and Sister Sara, and incorporated piano, organ, and voice.

Although many could not attend in person due to health concerns in these uncertain times, the event was broadcast live on Facebook and an audio recording is available on the Christ Lutheran website. Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, those far and near enjoyed the beautiful performances!

We are grateful for all who made this event possible, from the hardworking musicians to the festive reception hostess (thanks, Alexis Burkhalter!). Truly, God is good to us in all circumstances, and what a timely reminder of that truth at the beginning of a new year! ■



Front row: Kristen Shavlik; Second Row: Silvia Ma (and mother Candy Lui); Back row: Nathan Burkhalter, Emma Agent, Emily Held, Miles Agent, Sister Sara.



endless song of praise—
THE LITURGY

Sister Sara

The Offering

We come this month to the bridge between the services, what is known as the *preparation*. This is the point in the Divine Service at which the "table" (the altar) is "set," or *prepared*, for the Service of the Sacrament. You may have noticed that while the ushers gather the offerings and the organ plays an interlude, Pastor is busy using that time to uncover the elements and arrange the altar for communion. True, Pastor is making good use of the down time, but in fact, there is a lot more going on here than meets the eye.

To begin unpacking the theological significance of what really just seems like a break between prayers and songs—an intermission of sorts—let's start with the basics: the preparation has two parts—1) the offering, and 2) the offertory. The **offering** entails the gathering of the offerings (obviously), and the **offertory** is the psalm that we sing as the offerings are processed to the chancel. But, as I said, there's a lot going on in these two little parts, so let us take them one at a time, beginning this month with the offering.

Let's start with a little history lesson. You remember the Levites, right? Out of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, God chose one—the Levites—to serve as the priesthood on behalf of all Israel. Their vocation was to make the sacrifices and to care for the tabernacle (and later, the temple), to serve as priests and intercessors on behalf of the people. It was a

venerable vocation to be sure, but being a priest all day doesn't allow for much time to raise crops and feed one's family. Fortunately, God in His providence thought of that. If you can remember back to reading through all the boring parts of Leviticus, you'll notice that the food of the Levites came directly from the offerings and sacrifices of the people they served. In fact, Moses records a number of strange commands about which part of the sacrifice is burned, which is offered, and which is reserved for the priests to eat. A deeply theological point is being made here: the sustenance of the priesthood (think here of the ultimate Priest) is, quite literally, sacrificial.

Keep that point in mind, and humor me as we switch gears for a moment. Let us fast-forward to the Early Church. You in your first-century robes and sandals are at the Divine Service, and the moment for the offering has come. The Christians around you are not bringing bulls and rams to be slaughtered by the pastor, but instead, they bear food of various kinds to the altar—most notably, they bring bread and wine. You notice that they proceed with the singing of a psalm and then begin the Service of the Sacrament. When the pastor prepares communion, he takes bread and wine from the pile of offerings, to use as the Body and Blood. He blesses them with the words of Christ, and then offers them to the members of the church.

Let us make a few important observations here. Perhaps most obvious one is the parallel we see between the priesthood of old, who sacrificed at the Temple for the atonement of Israel, and the priesthood that God has ordained in these latter days, who give to us the Body and Blood of the Ultimate Sacrifice. But there are some nuances to be drawn out of this parallel…

First, did anyone notice that there's still a pile of food around the altar? The pastor in our first-century image only took bread and wine from that pile of offerings, which means there's a lot still sitting there. What happens to that food? That pile, my friends, is the offering of the church to sustain her priesthood. Just as the Israelites' sacrifices provided food for the Levites, so also the offerings of the early church fed her pastor. And even in this present day, the offerings of our congregation go in large part to sustaining our clergy: the sacrifice you offer in your tithe feeds your pastor. Just as we saw above, the *sustenance of the priesthood is sacrificial*.

Secondly, the bread and wine used for the Lord's Supper came from those same offerings. And even today, the money that is given in the offering plate is used to purchase the bread and wine for Holy Communion. And where does that consecrated bread and wine go? Into *your* mouth. It sustains *you*—even unto Life Everlasting. You see, the offerings not only support the pastor, but they support the church as well. Put differently, what the priesthood lives off of and what the church lives off of *are the same thing*. There is no priesthood without the church, and there is no church without the priesthood—they are necessarily intertwined, and their life is drawn from the same source, from *sacrificial offering*. The life of God's holy people, whether pastor or layperson, is born in and defined by sacrifice.

And we know that, though we feel the twinge of sacrifice when we part with our hard-earned money in the offering plate, we have nothing without the sacrifices first made by the God who gave us those gifts. In the First Article of the Creed, we confess that He has given us our "body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses… clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have…" Not only does God create and sustain us out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, but He has given His Son as the sacrifice of our redemption, and His Spirit to preserve us in the Faith. God demonstrates His own life of sacrifice for us in all this, for sacrifice is that act of love, and *God is love*.

So when we give back in the offering, when we make our own humble sacrifice, we are acting as little Christs, in the imitation of God, pouring out our life of love back to the One who gave it to us. And He welcomes us into His sacrifice once more as we approach the altar to receive His Body and Blood.

And therefore we sing, "What shall I render to the Lord, for all His benefits to me…."■

Writing Pictures

A Guided Tour through a Gallery of Christian Art

The Transfiguration of Raphael

Pastor Fields

The great Renaissance painter Raphael composed a final work before his death: a depiction of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor.

It is strange in several respects.

The first thing people might notice is that there are too many people in the painting. In the Transfiguration narrative from the Gospels, there are six people present: Christ, Elijah, Moses, Peter, James and John. Yet in Raphael's painting, there are twenty-four. Why?

Well, it is partly because the painting actually shows two narratives which Raphael wishes to bind together.

On the upper half of the work is the Transfiguration proper. It mostly shows what one would expect: Christ gleaming in white *brighter than any bleacher could bleach* as St. Mark so poetically writes, with Moses, carrying the book of the Law on right, and Elijah on the left, both looking upon the Lord with rapt interest. Sts. Peter, James, and John lay awestruck below them, hiding their faces before the glory of the Lord and gesturing something akin to pain, *for no man can see God and live.*

Curiously, there are two other figures on the side of the upper frame, which are widely identified as St. Justus and St. Pastor, child martyrs from the early Church. Some say they are there simply because they share their feast day with the day of the Feast of Transfiguration, and that is true enough. But Raphael includes them, not covering their eyes in fear or shame, but looking onward to God to illustrate Jesus' quote: *'Let the little children come to me.'* Both in their innocence, in their martyrdom for the name of Christ, and their glorification in heaven, they are able to see the glorified Lord.

On the lower half of the painting is a depiction of the Apostles attempting to cast a demon out of a child, and failing, as is written in Matthew 17. The family of the child stands holding him on the right of the frame, scared and angry. On the left stand the Apostles, arguing it seems, or perhaps confused as to why they cannot cast out the demon. On the bottom left is St. Matthew himself, holding the book of his Gospel, and stretching out his arm as if to say 'just wait and see, the Lord is coming Himself to heal this child.' No one in the painting is paying attention to St. Matthew, save a women in the center of the frame who, calmly, has her face turned toward him. She represents faith, for she looks to the saving truth of the Gospel of Christ for healing, not to the anger of crowds, nor even the failure of Church ministers, represented by the Apostles. She alone clings to the Gospel.

Raphael joined these two narratives together as he neared death for he believed it was an exposition of his own name, Raphael, meaning 'God will heal,' in Hebrew, for he believed that God would indeed heal the sickness of death, but only in heaven, when he would, like the child saints in the upper half of the painting, see Jesus face to face.

Many modern critics have spoken badly of Raphael's final work, believing it to be confusing or, if nothing else, misnamed. Montesquieu famously quipped it should be renamed simply *'Healing of the Obsessed Youth',* believing that the Transfiguration depicted in the upper half had nothing to do with the 'main subject' of the painting.

However, Raphael believed this piece to be his masterpiece and his final confession of his faith in Christ. Whatever the crisis of the world may be, shown in the frustrated family on the right lower frame, or the torments of the Church, shown in the left lower frame, he, a sick and demon oppressed human being would find his final healing in the vision of Christ, His Lord and God. ■

Introduction
by Pastor Fields

The following is a scholarly essay written by Dr. Jane Hettrick, generously donated to us for use in our newsletter. The original title is "Brahms's *A German Requiem*: Reconsidering Its Biblical, Historical, and Musical Contexts."

Though this is a bit unusual compared to our regular content contained in this newsletter, it gives a very good sense of the continuing scholarly work that is done by theologically interested and excellent thinkers within Lutheranism.

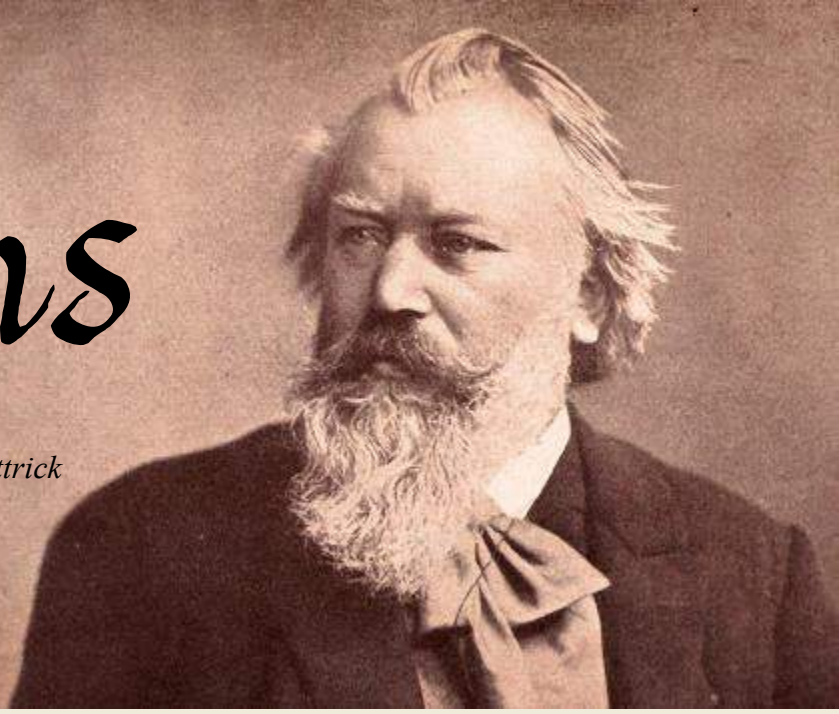
Having recently returned from the LCMS annual Symposia, I thought it would be good for Christ Lutheran to see the kinds of things that we pastors and deaconesses interact with on such occasions of 'continuing education', and read about regularly within our own professional circles.

Without further ado, the essay!

Brahms

A German Requiem

Jane Schatkin Hettrick



In the final chapter of this book, entitled "Closing Statement," the author asks the following question: "If the reader is not convinced by now, what more can be said?" I would ask a different question, that is, why would the author of a scholarly study feel the need to pose this (seemingly defensive) inquiry? After all, scholarly research is not usually bound to justify itself. It is presented, presumably intended to add to our knowledge of a given subject, and it should be impartially judged on the merits of the work. In this case, however, anyone familiar with current academic views of the Brahms Requiem will not find it hard to answer this second question. The reason? Author R. Allen Lott disagrees with what might be called "establishment doctrine." In brief, he challenges the prevailing interpretation of this great choral work, which holds that Brahms intended *Ein deutsches Requiem* as a "universal" work, encompassing all religions, or even no religion. Mixed into this thinking is the belief that its theology expresses "secular humanism," and specifically avoids Christian belief. From there, it was an easy leap to label Brahms a "secular, skeptical, modern man." (p. 8)

The arrangement of the book borrows from courtroom procedure. There are five chapters, supplemented by six "exhibits" that furnish "evidence" as found in source material, with case summaries in opening and closing statements; occasionally it adopts other legal language (e.g., "witness for the prosecution," "testimony," and "cross -examination" p. 141, 178). In his "opening statement," Lott states his purpose: "My goal in this book is to present a convincing argument that the *Requiem* is not theologically or doctrinally inclusive but instead adroitly summarizes the unique Christian view of death, grief, and an afterlife." (p. 2) A necessary part of this process would be to debunk the deeply ingrained myth that the work was "essentially humanist in conception." (p. 1) "Exhibit A" (Recent Appraisals of the *Requiem* text), quotes passages from writings of fifteen modern scholars (e.g., Musgrave), who viewed the theology in *Requiem* variously as undogmatic, "liberal religiosity," "free of churchly bonds," not "explicitly Christian," "overtly secular," etc. Several defined it as "secular humanist."

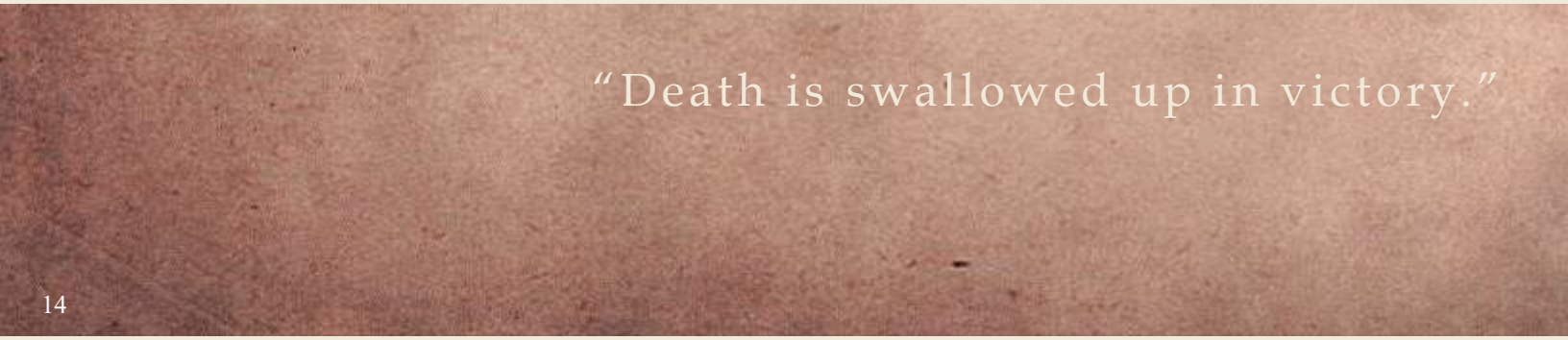
The subject does not lack source material. As Lott points out, Brahms was an avid correspondent and had many friends. There are "thousands of letters written by the composer and numerous personal reminiscences by close friends." (p. 12) Added to that is the plentiful critical opinion published at the time and ongoing for decades. Rather, the problem seems to lie in various misuses of those sources: misreading or selective use of documents, ignorance or incomplete knowledge of historical contexts and terms, and probably, reliance on collective thinking.

For example, as mentioned above, it is widely held in modern scholarship that Brahms was not a believing Christian. This view is justified by a few remarks he made in a joking context. In truth, however, as his friend composer Heinrich von Herzogenberg judged: Brahms was "a quintessentially Protestant and deeply religious man." (p. 136) Baptized and well trained in the Lutheran tradition, Brahms memorized the Luther catechism and studied the Bible, gaining a deep familiarity with Scripture. He owned several Bibles, favoring the Luther translation. He was godfather to at least sixteen children. Given this religious history, the case for Brahms as a skeptic is weak at best.

In Chapter 1 (Interpretive Principles) then, the author looks at the underlying tenets of those opinions. What he finds is that in these discussions, "the supposition for the interpretation is rarely delineated." (p. 11) In other words, the writers in question do not adequately explain how they arrived at their interpretations or provide the evidence that led them to their conclusions. Lott expands here on an apparently little-understood but crucial topic: "intertextuality." This concept is critical to the understanding of the Requiem texts and it is one key to the misconstruing that shapes modern academic opinion. This term means that literary texts rely on being understood by the hearer in their wider context and their (unstated, even unconscious) connection to related or other texts. In the case of the *Requiem,* therefore, it would have been expected that the listener would come with a well-developed Christian perception of all the specific passages in the text. When Brahms composed the *Requiem*, he intended it for an audience that was educated, middle-class or higher, German, and Christian. Like himself, such listeners would be biblically literate. At the time, this was the norm. For one thing, the German educational system included religious instruction and confessional (Catholic or Protestant) inculturation. Biblical allusions are commonly found in literary works. Indeed, nineteenth-century German culture and politics were permeated by religion.

In chapter 2 (Biblical Contexts), preceded by Exhibit B (The *Requiem* text), Lott analyzes the text, demonstrating how it is perfectly true to the doctrine and creeds of historic Christianity as recorded in the Bible. Moreover, while it reflects no denominational identity, the author rightly posits that "it reverberates with Lutheran doctrine" (p. 59) in the tradition of Schütz and Bach and a long line of other German composers. Modern criticism holds that the *Requiem* cannot be about Christ because the text never mentions his name ("Christological deficit"). This is a simplistic view, because it fails to consider the larger picture. That is, especially in Lutheran theology, the Bible is taken as a unified whole; Martin Luther believed that the entire Scripture points to Christ alone. Brahms knew the Bible intimately, and he selected his texts deliberately. He also was steeped in the Lutheran sacred music that came before him. Recognized by music scholarship to be a "historicist" composer and at times a musicologist, Brahms studied and collected early choral music, and himself edited music of earlier composers. Thus he was working with a strong sense of history and tradition. The entire work captures the Lutheran message of comfort in grief and hope in death—a theme that contrasts sharply with the Latin Requiem text, which focuses on judgment and deliverance of the soul from purgatory. Of course, Brahms's *Requiem* is not a liturgical work (an official funeral liturgy never was developed in the Lutheran Church).

In Chapter 3 (Contemporaneous Assessments), the author explores the early reception of the *Requiem*, offering thirty years of reviews and essays. A thorough reading of these documents proves that virtually without exception those commentators "heard it as a piece upholding common Christian beliefs." (p. 98) Modern scholarship has neglected to recognize that Christian belief continued to be a potent force in German society. Lott reminds us that the less radical German Enlightenment retained a belief in God, and did not discard religion as the French did. (For example,



Friedrich Hegel acknowledged that "religion is the most important thing in our lives.") (p. 100) The contemporary rulers of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III (r. 1797-1840) and Friedrich Wilhelm IV (r. 1840-1861) were both devout monarchs, who made sure that theologians teaching in universities were orthodox Christians. Lott finds numerous early critics who commend the choice of a purely biblical text and praise the selection of texts as suited to the theme. Carl Beyer wrote that it "supplies the eternal ideas, the essence of Christianity." (p. 112) Music critic Hermann Deiters chooses more specific words: the work "touched on the promise of comfort, the hope of future resurrection, [and] trust in the creator's goodness." (p. 115) Musicologist Philipp Spitta saw in the *Requiem* the message: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (p. 118) The most prominent critic of Brahms' milieu was, of course, Eduard Hanslick. He considered the *Requiem* to be a masterpiece, "an imperishable work … of modern church music"; he observed that an audience "listened to the work with solemn devotion, like a worship service." (p. 198)

Not uncommonly, the *Requiem* was compared to the Latin Requiem, and both Catholic and Protestant commentators, whether or not they admired the piece, concluded that it was a "specifically Protestant work." This would not have been difficult to determine—for one thing, the Catholic Church did not expect or encourage laymen to know the Bible. Lott has combed the literature and found ample contemporary validation of its Protestant identity. Bernhard Vogel hears in it "the beating of the wings of the Protestant spirit." (p. 122) Biographer Walter Niemann characterized it as "fundamentally Protestant." (p. 124) Catholic music theorist Rudolf Louis, despite his vigorous disapproval of Protestant music in general, proclaimed it "the most significant sacred musical work of the specifically Protestant spirit of modern times." (p. 125) In this environment, it is perhaps not surprising that major articles on the *Requiem* appeared in theological journals as well as in musical writings. One of these (presented in full in Exhibit D) was a lengthy review by prominent theologian Paul Kleinert, Professor of Old Testament exegesis at the University of Berlin. It was published in 1869 in the *Neue evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, a journal of the Evangelical Alliance. Lott calls Kleinert's review "the most serious and sustained theological consideration of the *Requiem* . . . which supports not just a contextual reading of the biblical passages, but an explicitly an evangelical one." (p. 155) He further notes that though modern scholars are aware of and occasionally quote briefly from this writing, it has been mostly "incompletely understood or at least unacknowledged." (p. 156) He also observes that they "did not discern the context of the review and mined quotations selectively." (p. 157) Kleinert discusses the *Requiem* from a traditional biblical outlook. He centers on the evangelical essence of the text, stressing its

unaltered quotation from Luther's translation.

True to a fair justice system, under the heading "Witnesses for the Prosecution," the author searched for evidence that would prove the contention that "the *Requiem* was composed for people of all faiths." (p. 141) The results of this search are striking: it shows that no one who argues this position has ever given a solid example of a specific non-Christian religion to support his case. Going deeper, Lott examines the testimony of a few whose negative opinions of the *Requiem* served to support the modern opinion of universality. A close inspection of these writings, however, reveals the presence of underlying issues, such as preference for Catholic liturgical texts and even professional rivalry. When used by modern scholars to claim a universalist instead of a Christian view, most of this evidence "dissolves under cross-examination." (p. 141)

The theory of a "universalist" or "non-Christian" view of the *Requiem* seems to depend chiefly on the work of two early biographers. English pianist Florence May, who studied with Brahms, published her biography in 1905. Lott describes her interpretation as confused and her thinking dominated by an obsession with some vague concept of "love." He quotes her statements on the absence of "doctrinal purpose" and "definite belief." Max Kalbeck wrote a four-volume biography (1912-21), in which he incorporated adjusted selections from a lengthy essay on the *Requiem* (1888). Lott considers Kalbeck's evaluation of the *Requiem,* like that of May, "a confusing mélange of viewpoints." (p. 151) While Kalbeck finds it suited for all creeds, he does not support this claim with "a single example of another religion or deity." (p. 152) In other statements, he asserts that Brahms was an unbelieving, anti-Christian free-thinker. So wide-ranging were his comments that even modern scholars acknowledge that Kalbeck's biography is "unreliable." (p. 154) Unreliable, but still influential, in that "scholars have too consistently depended on Kalbeck's idiosyncratic account as representative of the work's early reception." (p. 155)

In Chapter 4 (Early Performances) Lott reviews the early performance history of the *Requiem.* Like the critical reception discussed in the previous chapter, the issues that arose around performances affected modern judgements of the work. The premiere in Brahms's adopted city of Vienna (1 Dec. 1867) was conducted by the composer's sometime rival, Hofkapellmeister Johann Herbeck, in the *Redoutensaal* of the court. This performance, which featured just the first three movements, has gone down in history as a fiasco, because the timpanist overwhelmed the entire ensemble in the long pedal point that closes the third movement. (Unfortunately, those timpani parts are lost. Otherwise, they might have told us something about how this happened under such a highly regarded conductor.)

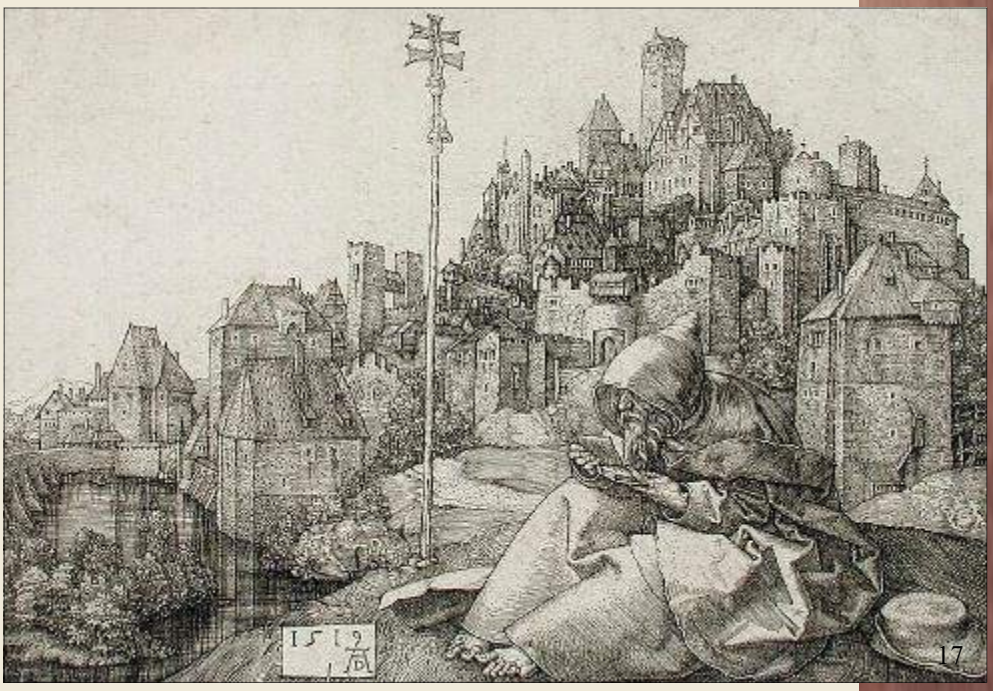
The most important early performance, complete except for one movement, took place the following year in Bremen. Lott traces the progress of how the manuscript came to be in Bremen and how it came to the attention of conductor Karl Reinthaler. As he often did with his friends, Brahms asked Reinthaler for his appraisal (his "honest opinion") of the work. Reinthaler responded with a lengthy letter (presented as Exhibit E). The selective reading of letter has provided fodder for modern scholars as they try to make the case for a non-Christian label. In fact, Reinthaler assessed the *Requiem* as standing "on not only religious but on completely Christian ground." (p. 171) The opposition seized on Reinthaler's concern that the text lacks all reference to "the redeeming death of the Lord." (p. 171) Brahms's now infamous retort to Reinthaler that he could do without setting the verse John 3:16 supplied further usable material. As has already been shown by Robin Leaver ("Brahms's Opus 45 and German Protestant Funeral Music"), the reason for this issue was that the work had been planned for Good Friday, which focuses intensely on the crucifixion. That the conductor brought it up does not invalidate the chosen texts as a full expression of Christian belief. Again, recent scholars draw on sources selectively. In his letter, Reinthaler made three unambivalent statements about the Christian content in the *Requiem*, all of which have been ignored or dismissed. In fact, despite reservations, the Bremen premiere did take place on Good Friday, and in the following years the *Requiem* was performed dozens of times on Good Friday and other days of Holy Week, often in churches; it was also presented for *Todtenfest* (Celebration

of the dead) and *Busstag* (Day of repentence). (An appendix provides a complete list of performances and their locations between 1867 and 1882.)

In Chapter 5 (Musical Traditions), Lott approaches the subject of the music itself in history. It has already been established that Brahms studied and loved the German musical heritage. His "profound assimilation of his nation's earlier legacy of sacred music" has been noted. (p. 239) Looking at early assessments, Lott finds that critics were conscious of the work's place in the great German musical tradition. It was acknowledged as the next masterpiece in the heritage of German sacred music. These writers heard in it the voices of Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and other German masters. Several excerpts show clearly that they perceived that the sound, forms, text treatments, and technical aspects of the music "reinforced the traditional interpretation of the biblical text." (p. 232) Early musicology, too, viewed Christian doctrine as the basis for interpreting the *Requiem*. Hermann Kretzschmar (general editor of the German *Dankmäler* and director of the *Institut für Kirchenmusik* in Berlin), applied the theological term "hermeneutic" (basis for interpretation) to music. Citing the analyses of Kretzschmar, Adolf Schubring, and others, Lott suggests that these critics accepted the premise that "Brahms composed as if he did believe." (p. 238)

Finally, in this chapter, the author covers interesting details about the music itself: stylistic, technical, historical, and theological. To illustrate Brahms's debt to the German heritage of sacred music he draws on individual comparisons to sacred works of other composers (e.g., Schütz, Bach, Cherubini, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn). He points out substantial correspondences, both textual and musical, between the *Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah.* He also sees the force of tradition in allusions to Lutheran chorale melodies, the scoring of trombones (a constant in late Classical Masses and Requiems), the inclusion of the organ and the closely related use of pedal points in every movement, and the overall text-painting by melody, harmonies, and keys. As compared to most funeral music, every movement is set or ends in a major key, which conveys the scriptural message of hope. Indeed, Lott judges that the entire theological concept of the *Requiem* rests on the simple phrase "I hope in thee."

I will conclude by answering the author's question quoted at the beginning of my review: This reader is convinced. Without a doubt, R. Allen Lott has proved his case. In this thoroughly researched and extensively documented study, Lott has confronted mainstream Brahms scholarship with a mountain of evidence for "Reconsidering the Biblical, Historical, and Musical Contexts" of Brahms's German Requiem. He contends that one of the central barriers to full understanding of the *Requiem* is that modern scholars do not consider its intertextuality, which really amounts to a poor knowledge of the work's historical and cultural context. This attitude probably reflects the drastic cultural shift that took place in the twentieth century, but it does not excuse the deficiency. Through the lens of objectivity, Lott has (re) examined a great quantity of source material, and shown clearly that the preponderance of evidence proves that the *Requiem* was intended and understood as a Christian work. At the same time, by highlighting the virtual absence of evidence to the contrary, he places a big question-mark on the commonly accepted belief that it was meant and heard as a universal, multi-religious, and secular-humanist piece. The book has an impressive bibliography and very detailed index. It is also supplemented by four on-line appendixes containing much valuable related material. It is unfortunate that the notes to the text are placed at the end, making it annoyingly inconvenient to access material so integral to the text. *Brahms's A German Requiem: Reconsidering Its Biblical, Historical, and Musical Contexts* is a monumental work of research; the world of Brahms scholarship cannot ignore it. ■



Septuagesima

Preparing for Lent

While most churches in the LCMS use the three-year lectionary, there remain many who continue with the historic one-year lectionary. A Southern sister congregation of ours, St. Paul in Cullman, Alabama, is one such church. Let's take a brief visit to see what they are learning this time of year, as we all prepare together for the coming season of Lent.

Sermon for Septuagesima 2021

Preached by Rev. Christopher Clark
to the saints at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Cullman, AL,
on January 31st, 2021.

Old Testament: Exodus 17:1-7
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5
Holy Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

Ask any English literature teacher, and you'll certainly hear of the importance of CONTEXT. Of the facts that surround a particular story or report. Context often sets the stage for a narrative. It adds increased thrust to an argument. Perhaps most importantly of all, when used properly, it puts all things into perspective.

The scandal of Israel's many grumblings against Moses, and ultimately their God, are shown for their absurdity when the greater context is recalled – that of their miraculous deliverance from slavery by God's hand. The context of their dessert wanderings adds weight to God's actions too – HE was to be their only source of life; given in their almost liturgical reception of the spiritual water and spiritual bread from heaven.

Context plays a tremendous role in our liturgical life as well. Today ushers in the "Gesima" Sundays of Pre-Lent, and with that context naturally are introduced the thoughts and themes of the upcoming season. Thoughts of sacrifice and devotion. Of self-denial, burdens, and labors. You get the sense immediately in our Introit this morning, and it practically *groans* within our Collect, as we pray for mercy and deliverance against the sufferings we justly deserve.

Our Lord's parable in the gospel fits within this same context, as well. For his telling it to the disciples immediately follows the well-known episode in which a rich young ruler, seeking to be a follower of Jesus, asks what he must do. Afterwards, as that young man leaves (distressed over the prospect of forsaking his great wealth) Peter, on behalf of the twelve, boldly asserts, "Well, we *have* left everything to follow you! What then will there be for *us*?" And so it is to this that Jesus replies with the springboard into our text: "The last will be first and the first will be last."

"What then will there be for US - what's IN IT for US?" Even from within the ranks of the disciples, such questions belie a certain self-centeredness. And in Jesus' parable, they are echoed in the outrage from those hired first into the vineyard– "WE worked ALL DAY! WE labored in the SCORCHING HEAT! WE TRULY GAVE OF OURSELVES to the service of this vineyard! And for all that, we receive nothing more than the workers who barely walked in before quitting time?"

"Just so," says the Lord, "the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Within the context of Septuagesima, and with Lent drawing ever closer, this text serves to remind us that our call into God's kingdom is *not* a call to some sort of quiescence or idleness. Idleness, after all, is the hallmark of those *outside* the vineyard, who as-of-that-moment were destined to receive nothing at the close of day but empty pockets. Instead, life within the Lord's vineyard *does* imply some degree of burden. Parabolically speaking, it means toil and labor under the scorching sun – in our life today, it means the very real possibility of suffering for the sake of the kingdom, and bearing hardships brought upon us by our sins and the sins of others. It means denying self for the benefit of others, and bearing one another's trials and infirmities. Like the young ruler and the Apostles, it may mean forsaking wealth and temporal comfort (whether righteously or unrighteously). Like the martyrs, it might even mean the giving up of life itself.

But there's another great truth to be found in the wider context of our gospel today. For not long after relating that parable, Matthew tells us that Jesus pulled his disciples aside again, this time to say, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

The Lord who calls us to take up our cross says "take up your cross and follow *me*… even as I take up *my* cross – the cross of *your* sins and pains. Serve one another even as I, the master, have become the servant, bearing the heaviest of all burdens in my

suffering upon the mount of Calvary. Deny yourselves, even as on the cross I was denied so much as the dignity of my garments. Make yourselves last even to the point of death if need be, for it was by the drawing of my last breaths that I am now the source of life for all. For by it all, your sufferings (alongside me and for my sake) no longer occupy a place of shame or loss, but are indeed made holy."

And it's by that great sacrifice, made by Christ to secure our atonement, that the parable and its fuller context come full circle. The master, seeing those destitute and idle, brought them into his vineyard with the promise of a generous wage – all of that ultimately by his grace. Again and again his call went out – others brought in through his grace and compassion. Contrary to expectation, all received the same reward at the end of the day – a sign of his grace to those the world would typically deem less worthy. And by it all, Jesus makes his point clear – like the parable, it's ultimately not about what we do or say; the sacrifices we make or hardships we bear. It's not about the laborers or even us (lest we begrudge the generosity shown to us) – it's about our master and Lord, who in immeasurable grace and compassion promises blessings more than we could ever deserve.

So, as today's context would suggest, let us prepare joyfully for the upcoming Lenten season, keeping such grace in mind. Let us turn our minds to the training by which we are kept fit for life in the kingdom – the exercises of self-control; the discipline to mange the body and soul with their burning, unbridled passions. Let us devote ourselves once again to the confession of our crucified and risen Savior that will guide us along the grueling race path and unto Easter triumph. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who by grace will deliver us through our trials, both great and small, that we may receive more than the day's denarius, but indeed the riches of heaven; more than the perishable wreath of a race won, but indeed the crown of eternal life. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.■

Totally Justified

A CLC Original by Jonathan Kettler

This Month
At Christ Lutheran

The Feast of the Transfiguration

+ February 14 +

10:30 a.m.

February 17

10:30 a.m. | 7:00 p.m.

~ Altar Flowers ~

Sign up on the Fellowship Hall bulletin board to provide altar flowers in 2021. They are $45, and you may take them home after the worship service.

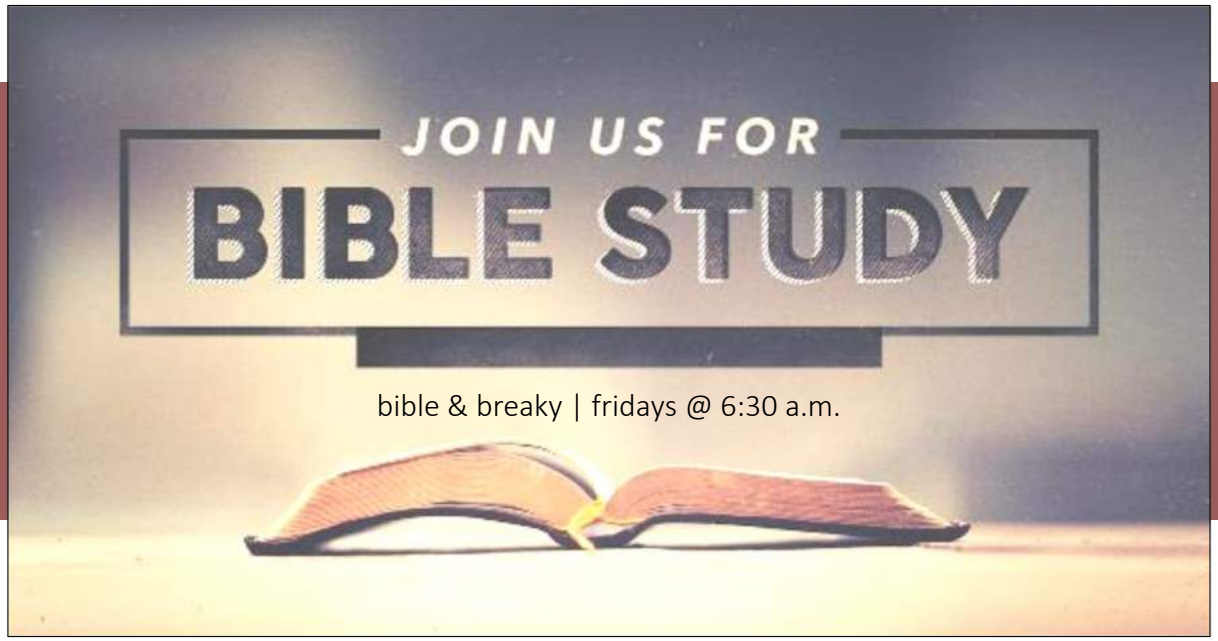
Thank you for beautifying the Lord's house!

No Offering Plate? No Problem!

Send your tithe to

4423 I-55 N
Jackson, MS 39206

Visit ChristLutheranJacksonMS.org and click the "Give" button at the top of the page



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Artwork in This Issue:

Cover: *Transfiguration*, Fra Angelico, 1440-1442.
Page 4-5: *The Transfiguration*, Peter Paul Rubens, 1605.
Page 6: *The Virgen with Angels*, William Adophe Bouguereau, 1881.
Page 9: *Bread and Spoon*, Carlos Reales, 2003.
Page 10: *St. Luke Painting the Crucifixion*, Francisco de Zurbaran, c. 1650.
Page 11: *Transfiguration*, Raphael, 1516-1520.
Page 12: *Harrowing of Hell, plate nine*, Albrecht Durer, 1510.
Page 15: *Last Supper*, Albrecht Durer, 1510.
Page 16: *Christ on the Cross, or Over St. Veiter Altar*, Albrecht Durer, 1505.
Page 17: *St. Anthony Visits St. Paul in the Wilderness*, Albrecht Durer, 1519.
Page 18: *Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard,* Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich, 1750s.

Saints' Days in February

2 Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord
4 St. Rabanus Maurus of Mainz, Archibishop
5 St. Jacob (Israel), Patriarch
8 St. Solomon, King
9 St. Cyril of Alexandria, Bishop & Confessor
10 St. Silas, Fellow Worker of St. Paul
13 Sts. Aquila, Priscilla, & Apollos
14 Sts. Cyril and Methodius, Apostles of the Slavs
14 St. Valentine, Martyr
15 Sts. Philemon and Onesimus
16 St. Philipp Melanchthon, Confessor
18 St. Martin Luther, Doctor and Confessor
24 St. Matthias, Apostle

The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord

+ February 2 +

2021 Offering Evelopes
are finally here!

Find yours by the church mailboxes.

The Return of the King Bible Study!

Sunday, February 21

Adult Sunday School shall meet once more!
Join us on Sunday, February 21, at 9:15 a.m. to dive back into Scripture. Adult Sunday School will meet in the sanctuary so as to maintain a healthy distance between participants.
We can't wait to see you!

February 2021

PRAYER FAMILES and BIRTHDAYS	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
John & Celia Weidner 2—Reagan Dodge 4—Gary Atchley		**1**	**2** *Purification of Mary & Presentation of Our Lord* 6:15 p.m. Elders Meeting	**3**	**4** *St. Rabanus Maurus* 9:30 a.m. LifeLight	**5** *St. Jacob* 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	**6**
Yenish Family 7—Earl Haines 7—Will Pickering 10—Brent Hathcock 10—Anita Martin 13—Claudia Nelson	**7** **Epiphany V** 8:00 a.m. Divine Service 9:15 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	**8** *St. Solomon*	**9** *St. Cyril of Alexandria* 6:15 p.m. Council Mtg.	**10** *St. Silas*	**11** 9:30 a.m. LifeLight	**12** 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	**13** *Sts. Aquila, Priscilla, & Apollos*
Agent Family 17—Alexis Burkhalter 18—Westin Ramsey 20—Dave Teal	**The Feast of The Transfiguration** **14** 8:00 a.m. Divine Service 9:15 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service *St. Valentine* *St. Cyril & Methodius*	**15** *Sts. Philemon & Onesimus*	**16** *St. Philipp Melanchthon*	**17** **Ash Wednesday** 10:30 a.m. Matins 7:00 p.m. Vespers	**18** *St. Martin Luther* 9:30 a.m. LifeLight	**19** 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	**20**
Justin Alderson	**21** **Lent I** 8:00 a.m. Divine Service 9:15 a.m. SS & Bible Class 10:30 a.m. Divine Service *St. Timothy*	**22**	**23**	**24** *St. Matthias* 6:00 p.m. Supper 7:00 p.m. Vespers	**25** 9:30 a.m. LifeLight	**26** 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	**27**
Gary & Mary Atchley 28—Sarah Bowman	**28** **Lent II** 8:00 a.m. Divine Service 9:15 a.m. SS & Bible Class 10:30 a.m. Divine Service 5:00 p.m. Koinonia	For more from Christ Lutheran Church, visit the Christ Lutheran MeWe or Facebook page, or go to ChristLutheranJacksonMS.org/LifeAtChrist!			**Serving this month:** Elder—Gary Atchley Ushers—Mark Ochs, Allen Goodlett, Bruce Bodkin, Roger Fuhrer		