

SERVING THE LORD IN ASIA

NEWS FROM THE JASTRAMS



Nogawa Park, Tokyo

June 2021

Rock of Ages

Recent public opinion about the national extension of COVID emergency measures, the slow vaccination rollout in Japan, and questions about preparation for the Tokyo Olympics, all aroused my curiosity about . . . Japan's national anthem (the *Kimigayo*)! How will it represent Japan at the July Olympics? What does it say?

The last half of the anthem refers to the desired longevity of a prosperous reign: "Until the tiny pebbles / Grow into massive boulders / Lush with moss." But, this sounded curious to me. What does this mean? How does this happen?

A little searching revealed that just such boulders exist in Japan (*sazare-ishi*) and are composed of tiny pebbles fused by geologic conditions over time (thus "lush with moss"). These are often designated as sacred Shinto objects of worship, strung with sacred straw rope, and decorated with sacred streamers.



Why? Along with other unique and wondrous objects and sites of nature, these strange boulders are said to embody the Shinto universal divine spirit. More specifically, with regard to the national anthem, the boulder is also a striking image of national unanimity. This is how individual members of a community (pebbles) become a harmonious unity of strength (boulder), joined with each other for the greater good; not focused primarily on individual priorities, goals, and aspirations.

For Japanese citizens, these words of the national anthem symbolize the "Spirit of Great Harmony" (*Yamato-damashii*: the Spirit of Japan). However, for Japanese Christians—who are also fellow citizens with us in the Kingdom of God—the Word of God embodied in Jesus Christ is the true boulder of strength: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

*Rev. Dr. Jastram is the Asia Lutheran Resource Coordinator:
Making Lutheran resources of theology and worship available in Asia.*

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- *Our partners in mission, for your generous May support, and for the sustaining contributions of individuals, congregations, districts, and LWML groups that make this mission work possible.*

WE PRAISE GOD FOR:

- *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, which is the source of the International Development Grant that makes possible our translation project of Walther's Law and Gospel text into the Japanese language.*
- *Finishing more than 50 percent of Walther's Law and Gospel translation project.*
- *Outreach opportunities for catechetical studies and worship with international Tokyo expats.*

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- *God's wisdom for coordinating with others on our next translation project.*
- *Japan, as it manages its pandemic precautionary measures, organizes its national vaccination program and sets up its safety protocols for the summer Olympics.*

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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
P.O. Box 66861
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Gifts can also be given securely online through the LCMS website, on my online giving page at lcms.org/givenow/jastram.

Gateway for Bible Study



God has wonderfully arranged some recent connections with international Tokyo expats which resulted in our first catechetical study on park benches in the center of Tokyo (at the Shimizu gate entrance to the old Imperial Castle grounds). What a joy it is to gather together, with our 2017 catechisms in hand, for a review of the requested first topic of interest: Lutheran worship and liturgy. Park meetings like this have recently alternated with our gatherings for Lutheran worship in our apartment chapel services.

Project Update

This last month I was also very grateful for encouraging correspondence with Concordia Publishing House, Lutheran Heritage Foundation, and Concordia Historical Institute regarding various projects. Work with the translator on Walther's Law and Gospel continues on schedule and in good order. Correspondence and coordination for our next Japanese Lutheran

resource project are also progressing well. God has wonderfully opened doors and guided progress along the way.

God be praised for your continuing support of this important work. On behalf of all those who benefit from this proclamation, thank you for your partnership.

