



LIFE IN CHRIST

Receiving God's Gifts — Sharing God's Gifts

The Newsletter of Christ Lutheran Church, Jackson, MS

+ Epiphany 2022 +

About the Cover:

The Transfiguration

Sr. Abraham, Ethiopian community in Jerusalem

1990

Life in Christ

is the monthly publication of

Christ Lutheran Church, LC-MS

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Jackson, MS 39206

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www.ChristLutheranJacksonMS.org

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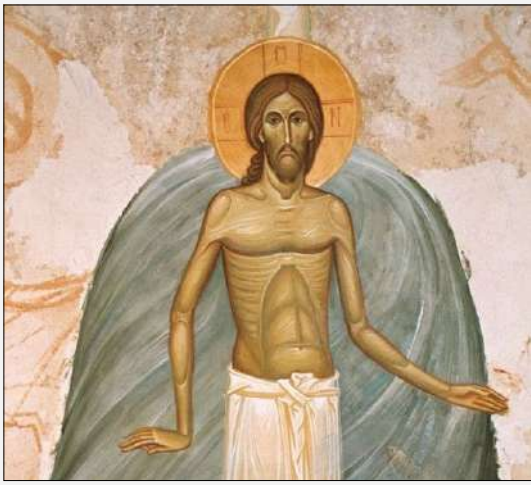


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SANCTIFIED AND INSTITUTED

All Waters

Pastor Fields

The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord is celebrated in the month of January. Yet, often we do not observe it. Why?

Well, the sad fact is that this great feast, which commemorates the official beginning of Christ's ministry in the created world, doesn't have a set day of its own. Sometimes it overlaps with the Feast of the Epiphany, which forces every pastor to ask 'What will we celebrate, the Baptism of Our Lord, or Epiphany?' Usually Epiphany wins. After all, the season that follows Christmas is named after that day, not after Our Lord's baptism.

In some traditions, in order to avoid this overlap, they place the feast day of the Baptism of Our Lord on a week day close to the Feast of Epiphany, something like January 8th, or 9th, landing the Baptism of Our Lord on a Monday or Tuesday. Sadly, outside of Lent and Advent, it is not the custom of most Christians in the West to attend high holy liturgies in the middle of the week. In fact, it is questionable if they could even get out of work early to arrive on time.

This makes the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord somewhat of a 'forgotten feast day' since it is rarely observed. But to our great felicity, we

have a newsletter! This means that we can at least come to a small understanding of its significance even if we do not have the usual processions and chanting and communion that would or should otherwise accompany this festive occasion. So what is it all about?

Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus, attempts to prevent the Lord from being baptized, but to no avail. Jesus is dipped into the waters, arises out of them, and the sky is torn open, and the Father declares, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' thus sending down the Holy Spirit upon the Christ, anointing Him as the one that is to come, the Messiah.

The fathers of the Church understood that this was not merely the institution of a 'baptism of repentance' as John the Baptist practiced, but a 'baptism of adoption.' For Jesus was the Father's Son by nature, yet it was publicly made known in the Jordan River. Yet from then on, every baptism would be an adoption by God the Father of a son, a son not by our own nature, but through the nature of Christ.

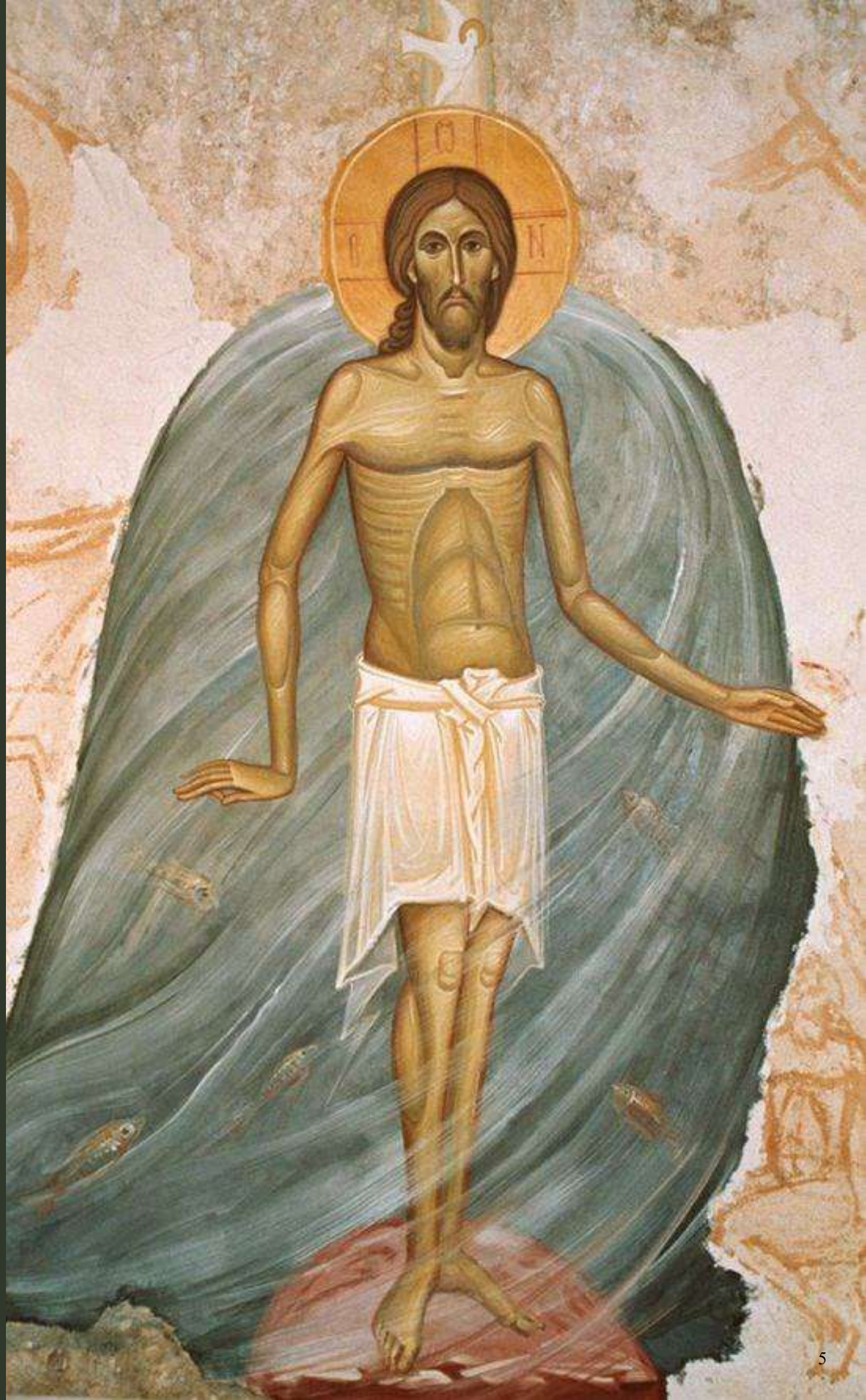
In a sense, there is only one baptism, even as there is only one Christ. Christ was

baptized, and the Father acknowledged Him as His Son. Now, every Christian baptism is joined to Christ's one baptism in the Jordan, and we are all acknowledged as a son of God in Christ, for we are in him, and he in us.

By our baptisms in our little churches in our little fonts, our sin is washed away, for we receive the innocence of Christ, the only sinless man. We become one with him, and therefore gain His sinlessness.

For this reason, Martin Luther, in his slight revision of the historic baptismal liturgy, added a prayer, which is now known commonly as 'The Flood Prayer.' In it, we pray, 'Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.'

Now it is not only the Jordan alone that anoints Jesus alone. Rather all waters, whether from a church font or a backyard creek or a hospital sink, are appointed to anoint all Christians who come in faith to those waters, that they may be sons of the Father, for it is not good that Jesus, the second Adam, be alone. ■



ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

KOINONIA CHRISTMAS

Christmas comes early at... Koinonia! We gathered for our annual Koinonia Christmas at the Burkhalter home, and as ever, the festivity was unrivaled. The evening began with fantastic food but soon erupted into some intense thievery as we played a game of "Unsanctified Santa." Cheryl won again this year in the "person most stolen from" category. Apparently she has a knack for picking the good gifts...

Many thanks to the Burkhalters for hosting, and thanks to all who came and made the evening merry! ■



Finally tearing into presents!



Merry Koinonia Christmas!





Psalms, Hymns, & Spirit

A Long-winded Explanation of the “Hymn of the Month”

Sister Sara

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Ephesians 5:18-20

Throughout his letters, St. Paul unfolds the manifold mysteries of God, often breaking forth in downright poetic rapture. But Paul is not just a theologian—he is a *pastor*, and he understands that not all Christians are the secluded monks sitting atop Mount Athos. We live real lives with each other in the real world... and applying the Faith can be hard. Bombarded by the busyness of life at best, and with the sundry evils of Satan at worst, how can a Christian remain faithful?

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...”

Okay, Pastor Paul, what if I don’t have a good voice? And besides, that advice just seems... well, kind of cheesy.

Maybe it does... but maybe Paul knows what he’s talking about. You might not go around the office chanting your psalms in a bold *fortissimo*, but Paul understands something very human in this advice.

Just as your body is a physical expression of the food you eat to build it up and maintain it, so also our souls express the spiritual food with which we feed them. A daily intake of personal negativity, petty arguments, and chaffing bitterness (let alone any of the crazy media these days) can bend and twist our soul into sad conformity with this world. How does one combat this persistent evil, especially when the Faith comes so unnaturally to fallen creatures such as us?



itual Songs



Martin Luther im Kreise seiner Familie.

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...”

How many songs do you have memorized? I’m sure you know “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” “Jesus Loves Me,” and “The Star Spangled Banner,” to name a few. And that doesn’t even begin to count songs from the radio. We even say that a song is “stuck in our head”—an explicit admission that tune and lyric can take our own mind captive without our permission. Whatever the reason, we are wired to remember musical words, even long into senility when our memory has abandoned us.

While there are many reasons for singing our liturgy and hymns, not least among them is that song implants those words of Scripture deep within our breast, beyond even Satan’s taloned reach. Can you even say the words “This is the Feast” without hearing their triumphant tune? How about “Away in a Manger”? It’s doubtful I can recall all the words without singing it to myself first. But boy, when I sing it, I remember... and with tears.

God knows this. Why do you think He devoted an entire book of Scripture to hymnody (for indeed, the psalms are *songs*, not spoken poetry)? God made you to sing. Even if you sound more like Barney Fife than like Pavoratti, *God made you to sing*. He knows that you will be harassed by the ceaseless cacophony of this world, and so He has girded you with song: song that bears His Word of hope, that sings the Truth against falsehood, that instills the Faith in spite of this faithless generation.

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...”

It is with this in mind that, for a year now, we at Christ Lutheran have been singing through the psalms, one by one, each week at Sunday School Opening. And more, we have been singing a “Hymn of the Month” to help us become increasingly familiar with the songs of our Faith—perhaps even to memorize them! It is my hope to begin introducing these hymns with a brief newsletter article each month, giving a little context and explanation to each one. I heartily encourage you to add these hymns to your morning devotions, drive-time playlist, or even gym regimen (don’t tell me Thy Strong Word doesn’t get your blood pumping...); internalize them in whatever way you can. In so doing, you will steel yourself against the mighty throes of Satan, even with a simple song.

So then, be filled with the Spirit, dear Christians of Christ Lutheran, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ■



Ladies Night Out



Our gals had another great night of food and fellowship as they gathered for Ladies' Night Out in January! Pasta and pizza nourished the body while the fellowship fed the soul.

Many thanks to Michelle Miller for being this month's hostess! ■

Hymn of the Month

Sister Sara



This tenth-century hymn, known affectionately as the “farewell to alleluias,” has been sung for hundreds of years as Christians approach the penitential season of Lent. During those six weeks that lead up to Easter, we close our lips from such a joyful expression in order to reflect upon our desperate estate and our need for the Savior. During this time, we don’t sing “alleluia” before the Gospel reading, we refrain from using it in our canticles, and we cease to sing hymns that even contain the word.

Alleluia, as you may know, is a word we English-speakers stole directly from Hebrew (well, Greek, actually; and the Greeks stole it from the Hebrew *hallelujah*). It is a jubilant exclamation that means “praise Yahweh!” St. John records in Revelation 19 that this is word is the eternal chorus of heaven:

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has
come...”

Therefore, the first stanza of our hymn of the month quite appropriately calls it the “voice of joy that cannot die.”

That is ironic, in a way, because a practice that apparently accompanied the singing of this hymn was the ceremonial burying of “Alleluia” in a coffin, complete with a full funeral service! (And people say Christianity is boring... ha!). Alleluia remained physically buried in the ground from the beginning of Lent all the way until Easter, when it was finally unearthed—resurrected, you might say!—with joy and festivity.

That funny little practice encapsulates a serious sentiment, though. We see it reflected at the end of stanza 2 and throughout stanza 3: “Babylon’s sad waters” and “mourning exiles” are a reference to Psalm 137, a psalm chanted by God’s people in their exile to Babylon, while their captors taunted them to sing songs of home... “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land,” they wailed in response. Likewise, we Christians mourn humanity’s self-imposed exile from the presence of God, our Fall into sin; but, “we do not grieve as those without hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13)! Rather, as stanza 3 recognizes, these tears are only for a time, for Easter is coming...

And just as our Lord died for a time, but rose on the Third Day, so too our alleluias will not stay silent, but rise again on Easter morn! Hence the last stanza breaks forth in rapture, “Therefore in our hymns we pray Thee, Grant us, blessed Trinity, At the last to keep Thine Easter... singing Alleluia joyfully.”

On February 27th, we will celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration, which is always the last Sunday before Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. Prepare yourself, because on Transfiguration Sunday, the last hymn we will sing is our hymn of the month, “Alleluia, Song of Gladness.” Pack in all your alleluias until then—sing them profusely, exuberantly, excessively, even! Sing this hymn at breakfast, on the road, and in the shower; because once Lent comes, we won’t be singing alleluia anymore. Sing this song. And then, when we “bury Alleluia,” remember... Easter is coming.

Alleluia!■

February—

Alleluia, Song of Gladness

LSB 417

Christ Lutheran

INDOOR

Work Day



Mary Atchley

Spring Cleaning is needed to spruce up the church building, so we are scheduling a Work Day on **Saturday, March 26th** to get this done. Any help that you can offer will be much appreciated!

I am suggesting two options:

1. **Pick an area that needs to be deep cleaned and accomplish it on your own timeline.**
2. **Join the designated Work Day. We will meet in the morning, assign any remaining tasks to be completed, and then have lunch together at noon.**

*If you choose to complete an area on your own, it will need to be completed before the designated work day.

Please contact Mary Atchley at (601) 750-6862 to schedule a cleaning project or to let her know when you have completed any of the above tasks before the scheduled work day. If you have any questions about any tasks, please do not hesitate to ask. I am more than happy to help however I can!

Areas needing to be deep cleaned:

Bathrooms

Clean paper towel dispensers and wipe down stalls. Clean off shelf in ladies' room.

Office Areas

Vacuum all upholstered furniture and carpets. Dust and wipe down all surfaces including baseboards and shelves.

Choir Loft

Dust, vacuum, and wipe down all surfaces, including baseboards. Vacuum stairs with hand vacuum, making sure to get all crevices cleaned.

Sunday School Rooms

Choose a room to deep clean. Vacuum and/or wipe down all surfaces including floors and baseboards, moving any stationary fixtures such as cabinets, couch, chairs, etc. Vacuum shades on inside windows and wipe down as needed (lounge only). Organize items in room and donate or dispose of any items no longer needed.

Kitchen

Clean refrigerator and defrost freezer, disposing of any expired food. Organize and wipe down cabinets, drawers, and shelves, disposing or donating any items no longer needed. Wipe out microwaves and check if stove needs to be cleaned.

Sanctuary

Vacuum all pews, wipe down baseboards, and check for any wax spills. Polish wood on pews and wipe down communion rails. Sharpen all pencils and replace as needed.

Windows

Wash all interior windows and sills in Sunday School rooms, Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, Narthex, and Office. (All outside windows will be done after painting has been completed).

Narthex Area

Dust and wipe down baseboards. Wipe down shelf above coat rack. Polish furniture in the entry. ■

christ Lutheran Decoration Day



Christ Lutheran members decked the halls on our annual Decoration Day, complete with...

cocoa and cookies,
tree decorating,
Christmas ornament crafts,
crazy games,
and yuuuummy chili!
A merry time was had by all!

Watching the magic happen!



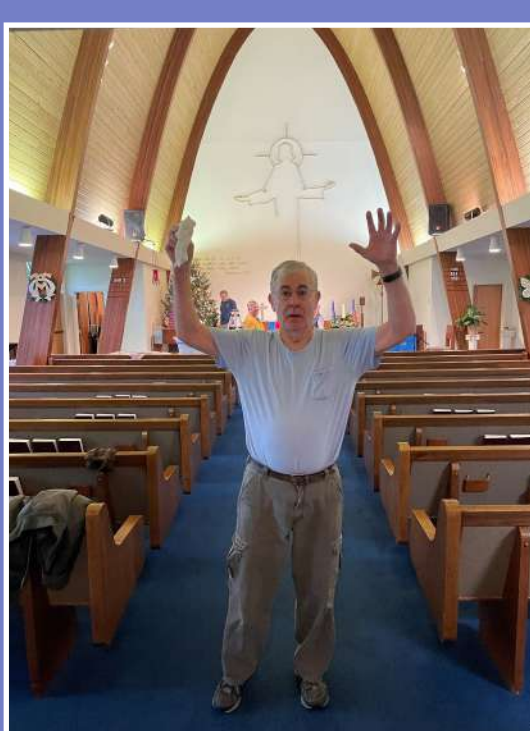
Food = Fellowship!
Bob, William, and Chris know where it's at!



James is taking festivity to a whole new level.



Glen supervises...



Never a dull moment with Gary!



Eric, Mary, and Nancy are on chrismon detail.



Hey Chuck, who is that mystery man?



Alexis—our chili angel!



David takes a break for a photo!

Mark, always dressing for the occasion.



Being this goodlooking is hard work, too!
But never too hard for Jake., of course.



Michelle and Margaret tackle the kitchen...





Let the games begin! Carol led the kids (and the young at heart...) in a Christmas-ified tug-of-war competition, and the competition was fierce! Festively fierce!

Not everyone was feeling the Christmas spirit... poor Savannah!



Krista led our crafts: "stained glass" Christmas ornaments!





Pastor Fields explained the chrismsons and their symbols to the kids.

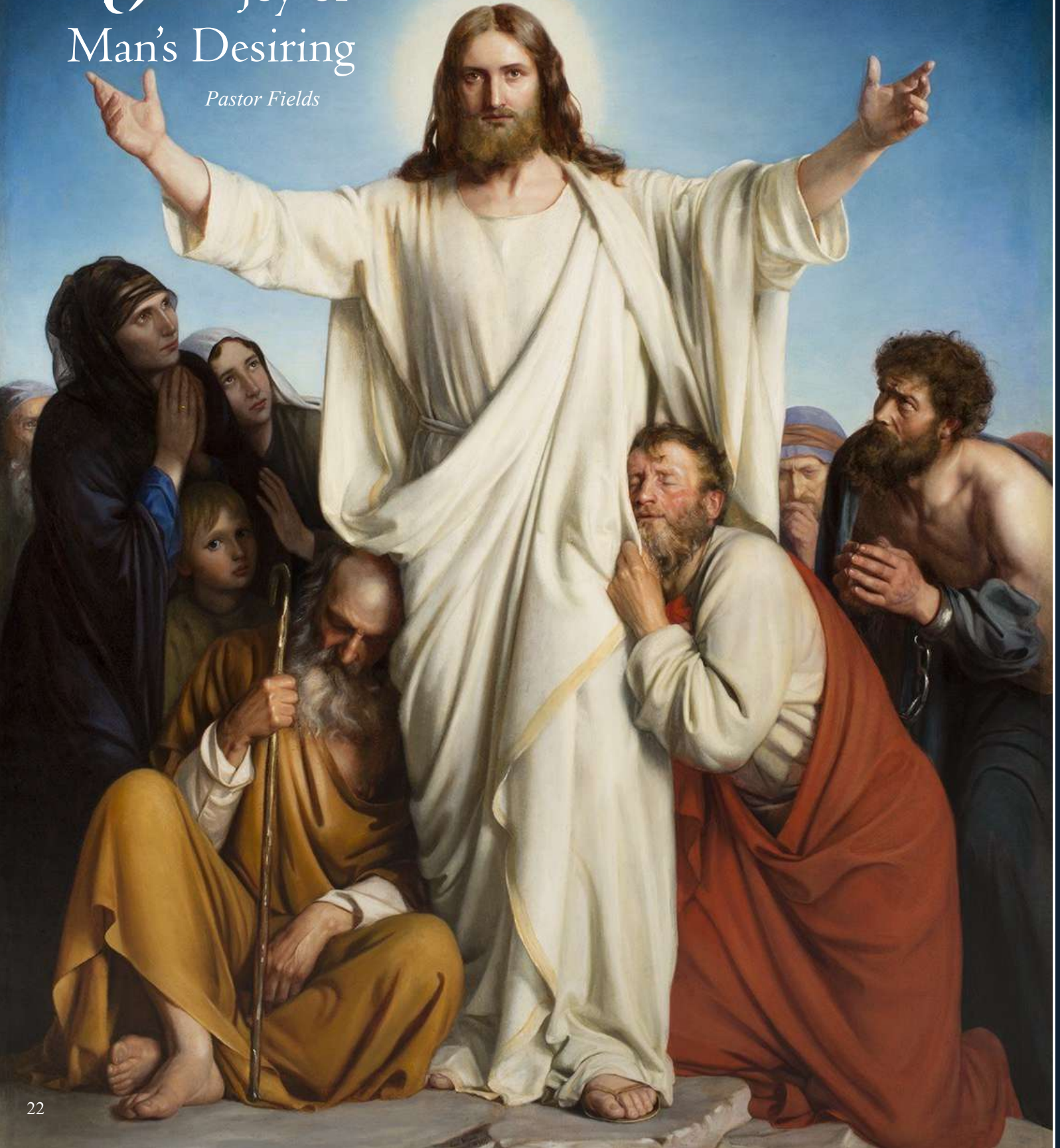


What We Need...

Jesu

Joy of
Man's Desiring

Pastor Fields



After the Bible, some of the earliest Christian writings the Church possesses are the works of a certain Justin Martyr. I have always found this figure fascinating, for, being a gentile originally, he was a most unlikely convert to the Gospel; and yet at the same time, no one was more likely to embrace Jesus. He was a pagan and a Greek, and hailed from a family of means. He was educated by the finest teachers and instilled with a highly cosmopolitan and distinguished mind and life. However, he found all of this somehow lacking. His being longed for more, and yet he did not know what it was that he longed for.

Justin began to study in some of the famed philosophical schools of his time, hoping that therein he would find what his soul desired. First he followed the Stoics, who taught that fulfillment came from living a life of duty and good works. This, he found, may have had some truth, but it still did not quell the unrest within him. He then joined the school of Aristotle, but there he found only greed, 'wisdom' on sale for the right price. Being disgusted by this, he became a Platonist, who taught that man could be joined to God by rightly contemplating Him. Here Justin thought he had found what his soul desired: union with God, and yet he found it was impossible to think himself up to God when God is, by definition, infinitely far away.

His quest, his longing, his desire had brought him from pleasure, to knowledge, to wisdom, to mysticism; but all of them failed to satisfy his deepest need. It was then that he met a Christian, and learned that God, the beginning and end, the purpose and meaning of all things, had indeed become a man, a man named Jesus, and had given himself for all humanity in general, and for Justin in particular. Justin had found what his soul had always groped for blindly. He had found Jesus, man's final satisfaction, his peace, his rest. Justin became a Christian, and as you might tell from his name, his journey ended there; he was martyred for the sake of the name of Christ.

What we learn from Justin is that what all men desire is peace, rest, satisfaction, fulfillment. The problem is that they do not know where to find it, and so they look in all the wrong places, thinking that this fulfillment may be gained through great accomplishments, or romantic love, or fleeting pleasures, or great possessions. Our society is overflowing with sadness because we are constantly reaching out at what seems to be what we need only to find we are grasping at smoke. St. Augustine once wrote: "You seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it." What we seek can only be found in God, as Augustine again once prayed: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Continued on next page

The story of the three magi told on Epiphany presents us with this reality. These three men were wise; they sought after truth, after knowledge, after wisdom; they constantly looked to the heavens, knowing that nothing on earth could satisfy their longing, and so perhaps something above could. There they saw a star, and that star guided them to Jesus, to Truth Himself, Knowledge Himself, Wisdom Himself. They knew that in the holy child, they had found the consummation of everything they ever sought.

Having found the one who could give them what they finally needed, they presented our infant Lord with three gifts: incense, gold, and myrrh. Incense was sacrificed during prayers in the ancient world; so they gave Jesus incense, for what we need most was God. Gold was the adornment of the kings and rulers; so they gave Jesus gold, for what we need then is a king to rule over our souls and guide our passions. Myrrh is what is used to embalm the dead; so they gave Jesus myrrh, for what we need is a savior to die for us, that we might be saved from our sins and made righteous before our King and our God.

From the beginning of Christ's life, it is made clear by these gifts who this child is, our savior, king and God; and what he is destined to do for us, to die on the cross, to be raised as our Lord, and to bring us in himself to God. Indeed, Jesus is all we ever needed, all we ever wanted; he is the end of all our longing and the satisfaction of every human yearning. He is indeed "The Joy of Man's Desiring."■





Issues, Etc.

The 2022 Issues, Etc.
“Making the Case” Conference

Friday, June 24 and Saturday, June 25, 2022
at Concordia University Chicago



William Barr



Dr. Albert Mohler



Dr. Joel Biermann



Rev. Chris Rosebrough

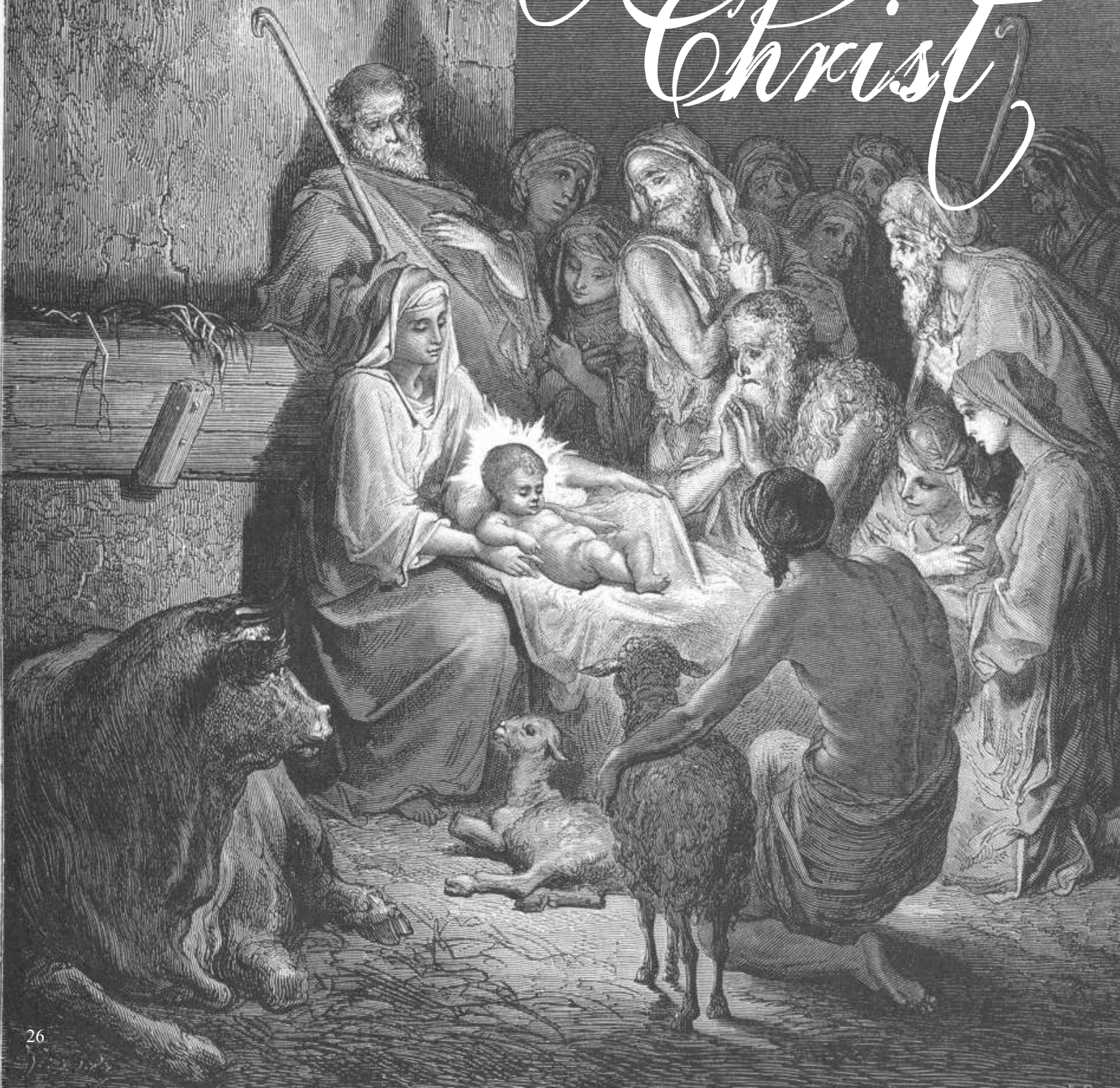


Rev. Bryan Wolfmueller

**Early Bird Registration
Now Open!**

For more information, visit IssuesEtc.org/2022-conference/

Christmas at
Christmas

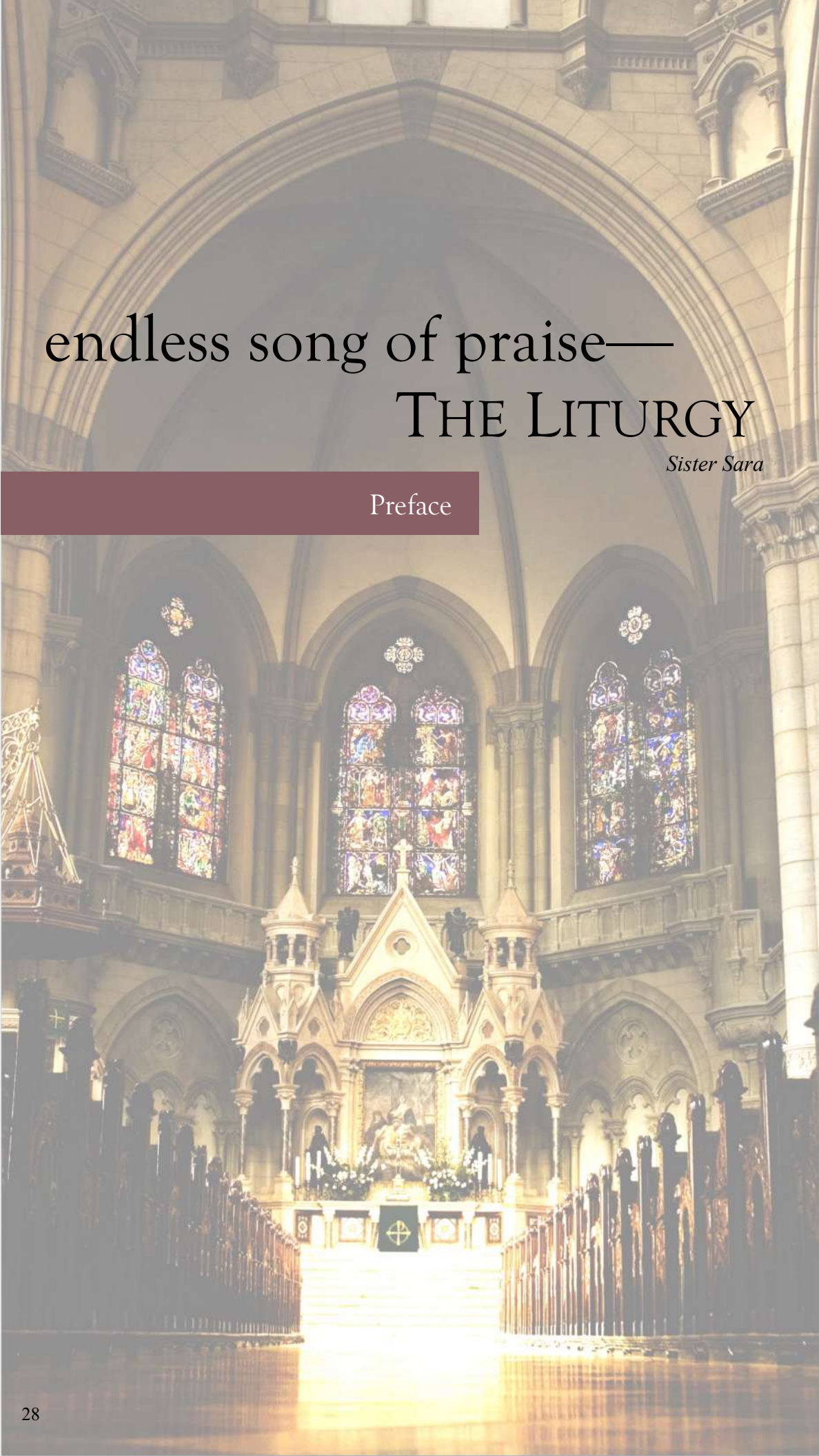




Last year, we celebrated a strangely “silent night,” as it were, with much of our congregation home due to the plague which has now become a part of our daily lives. But this year, by the grace of God, we gathered together in His house with loud shouts of joy and thanksgiving! The brassy tones of trumpet and trombone resounded, candlelight shined through the darkness, and hearts thrilled as we sang refrains of “Gloria in excelsis Deo!”

Especially given the hardships of the past couple years, we are deeply grateful to our Lord that He has come among us *in the flesh*, for it is just that physical closeness we have been starved of lately. If there is anything we have learned the hard way, it is that we are not mere spirits, but bodily beings, longing for the simple touch of a hug or a handshake. When God came in the flesh, He came to those were starved of more than a hug... He came to our fallen race by taking on our physicalness, our human bodilyness. He took on our flesh so that He might be united with us *not just halfway*, as through some spiritual version of a Zoom call (perhaps that is the very definition of hell...), but *wholly*, in spirit *and* body. Jesus came to redeem us whole, body and soul, and so He came as body and soul. And now we, His Body, dwell together in the flesh... indeed, in His Flesh. How deeply reviving it is to dwell together in this way, and for such a celebration as Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation. Truly, this was a merry Christmas! ■





endless song of praise—
THE LITURGY

Sister Sara

Preface

Despite a brief hiatus, we return once more to our series on the liturgy of the Divine Service. Back in October, we turned our gaze from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, from the pulpit to the altar... from the Service of the *Word* to the Service of the *Sacrament*.

And now we begin our journey to the Holy of Holies: to the Eucharist itself. Each Sunday, how do we embark upon this journey? If you recall, at this point in the service we have just brought our offerings and sung the offertory; so there we stand, the organ finally silent, and we await the pastor's next word.

**“The Lord
be with you.”**

These words sound familiar. We have heard them before. Flip back a few pages, to the *Salutation* (directly after the *Gloria in Excelsis*). Pastor blessed us with this greeting right after we sang the song of the angels at Jesus' birth, a song that directs mankind to find the God who has taken on flesh in that little manger stall. The *Gloria* tells us that this Deity long shrouded in cloud and darkness has descended to our lowly estate, clothed himself in our very flesh and bone, and dwelt among us. You

could say that, in fact, the song is proclaiming the promise of God's ancient name: *Immanuel*—"God with us." So, the very first time Pastor greets us with this phrase, "The Lord be with you," he is simply fulfilling the song of the angels by telling us that here, in the Service of the Word, Jesus is come among us. *God is with us.*

So why is he saying those words again now, at the beginning of the Service of the Sacrament? No, it's not clerical amnesia or superfluous liturgical repetition. Rather, Pastor begins this service by pointing us to "God with us," to the Immanuel who has not only spoken His Word through the readings we just heard, but who now manifests Himself in flesh and blood there upon the altar. Here, in the Sacrament, God truly dwells among us.

We respond with, "**And with thy Spirit.**" We know from last year, when this series on the liturgy examined this phrase, that the Spirit to which we refer is not Pastor Fields's personal spirit, but rather, the Holy Spirit who gives him the authority to stand *in the stead and by the command* of Christ. This is the Spirit through whom the Sacrament is consecrated. By our pastor's ordination, he bears this Spirit of Authority, and through Him feeds us the food of immortality. "And with thy Spirit" is our recognition that in this liturgy, Pastor speaks as Christ Himself.

Upon hearing our reply, Pastor exhorts us to "**Lift up your hearts.**" Besides sounding wonderfully pious, what does this command actually mean? In the offertory we sang only moments ago, we prayed that God would "create in me a clean heart," and so recalled the Prophet Ezekiel's promise: "And I [God] will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I

will put within you" (Ezekiel 36). God has promised to remove our heart of stone, the heart of the Fall which is hardened, cold, and dead. Instead, through our baptismal union with His Son, He gives us the heart of Christ. This heart beats with Jesus' own blood. It is this heart that we lift... but why? Why "*lift up* your hearts"? Because, just as the priests of old offering sacrifices at the Temple, we too lift up the object of our sacrifice to present it as an acceptable offering before God. But even moreso, for this is the ultimate offering. So, in this command, Pastor exhorts the Body of Christ to lift up the heart of Christ—the only sacrifice that can atone for sinful men. And truly, having been made new by the waters of baptism, joined with Jesus and knit into His own Body, we can rightly respond, "**We lift them to the Lord.**"

Now, with this holy sacrifice prepared, the Pastor begins the Eucharistic liturgy with the words, "**Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God.**" And why is that the proper way to begin? Because Christ alone rightly sacrifices the 'Thank Offering,' the offering of sinless Man in gratitude to God. Indeed, that is what the Greek word *eucharisto* (for which the Eucharist is named) means: "I give thanks." And we, as God's people, come in gratitude for the offering He has given on our behalf. Every element of this Sacrament is one of thankfulness. Therefore, we reply, "**It is meet [good] and right so to do,**" for indeed it is! With this mandate, we proceed to do as Christ our Lord commands, to "do this" in remembrance of Him, throughout time and eternity.

And so, in this way, we begin the ascent toward the altar of our God, the holy hill of sacrifice, Mount Zion itself. For surely, it *is* meet and right so to do. ■





Kenya is closer than you think.

Of course, as Christians, we have union with our Kenyan brothers and sisters through Jesus Himself—and there’s no getting any closer than that! But here at Christ Lutheran, we have yet another connection to Kenya: the parents of one of our members, Carol Yenish, are Lutheran missionaries in that lovely country; and this Christmas season, we received a visit from them in the flesh!

On January 2nd, Rev. Vance and Linda Becker joined us in Jackson, Mississippi—some 8,000+ miles (or almost 18 hours in a plane) away from Kenya—for Sunday school and worship. We got to hear from them about life in Africa, the work of the LCMS with Kenyan Lutherans, and how we can pray for our fellow Christians in Kenya. Rev. Becker taught Sunday school and then joined Pastor Fields in leading the Divine Service. We are grateful that they could come to share their experience with us, and more than that, the Word of God!

How to pray...

“Pray for Vance and Linda as they serve in Kenya, and ask God to help them fit in well in the culture of this rural area. Pray for Vance, that he would be effective in his role as a college teacher. Ask God to make Linda’s music and mentorship work a blessing to all the students. Pray also for the students they teach, that they would grow in faith, wisdom and abilities that will enable them to serve the growing church in eastern Africa. Pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya and Matongo’s students, that they would have the resources necessary to allow dedicated Christians to be trained for church work. Let us give thanks to God that the Beckers are serving His people in this part of the world.”

(Prayer requests taken from the LCMS website)



Lutherans in

KENYIA





*More about the Beckers,
courtesy of the LCMS website...*

The Rev. Vance and Linda Becker serve the Lord as missionaries through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in Kenya. Vance teaches at Matongo Lutheran Theological College in western Kenya, where pastors, evangelists and teachers are trained for service in 11 countries in East Africa. At the school, Linda works with music and deaconess students.



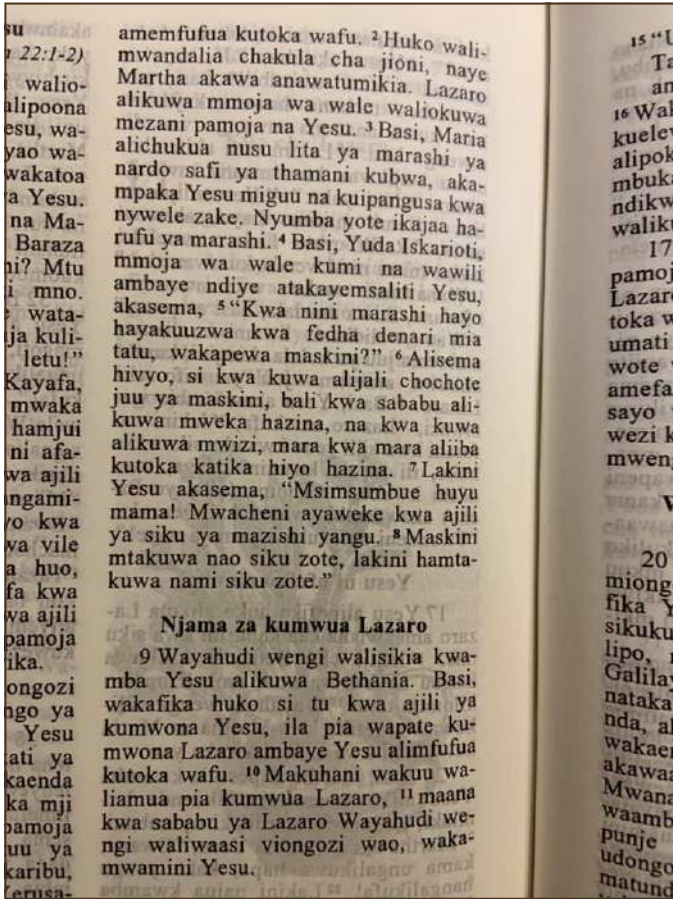
Vance graduated from St. John's Junior College, Winfield, Kan.; Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Ind.; and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (1982). Before becoming a missionary, Vance was a pastor at three LCMS parishes in South Dakota and Minnesota. Vance's other interests include building design and hymn writing. His current duties, in addition to teaching various classes, include serving as chair of the Department of Practical Theology, dean of Chapel and director of the internship program.



Linda graduated from Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minn., and the University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. She was later colloquized into the LCMS at Concordia University, St. Paul, St. Paul, Minn. Linda taught first through seventh grades in Lutheran and public schools in Virginia, South Dakota and Minnesota before serving in Kenya. Her hobbies include reading, playing piano and organ, and quilting. The Beckers both enjoy camping, hiking and bicycling.

<https://www.lcms.org/becker>

A reading from the Gospel of John in Swahili



Carol and Carolyn wore beautiful Kenyan dresses!

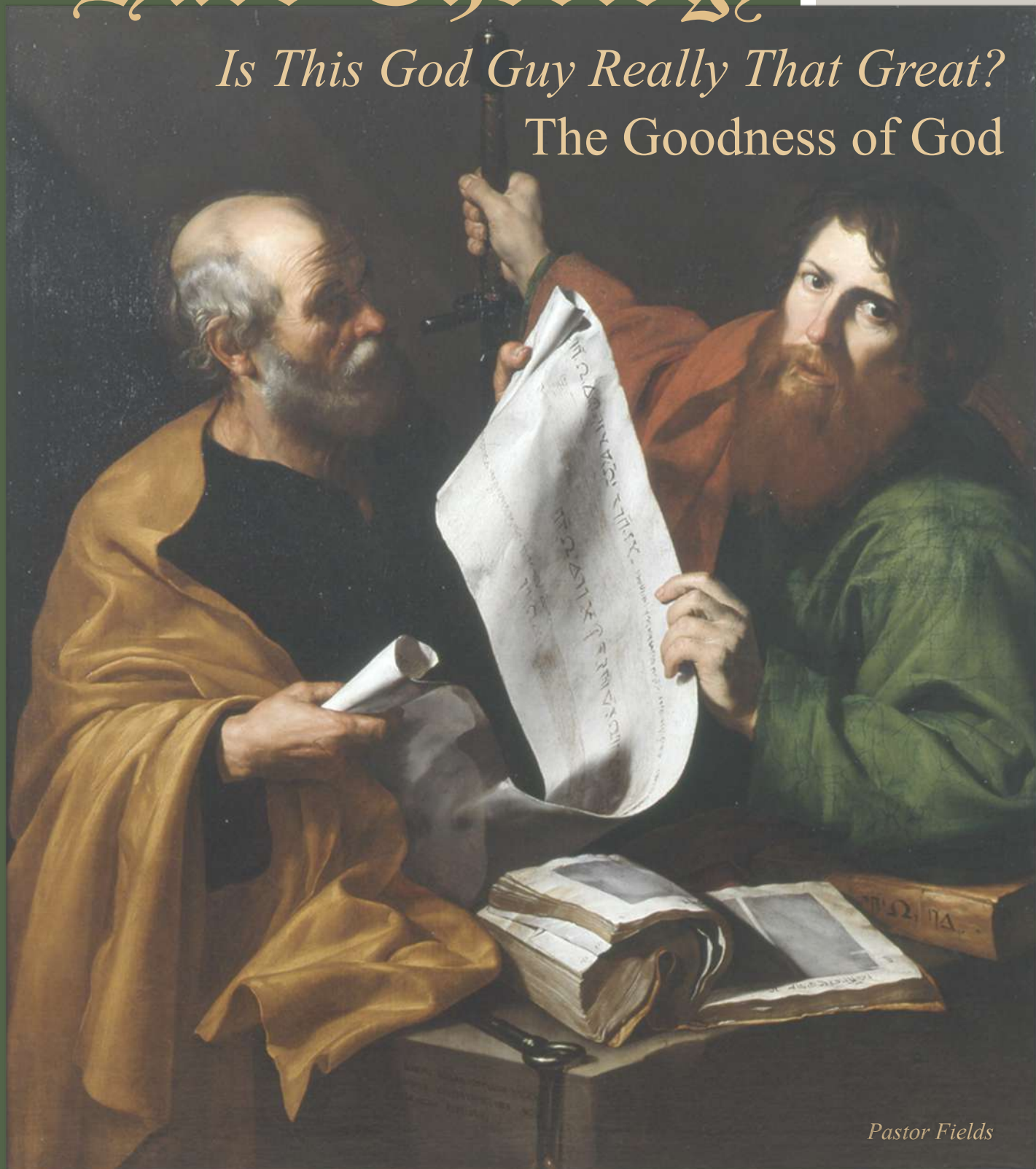


Rev. Becker shared photos as he talked and answered questions.



Hard Theology

Is This God Guy Really That Great?
The Goodness of God



Pastor Fields

It is almost a stereotype of Christians that when they feel thankful, they say something like, ‘God is good.’

They usually mean something like, ‘God has been good to me.’ Or if times are not especially pleasant, that ‘God is good to people in general, even if it doesn’t seem that way right now.’

But when theologians speak of the ‘goodness of God,’ they are talking about a pretty specific thing. For the bookish theologian, ‘good’ means something that is rightly desirable. Not desirable in the moment, like ice-cream. Not desirable because of our sinfulness, like wanting to lose too much weight or make too much money. But something that is just desirable; something that would be wanted even if, and I know this is a strange thing to say, if there was no one around to want it.

This can sound odd, but let’s think of it this way. If all of mankind evacuated the Earth and went to live on some other world, never to return, would we still think anything about the Earth is desirable? Would we want it to still have oceans filled with whales and fish? Would we want it still to have the Grand Canyon? Would we still want it to have the aurora borealis? I think most of us would desire the

earth to have such things, even if we never got to see them ourselves.

To prove the point, I think we would all find it hateful that, in our little thought experiment where we all leave the earth, we were to destroy the planet and everything in it in an inferno of nuclear annihilation. Even though the Earth would be something we are never coming back to, we would feel like something had been lost. We would feel like the universe was somehow less desirable, less good.

So when we say something is good, we are saying that it is, of itself, desirable. And when we are saying something is desirable, we are really just saying that we want it to exist.

Therefore the Fathers of the Church understood that somehow existence and goodness were really the same thing, just seen from different angles. This is why St. Augustine is not that crazy when he says that evil is merely ‘a lack of being.’ When something is less than it should be, it is bad. When it is everything it should be, it is good. And when it is good, we desire it, and rightly so.

So we return to the question of whether God is Good. St. Thomas Aquinas has an answer for us:

‘To be good belongs pre-eminently to God. For a thing is good according to its desirableness. Now everything seeks after its own perfection; and the perfection and form of an effect consist in a certain likeness to the agent, since every agent makes its like; and hence the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness. Therefore, since God is the first effective cause of all things, it is manifest that the aspect of good and of desirableness belong to Him.’

This can sound confusing, but the old theologian is really saying something quite simple! For one, God is good, because He is existence itself, and if existence, goodness, and desirability are all the same, then of course God, who is existence, is also good and desirable ‘pre-eminently.’ Second, since God is also the source of all existence for everything else (‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’) Everything in the universe finds its

existence, and the completion of its existence in God, which means that everything finds the completion of its goodness in God, and thus its desirability.

Basically, God is most good, and thus most to be desired, because everything else’s goodness and desirability is made perfect in and by Him and Him alone.

So yes, God is good, in season and out. ■

March for Life 2022



Above: Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, places a cross in its expansive fields for every baby killed by abortion in Indiana in the past year. This year, 7,756 crosses adorned the lawn.

Right & Next Page: LCMS members participate in the March for Life. Photos by Erik Lunsford.

This year marked the 49th annual March for Life, the nationwide pro-life protest against the legalization of abortion. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, with its conspicuous lime-green “LCMS Life Ministry” gear, joined the throngs once again as thousands marched on the capitol. This year’s march was particularly hopeful, with the *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* case (a case from Mississippi) currently being heard in the Supreme Court. We continue to pray for our government, mothers in our land, those who have had an abortion, those who are considering one, and most of all, the precious babies being knit together in their mothers’ wombs.



Prayer for Those Grieving Abortion Decisions

Merciful Father, You have promised that for Your own sake You blot out our transgressions and will not remember our sins. By Your blessed Gospel, forgive the sins of those who grieve past abortion decisions, and give them certainty that Your Son's absolving blood was shed to cover this very guilt and shame. Give readiness by Your Holy Spirit to pastors and Christian friends, that they may be surrounded by constant acclamations of their deliverance; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Prayer to Remember Those Whose Lives Have Ended in Abortion

Dear Lord, in great sorrow we remember before You the lives of many children that have ended in abortion. We mourn their deaths and cry out to You for mercy. In our despair, fix our eyes on the hope of Christ Jesus, who died for all; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Prayer for Expectant Mothers Vulnerable to Abortion

O God, our merciful Protector, arise with counsel and comfort for all expectant mothers vulnerable or pressured to seek abortion. Give them clarity of mind to see death for the enemy that it is, open their eyes to possibilities when they can see no other option, and give compassion to Your church, that she may be eager and ready to apply the balm of Christ's forgiveness and love to them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. ■



1 JOHN 3

Christ laid down
His life for us.
We love in deed and truth.

Christmas Recital

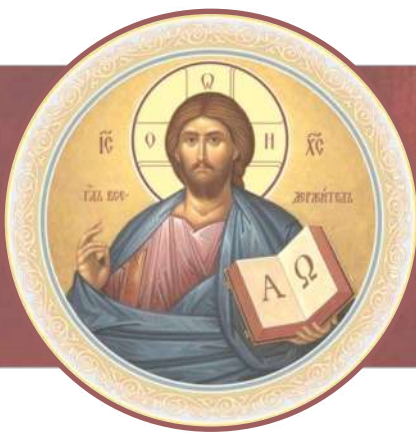
— Christ Lutheran Church —





On January 8, Christ Lutheran held its third annual Christmas Recital, complete with a scrumptious cookie reception afterward! It was an altogether lovely beginning to the New Year. The program featured everything from piano to cello to voice, and our talented kids—notably Emma Agent, Miles Agent, Nathan Burkhalter, and Emily Held—shared their God-given gifts with us. We are grateful for these blessings, and we heartily encourage our young musicians as they continue to be good stewards of these talents. ■





THIS MONTH

At Christ Lutheran

March for Life 2021

Join your fellow Lutherans in the 49th annual March for Life this January in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit lcms.org/marchforlife or eyesoflife.org.

National Squirrel Appreciation Day

— January 21 —

Collect Nuts

Hug a Squirrel

Pray for
Pastor Holowach



THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

Observed
+ January 9 +
10:30 a.m.

~ Altar Flowers ~

Sign up on the Fellowship Hall bulletin board to provide altar flowers in 2022. They are \$45, and you may take them home after the worship service.

Thank you for beautifying the Lord's house!



κοινωνία KOINONIA



SAVING LEONARDO

*A Call To Resist The Secular Assault On
Mind, Morals, & Meaning*



February 27
5:00 p.m.

Find Christ Lutheran on
Facebook and MeWe!

Divine Services
Bulletins
Church Updates
Blog Posts
Devotions
And More!



THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

+ February 27 +
10:30 a.m.



Cartoon by William Held



A S H W E D N E S D A Y

March 2

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



Saints' Days in January

- 1 Circumcision and Name of Jesus
- 2 St. J. K. Wilhelm Loehe, Pastor
- 10 St. Basil the Great of Caesarea, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Bishops and Confessors
- 17 St. Anthony, Abbot
- 18 The Confession of St. Peter
- 20 St. Sarah, Matriarch
- 24 St. Timothy, Bishop and Martyr
- 25 The Conversion of St. Paul
- 26 St. Titus, Bishop and Confessor
St. Polycarp of Smyrna, Bishop and Martyr
- 27 St. John Chrysostom, Bishop and Confessor
- 28 St. Charlemagne, King



Saints' Days in February

- 2 Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord
- 4 St. Rabanus Maurus of Mainz, Archbishop
- 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

LENT

+ March 2 +

Ladies Night Out

Aplos Simple Mediterranean
Jackson
Wednesday, February 23
6:00 p.m.

Please RSVP to Carol Yenish
by February 20

Artwork in This Issue



Cover: *The Transfiguration*, Sr. Abraham, 1990.

p. 5: *Baptism of Christ* (detail), Ioan Popa & Camelia Ionesco-Popa, 2003.

p. 10: *Luther Making Music in the Circle of His Family*, Gustav Spangenberg, 1875.

p. 12: Design for an organ, Johann Georg Dirr, 18th century.

p. 16: *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charles M. Schulz, 1965.

p. 22: *Christus Consolator*, Carl Heinrich Bloch, 19th century.

p. 17: *Compassion*, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1897.

p. 26: *Nativity*, Gustave Dore, 19th Century.

p. 34: *Saint Peter & Saint Paul*, Jusepe de Ribera, 1616.

p. 36-37: Photos by Erik Lunsford, 2022.

p. 38: *The Holy Night*, Carlo Maratta, 1650s.

De-Decoration Day!



Epiphany is upon us—
Join us for De-Decorating!

Saturday
January 8
3:00 p.m.

Coffee, of course,
will be provided!



THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

+ January 9 +

**Church
Work
Day** Saturday
March 26

✦

Epiphany House Blessing

C+M+B+2022

The numbers represent the New Year
2 meanings for C, M, B

↻ (Caspar) (Melchior) † (Balthasar) ↻
traditional names for the magi

"CHRISTUS MANSIONEM BENEDICAT"
which in Latin means
"MAY CHRIST BLESS THIS HOUSE"

*The "+" signs represent the cross
and 2022 is the year of the blessing.*

House Blessings

+ 2022 +

Epiphanytide means House Blessings!
New house or old, big or little, clean or dirty,
Pastor Fields is here for you!
Contact Sister Sara to schedule yours
as we enter this new year!



February 2022

PRAYER FAMILIES
and BIRTHDAYS


Keeley Rimoldi
2—Reagan Dodge
4—Gary Atchley

Chuck Rubisoff
7—Earl Haines
7—Will Pickering
10—Anita Martin
10—Brent Hathcock

Ben & Natalie Rudenske
13—Claudia Nelson
17—Alexis Burkhalter
18—Westin Ramsey

John & Jo Rudenske
20—Dave Teal

Daryl & Sherri Smith
28—Sarah Bowman

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6 EPIPHANY V 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	7 6:15 p.m. Elders Mtg.	8 St. Solomon 6:15 p.m. Council Mtg.	9 St. Cyril of Alexandria	10 St. Silas	11 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	12
13 EPIPHANY VI 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service Sts. Aquila, Priscilla, & Apollos	14 Sts. Cyril & Methodius St. Valentine	15 Sts. Philemon & Onesimus	16 St. Philipp Melancthon	17	18 6:30 a.m. Bible Study St. Martin Luther	19
20 EPIPHANY VII 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	21	22	23 6:00 p.m. Ladies' Night Out	24 St. Matthias	25 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	26
 27 FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service 5:00 p.m. Koimonia	28					

Serving this month:
Elder—Chris Burkhalter
Greeters—Rush & Allison Agent