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Redeemer's Christian Connection

Pastor's Page



The new year is often a time of resolutions to do better this year than last. But our past failures are not so easily buried or forgotten, nor are our past successes as enduring as we would like. If you find, like me, that you are still plagued by the effects of sin, which continues to dog your every step into the new year, then consider these words from C.F.W. Walther, the first president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Should the Christian stand all day long at the grave of all joys which he enjoyed in past years? Through Holy Baptism a great stream of joy has been conducted in his heart, which does not drain away, but streams forward with his life until its waves carry him into the sea of a blessed eternity. Should the Christian be reminded all day long that the flowers of his youth fall more and more? He stands planted by God in the water of his Baptism as a palm tree which becomes greener and greener and whose leaves never wither. Yes, his Baptism makes death for him like a short winter's nap, out of which an eternal spring—an eternal youth—follows.

For Baptism is a bath that washed me not only once when I received it—washed me pure with Christ's blood—but it continuously washes me clean even daily for as long as I hold it in faith. For just as the same water of the flood drowned the sinners, but Noah with his relatives were brought to salvation and carried to Mount Ararat, so also did the water of my Baptism drown my sins, but my soul was brought to the eternal mountain of divine grace. And just as once those same waves of the Red Sea, which swallowed up Pharaoh and his army, were a protective wall of Israel, so also has my baptismal water swallowed up all of my damnation and is for me a sure wall before God's wrath and punishment...

Now then, all of you who believe in God's Word, let your watchword for entering the new year be this: "I am baptized!" Although the world may laugh at this comfort, the enthusiasts vex its confidence...nevertheless, abandon any other dearly held pledges and speak only throughout the entire year to come, in all terrors of conscience and necessity through sin and death: "I am baptized! I am baptized! Hallelujah!" And you shall prevail! In every time of need, you will find comfort in your Baptism; on account of it Satan will flee from your faith and confession; and in death you will see heaven opened and will finally come into the joy of your Lord to celebrate a great year of jubilee, a year of praise, with all the angels forever and ever. Amen!



“The Word in Song.”

Preamble:

For this new year, in place of the Hymn of the Month, I will be adapting a Hymn of the Day study/devotion provided by our Synod entitled: “The Word in Song.” This month we’ll focus on the hymn,

“O Christ, Our True and Only Light”

(LSB 839).

Introduction:

This hymn by Johann Heermann (1585–1647) is primarily associated with the famous call of Isaiah 60 (“*Arise, shine, for your light has come*”) as God’s beacon of salvation for all nations. It’s a hymn and prayer for the mission of the Church, that the light of Christ may enlighten and shine on all who are yet enslaved by the spiritual blindness of the fallen nature.

Exploring the Scriptures:

In Isaiah 60:1–3 the gracious good news of salvation is announced as light shining in darkness. The darkness of spiritual blindness and death is described in the previous chapter (Isaiah 59:9–10). The fact that thick darkness covers the earth and all people emphasizes the universal fact of the fallen nature of all people. Sin and death are our lot until we are released and freed from their slavery by the gracious action of God. His salvation is as universal as our need, in that “nations” (60:3) shall come to the light.

Exploring the Hymn:

Johann Heermann wrote this hymn in the midst of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648). Heermann’s hymn and prayer sings from the light of the truth of pure doctrine as contained in the Lutheran Confessions. “Mission and Witness” is a main aspect of the Church’s work, as we read in Matthew 24:14, “*And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*”

Text:

1 O Christ, our true and only light,
Enlighten those who sit in night;
Let those afar now hear Your voice
And in Your fold with us rejoice.

Stanza 1 identifies Jesus Christ as Isaiah’s “light” (Isaiah 60:1). This is true of Christ according to both natures. We confess Him as the divine Son of God in the words of the Nicene Creed, “Light of Light, very God of very God,” and the incarnate Son, Jesus, says of Himself, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). It is He who “enlightens,” that is, reveals the truth to His disciples (Luke 24:45).

2 Fill with the radiance of Your grace
The souls now lost in error's maze;
Enlighten those whose inmost minds
Some dark delusion haunts and blinds.

Stanza 2 is a prayer that those “the souls now lost in error’s maze,” those whose “inmost minds some dark delusion haunts and blinds,” would be enlightened by the “radiance of [Christ’s] grace.

3 O gently call those gone astray
That they may find the saving way!
Let ev'ry conscience sore oppressed
In you find peace and heav'nly rest.

Stanza 3 continues our prayer for every sinner, that they be gently called to salvation, peace and rest.

4 Shine on the darkened and the cold;
Recall the wand'ers to Your fold.
Unite all those who walk apart;
Confirm the weak and doubting heart,

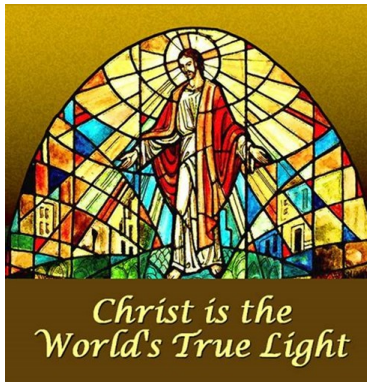
Stanza 4 speaks of the “darkened” and “cold,” the “wand’ers,” and those who “walk apart.” This seems to identify those who are led astray by false teaching or doctrine. Those who “walk apart” are distinguished from others, that is, those who “walk together,” which is the definition of the word “synod,” walking the same road (of confession). We continue to pray and work for the unity of the Church across so-called “denominational” lines to agreement in the truth.

5 That they with us may evermore
Such grace with wond'ring thanks adore
And endless praise to You be giv'n
By all Your Church in earth and heav'n.

Stanza 5 speaks of the grand goal of the unity of the “una sancta,” the one holy Church of every time and place, at the final marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end.

Making the Connection:

This hymn should, among other things, draw together the concerns for both the truth of sound doctrine and outreach to the lost. For it is only as we believe, teach and confess the truth that we have any power for reaching the lost with the glorious Gospel of salvation. There may be other ways and other messages that “reach” or draw people, but the question is always, to what end? If the issue is looked at as merely a question of “marketing,” one will certainly want to downplay the “negative” diagnosis of our audience as those who are lost, in darkness or in error. If, however, the issue is bringing people to repentance and saving faith, we need to face up to the truth of the spiritual condition of all people according to our common, fallen nature, and then deliver the glorious good news of God’s gift of salvation.



Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, in Your kindness You cause the light of the Gospel to shine among us. By the working of Your Holy Spirit, help us to share the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may rejoice in the gift of Your unending love; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Mission Observance).

NEWS FROM REDEEMER LUTHERAN SCHOOL

By the grace of God, we have exceeded our goal of raising \$969,028 for the construction of a school building! We are extremely grateful for your support and for your continued prayers.

More than 200 people at the RLS Christmas program heard the message of God's amazing love shown in sending us His only Son. Thanks to Barb Nagoda for accompanying the singing, and to Jenean Hovel, Karen Richardson, Brandy Wood, Sharon Althaus, and Renee' Beck for preparing and serving refreshments afterwards. RLS students enjoyed caroling at Crossroads in Delta prior to Christmas break.

This month our students will be learning about life in Australia, through the immersive "Gospel Adventures" program offered online by Lutheran Hour Ministries.

RLS students are joining with other schools to celebrate National Lutheran Schools Week January 22-26. LCMS congregations operate the largest Protestant parochial school system in America. Lutheran schools share the life-changing message of Jesus' love with more than 200,000 students, their families, and the community. The theme for this year's celebration is CONNECTED, based on John 15:1-5. Jesus told His church: "I am the vine; you are the branches. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine." We rejoice that by God's grace and through God's Word we are connected to the Vine, which is Jesus Christ.



Life Thoughts in the Church Year

January 7 – Epiphany I/Baptism of Our Lord – Nothing and nobody comes into existence apart from the will and the Word of the Lord God Almighty (Genesis 1:3). This means God desires the survival of every human life from fertilization to forever. We court great danger if we go against this intent or counsel others to do so (Psalm 29:7-8). Instead let us receive neighbors as blessings and enjoy our Father's favor (Mark 1:11)!

January 14 – Epiphany II – Life issues like surprise pregnancy and terminal diagnosis come with uncertainty. But the Lord our God knows both our worries (Psalm 139:4) and the best way forward. He has already seen (John 1:48) what it will take to save, and He has still chosen life for all humankind, even when we behold only darkness and despair. We may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know who holds tomorrow.

January 21 – Epiphany III – The size of a people (as in the case of Nineveh, Jonah 3:3-4) makes no difference to their worth. Nor does the height of an individual's status (so says the Psalmist, Psalm 62:9) affect his or her sanctity. The life-giving grace of God measures according to His abundance rather than our scarcities of age, appearance, or ability. May we likewise direct gazes beyond abortion's and assisted suicide's shortsightedness (1 Corinthians 7:30-31).

January 28 – Epiphany IV – Gospel-motivated voices have the privilege – and the responsibility – to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Those who speak otherwise dabble in judgment and condemnation (Deuteronomy 18:20). The Scriptures and the Savior have graciously made clear – with "shalls" and "shall-nots" – His jealous devotion to the survival and salvation of every human life. We get to repeat and rejoice in it, especially for the sake of the weaker ones (1 Corinthians 8:12).

Birthdays

Nick Orros—January 10
Marion Wilson—January 15
Nathan Jordan—January 15
Dale Rustebakke—January 23
Abigail Mummert—January 25
LeeAnn Sinner—January 29

Baptismal Birthdays

Aaron Clubb—January 5
Renee Orros—January 5
Kathy Kadlec—January 7
Michael Althaus—January 8
Herb Kruger—January 10
Michelle Clubb—January 12
Gracie Kindschy—January 12
Marie Buchholz—January 18
Sheri and Joey Gates—January 19
Austin Althaus—January 19
Tom Wingfield—January 20
Nathan & Natalie Jordan—January 23

Wedding Anniversary

Lloyd & Marilyn Liebetrau—January 7



THE LORD'S MINISTRY

Redeemer Lutherans attendance figures and financial blessings that were given for the month of December to further maintain the Lord's ministry.

Date	Attendance	Communicants	Offerings Received Gen./Designated Funds	Needed Operating Budget
12-3-2023	87	70	\$4,656.00/\$4,835.54	\$4,455.06
12-6-2023	19		\$180.00	
12-10-2023	102	84	\$2,305.13/\$8,858.52	\$4,455.06
12-13-2023	29		\$419.00/\$3,705.54	
12-17-2023			\$1,915.30/\$25,760.00	\$4,455.06
12-20-2023			\$495.00/\$4,089.94	
12-24-2023	67		\$2,093.00/\$8,520.00	\$4,455.06
12-24-2023	99		\$2,127.00	
12-25-2023	37	27	\$1,594.00	
12-28-2023			\$940.00/\$32,560.00	
12-31-2023	69		\$2,648.25/\$1,195.00	\$4,455.06