

FORWARD

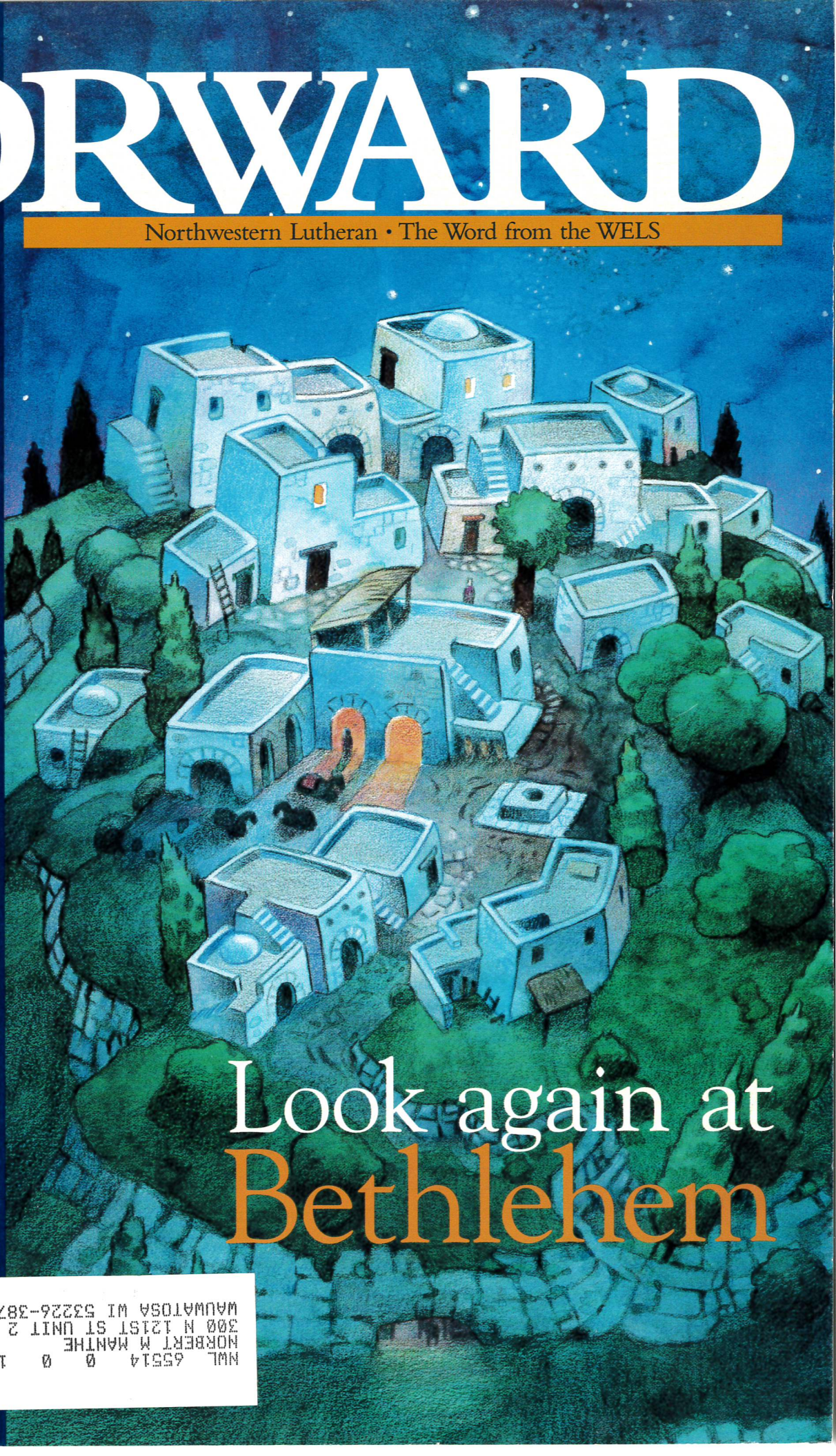
December 1999

Northwestern Lutheran • The Word from the WELS

Man in the
workplace

Saving slugs?

Four ideas
on serving
the poor



Look again at
Bethlehem

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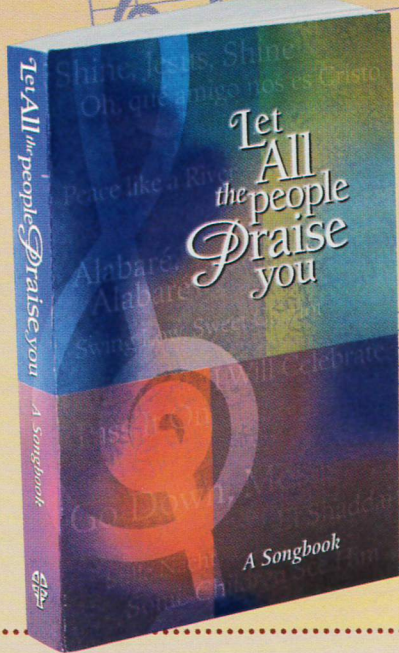
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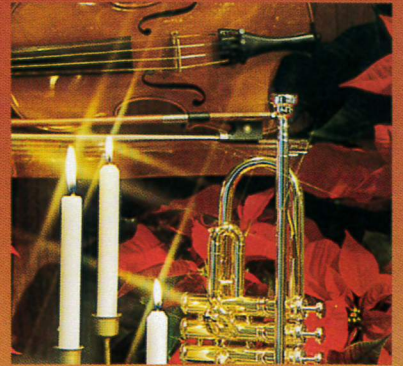


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Hope for his people

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down! Isaiah 64:1

Thomas A. Westra

A little boy fell down a deep well. After several failed attempts to reach him, they lowered a microphone down to him, to monitor his condition. The boy kept crying, "Momma, Momma, when are you coming to help me?" He couldn't understand why his mother had not yet come down.

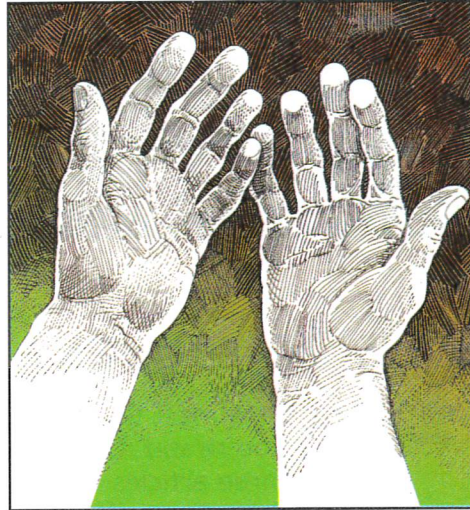
We pray for help

I think of that story when I read Isaiah's plaintive cry. After looking at the plight of God's people, he cries out, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down" (64:1). He's yearning for some sign of nearness from a God who seems far away.

Have you ever prayed like that? "Father, you say that I'm your child, that you love me. But honestly, I don't feel very loved right now. Where are you? You seem a million miles away. Why haven't you come down to help me?"

Whether the prayer comes from a student failing school or a young person failing in love, from a business man about to lose his job or a young mother facing a divorce, from a parent in conflict with a child or a hospital patient facing a devastating illness, from a couple who lost a child or from a widow(er) who lost a soul mate, it is a cry for some sense of nearness from a God who seems to have moved away.

If only I could see a few more miracles, a few more signs that God is near, we think. But I'm still in the bottom of this well, wondering why he hasn't come down to help me.



God comes and saves us

Then it's Advent season, and I am reminded that God did come down: not in power, but through the womb of a Jewish peasant girl in Bethlehem. He came to help me out of my greatest problem: my sin and the death it deserves. The God we sometimes think doesn't care because he doesn't act, did act because he does care.

Looking beyond his manger bed to see him stapled to a Roman cross, writhing in agony, we are reminded that God is not oblivious to our pain. He came down and absorbed the awful pain that we had brought onto ourselves.

To many, the cross speaks of defeat, of a God so powerless he could not prevent his Son's execution. But to those who understand that he went to that cross by choice, the cross thunders: "I love you. I love you so much that I came into your world to pay this awful price,

so you can live with me in glory."

If Isaiah were here this Advent, he might say, "Expect God to act in your life because he cares. As you hear his Word and receive his sacrament, expect that he takes his place in your heart. You don't stand alone, guilty and unloved. You stand with him, loved with a never-ending love and forgiven."

Isaiah might also say, "Expect God to act again. Expect him to rend the heavens and come down in an awesome display of power. Expect him to wipe every tear from your eye, to take you from all the pain, sadness, conflict, and loneliness of this evil world and lift you up to heaven."

Advent means hope

Many live in despair and in sadness. They feel stuck in the bottom of a well. How different it is for God's people. It's not the mysterious presents, the enchanting lights, or the beautiful music that fills us with wonder and hope this Advent. It's the message of the prophets that our God did come down. Our God comes down daily into our lives through Word and sacrament. And our God is coming again.



Tom Westra is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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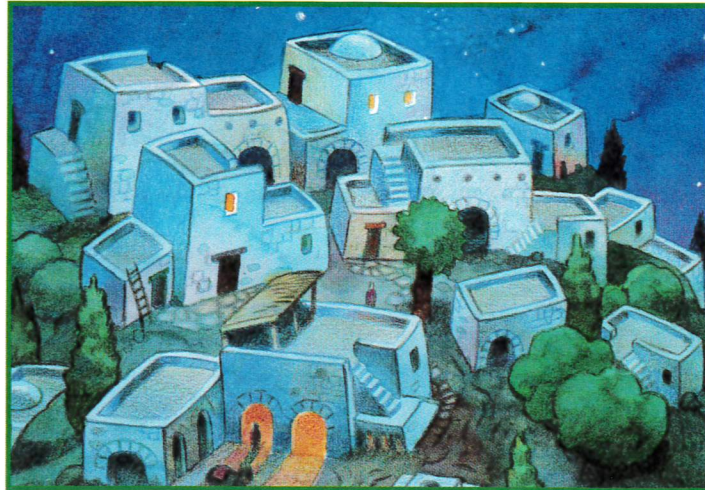
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A history
of sadness.
A moment
of glory.
An eternity
of bliss.

8

bits & pieces



Merry Christmas! Or do you wonder what's so merry about it? Maybe you're sad. Or lonely. Maybe you're hurt, tired, confused. Three articles remind you that because of the baby in the manger, God will wipe every tear from your eyes.

- The people of Bethlehem didn't have a history of happiness. But God used that town to bring hope to an entire world—and to you. Turn to "O sad little town of Bethlehem." (p. 8)
- Maybe you wonder if God hears you. He does. But why doesn't he answer? He already has. See "Hope for his people." (p. 3)
- Scared about 2000? Find reassurance in "001999." (p. 18)



We are wrapping up our series on encountering world religions. We hope you've learned about other religions and how missionaries witness to followers of these religions. (p. 10)



Also ending this month is our "WELS in action" series. It's been an interesting trip around our synod as we met 12 different congregations who share a common goal. (p. 14)



Wayne Mueller ends his series on men's roles. We thank him for his insights. (p. 12)



On a personal note: Marriage carried me far from Wisconsin in November, so this is the last time you'll see LRB on the bottom of this column. Each month for the past seven years, I've been given the honor of sharing stories of people who deeply love their Lord. Through these stories, I've also made friends throughout the world. In addition, my co-workers, who set an example by serving with their whole heart, have made working here a joy. I didn't deserve any of these blessings, but they were given to me anyway. I am thankful, and humbled.

May God, who loves you deeply, hold you close until we meet—not every month in a magazine, but every day in heaven.

—LRB

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Finding the quiet in Christmas



I was reading the article "Divorce is not an option" [Aug.], and it provoked many thoughts. This is how God intended marriage. You're in for the duration. My wife and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary on June 29. I had been married to my kid's mom for 25 years. I was looking forward to spending the next 25 years, or more, married to my wife.

But, in God's wisdom and grace, it was not meant to be. My wife was called to her eternal glory on Aug. 6 at age 45. "In for the duration!" Sometimes the duration is not long enough.

Woe to those who do not know the Lord and his saving grace. They do not know that reunion in heaven is only a heartbeat away. During the time of grace God has given us on earth we must get the Word to as many as possible. Souls are at stake.

While my wife was in the hospital, I had the opportunity to share God's Word with others. It was a rewarding experience. Hopefully, through the strength God provided my wife and me, the Holy Spirit touched the lives of many. Doctors, nurses, hospital staff members, and families of other patients have seen the strength God provides through his Word. Even though St. Paul Medical Center is a Catholic hospital, many WELS tracts are now floating around.

We're in for the duration. When you consider eternity, there isn't much time left.

*Jim Hofferbert
Rowlett, Texas*

I appreciated Dan Reber's thoughts on worship as an evangelism tool [Sept.]. The unbeliever will not likely be impressed by purity of doctrine and flowing liturgy. A service designed to attract the seeker is done best face to face, one on one.

Yet visitors are regularly our best prospects. We fail if we do nothing to bring them back to our services. I

think there are ways to make worship more attractive to the visitor (unbeliever) without diluting the spiritual food that the believer needs.

1. Use music that is culturally compatible to the community served. Music that sounds foreign to the visitor's ears suggests the church is not interested in serving its community.

2. Plan an occasional "seeker service." We call it "Friendship Sunday." On one Sunday we try to display the best of what our church has to offer, and the members participate by inviting friends.

3. Practice the "new commandment" (John 13:34) so visitors see that Jesus' disciples worship here. When visitors see members exchanging genuine affection, when they are greeted with warmth and personal attention, a real need is being met. That may open a window for the gospel to create faith and turn the visitor (unbeliever) into a member (believer).

*Rolf Westendorf
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*



Years ago, I provided a small financial subsidy to a young boy attending East Fork Elementary School, East Fork, Ariz. After a few years, I focused my financial donations on my local church

and other WELS programs.

When I read "Apache students reach out to Navajos" [Sept.] and saw the picture of the six Apache students who went to New Mexico for mission work among the Navajo, I had a wonderful surprise. I had helped send one of those Apache students, Jarred Truax, to school for a few years. What a wonderful reminder that the Lord uses us all in different ways to bring his Word to the world. It is good to know that Jarred has grown up into

a young man who is willing to serve his Lord and his fellow Native Americans.

*Stephanie Remetich
Pelham, Alabama*

Let your light shine [Sept.] about John Flister was a wonderful testament of this man's faith. It's so hard to see a loved one go through this disease called "cancer."

During a time like this we can't help but ask, "Why, Lord?" We'll probably never know the answer, but we do know that when our loved ones die, they go to heaven and one day we'll be together again with them. We're also reminded how precious life is and that we should all be prepared at all times to enter our eternal home.

Our 11-year-old daughter passed away on Jan. 11 from a cancerous brain tumor. We miss her terribly but look forward to the day when we're together again in heaven. Our daughter knew Jesus loved her and that she was one of his lambs. Many times she sang, "This little gospel light of mine. . . let it shine, let it shine!"

Thank you for sharing this story about how John Flister let his light shine. May we all remember to let our lights shine every day.

*Sherry Mau
Beaver Dam, Wisconsin*

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Ready or not, here I come

Armin J. Panning

As kids playing Hide and Seek, we had some fairly definite rules. After allowing a reasonable time to hide, usually measured by counting to an agreed-upon number, the person who was "it" was expected to holler, "Ready or not, here I come."

There are also "ready or not" situations in life. Certain events will come, whether we're prepared for them or not. One is the Y2K situation that will be upon us at midnight on Dec. 31.

A considerable amount of advice is being given on how to prepare for it. Most advice is low-key. Treat it like a long weekend, we're told. You might want to lay in a few extra supplies, but in general nothing drastic is required.

Admittedly there could be some serious situations, such as being in surgery when computer-supported systems become unstable, but generally the thought is that, while there might be some temporary inconveniences, they're not likely to be life threatening.

But for all of us, there is an infinitely more serious life or death situation that we ignore at our own peril. To a largely complacent world our Lord also says, "Ready or not, here I come." Unlike Y2K, which can be calculated to the second, we do not know the time of our Lord's return. We don't know when, but we know that he is coming. He has clearly told us so.

Note that as Christ was preparing to leave this world, he became ever more pointed and earnest in urging people to be ready for his second coming. For example, many parables touch on this theme. We think of the graphic pictures supplied by such parables as the weeds being separated from the wheat, the rough fish in the net sorted out from the "keepers," the wise and the foolish virgins waiting for the bride-

groom, the unprepared wedding guest being cast into outer darkness.

Expressed or implied, Jesus' emphasis regularly was, "Keep watch, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come." Far from being a disadvantage, however, this lack of specific information serves as a benefit for the Christian, for it points to the only right preparation, namely, being ready at all times.

But how are we to do that? Scripture gives us clear directions. At Christ's first coming, John the Baptist sounded the urgent warning: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." That's still the proper preparation today: to repent of the sins that so regularly beset us and in faith to accept God's forgiveness of those sins. Then, in appreciation for God's great gift to us in Christ, to apply ourselves diligently to the opportunities for service that God puts before us, whether as a parent in the home, an employee at work, a student in school, or as an active member of our congregation.

In joyful response to God's grace, we busy ourselves with our varied tasks until the Lord's return, trusting Christ's promise, "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns."

"Ready or not" is not a terrifying prospect for those who are ready by faith in Christ. They know that the Judge's verdict on all believers will be "Come and share your master's happiness." Hence, when Christ, in the closing chapter of Revelation, promises, "Yes, I am coming soon," we enthusiastically respond with the apostle John, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

Armin J. Panning is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

"Ready or not" is not a terrifying prospect for those who are ready by faith in Christ.

O sad little town of Bethlehem



Only those who have never been to Bethlehem could think it was a happy place. If you have ever visited, whether in person or through the pages of Scripture, you know Bethlehem as a place of sadness.

Sadness in Bethlehem

Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, died there giving birth to their son Benjamin. Tour guides still point out Ramat Rachel, midway along the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, where tradition says she died. Jacob's family circumstances—bride switched on their wedding night, a dozen sons and uncounted daughters by four different women, his obvious favoritism of Rachel over Leah—tell their own story. Many hearts were broken in Jacob's household.

Two ugly stories conclude the book of Judges. Neither implicates Bethlehem as such, but both tell awful stories of ungodly men who came from there.

When the Judges ruled Israel, there was also a Moabite woman named Ruth who married an Israelite man, then chose to move with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem, after their men died. From the hillsides around Bethlehem, one can still gaze across the Dead Sea valley to the hills of Moab. As a poor widow, trailing behind the harvesters to glean whatever they would leave for her, glancing back at her homeland, Ruth must have wept bitter tears among the sheaves.

A shepherd first put this little town on the map, but Bethlehem's citizens probably wished David had grown up someplace else. David

Though the Christmas hymn may tell of silent stars going by, the real story of Bethlehem is filled with tears and cries.

Mark E. Braun

lived for a while among the Philistines, and some may have expected him to become their ally. When David rose to become Israel's king, his armies assaulted Philistine strongholds, and the Philistines retaliated by dispatching troops to occupy his hometown.

Some mothers in Bethlehem may have wished Jesus had never been born there either. Being identified with Jesus has always meant giving up your life. The sadness came full circle when Herod's butchers murdered Bethlehem's innocent baby boys. "Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more'" (Matthew 2:17,18).

Sadness for Christians

A special kind of sadness attends being Christians. We weep at the death of a loved one because we understand how unnatural death is. God made us to live with him forever. Sin ruined that and so much more. Each of us arrives at church on Christmas night bearing some sort of sadness because sin won't leave us alone. Maybe we carry our own sin and the crushing load of a guilty conscience. Maybe we have been wounded by someone else's sin, ravaging our lives and shattering once cherished relationships. Or maybe we suffer the free-floating sadness endemic to a fallen world. No one in particular is to blame for any specific misdeed, just a generalized hurt deep down that something in life has gone terribly wrong and we cannot put it right. No wonder Jesus wept at the grave of his good friend Lazarus—just a short distance over the Mount of Olives, not far from Bethlehem.

Jesus promised persecution to those who followed him. On the night he was born, angels announced "peace on earth," but fresh evidence each morning shows that political peace, military peace, even inter-religious peace, is nowhere on the immediate horizon. The history of Bethlehem is drenched in bloodshed. "In this world you will have trouble," Jesus said.

Christians feel a unique sadness because so many people they love do not know the forgiveness, peace, and eternal life Jesus came to bring. We are sad because Jesus remains mostly a stranger to the people who live where he was born. The shepherds spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. Why has their testimony penetrated so few of the hearts of their countrymen? The chief priests correctly interpreted Micah's prophecy of the Christ being born at Bethlehem. Why did they fail to join the Magi in worshiping him? Herod urged that a careful search be made for the child. Why did he seek to murder Jesus rather than adore him?

Overcoming sadness

Every year our world sings "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Why do so many sentimentalize the moment while missing the message?

But the hymn writer got it right: "To this veil of tears he comes, here to serve in sadness, That with him in heaven's fair home we may reign in gladness." Yes, "in this world you will have trouble," Jesus said. "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The sadness Christians feel becomes the backdrop against which the glory of the Lord shines more brightly. Jesus came to live among us and for us and to die in our place, so that we

can live with him, and believe in him, and become like him. Jesus comes to broken-hearted sinners today because we still need him. And the story born at Bethlehem reminds us—we still have him.

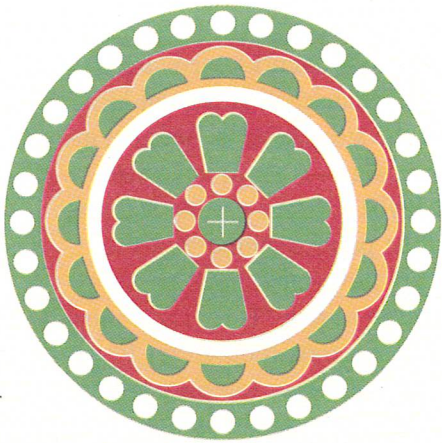
Maybe it is our earthly sadness and the painful memory of the unholy things that have always occurred in that "Holy Land" that keep our hearts focused on Jesus. If this life becomes too pleasant or too easy, we may be tempted to settle for treasures here instead of seeking those blessings yet to come. Were we to find total contentment in our families on earth, we may abandon the home God is preparing for us above. Should we grow too comfortable here, we may take for granted the peace of sin forgiven. Earth must be a desert drear to remind us that heaven is our home.

Charles Dutton, the actor, spent time in prison as a young man for manslaughter. When asked how he managed to change his life, and how he—unlike many other youthful offenders—avoided returning to a life of crime, Dutton answered, "Unlike the other prisoners, I never decorated my cell."

Bethlehem is where Jesus was born, but it is not where Jesus ended up. That was Jerusalem. Jesus does not promise us that one day we will live in the new Bethlehem, but in the new Jerusalem. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

"Not in that poor, lowly stable with the oxen standing by shall we see him, but in heaven, set at God's right hand on high. Then like stars, his children crowned, all in white, his praise will sound."

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



HINDUISM

Q&A

What Hindus believe and how you can share the gospel with them. Lynn E. Wiedmann

Namascaram-andil (Greetings!)

I met my first Hindu eight months ago. Hindus are real people. They have real names. They laugh. They cry. They love. They hate. They have doubts and fears about the present. They have hopes and dreams about the future. They feel guilt and shame about the past. Here are some questions I asked about their religion, and the answers I received.

How old is Hinduism?

Hinduism is about 3,000 years old. It is the mother of Buddhism, which rejects the caste system but retains the belief in the samsara, the continuous wheel of life or reincarnation. Jainism is a reform movement in Hinduism. It emphasizes absolute respect for life. The Sikh religion fuses Hinduism and Islam.

What are the gods of Hinduism?

For some Hindus, the primary gods are Brahma (creator), Shiva (destroyer), Vishnu (preserver, god of goodness and mercy), Hanuman (monkey god of strength, speed and service to Lord Rama), Ganesh (elephant god, who destroys obstacles and bears burdens), and Durga (the mother goddess, goddess of war). Gods were added to Hinduism as India assimilated invaders over the centuries.

Perhaps more important for Hinduism is the concept that inside of every living thing is god. The great world Soul or Self is a part of each one of us. Realizing this and reaching unity with this over-soul, which is nirvana, is the goal of every high caste Hindu.



The members of Mount Olive, St. Paul, Minn., provided the resources for this church to be built. In their honor, this church in India is named Mount Olive.

What sacred books does it follow?

The *Vedas* are the most ancient Hindu epic poems. In the *Mahabhrata*, Vishnu appears as Krishna (supreme god) and teaches the Hindu way. The *Ramayana* describes Rama's battle against evil. It contains the *Bhagavad Gita*, a summary of Hindu ethics.

Countless gurus have applied, interpreted, spiritualized, and explained Hinduism. Its leading teachers changed and reshaped it.

Like Christianity, it appears in various forms. It is affected by the different cultures of India and is practiced with varying degrees of commitment.

Where do you go to church?

Hindus do not have worship services as Christians do, but some worship much more often. Some Hindu homes have a special altar room. After bathing, an hour or more is spent in meditation or ritual activities (lighting candles, burning incense). Pictures, carvings, and statues help the worshiper maintain mental focus on the god in much the same way a Christian might think about the cross. We do not worship the cross, but it reminds us of Jesus' work there.

Why are the rivers so important?

Some Hindus believe that the rivers are sacred. The Ganges flows from the feet of Vishnu. Its water provides cleansing and forgiveness.

Are all Hindus vegetarians?

"Eating the flesh of another living being is like eating the flesh of your own son." In this way you might understand how offensive meat eating is to some Hindus. Indulging the senses of taste and smell and the appetite that goes along with meat eating are contrary to the highest forms of spiritual life sought by the Hindu.

What about the “holy cows”?

The Brahma cattle are the sacred animals of the god, Brahma. The cow carries the sacrifices to the gods. All sacrifices are offered with curds and *ghee* (clarified butter), the products of the cow. The killing of cattle is offensive to Hindus. This causes conflict between Hindus, Moslems, and Christians.

What is “karma”?

“Duty” is an important word for Hindus. By carefully performing the duty assigned, good karma is achieved. With good karma comes the hope of advancing to a higher state in the next life. The ultimate goal is nirvana, a oneness with Brahma. The duty for each caste is carefully spelled out, but not always consistently applied throughout the ages.

Just what is “yoga”?

The word yoga means “yoke.” It is similar in meaning to the word “religion.” In Hinduism there are three general methods of connecting with god:

- ritual: they perform special washings and special worship in special places. These bring a worshiper closer to god.
- meditation: Hindus strive to detach from the world of the sensual and attach themselves to the “Oneness of the Soul.”
- good deeds: Each caste has special assignments and duties to perform. They give gifts, do their duty, and read the sacred scriptures.

What is the caste system?

Some Hindus say that Brahma created the four castes (*Brahman* or priest caste, *Kshatriyas* or warrior caste, *Vaisyas* or agricultural caste, and *Sudras* or the caste that follows its desires). Today there are thousands

of castes and sub-castes. For some Hindus there are rigid requirements for each caste. It is important that each person in a caste does his duty to achieve good karma. Those who do not follow these requirements are placed in an untouchable caste of outsiders, those below the lowest level of humanity.



Jesus' love frees these children from the pressures of Hinduism. They live at the WELS orphanage in India.

How do you get married?

Parents often choose the spouse. It is a logical extension of the Christian fourth commandment requiring children to “honor their parents.” Parents carefully examine the religion, the caste, the education, the family background, and the language group of the prospects. Many people require that a horoscope is supplied because the horoscopes should match. Then a holy man finds an auspicious day, time, and place for the wedding.

What are the colored dots and special paints on your forehead?

Both men and women use the special colors to show their devotion to the gods and to express their moods, feelings, or religious circumstances.

Why do Hindus ask Christians to pray for them?

Many Americans have come to India on missions of mercy. They

have sacrificed many things and are regarded as blessed or virtuous. We are respected as “holy men,” and Hindus value our prayers. They ask us to put our hands on them, and they will sometimes touch the feet of those who pray for them.

How can we reach Hindus with the gospel?

A Hindu receives cleansing and forgiveness only when he has followed certain rituals correctly and bathed in a certain river on a certain day. Jesus offers them full forgiveness and complete cleansing every day.

A Hindu pays careful attention to special times and special days because he wants blessings for himself and his family. Jesus offers them goodness and love every day and eternal joy and peace.

A Hindu hopes that some day he will achieve nirvana. Jesus offers them eternal life each day and eternal life with him in heaven.

A Hindu scorns the pleasures of this life and strives to do his duty. Jesus has created the pleasures of life for man's enjoyment and offers us clear directions for using them to his glory.

A Hindu hopes for good karma and for an end of the wheel of reincarnations. Jesus offers them his good will even when they sin, and an end of suffering at the end of this life.

A Hindu hopes for a peaceful oblivion. Jesus offers them the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever.

May we understand Hindus so that we can understand what they—and we—need from Jesus.

Lynn Wiedmann is a friendly counselor to India.



God's man at work in

Your faith does not get left at home when you go to work.

When I ask men's groups, "What is a Christian man's role in the world?" I am often met with glaring silence. It's almost as though it's possible to believe that man's headship relates only to his Savior, wife, family, and church and has no reference to the world around him.

This kind of thinking was almost predictable. Our synod has spent 20 years reviewing Bible principles and applications of male headship to the family and church. And we men still have a long way to go and grow in this spiritual knowledge and aptitude. But in the meantime, we have neglected to mention that a Christian man also represents the headship of Christ when he walks into the world around him. I have even heard competent male teachers in the church assert that the Bible really does not address the issue of male headship in the world.

Living your faith at all times

Oh, but it does! God established male headship in his creating order in Genesis 2. All men of all times are sons of Adam. When St. Paul reasserts this order in 1 Corinthians 11:3, he poses man's headship under Christ as a general principle. Because man's Christlike headship is most closely and regularly exercised in his family and church, Paul makes most of his applications of male headship to marriage and church life. But when he tells young Pastor Timothy what to teach his congregation, he writes, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy

hands in prayer" (1 Timothy 2:8).

As a general moral principle, male headship applies to all men of all times—and all places. A man does not leave his Christian headship at the door of his house or in the narthex of his church when he goes to work in the world. Just as he encourages his children to obey the Fourth Commandment at home, he obeys his superiors on the job (Ephesians 6:5-9) and the authority of his government (Romans 13:1-7).

The wicked world, however, poses challenges to Christian men that they don't meet at home and in church. The most obvious difficulty is that the outside world does not surround us with people who share our Christian values. How should

we respond when our boss curses or swears, tells lewd jokes, rips off his clients, or asks us to join him in questionable business practices? How should Christian men respond to women supervisors who consciously mock the concept of Christlike male headship?

Sticking with God's Word

Jesus warns us to expect that the world will hate us for sticking with God's Word (John 17:14). St. Paul gives us a general rule of conduct when he tells us that we are to be in the world, but not of it (1 Corinthians 5:9,10). We are not to withdraw all contact with openly sinful people. Yet our association with the wicked must neither condone nor foster their immoral conduct.

Ways to witness in the workplace

- Create opportunities for people to ask you where you're coming from and what directs your actions. Don't curse or swear. Don't lie. Don't laugh at dirty jokes. Don't gossip. Instead speak positively about your spouse, children, and church.
- Be a good worker. This doesn't mean working yourself to death. Instead demonstrate to your fellow workers that work supports your family, your family doesn't support your job.
- Pray to God to give you opportunities to talk about your faith with fellow workers. Even ask God to have people ask you questions. This is a prayer God readily hears and answers.
- As St. Peter says: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). Be ready when people ask you

the world

Wayne D. Mueller

Of course, that's easier said than done. Headship under Christ means witnessing to both the law and the gospel. Christ's servants publicly acknowledge God's law with willing and happy labor wherever they work. We obey our bosses, whether male or female, "not only to win favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men" (Ephesians 6:6,7).

Although we willingly obey the law, we may have to suffer at the hands of those who don't. We may suffer innuendo, jeopardize our pay raises, and even lose our jobs by walking the narrow path. But this is exactly the point at which Christian

manhood comes to the forefront. Rather than laugh at filthy humor, go along with shady deals, and offend Jesus to please worldly bosses, we carry the cross as our Head did.


Creating opportunities to witness

Still, a Christian man's main witness to the world is not to biblical morality. Many who see your willingness to limit your work for the sake of your family and church will attribute it to your lack of dedication to your profession. For some, however, your high morality and putting Lord and family first will create an opportunity to witness to the Bible's higher message: the gospel.

This is what a real Christian man

lives for—at home, at church, in the world. He lives to head up his Savior's Great Commission: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Male headship does not change when we leave home or exit worship. As we teach our children about the love of God and direct the affairs of his church to bring the Savior to his community, so we carry our lunch pail for what might be just one more chance to tell someone about Jesus.

With godly wisdom, a Christian man uses his occupation, whatever that may be, to serve his pre-occupation: witnessing to his saving Head.

 Wayne Mueller is the administrator of the Board for Parish Services.

about your beliefs. Take a Bible class on witnessing. Study your Bible. And remember not to focus on morality, but instead to put the entire focus on Jesus and what he did for all people.

For a Personal Witness Resource Guide, contact the evangelism office at 414/256-3288; <evan@sab.wels.net>.





Eunice Seder and Edwin Greger in front of the columbarium, which is located adjacent to Our Savior. Each has a spouse buried there.

A church full of grandmas and grandpas



Janet Klann

Our Savior, Sun City, Ariz., serves older people with the ageless gospel.

Our country's population is getting older. In 1980, Americans who were age 65 and older made up 25 percent of our population. In 1996 that figure rose to 33.9 percent, and by 2010 almost 40 percent of Americans will be eligible for Social Security and Medicare.

Our Savior, Sun City, Ariz., typifies this trend. As one of the few WELS congregations in a retirement community, 40 percent of its members are over 80 years old, and fewer than a dozen are under age 55.

Beginnings

Our Savior began in 1970, just 10 years after builder Del Webb created Sun City, the country's first community planned for "active adults." Sun City was designed to lure retirees from the Snowbelt to the Valley of the Sun, with its palms, citrus trees, and December days of 70-degree sunshine. They came by the thousands, trading galoshes and snow shovels for sandals and golf clubs.

Twelve of those who relocated became charter members of Our Savior, securing a loan of \$15,000 from the Board for Home Missions to purchase land. Pastor David Gray of Emmaus, Phoenix, conducted services in a recreation center until

Pastor Victor Schultz was installed in August 1971.

The congregation formally organized in January 1972 and began its first building that September. The congregation had 14 voting members and 40 communicant members.

By 1983 the congregation had to enlarge and redesign the sanctuary. Luther Hall, a social room, was also added. The remodeling was so extensive that the congregation held services in a mortuary for five months.

The building was dedicated on Nov. 11, 1984. Congregation historian Harold Moss wrote, "God's blessings became apparent in 1985, when synod's subsidy was ended and again in December 1988 when the congregation became debt free."

Members face challenges

Today, Our Savior has 130 communicants and 135 souls. Serving a congregation composed almost entirely of seniors brings unique challenges and joys. "We have few evening meetings and no evening services other than Christmas Eve," reports Pastor Paul Siegler, "since our members prefer not to drive at night." Choir practice, Ladies' Guild, even Lenten services are held during the day.

As members age and health problems increase, finding officers for

organizations and volunteers for projects becomes more difficult. "We used to clean the church ourselves and do all the yard work," says Esther Borkenhagen. "But now we have to hire people to do those jobs."

Attendance at Our Savior fluctuates with the seasons. In January and February the arrival of winter residents pushes Sunday attendance to nearly 200. In July and August, when temperatures hover between 105-115 degrees, many members move back to cooler climates. Then, average attendance drops to around 90.

The list of hospitalized and shut-ins at Our Savior is longer than at most churches of similar size, and funerals are more common than baptisms or confirmations. "Saying goodbye" is one of Siegler's hardest tasks. "But there is great joy," he says, "in witnessing the beauty of mature faith as it faces death, confident of a home in heaven with the Lord."

The majority of people who relocated from other states expected to be buried in their hometowns. But shipping a casket became too great an expense for some, and they turned to cremation as an alternative. Adjacent to Our Savior, a marble-faced brick and concrete columbarium with large letters



Our Savior, Sun City, Ariz. As one of the few WELS congregations in a retirement community, 40 percent of Our Savior's members are over 80 years old, and fewer than a dozen are under age 55.

last of a 12-part series

Our Savior

Founded: 1972
 Communicants: 130
 Souls: 135
 Pastor: Paul Siegler
 9925 N 103rd Ave
 Sun City AZ 85351-4701



★ = featured congregation
 • = congregations already featured

states, "Heaven is My Home." It contains 54 vaults. Each can hold two urns. Although a new idea for WELS churches, such structures are common in the Sun City area.

Harold Boudrie, who led in planning the columbarium, feels that this burial on church property follows the tradition of cemeteries that used to be located next to churches.

A generous congregation

Our Savior is known as a friendly church. "Most of us do not have families out here," explains Leona Johnson. "So we try to find people who are new and talk to them after the service." Recent transfers Henry and Dene Munzinger say they were made to feel "exceedingly welcome."

That welcome extends to people of all ages. Gary and Deb DeWilde are a military family stationed at nearby Luke Air Force Base and parents of Abigail, age 5. "The people at Our Savior have been very open and inviting," says Deb, "and Abigail seems very comfortable attending a church full of grandmas and grandpas."

Our Savior is also blessed financially. The congregation meets its commitment to the synod each year, and also generously supports the work of related institutions. Special Lent

and Advent offerings support Good Shepherd Lutheran School, Phoenix, as well as Arizona Lutheran Academy and the new mission effort, Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Ariz. Mission envelopes regularly bring in amounts over and above what is budgeted.

"When folks here are informed of an opportunity, they respond readily," says Siegler, "taking the starch out of the claim that the elderly are selfish."

Outreach and missions

Although its unique population results in some notable differences between Our Savior and other WELS congregations, two important items are the same. First, every Sunday, members hear the message of God's law and gospel—that all people are sinners and need Jesus Christ as their Savior for eternal life in heaven. Second, members hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Go and preach."

An evangelism committee is preparing brochures. The first will be a door hanger, introducing the church to prospects. "The second flier will be a more detailed explanation of Lutheran beliefs," says committee chairman, Edwin Duff, "and will be sent after contact by telephone or personal visit."

Our Savior made a major contribution to the mission effort in November

1998 when 18 of its members transferred to Shepherd of the Valley, an exploratory mission in Surprise, a booming community growing by 300 homes every month. Was there concern over losing this many members? "We miss them very much," says Cleo Klemann. "They were active members. But the new mission is a wonderful idea." The friendships among members of the two churches assure that there will always be strong ties.

Anyone who watches television or pays attention to advertising is aware that American culture worships youth. Older people are often dismissed as useless, or stereotyped as self-centered, tight-fisted folks who dislike children.

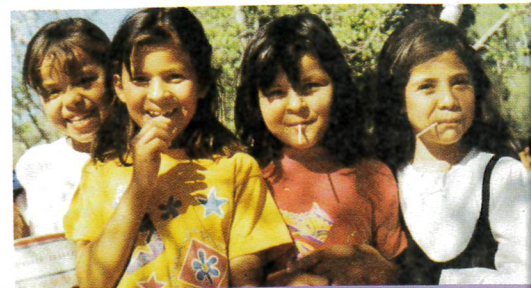
But a close look at the members of Our Savior shatters this myth. These mature Christians love the Lord and gladly support the work of his church. They face life's end with confidence, trusting the God who says, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he . . . who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you" (Isaiah 46:4).

This is good news for all of us—ageless good news.

Janet Klann is a member at Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Arizona.



Our mission is to them, too



God blesses ministering to the poor as he blesses all preaching of the Word.

It was more than two years after I left New York City that I received the letter. I didn't recognize the return address. I turned the envelope over a few times before opening it, wondering who sent it. The signature inside brought back a flood of memories even before I read the message.

Dear Pastor:

It's a frosty Friday here in the City, and the wind is howling along the Hudson. An hour ago I was walking home up Broadway and thought of you and decided I had to write. I can still remember the cold night when I first saw you and the other members of Peace Lutheran, and how you came up and offered me a sandwich and a word of encouragement. And I remember all those other Friday nights, when I helped hand out the sandwiches. But most of all I remember the Bible classes and worship, which brought even deeper encouragement. I thank the Lord for sending you here. You are gone but not forgotten. Caleb

Handing out sandwiches and tracts to the homeless, bringing spiritual counsel to a group of AIDS victims, conducting Bible studies in a welfare hotel—these probably have never been suggested as evangelism tools in your congregation. But they are just as biblical and legitimate for evangelism as supporting a Christian elementary school, having a Friendship Sunday,

or advertising worship services in the newspaper. The only difference is that these activities are directed at a different population—the poor. Our mission is to them, too.

1. Ministry to the poor is important. Statistics show that while our nation's affluence is ever increasing, so is the poverty. And the gap between the two groups is widening. We have to make a concerted effort to cross that gap with the gospel and its message of love.

2. Ministry to the poor is possible. Difficult at times, but certainly possible. God blesses it as he blesses all preaching of the Word. Some people come to faith; some change their lives or are enabled to rebuild them.

Homeless get homes, prisoners stay free, unemployed get jobs. But more important, all learn about their sin and their Savior from sin—Jesus. It takes time to learn how to minister to the poor, just like learning any new skill. But God encourages us and promises to bless our work in his name.

3. Ministry to the poor can be good stewardship. Some think that ministry to the poor is itself poor

Ministry: Mission to the Children, P.O. Box 68123, Tucson AZ 85737

Purpose: Provide for the spiritual and physical needs of families, especially children, in northern Mexico

Began in: 1984

Resources provided by: Church groups, individual donors, and volunteers

Program coordinator: Gene Durfey

Fifteen years ago Durfey and a friend began distributing food to poor families in northern Mexico. Every weekend they returned, and an old man finally asked them why they did. They told him that their love for God and all his people moved them. He replied, "Will you teach our children about Jesus?"

Since then, Mission to the Children volunteers have distributed food, clothing, vitamins, and necessities to the poorest families in northern Mexico. At the same time, families receive Bible study worksheets that include Bible readings, prayers, and activities for children.

The 45 neediest families are sponsored by individual church organizations. Others are supported by general fund donations.

stewardship. Such reasoning grows out of a false understanding of stewardship. In many ways it is wonderful stewardship. Project Share in Bay City Mich., ministers to several hundred unchurched people every week with only one full-time worker! Lay volunteers and clergy who take part in Mission to the Children in



Glen L. Thompson

Ministry: Project Share

Purpose: Reach prisoners, ex-offenders, and the disadvantaged with the gospel, and help them get back on their feet

Began in: 1995

Resources provided by: 14 area congregations and Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Program coordinator: Duane Anderson, staff minister of evangelism, 517/892-0300

Anderson sponsors a support group for those struggling with addiction and other crises, works with over 100 inmates each month, leads weekly Bible studies at homeless shelters and juvenile homes, and helps with daily struggles.

One juvenile home resident who committed several serious crimes and knew little about God attended Anderson's Bible study. After moving to another facility he wrote: "I would be happy to do some of the Bible study guides. But I'm going to wait because right now I'm in the middle of Genesis. I plan on reading the entire Bible slowly but surely. Every night I read a chapter or two. As of now, I do not just believe in God. I have a relationship with him. Every day he's walking right there beside me."

Ministry: Northside Lutheran Ministries

Purpose: Spread the gospel through social ministry

Began in: 1987

Resources provided by: WELS Kingdom Workers, donors, and volunteers

Program coordinator: Pastor William C. Kirchner, 414/933-9700

In the past two years, Kirchner, seminary students, and volunteers have provided an inner-city community in Milwaukee with Bible studies, food, clothing, and counseling. Over 600 people attended Bible studies during this time.

Kirchner comments: "Many people live in despair and hopelessness because of poverty. How they got there is irrelevant. What is relevant is that Jesus Christ died for them too. . . . Poverty, race, and culture are only circumstances we must be aware of in our attempts to bring the gospel to others. Many of the people I work with have the feeling God is punishing them already through their poverty and suffering. They feel it's only the beginning. Hell is next. They need to know they are loved and Jesus has prepared a place in heaven for them."

Tucson, Ariz., travel to Mexico twice a month to distribute food and clothing and have Sunday school and Bible class with over 1,000 children. Such ministries are examples of wonderful stewardship of our members' time and resources.

4. Ministry to the poor has results. It brings hope and is blessed

with the same success that comes from the preached Word everywhere. Sin doesn't disappear from any congregation, and not all the poor and homeless will become model citizens either. But many can become citizens of heaven.

The success stories are sometimes harder to find, at least in outward

terms. Backsliding occurs, just as in any other congregation. But the Calebs are there too. And it will only be at the heavenly banquet with the Lamb that we will know for sure the effects of our ministry.



Glen Thompson is the director of the WELS Multicultural Preseminary Program.



Mark A. Paustian

Something about the long row of nines makes us think about end times.

“Hey, kids! Look at this!”
The family car is a turquoise-green Chevy station wagon, and the odometer reads 099999. A hush falls over the backseat. We watch in stunned silence. You’d think we were seeing a man land on the moon. The long row of “nines” turns into a row of “zeroes.” Simple minds are easily amused. Even simpler minds talk about it 30 years later: the day the Chevy hit 100,000.

Earth — running out of time

And now something of the same fascination belongs to the whole world. The earth’s odometer has hit 001999. This is the year of hushed silence. Beneath the question, “Are our computers ready?” lies a deeper one: “Are we?”

Really, it’s all so arbitrary. The year 2000 is based on a miscalculation of Jesus’ birth. The actual moment—precisely 2,000 years after God landed on the straw in Bethlehem—came and went uncelebrated some time during, perhaps, 1995.

And yet, there is something about all those “nines” lined up across our new calendars, all those “zeroes” hiding somewhere out of sight. It’s palpable. You can feel it. We are closer all the time. “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7).

And our answer to folks who are alarmed and a little afraid, and who think that day, 01/01/00, might be *the Day*? Our answer is not, “No, it can’t be *that* day.” Our answer is, “It might be *this* one!”

More than that, our answer is, “Friend, the news is not bad. The news is good.” The Christian prediction that there is an end—a fixed moment toward which time is rushing—is not, for the Christian, a prediction of gloom.

Look closer, worldly friend. We’re smiling. We smile because some 2,000 years ago, give or take, God did come to this dark, doomed world. And what is really wrong with everything, including you and me—our sin, our shame, our death—just killed him.

But Jesus lives.

And he prepares a place.

And he prepares a moment.

And he prepares you. Through the faith you have in him, by the Spirit who works through the Word, you are prepared for the moment when everything begins again.

This time nothing goes wrong.

This time it’s forever.

Heaven — nothing but time

1999 to 2000. It’s going to take some getting used to, as it does every year. I’m still getting over the

weirdness of writing 1999 and the strangeness of being 37 and . . . what is this curiosity about us human creatures? We act perpetually surprised by the passing of time. Why should this be? Is a fish continually surprised at the wetness of water? Of course not. Water is all a fish knows. So what is this continual amazement about time but the hint of a great truth. We were made for something else. “(God) has also set eternity in the hearts of men . . .” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Michael Card sums up the human experience in one of his songs: “Bound for eternity, stranded in time, and weary of struggling with sin.” But not for long. We are forgiven, and “we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

It will happen just that quickly—that’s all the time it will take for a long row of weary “nines” to become “zero death, zero mourning, zero crying, zero pain.” Maybe next year. Maybe this one. “How my heart years within me!” (Job 19:27).

Mark Paustian is pastor at New Life, Rockford, Illinois.



It's a slug's life

David H. Birsching

Would you be willing to become a slug to save the entire slug race?

Think for a minute about the lowly slug. In the Pacific Northwest, we have a preponderance of the slimy beasts, officially known as pulmonate gastropods. But no matter what we call it, a slug is still a slug, a loathsome little creature that hangs out in damp, dark places where reaching fingers can find it when least expected. It's still the critter that leaves slime trails wherever it goes—still ugly and disgusting. It's still a slug.

Man becoming a slug

I can't imagine anyone willing to become a slug. Who would exchange a human body—head, torso, arms, and legs—for the banana body of a slug? Who would trade advanced intelligence for a slug brain? Warm skin for cool slime? Walking for oozing? The ability to speak for silence? The love of light and dry for the love of darkness and dampness?

To a slug, it doesn't sound bad. It's not a big deal because being a slug is all a slug knows. But a human making such a change?

What if all slugs were doomed to eternal torture if a human did not become a slug and die in their place? Would that make the change more appealing? Would people line up to offer themselves on behalf of slugs? Even in this age of causes, it's hard to imagine anyone mount-

ing a campaign to save slugs. For the slug it would be vital, but how many humans would see it that way? How many people would honestly lament the demise of slugs?

God becoming human

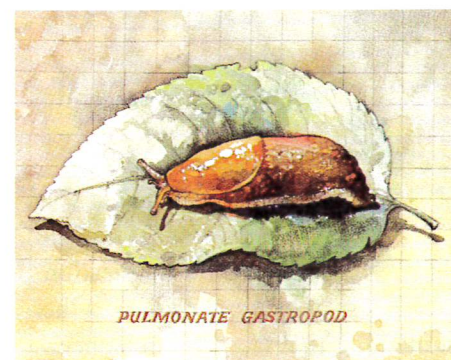
As we consider the immense change from human to slug, and our unwillingness to make such a change, perhaps we can appreciate more the magnitude of our Savior's love for us. For us, becoming a human is admirable and desirable. But think what that change meant to God.

As fond as we are of ourselves, to God there was nothing attractive about becoming a man.

Jesus exchanged his glory for the ordinary, his majesty for the mundane, his immortality for mortality. He traded omnipresence for solitary confinement in a baby's body, omnipotence for the limitations of a baby's body, omniscience for an infant's mind. Once the universe had been under his control, but now he would be dependent on a human mother and father. Although once the continual praise of angels surrounded him, now the ridicule of men would ring in his ears. He had lived in his holy, heavenly home, but now he would live in a world of sin.

As fond as we are of ourselves, to God there was nothing attractive about becoming a man. Besides the obvious human limitations, there

was something even more abhorrent. God knew we were covered in the slime of sin. We left our slimy trails of sin wherever we went. We slimed joyously in the darkness, always avoiding the light. From God's holy point of view, we deserved what we were headed for—eternal torture in hell.



That, however, was unacceptable to our gracious God. He insisted on being born as a baby in a stable—born specifically to die—to save sinful people. As his tiny back rested in the feeding trough, so one day his bleeding back would rest against the cross.

That is the incomprehensible love of Christ. He came to save something that, from his point of view, was worse than a slug. Jesus set out to save sinners. He considered us precious, but not because of anything in us, for we are utterly contemptible to God. He considered us precious because of his own incredible, incomprehensible love.

Become a slug? No way! But, thanks be to God, Jesus didn't look at it that way!



David Birsching is pastor at St. Paul, Tacoma, Washington.

WOMEN DISCOVER EMPTY TOMB, SEE JESUS



Inconsistent gospel accounts

What may seem like contradictions at first are simply different ways of reporting the same event.

Forrest L. Bivens and John D. Schuetze

“**W**hen did the doubts begin?” Jim and Joan wondered. When did their son, David, begin to question the accuracy of the Bible? Was there something that triggered his uncertainty? Or was it something that gradually happened over time?

When David was home from college for a weekend, they asked him.

Certainly his doubts didn’t arise overnight, but he recalled the previous Easter. “Do you remember we went to the sunrise service? And then after breakfast we stayed for the other service?” David began.

Each [Gospel] writer used his own style and vocabulary and listed what he felt was important in the account.

Jim and Joan nodded and waited for him to continue.

“In each service the pastor read a different version of the Easter accounts. It struck me that they did

not agree. I’ve spent some time comparing the four gospel accounts. From what I can tell, there seem to be some clear contradictions.”

“In what way?” his parents asked in a patient yet curious manner.

“What about the number of women who went to the tomb?”

David said, reaching for his Bible. “It says here in Matthew 28 that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. If you turn to Mark 16 it lists three women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. This only begins the confusion. Luke mentions Johanna as well as some other women while John only speaks about Mary Magdalene. None of the accounts agree which women—or how many—were at the empty tomb.”

“David, do you remember the story about the president that we watched before supper on the evening news?” Jim asked after a brief pause. “Who did it say was traveling to Europe for the meeting?”

“It showed both the president and his wife boarding Air Force One.

I assume both of them were making the trip.” David responded.

Picking up the morning paper Jim continued, “That’s right, but here on the front page of the newspaper it reads, ‘President Departs for World Meeting.’ It doesn’t say anything about his wife going with him. Do you see what I’m driving at? Just because a reporter doesn’t mention other people doesn’t mean they weren’t there. In fact, it’s natural for people to describe the same event in different ways.

“That’s what we have with the Easter account. What may seem like contradictions at first are simply different ways of reporting the same event. Just look at the account from John 20. Mary Magdalene is the only woman mentioned, yet in verse two she says, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!’ The ‘we’ seems to indicate that she came with other women even though they are not mentioned. Since John wrote his gospel later, he may have assumed that his readers were familiar with the other accounts. They would understand that other women

MARY SEES JESUS AT TOMB

were also at the empty tomb. But because he was focusing on Mary's encounter with the risen Lord, he only speaks about her going to the empty tomb."

"I can understand what you are saying, but the number of women at the empty tomb isn't the only discrepancy with the Easter accounts," David added.

"What about the time when they came to the tomb?"

David asked. "Mark says they came just after sunrise. John says they went while it was still dark."

"I agree that this may seem like a contradiction. But can you think of a way to resolve this apparent problem?" Jim asked.

David thought for a moment. Sitting up in his chair he said, "I guess it's like when I would have to get up early to catch the bus for high school. When I got on the bus it was dark, but by the time I got to school it was light. It could be a matter of perspective."

"So you see there are often ways we can overcome these difficulties if we think about it," Jim replied, pleased with his son's answer.

"But what about the number of angels at the empty tomb?"

David continued before Jim could get too comfortable. "Matthew and Mark only speak about one angel

although Luke and John say there were two. That's seems like a clear contradiction."

"Wouldn't that be the same as the confusion regarding the number of women?" said Joan. "Just because a writer only speaks about one angel doesn't mean there weren't others. Last summer when we were fishing at the cabin you caught several fish. But you told your friends only about the large walleye you landed. You didn't refer to the others because they weren't important to your story."

"David, let me ask you a question." Jim said, trying to remember the exact wording his pastor had used. "Can't we find a certain comfort when seeming contradictions in the Bible are cited?"

"What do you mean?" David asked with a confused look on his face.

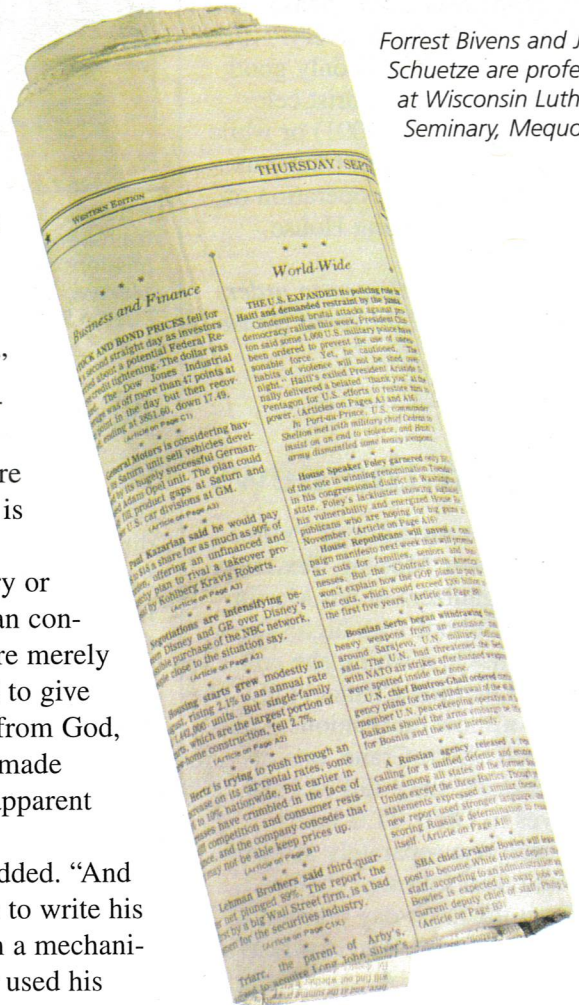
"The fact that there are apparent contradictions is itself an evidence that Scripture is not a forgery or the result of some human conspiracy. If the Bible were merely a human book designed to give the impression it came from God, the writers would have made strong efforts to avoid apparent inconsistencies."

"That's right," Joan added. "And when God inspired men to write his Word, he didn't do so in a mechanical fashion. Each writer used his

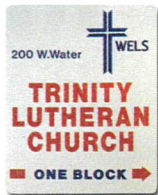
own style and vocabulary and listed what he felt was important in the account. We can see this with the Easter accounts."

David conceded. "You've made some good points. I've never thought about it that way. I'll think about it some more. Well, it's almost seven, and I promised my friends I would meet them at the gym in a few minutes. Thanks for the talk, but let's talk again. I have some more questions about what I see as contradictions in the Bible."

Forrest Bivens and John Schuetze are professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.



Helping the lost find their way



Tired of people getting lost trying to find your church? Want an easy way to direct them?

Tell them to look for a church sign that has your church's address and directions to help them find it.

And we'll help by providing two signs for a quarter of the normal cost. One is FREE—an \$80 value—to the first 815 customers. The second is \$36.48 (half price, originally \$72.95), as are other extras.

Check out the details:

- All new, highly visible design, including the WELS logo.
- Size: 24" x 30"
- Shipping costs extra. Please allow three weeks for delivery.

Act now! This offer is only good during the Forward in Christ celebration (until July 31, 2001) or while supplies last. A gift from Lutheran Brotherhood and the cooperation of Northwestern Publishing House made this possible.

For more information or to order, call Northwestern Publishing House at 1-800-662-6093 ext. 7.

World missionaries share ideas

Fifty missionaries from 18 different countries attended the World Missionary Seminary Conference at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon in August.

The conference's purpose? To gather people involved with pastor training programs from around the world "to share ideas, techniques, and insights about new materials and training methods they've developed," said Walter Westphal, associate administrator of world missions.

Participants attended presentations on the translating of theological materials, curriculum for pre-seminary training, teaching a transferable evangelism technique, the faculty exchange program, and the world mission collection.

"As new missions develop, there is always a need to develop new programs," said Westphal. "We don't want to reinvent the wheel. We want to learn from what others have done and share new ideas."



Attendees at the World Mission Seminary Conference. These men work hard to train people all over the world to be pastors. Over 200 people in WELS world missions are studying to be national pastors and evangelists in countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Bulgaria, Albania, Russia, Japan, Sweden, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Mexico, India, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Apacheland in Arizona.

News to you

Did you know that information you find on the WELS Web site can be directly e-mailed to your home? Some people already know. Here's how many have subscribed so far:

- Call Report—1,258**
- Nomination Alert—248**
- Devoted to Christ E-devotions—989**
- Homenet (WELS/ELS home-schooling families)—109**

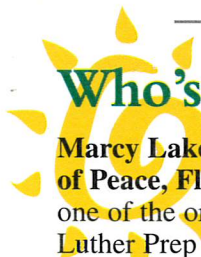
A new list server was added to the above in August. YTHINK offers a forum for WELS members who serve or are interested in ministry to teenagers. Besides getting advice from others, you will receive a

monthly youth ministry newsletter from Jerry Kastens, youth discipleship administrator, containing encouragement, resources, research, and news. YTHINK already has 119 subscribers.

For more information, go to <www.wels.net>.

Did you know?

This year, 705 teacher call lists were processed synodwide. The previous high was 650.



Who's in the news

Marcy Lake, a member of Prince of Peace, Flower Mound, Tex., was one of the organizers of her Martin Luther Prep School 10th high school class reunion. On a whim, she contacted The Learning Channel (TLC), which airs a show on reunions. Lake had not seen Sherri Crane, one of her best friends, since fall of 1989. Crane lives in Ohio. TLC interviewed each one separately at their homes and then followed them throughout the three-day reunion at Luther Prep School, Watertown, Wis. The show aired Nov. 4.

Name change—AGAIN?

Since *Northwestern Lutheran* has changed its cover masthead to *Forward** in recognition of the Forward in Christ anniversary celebration, we have heard many favorable comments but also learned of some confusion caused by the change.

We apologize, therefore, that another change has become necessary. We learned recently that another periodical has had the name *Forward* for many years, and we have decided to change at their request.

To continue what we have begun, we intend to use the full theme, Forward in Christ, on our masthead

for the duration of the anniversary celebration. Watch for that change in February.

The question is asked: "Is this change permanent?" The answer is that it is part of the Forward in Christ two-year celebration. However, because a large majority of the people we have heard from favors a change, we will address that question further during this period.

Thanks to all our readers for your understanding.

* We have retained *Northwestern Lutheran* for the time and identify ourselves as *Forward/Northwestern Lutheran*. We will continue to use that combined name during the anniversary.

WELS pastor receives U.S. citizenship

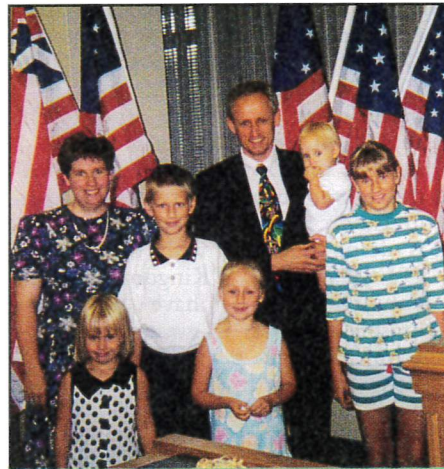
It was a long, long wait—a 20-year wait. But finally, on Aug. 27, Winfried Schroeder was sworn in as a U.S. citizen. Schroeder is pastor at St. Paul, Roscoe, and St. John, Bowdle, both in S.D.

Schroeder came from South Africa in 1976 when he enrolled at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis. He graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, in 1984. After graduation, he returned to South Africa for a year.

When he returned to the United States in 1985, he was assigned to St. Luke, Vassar, Mich., where he met his future wife, Carol. In 1986, they moved to Montana where he served Good Shepherd, Wolf Point, and Salem, Circle.

He had already begun the citizenship process. However, in 1990, that ended when Schroeder accepted a call to serve at St. John, Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada.

In 1995 when the Schroeders moved to South Dakota, they started over with the paperwork. Schroeder received word in July 1998 that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) would act on his application within the next 365 days. It took over one



Pastor Winfried Schroeder became a U.S. citizen in August. He celebrated with his wife, Carol, and children (from left) Anna, Ben, Becky, Elizabeth (held), and Emily.

year, but finally he reached his goal when he was sworn in.

"Becoming an American is a big deal," he says. "People do not always appreciate the blessings they enjoy in this country, such as freedom of speech, freedom to assemble, and freedom of religion."

"It's been a long wait, but this is very exciting," he continues. "Now I can vote."

Ukrainian choir visits

An over 20-voice choir from the Ukraine toured and sang at WELS churches and schools in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana from Sept. 25-Oct. 17.

The Ukrainian Lutheran Church choir, consisting of members from four Ukrainian churches, presented an over two-hour concert with sacred music, solos and instrumentalists, and Ukrainian folk music.

The Ukrainian Lutheran Church, organized in 1993 with two congregations, has grown to 13 congregations with over 2,000 members. It is a mission of Thoughts of Faith, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod organization dedicated to spreading the gospel to Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and other Eastern European countries.

WELS briefs

These updates are from the offices at the synod administration building. You can contact this office and administrator at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Special ministries

The **Special Education Services Committee is promoting Accessibility 2000**—an effort to contact all WELS congregations and help them make all churches accessible to those with vision and hearing problems, mental retardation, and mental illnesses. For more information contact Bruce Cuppan, 920/922-8672; <bncuppan@excel.net>

On Oct. 16, the **Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MDHH) held its second Advocate Workshop**. The one-day event helped attendees involve deaf and hard of hearing people in the church and community.



District news

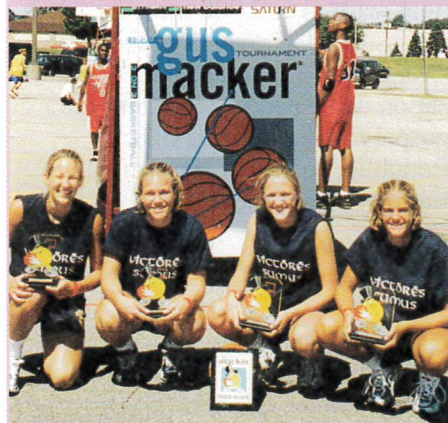
Northern Wisconsin

With a view of Rib Mountain in the background, **Mountain of the Lord, Rib Mountain, Wis.**, dedicated its first church on Sept. 12. The afternoon service drew 375 people to this 5,000 square foot building, which was built by Builders For Christ.

Nebraska

Crown of Life, Pueblo West, Colo., had its first worship service on Sept. 26. **Christ the Solid Rock, Clifton, Colo.**, had its first worship service in October.

Western Wisconsin



Victores Sumus, a group of four Tertianers (seniors) from Luther Prep School, won the Sportsmanship Award for their age group at the Gus Macker 3 on 3 basketball tournament on Aug. 28-29 in La Crosse, Wis. The team consisted of Melissa Ehlke (Watertown, Wis.), Holly Hartmann (Eagle River, Wis.), Tami Schmidt (Kenai, Alaska), and Rachel Carey (La Crosse, Wis.). They even made the Saturday evening news. Approximately 200 teams participated in the tournament that represented five states, including youth to adult, both male and female.

Pacific Northwest

Members at Faith, Tacoma, Wash., are reaching out into nearby South Hill, Wash. They canvassed 1,500 homes and on Oct. 10 began satellite worship at an elementary school in South Hill. This effort helps Faith with its overcrowding problem and helps them better serve members and the growing population in South Hill. They worked with the Board for Home Missions and the District Mission Board for ideas and some funding.

South Atlantic

Risen Savior, Navarre, Fla., will dedicate its new 4,500 square foot worship and education facility on Jan. 16, 2000. Outreach work in the area started about five years ago. The congregation numbers about 65 souls.

North Atlantic

Shepherd of the Bay relocated from Leonardtown, Md., and is meeting at Dowell Elementary School in Calvert County. The new building offers a fresh setting in an area close to the center of the population. Oct. 3 marked the first meeting, and attendance was up by one-third. The congregation, which numbers around 40, is doing outreach with the help of OWLS and WELS Kingdom Workers volunteers. They have over 500 prospects. There is great potential—about 75 people per week move into a 10-mile radius. In summer, the church held three one-day vacation Bible schools. Fifty-seven students participated—most of whom were unchurched. This fall, they had booths at local county fairs, getting close to 100 additional prospects.

Messiah, South Windsor, Conn., participated in the town's "Wapping Fair" as an outreach project. The fair, which has happened annually for over 100 years, includes a midway, contests, and food booths. With attendance nearing 10,000, it provided an excellent venue to inform the community of the church and of their Savior.

The congregation set up a large booth offering face painting and a free book raffle. Literature about the church, pens, yardsticks, coloring books, and balloons were distributed. The congregation distributed 1,000 balloons, 500 pens, 400 children's bags of coloring books and information, and

received over 200 prospects through the raffle. Two individuals are in pastoral counseling as a result of contacts made at the fair.

Southeastern Wisconsin

St. Lucas, Milwaukee, dedicated its school on Sept. 19.

The Southeastern Wisconsin District is **considering realigning its conferences**. The committee has met and has an initial proposal.

"**Clergy Talks**," in which members of the synod's praesidium meet with all WELS pastors, are finished in two conferences and are scheduled in three of the other four.

Pastor Martin Schulz replaced Pastor Paul Eckert as chairman of the **transition assistance team**. The team helps workers who have left the public ministry to identify resources (financial, job search, counseling, etc.) to help them make the change to other careers or move back into public ministry. The team does not do the actual training.

Minnesota



Ten people joined the Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., faculty for the 1999-2000 academic year. Back row left to right: Robert Potratz (music); Ronald Brutlag (admissions/recruitment); Mark Goeglein (religion/Spanish); Bart Brauer (tutor). Front row: Daniel Kuehl (English); Carla Melendy (education); Tammy Kuehl (adjunct instructor in early childhood education); Stephanie Hopf (admissions/recruitment); John Dolan (admissions/recruitment). Richard Ash (science) isn't pictured.

Happy anniversary!

NA—Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, celebrated its 25th anniversary on Oct. 2-3. Several other events were held throughout the year: reunion of past confirmation classes with a renewal of confirmation vows, a paper chain with the names of every person baptized at Abiding Word, and a mass renewal of wedding vows for every couple married at Abiding Word.

SEW—St. Matthew, Port Washington, Wis., celebrated its 20th anniversary on Nov. 7.

On Sept. 18, St. Mark, Brown Deer, Wis., celebrated the 26th anniversary of church organist **Janet Swanson**. Janet began serving when she was 14 years old.

Zum Kripplein Christi, Iron Ridge, Wis., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Aug. 8.

Salem, East Side, Milwaukee, observed its 110th anniversary on Sept. 12.

St. Paul, Grant Park, Ill., celebrated its 130th anniversary on Sept. 19.

On Oct. 10, **Lord and Savior, Crystal Lake, Ill.,** celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Trinity, Crete, Ill., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Oct. 31.

On Nov. 7, **St. Paul, East Troy, Wis.,** observed its 125th anniversary.

SA—Bay Pines Lutheran Church (40th) and School (25th), Seminole, Fla., celebrated twin anniversaries on Nov. 14.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Kevin Schultz; NE—Keith Petersen; NW—Joel Lillo; PNW—David Birsching; SA—Mark Haefner; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Elton Stroh.

Minnesota



At the Princess Kay of the Milky Way contest at the Minnesota State Fair, the three scholarship winners were WELS members. They are (from left) Michelle Damman, St. John, Glencoe; Renae Jorgens, Living Water, Dawson; and Leah Schliep, Christ, Zumbrota.

Outreach 2000: get set to witness

The Outreach 2000 campaign—a Forward in Christ anniversary invitation to Easter—is taking shape as we get closer to April 23. The goals are to increase national awareness of the WELS ministry and mission; to give witness to our Savior, Jesus Christ; and to extend a nationwide invitation to our Easter 2000 services.

At the center of the Outreach 2000 campaign is a TV spot. Two 30-second spots have been developed, one for young adults—Generation X; the other for adults ages 30-50—Boomers. Combined, these groups represent the largest segment of unchurched in North America.

The spot takes the approach of using personal witness from WELS Christians of various ages and cultural backgrounds. Each person shares a weakness or problem, and all share that, even with these weaknesses, there is the comfort and joy of knowing they are saved and forgiven through the love of Jesus Christ—and everyone else can have the same comfort. At the end of the spot they are assured by the Savior—"I am

with you always."

The spots will air on national cable and regional network television stations two weeks before Easter. Congregations may want to consider buying additional time on local network and cable stations. The spot may be able to run as a public service announcement (PSA). Contact your local cable company for more information.

Other media tools, which have the same look and feel as the television spot, support the television efforts.

Radio—The soundtrack of the television spot is being produced as a radio spot (possibly a PSA). Local radio stations will have more information. Master tapes are available from the Evangelism/Mass Media office. For congregations interested in radio, consider airing the spots during Holy Week.

Mini-billboard—Posted in front of local churches and other community areas, this mini-billboard, 4' by 8' in size, is an excellent and efficient way to extend an invitation to the community-at-large. A full-size

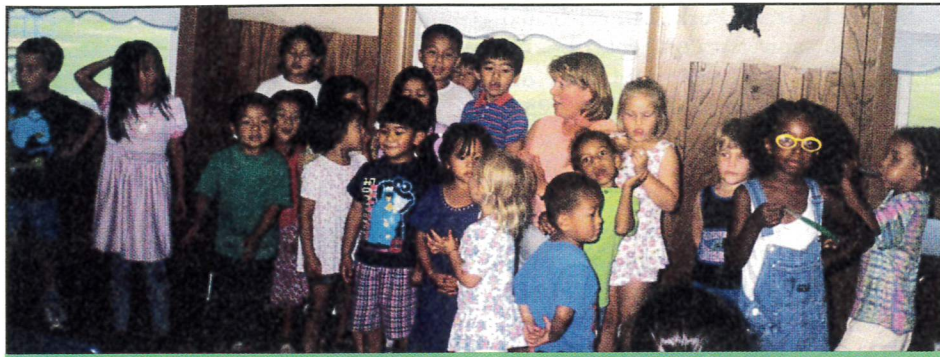
billboard will be created if there is enough interest.

Brochure—Two brochures are available for congregations to distribute to mission prospects, families of the church, and houses in the community. One brochure focuses on our Outreach 2000 efforts while the other highlights the WELS 150th anniversary celebration.

Invitation to Easter 2000—This invitation can be distributed to houses in your area and given to prospects, inviting them to celebrate Easter with you.

Public relations—A press release will be made available to all congregations. The release can then be distributed to local newspapers.

Materials for Outreach 2000 have been mailed to congregations. This includes an action plan for using the media and for inviting guests from your community to your Easter service. Contact the Committee on Evangelism, 414/256-3287; <evan@sab.wels.net>.



Vacation Bible school for Hmong children in La Crosse, Wis.

Reaching Hmong children

Three churches in the La Crosse, Wis., area—Grace, La Crosse; First, La Crosse; and St. Paul, Onalaska—have been holding vacation Bible school and Sunday school for Hmong and other children since 1998. They meet every Wednesday throughout the summer and every Sunday night the rest of the year at a low income housing development community center. A volunteer shares her experiences from summer 1999:

I had always dreamed of being a foreign missionary. This summer my dream finally came true. What is even better is that my daughter and parents joined me! We served the entire summer and still held down our jobs. No, we did not take a sabbatical. We helped with WELS outreach to the Hmong on the north side of La Crosse, Wis.

Although we had the comforts of home—no battling strange animals or adjusting to different foods or weather—we still experienced many of the same obstacles that our colleagues might encounter in foreign lands.

Most of the children spoke English, but many had a strong accent. Writing their names for attendance was an experience. Xai (zy), Kou (cow), Mai (my), Xong (zong), Pa Bre (pobbray), Mai Yia (my ye), Mai Kao (my cow), Kazoua (kazow), Chong (chong). I quickly learned that English phonetics don't translate into Hmong.

The preschoolers had little or no English ability. The craft time chatter was in Hmong, punctuated by an occasional English exclamation. (Hopefully, they were not joking about me!) They respectfully listened to Bible lessons. Many had experience with gardens and trees, so the Creation was fascinating. The miracle of Jesus calming the storm seemed to be reassuring. The loosening of the chains in prison was pretty amazing.

After "The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace," and carefully reciting Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, a 14-year-old girl asked if that was a true story. She wondered how these men could have survived the fire and been saved by angels. I said it was true, and that it was in the Bible, God's Word. She smiled politely. The Bible was a new book to her. I have to be confident in the Holy Spirit now, because my lowly attempts to convince felt pretty lame. The point the students did seem to grasp was how these three men were living in a strange land with a new culture, governed by a foreign leader, and forced to abide by other people's rules.

Xai, Xong, Chong, and the others will always have a special place in my heart. I pray that they have a special place for Jesus in their hearts!

Rebekah Carey

Asian Call—Two participants (below) at Asian Call '99, a special rally held for Asian students, scholars, and residents. Over 100 people—almost all ethnic Chinese—attended the rally, held Sept. 10-12 at St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.

Asian Call worked to bring Asians with some interest in Christianity to a higher understanding of God's plan of salvation. The rally, free to all participants, was done in cooperation with WELS Campus Ministry and was funded by the Schwan Foundation.

Rally organizers are still seeing results. Joel Lintner, pastor at Salem, Stillwater, Minn., and a rally organizer, writes:

The following week, several new people came to Bible study for the first time. One was "Lee." . . . He came with many questions. He had wanted to study the Bible since he was 12. In China, he said, all the "pastors" are Communist party members. He felt it was a waste of time to talk to them. He came to the United States and met a Chinese pastor in San Francisco. But that man only spoke Cantonese—the dialect of Hong Kong. For Lee, who spoke Mandarin, it might as well have been Swahili.

He was so happy at Asian Call to find people willing to share the Bible with him. When he asked how much it would cost in dollars, and I told him it was free, he was even more flabbergasted! Here was a man truly hungry and thirsting for righteousness.

A righteousness we can share.





Inter-Act

"The Word of God is living and active."—Hebrews 4:12

Introduction

"When it came time for God to hand out spiritual gifts, I must have been standing behind a post because I didn't get any." Does this remark reveal humility, ignorance—or perhaps blasphemy?

I. Text

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

III. Applications

1. How might a person use his or her spiritual gifts for selfish advantage?
2. If wisdom is the practical application of knowledge, give an example of when knowledge is necessary in a Christian congregation. Of when wisdom is necessary.
3. We no longer look for the gifts of healing or miracles in the same sense as they were found in the first century. In what way, however, does God still give the gift of healing? In what sense can saving faith in a person's heart be called a miracle?
4. Why is it important in the church to use words that people understand? How dignified should language be? Is there ever a place for common, everyday slang?
5. When it comes to spiritual gifts why is there no place for envy or boasting? How instead should we think of our own spiritual gifts and the gifts of others?
6. Take an inventory of the spiritual gifts God has given you. For what purpose has he given you each of these gifts?
7. How is each gift the Spirit gives connected to Christ and the cross?

Mark Lenz is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

II. Questions

1. Each believer has been given spiritual gifts. Of what is this evidence? For what purpose are these gifts given? See 1 Peter 4:10-11.
2. Why don't believers have the same gifts?
3. All Christians have saving faith, so this cannot be the kind of faith of which Paul is speaking. What kind of faith does he mean?
4. Why did God give Paul and other apostles the gift of healing? See Acts 19:1-22, especially 11,12.
5. "Miraculous powers" refers to powerful deeds that can't be explained by natural means. Name some of Jesus' miracles.
6. From these references, determine how the word "prophecy" may be understood:
 - a) Acts 11:28; 21:10-11
 - b) 1 Corinthians 14:29-30; Acts 13:1-2
 - c) 1 Corinthians 14:3.
 If prophecy is defined as a communication of the mind of God imparted to a believer by the Holy Spirit, how is it still found today? See Romans 10:17.
7. How can we distinguish prophecies that come from the Holy Spirit and those from evil spirits? See 1 John 4:1-6.
8. The Greek word translated as "tongues" also means "languages." In what kind of "tongues" did the apostles speak on the day of Pentecost? See Acts 2:4,6,11.
9. How many spiritual gifts can you think of in addition to those mentioned in the Scripture reading?
10. Who determines the number and kind of spiritual gifts each believer has?

IV. Prayer

Holy Spirit, you have given me and all my fellow believers spiritual gifts as you have determined. Keep me from envy or covetousness. Never allow me to be proud or boastful. Instead, fill my heart with gratitude. Cause all your gifts to be used for the common good, for the building up of believers in the faith, and for reaching others with the good news of forgiveness in Christ. Hear me for the sake of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

Top religion stories of millennium—*Religion & Ethics News Weekly* kicked off its third television season by citing the top 10 religion stories of the millennium. The selections were made in consultation with scholars and advisers. The list, in chronological order, highlights these top stories of the past 1,000 years:



1. The Great Schism of 1054, dividing Christianity into the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox branches.
2. The Crusades, 1095-1291.
3. Muslim expansion and conquest of India (1190-1200) and the reign of Islamic empires in the Middle East and parts of Europe.
4. Printing on movable type of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455.
5. Church patronage of the arts, and of universities and learning.
6. Martin Luther posts the 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, beginning the Reformation.
7. Colonialism and the Christian missionary period, responsible for the spread of Christian faith to North and South America, Africa, and Asia.
8. In 1620, English Puritans settle in Plymouth, Mass., the first of many immigrants seeking religious freedom. Religious freedom becomes the cornerstone of American democracy.
9. The ideas of 19th-century thinkers including Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud challenge traditional belief.
10. The ongoing anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews, culminating in the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel (1948).

Counselor arranges abortion for student—Howard and Marie Carter of Hatboro, Penn., have sued a pub-

lic school guidance counselor, charging he violated their constitutional rights by helping their minor daughter obtain an abortion.

The suit charges that school counselor William Hickey helped the student get in touch with the out-of-state abortion clinic, arranged for the necessary financing, and provided an excuse for her absence when the abortion was performed.

Pennsylvania law requires consent of a parent or a judicial exemption for a minor to undergo an abortion. New Jersey does not require parental consent.

"Hickey repeatedly emphasized . . . that going to New Jersey for the abortion would ensure that the abortion would remain secret from her parents," the complaint states. It further charges that Hickey responded to the teen's doubts by telling her "welcome to the adult world" and "someday you'll look back on this and laugh."

The parents are seeking a permanent injunction to prevent the school district's employees from counseling minors about abortion or pregnancy without obtaining written parental permission.

Presbyterians reject effort to ease gay ordination ban—The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has called for a two-year study on a controversial rule that many see as effectively barring the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians.

The rule was added to the church's Book of Order last year requiring the church's pastors, elders, and deacons to live lives of "fidelity within the covenant of marriage" and "chastity in singleness."

Debate on whether to ordain gays and lesbians has embroiled members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for years. The final vote, 319-198, reflected the depth of division on the issue within the 3.6 million-member denomination.

Appeals court sets aside graduation prayer decision—One ruling declared that a Florida school system's policy permitting students to include prayers in graduation messages was unconstitutional. Now, an appellate court has set aside that ruling.

The policy permitted seniors to vote on a graduation message that would be delivered by a student. The messages, which often include prayers, cannot be censored by school officials.

The decision, made by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in June, means that the full court will rehear the case.

Abortion rate plummets—In South Dakota, the abortion rates plunged 26 percent in 1998. Since 1983 there has been a 60 percent decline in abortions. In 1983, 1,693 abortions were performed in South Dakota compared to 674 in 1998.

[South Dakota Life Facts, reprinted in WELS Lutherans for Life's Life Wire]

Widespread interest in experiencing spiritual growth—When 502 teens were asked "Do you feel the need in your life to experience spiritual growth?", a remarkable two in three (67 percent) said yes, with this desire most pronounced among blacks and Protestants.

An even higher percentage (82 percent) of adults, 18 and older, expressed the same desire. This figure represents a sharp increase over 1994 when a *Newsweek* survey reported the results were 58 percent.

[*Emerging Trends*, December 1998]

Most news reported in this section is derived from Religion News Service. Items do not necessarily reflect the views of WELS or Forward/NL.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Clement, Arthur J.**, to Ann Arbor, Mich.
- Cordes, Chris A.**, to Colombia mission coordinator, Phoenix, Ariz.
- Dorn, Steven P.**, to Beautiful Savior, El Paso, Tex.
- Eckert, David M.**, to Trinity, Rollingstone, Minn.
- Fink, Randel R.**, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
- Hanson, Virgil E. Jr.**, to Mt. Calvary, Kimberly, Wis.
- Kant, William R.**, to Good Shepherd, Vallejo, Calif.
- Liesener, Thomas A.**, to Christ, Juneau, Alaska
- Lintner, Joel W.**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.
- Marks, Harry W. Jr.**, to retirement
- Schleicher, Richard H.**, to Prince of Peace, Flower Mound, Tex.
- Schmugge, Karl M.**, to MLS, Saginaw, Mich.
- Schwark, James W.**, to Alpine, Alpine, Calif.
- Strackbein, Philip B.**, to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
- Zahn, David M.**, to Zion, Peshtigo, Wis.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 1999 lock box offerings will be credited as 1999 receipts through **Jan. 10, 2000**, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as "December" offerings on the remittance coupon. We ask that you continue to mail your offerings to the lock box. That location, our bank, will provide you with the fastest deposit process for your congregation.

Mark Meissner, director of finance

The synod administration building will close: Dec. 23-24—Christmas; Dec. 31 & Jan. 3—New Year's. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Ottawa, Ontario, Canada**—St. Paul (125). Dec. 31. Service, 7:30 PM; reception follows. 613/234-0321.
- Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.**—St. Paul (100). Jan. 9, 2000. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM; meal follows late service. 715/421-3634.
- Spring Hill, Fla.**—Grace (25). Jan. 9, 2000. Service, 4 PM; dinner follows. 352/688-1057.
- Fond du Lac, Wis.**—Winnebago Lutheran Academy (75). Feb. 6, 2000. Service, 3:30 PM. 920/921-4930.

COMING EVENTS

- Regional campus rallies**—Dec. 27-29 Baton Rouge, La.
Mar. 3-5, 2000 Philadelphia, Penn.
Mar. 17-19, 2000 Columbia, Mo.
Mar. 24-26, 2000 Stevens Point, Wis.
Apr. 14-16, 2000 Tempe, Ariz.
Karen Marshall, 414/256-3279; <usr20@sab.wels.net>
- Ladies' retreat**—WELS/ELS. Jan. 7-9, 2000. Montverde, Fla. Topic: How and why to pray. Cost: \$100. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591.
- Christian Women Today retreat**—Mar. 24-26, 2000. Olympia Resort & Spa, Oconomowoc, Wis. Kathi, 414/521-1159.

OWLS tour—The Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors is sponsoring a tour to Arizona, New Mexico, and the Apache mission. Departs Feb. 7, 2000. Cost: \$1,300. Rev. H. Kaesmeyer, 517/652-8772.

Martin Luther College Choir Tour

- Feb. 25—St. Peter, St. Peter, Minn., 7:30 PM
- Feb. 26—Eastside, Madison, Wis., 6:30 PM
- Feb. 27—Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis., 8:30 & 11 AM
- Feb. 27—St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis., 7:30 PM
- Feb. 28—Immanuel, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., 7 PM
- Feb. 29—Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich., 7:30 PM
- Mar. 1—Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., 10:09 AM
- Mar. 1—St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich., 7:30 PM
- Mar. 2—Michigan LHS, St. Joseph, Mich., 2 PM
- Mar. 2—St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich., 7 PM
- Mar. 3—Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis., 2 PM
- Mar. 3—Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis., 7:30 PM
- Mar. 19—St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn., 7:30 PM

WELS handbell festivals—

- Northeast region, Apr. 1-2, 2000
- Southeast region, Apr. 1-2, 2000
- Western region, Apr. 8-9, 2000
- Michigan region, Apr. 8-9, 2000
- Cheryl Diener, 715/258-7203.

Spiritual renewal weekend for women—Mar. 31-April 2, 2000. Rochester, Minn. Deb, 507/931-3383.

Today's Christian Women retreat—Apr. 7-9, 2000. Lansing Sheraton Hotel, Lansing, Mich. 248/391-1133.

China study tour—The history and geography of China. June 16-July 5, 2000. Registration deadline, March 2000. Limited enrollment. Prof. Earl Heidtke, 507/359-9774; <heidtker@mlc-wels.edu>

AVAILABLE

- Basketball scoreboard**—used. Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis. David Nell, 920/921-4020.
- Organ**—Seeburg. Complete pedal board, rhythm section, full variety of stops, 2 manuals. 414/571-4224.
- Parameters**—green, purple. Jehovah, Altura, Minn. Beverly Nelson, 507/796-6421.
- Candleholders**—spring-loaded. 14 with 10-inch cylinder, 1-inch base. 13 with 12-inch cylinder, 1.5 inch base. Christ, Marshall, Minn. 507/532-2162.
- Pews**—nine 10 1/2 ft. long. Light finish. Free for the cost of shipping. The Lutheran Home: Belle Plaine. John Zeitler, 1-800-600-TLHA.
- Photographs**—depicting flood, earthquake, volcano, or other natural disaster to illustrate a Bible study on end times. Must not violate copyrights. Robert Smith, <rsmith@mitec.net>.
- School equipment**—21 school desks with chairs attached. 2 chalkboards: 1 small, 1 large. All in good condition. Free for the cost of shipping. Our Savior, Grafton, Wis. Allison Wolf, 414/377-5588.

SERVICE TIMES

- Safford, Ariz.**—Grace. Sunday, 10:30 AM. Bible class, 9:45 AM. Paul Schulz, 520/428-7620.
- Yuma, Ariz.**—Prince of Peace. Sunday, 8:15 & 10:45 AM. Bible class & Sunday school, 9:45 AM. Alan Gumm, 520/726-8716.
- Benson, Ariz.**—Bethlehem. Sunday, 8 AM. Steven Spencer, 520/458-5897.

NAMES WANTED

- Charlottesville, Va.**—Grace. Services held occasionally. Kevin Wattles or Walter Beckmann, 703/534-1719.
- Rapid City, S.D.**—Abiding Word. David Maertz, 605/399-1479.
- Champaign/Urbana, Ill.**—Star of Bethlehem. Tim Glende, 217/384-8920.
- Vacaville, Calif.**—Vacaville, Fairfield, Travis AFB area. Scott J. Stone, 707/455-7575.
- Mobile, Ala.**—Living Word. Mobile and Gulf Shores, Ala. and Biloxi, Miss. area. Larry Simpson, 334/342-4048.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Controller—Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn. Send resume by Dec. 1 to Paul B. Tweit, Administrative Vice President, Bethany Lutheran College, 700 Luther Dr, Mankato MN 56001-6163.

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210; FAX, 414/256-3899; <usr73@sab.wels.net>. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

January 2000

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. 1 John 1:1–2:2 | 16. Is. 50:4–51:16 |
| 2. 1 Jn. 2:3-27 | 17. Is. 51:17–52:12 |
| 3. 1 Jn. 2:28–3:10 | 18. Is. 52:13–53:12 |
| 4. 1 Jn. 3:11–4:6 | 19. Is. 54 |
| 5. 1 Jn. 4:7–5:3 | 20. Is. 55 |
| 6. 1 Jn. 5:4-21 | 21. Is. 56, 57 |
| 7. 2 John, 3 John | 22. Is. 58 |
| 8. Isaiah 40 | 23. Is. 59 |
| 9. Is. 41 | 24. Is. 60 |
| 10. Is. 42:1–43:13 | 25. Is. 61:1–63:6 |
| 11. Is. 43:14–44:23 | 26. Is. 63:7–64:12 |
| 12. Is. 44:24–45:25 | 27. Is. 65 |
| 13. Is. 46, 47 | 28. Is. 66 |
| 14. Is. 48 | 29. Matthew 1 |
| 15. Is. 49:1–50:3 | 30. Matt. 2 |
| | 31. Matt. 3 |

May the name of the Lord be praised

When you meet with adversity, don't fixate on the difficulty you are facing. Look to the Savior God.

Jon D. Buchholz

Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:20,21).

"Praise the Lord!" Isn't it easy to say those words when things are going well? Now it's easy for me to praise God. Today was a beautiful sunny day in the Pacific Northwest. I'm writing this after a delicious supper. I'm in good health. My children are safely tucked away in their cozy beds. I feel happy and truly blessed. Life is good. "Praise the Lord!" Easy words to say.

But what if God took it all away? What if he chose to exchange my full stomach for the pangs of starvation? What if I were stretched out on a hospital gurney, looking into the eyes of the anesthesiologist prepping me for surgery? What if I were standing by a six-foot hole watching the casket of a loved one being lowered into the earth? What if happiness were replaced by clinical depression, prosperity with poverty, safety with peril? Could I still praise the Lord? Could you?

Destitute

Job had it all taken away. Everything! One moment Job was the happiest, most prosperous man in the region. In the next few moments—as each of four messengers

brought a more devastating report than the last—Job found himself stripped of everything he held dear. His wealth, his livelihood, his treasured children were gone in a heartbeat, snatched away by demonic cruelty. Job was destitute.

What was the response of this God-fearing man who had lost everything? He was not bitter. He did not ask, "Why?" He did not indict God for his misfortune. Instead, Job praised God! He responded in humble words of adoration as he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Notice that Job did not persevere by digging deep inside himself for the inner strength to cope. Even as he mourned his loss, his immediate response was to look outside of himself. He fixed his eyes upon the object of his faith—the Lord his faithful God. He cast off despair by lifting his heart to glorify his Redeemer with a song of praise.

Praising

Could you and I respond as Job did? Honestly, I don't know. I haven't been

tested as Job was, and I pray that I never will. But that's when we find out what our faith is made of, isn't it—when we're put to the test? Two people might endure the same affliction. One screams, "Why me?" and becomes embittered toward God. The other glorifies God and responds, "Thank you, gracious Lord! Thank you for using tough times to strengthen me. May the name of the Lord be praised!"

Sooner or later my faith will be tested. So will yours. That's a guarantee. When you meet with adversity, don't fixate on the difficulty you are facing. Look to the Savior God who refines your faith in the fiery crucible of testing.

He uses suffering to produce perseverance. He develops your character and increases your hope. Even in your darkest hour, his faithful love will never leave you.

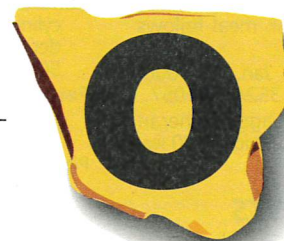
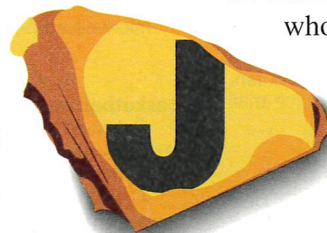
Praise the Lord!

Jon Buchholz is pastor at Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Washington, and teaches at Evergreen Lutheran High School.

For further study:

Read Job 3

Next month: With friends like these . . .



Colorblind at Christmas

Christmas is a colorful season. Brightly colored lights trim whole houses. Strings of colored lights adorn many a Christmas tree. I find that a many-colored tree adds to the festiveness of the season. So it would be hard for me if I were colorblind at Christmas.

Being colorblind at any season of the year can't be easy. A colorblind friend of mine who travels frequently has his wife pack his suitcase, labeling which suits and shirts and ties go together. To lose those notes could be inconvenient, maybe even embarrassing. But, it seems to me, to be colorblind at Christmas has to be a special handicap.

Being colorblind at Christmas can be a beneficial condition, however, when it comes to how we view people. People, by God's choice, are not all the same color. Growing up more than five decades ago in a small Midwestern town, I naively thought everyone had been made the same color. But today, almost anywhere in our land, we can see a great deal of different colors. We are not all alike outwardly, physically.

These differences, do they really make any difference? Not as God sees them, they don't! When it comes to outward appearances, God, as he means for us to be, is colorblind. Different races, different nationalities, mean nothing to him. God even showed he was colorblind at the first Christmas.

Gentile Magi, along with Jewish shepherds, came to worship the Christ Child. To the Jewish Shepherds, the heavenly angels proclaimed: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." The Gentile Magi heard an Old Testament prophecy repeated: "Out of you will come

a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel." Each heard, whatever their nationality, that they would not be alone in enjoying the eternal benefits the Savior brings. As Simeon was to say in describing the infant Redeemer: "A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). In other words, God is colorblind.

Although it may not be good to be physically colorblind at Christmas, spiritually it's a blessing. For, spiritually, it teaches us the important lesson from Paul in Romans 3:22-24: "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Being colorblind is only a small physical defect; being sinners from birth is fatal. So thank God he was colorblind. Regardless of our color, in his Son, Jesus, God has redeemed us all. This Christmas, then, just like God at the first Christmas, let's become more and more colorblind. All together let us share the Savior with everyone, whatever their nationality or race, as we move forward in Christ.



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

Being colorblind at Christmas can be a beneficial condition when it comes to how we view people.

Origins of earth and people

John F. Brug

Where do the different races come from?

We don't know specifically except to say that all peoples are descended from Noah's three sons. The descendants of Japheth are largely inhabitants of Europe and western Asia. The descendants of Shem are peoples of the Middle East. The descendants of Ham include peoples of northern Africa and perhaps other Africans. There is no clear identification of Oriental peoples with any of these groups.

Although the Bible recognizes the obvious divisions of mankind into groups that are distinguished by homeland, language, and appearance (Genesis 10), it does not deal with the concept of distinct races. It recognizes one race, the human race, which descended from Adam (Acts 17:26). This one race is united by two factors: all share the same sin and the same Savior.

The lines between "races" are blurry. For example, it is by no means clear that all dark-skinned people are descended from Ham. Some dark-skinned people of India are classified as Caucasian. Peoples classified as "European" differ considerably in skin color, which generally is arranged along a spectrum from south to north. Many of today's ethnic groups are a result of mixing and blending from earlier groups.

We do not know what any of Noah's sons looked like, so we

cannot say to what degree the beginnings of racial diversity were reflected already in their appearance. We do know that the diversification of humanity into different linguistic groups was not simply the result of gradual, natural development. God intervened at the Tower of Babel and dramatically accelerated the breakup of mankind into different language groups. It seems likely that he did the same with "racial" differentiation, since there does not seem to have been sufficient time for this to happen as a slow, purely natural process. Since the scattering from Babel, racial and linguistic groups have continued to develop, diverge, and combine, yielding all the diversity that we see within the human race today.

Today's racial diversity is a result of the development of the genetic potential that God placed in Adam and Eve at creation, perhaps with special intervention or direction by God's providence after the Flood.

Since the Bible gives no specific information about this process, any explanations we offer are only speculation.

Is there any reference in the Bible that tells us or gives us an idea of how old the earth is?

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how old the earth is. Various Bible references compared with what we know from other historical sources make it relatively easy to set dates from the life of Abraham on.

The genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 provide some information for the

times before Abraham. The Anglican Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656) determined that the world was created about 4000 BC by adding together the age of each person in the genealogies of Genesis when that person "became the father of" the next person in the genealogy.

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how old the earth is.

The problem with attempting to arrive at an exact date using this system is that the Hebrew expression that is translated most often into English as "became the father of" does not necessarily imply a direct father/son relationship. The expression can mean "became the ancestor of." In other words it can imply a grandfather/grandson relationship or a great-grandfather/great-grandson relationship. These genealogies were intended to trace the line of the human ancestry of our Savior rather than provide us with an exact chronology.

Nevertheless, the Bible presents creation as relatively recent. An age of not less than 6,000 years and not more than about 12,000 years fits with the biblical presentation. An age of millions or billions of years does not.

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

Send questions to your question, please,
Forward/NL, 2929 N Mayfair Rd,
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.
<nl@sab.wels.net>



Picture this

In 1969 Pastor T. Paul Mitra became the first pastor in India with whom WELS worked. Mitra uses his violin as a tool in evangelism. The children in particular like to hear him play.

Photo submitted by Lynn Wiedmann, friendly counselor to India.

For more information about our India mission and what it encounters, see p. 10.

Share your picture of Christian fellowship, worship, and faith. On a separate sheet, tell us why you took it, who is in it, what it means to you. Include your name, address, and phone number. Those whose photos get printed will receive a small gift. Picture this, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Among the influences listed that help create a climate of violence among teenagers: Spiritual Vacuum.

Only 13 percent of teens say people their age are influenced a "great deal" by religion. Twice as many turn to themselves to answer the problems of life as turn to God.

(Emerging Trends, May 1999)

If 99.9 percent is good enough, then . . .

- 22,000 checks will be deducted from the wrong bank accounts in the next 60 minutes.
- 12 babies will be given to the wrong parents each day.
- 268,500 defective tires will be shipped this year.
- 103,260 income tax returns will be processed incorrectly this year.
- 18,322 pieces of mail will be mishandled in the next hour.
- 20,000 incorrect drug prescriptions will be written in the next 12 months.
- 107 incorrect medical procedures will be performed by the end of the day today.
- 315 entries in Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language will be misspelled.

(InSight, Syncrude Canada Ltd., Communications Division Communicator)

Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."



What, me worry?

An average person's anxiety is focused on . . .

- 40 percent—things that will never happen
- 30 percent—things about the past that can't be changed
- 12 percent—things about criticism by others, mostly untrue
- 10 percent—about health, which gets worse with stress
- 8 percent—about real problems that will be faced

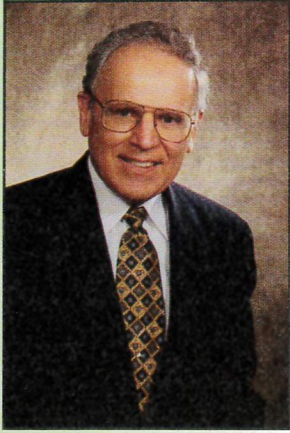
(Survey by Sermon Illustrated quoted in First Draft, August 1999)

Matthew 6:34: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

We don't know the exact day and year of Jesus' birth, but we know that Herod the Great died in the spring of 4 BC. Our calendar may be at least four years late based on the real birthday of Jesus, estimated by many as sometime between the fall of 5 BC and March of 4 BC.

Estimating a town of some 2,000 when Herod ordered the death of all male babies two and under in Bethlehem, about 25 babies were probably slain.

According to the church father Justin Martyr, who was writing in AD 150, Jesus was born in a cave used as a stable. The traditional site of his birthplace is just such a cave.



Gary P. Baumler is editor of *Forward/NL* and WELS Director of Communications.

The busier
you are,
the more you
need the quiet
of Christmas.

Finding the quiet in Christmas

“**B**usy” used to be for bees. Now it seems to have attached itself permanently to me, especially as Christmas approaches.

I think you know what I mean. Don’t you wish you could catch a break, get a little rest?

But how can you rest with so much to do?

The answer is Christmas—not the Christmas that taxes every ounce of your energy, but the birth of Christ. The busier you are, the more you need the quiet of Christmas.

Be clear, however. I’m not talking about kicking back and losing yourself for five minutes in the lilt of a Christmas lullaby. I’m not saying, “Think of quiet Bethlehem.” Quiet? Maybe normally, but with the tax enrollment and no room anywhere in town, this wasn’t a normal time. Quiet in the hills with the shepherds? Perhaps it was. But if you’ve ever worked a night shift, you’d hardly hold that up as an ideal way to get rest. The baby quietly sleeping in his manger bed? That can give you a warm, fuzzy feeling. But will it last?

Now, look closer in that manger. The quiet is there. But you need to see more than a baby. Look, and see your Savior.

Are you a laborer like the shepherds, always on the job eking out a living? Does the drudgery of daily duties depress you? The Christmas angels sing their song for you. “Unto you is born . . . a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” The shepherds represent you—going to the stable in anticipation, leaving it in joy, glorifying and praising God, telling others of the wonders they had seen. Now they knew quiet and contentment, for they had seen the Prince of Peace.

Are you highly educated, considered wise for our day? Does your level of knowledge increase what others expect of you? So many expectations! Here is a King for you to adore, a place to bring your gifts and worship, the restful end to a long journey. Here is someone who does all the important work for you and whose wisdom and peace surpass all our understanding.

Children, God’s own son became a child just like you, except he didn’t get into trouble like you do. He was perfect, and he spreads his goodness to you too. When he became a man, he welcomed little children and held them on his lap. He leads you through all the bumps and scrapes of life. He assures you everything is right when you’re with him.

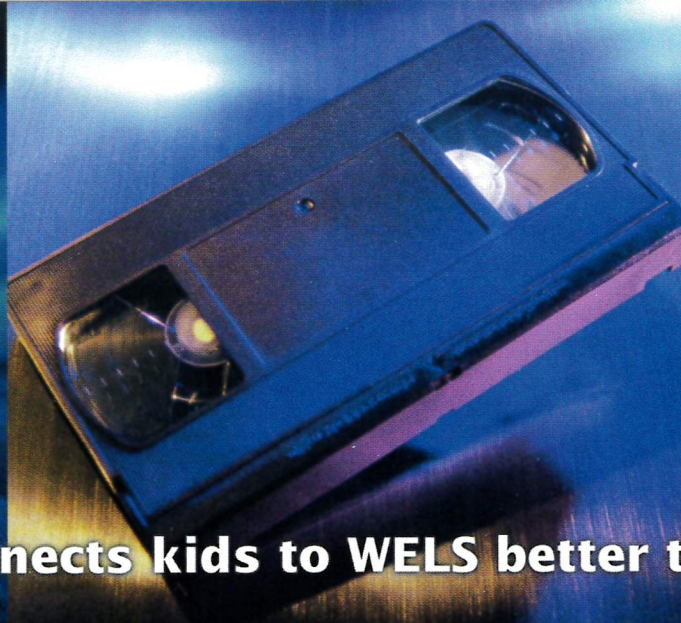
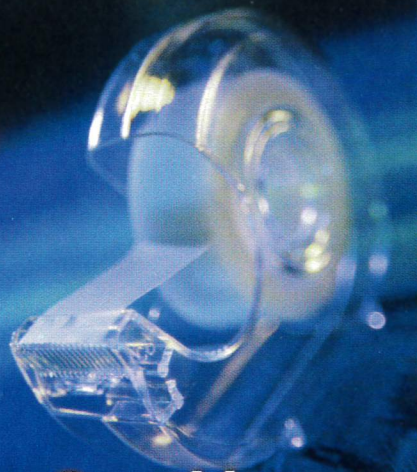
Fathers, can you fail to care for your own or grow lukewarm in love, when you think of the Father in heaven sending his own Son to bring you into his family? Such responsibilities you have as a father! Such calm and confidence you can have as a son of the heavenly Father!

Mothers, does everything seem to fall to you, and you wonder how to manage it all? You have nothing on the mother of our Lord. She found peace by pondering in her heart all the events surrounding the miraculous birth of her son.

Sinners, the baby in the manger became the Christ on the cross. He lived for you, and he died for you. Now, he invites you to come to him for rest.

There’s no time like right now—in the quiet of Christmas.

Gary P. Baumler



One thing connects kids to WELS better than others . . .

. . . and that's the video news magazine *Kids Connection*

Kids Connection is a 15-minute monthly video news magazine for kids hosted by kids. Every month we connect kids to happenings in the WELS. It's ideal for Lutheran elementary schools, Sunday schools, youth groups, youth Bible classes, and homes.

Past stories have included:

- a WELS firefighter, actress, triathlete, musician, congressman, judge, CNN reporter, and a doctor all talking about God's role in their lives
- three synodical schools
- missions in Russia, Thailand, Puerto Rico, Bulgaria, and Malawi
- a VBS parade in Michigan
- Pastor Tony Schulz's unique, yet practical, Bible devotions

and so many more . . .

Share your stories!

Kids Connection wants to hear from you! Send us videos of special projects, programs and events involving your Lutheran elementary schools, Sunday schools, and youth groups. Your stories could be shared with others around the world on . . .

Kids Connection

WELS Commission on Youth Discipleship
2929 North Mayfair Road
Milwaukee, WI 53222-4398
414-256-3274
Fax: 414-256-3899

Mission of WELS *Kids Connection*:

To illustrate—through example and examination of Christian lives—the purpose, excitement, and joy of a living faith in Jesus Christ.

One of the many ways *Kids Connection* achieves this goal is by interviewing adults and youth who are living their faith. Here's what one guest had to say:

Being a Christian has helped my career . . . I know God has put me here for a reason.

Joel Hochmuth, CNN reporter

Order Form

Your nine episodes are available by subscription and arrive in two installments.

The subscription price is \$55 (plus \$5 for shipping and handling) for the entire season.

I am ordering *Kids Connection* for use in:

school Sunday school youth group Bible class my home other (please specify): _____

Name _____ Church/School _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

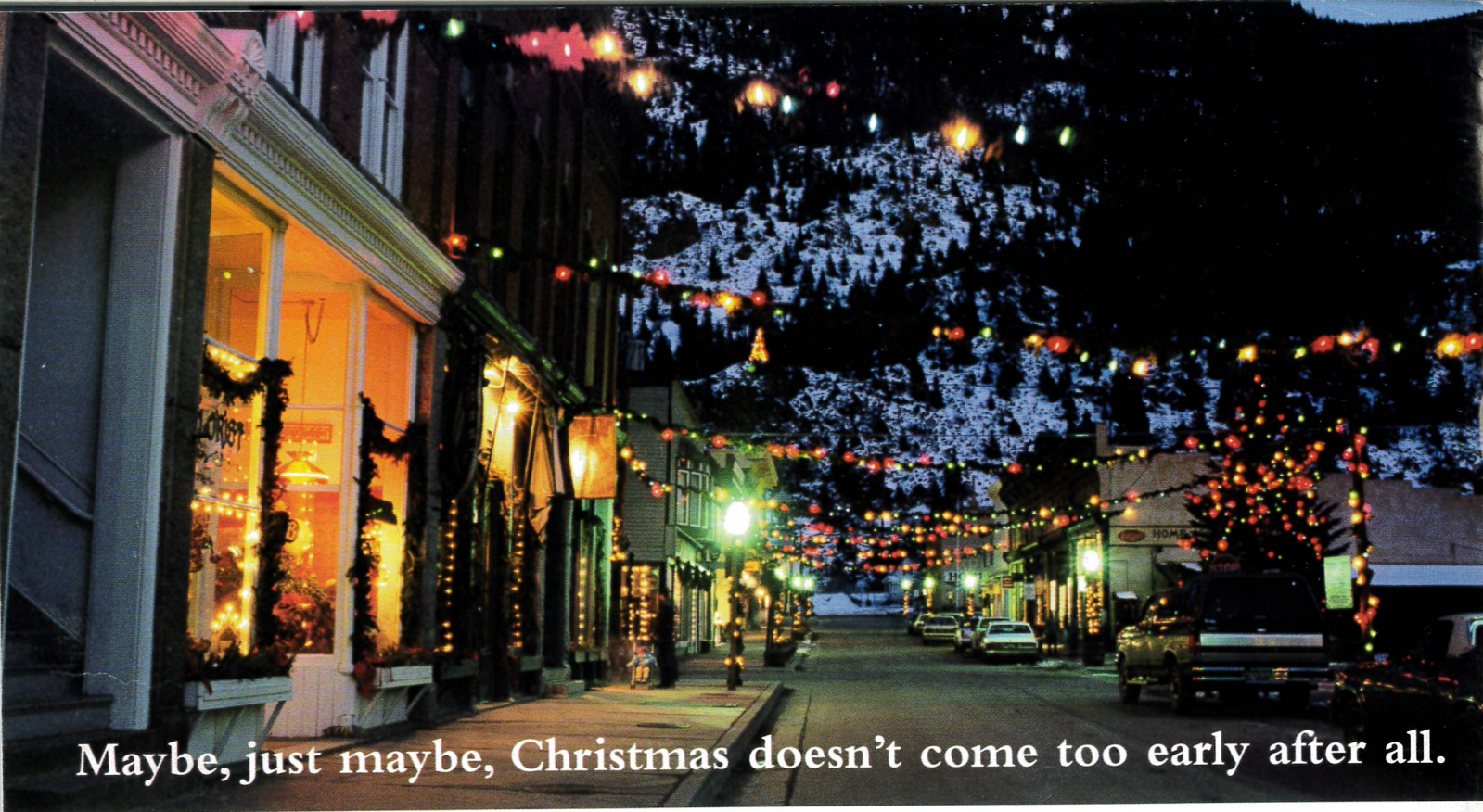
Please make checks payable to:

WELS c/o the Commission on Youth Discipleship, 2929 North Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, WI 53222-4398

Questions? Call 414-256-3274



This form may be duplicated.



Maybe, just maybe, Christmas doesn't come too early after all.

C H R I S T M A S

commercialization

Joe King

Commercialization of Christmas seems to come earlier and earlier each year. When I was young I didn't see Christmas decorations until after Thanksgiving, but now they often appear right after Halloween. This seems to be pushing it too much.

But perhaps this isn't such a bad idea. I realize that most merchants see Christmas as a time of increased sales. But how often during the year do we see anything Christ-related advertised everywhere we look? Perhaps the point is lost on most people, but statistically church attendance is up during this holiday.

Yes, the true message is often lost, but if it makes a few people

think about it, then I say let them start as early as possible celebrating one of the most important days in our lives. Somewhere among the snowmen, Santa Claus, reindeers, and glitter, there are the scenes of Bethlehem, the manger, and the wise men.

Think of Christmas as a giant evangelism movement.

Even the unchurched know most of the words of some Christmas songs. Maybe this is the year they'll listen to what the message is. Maybe the Christmas card they

receive with a Scripture verse on it will start them thinking. Maybe seeing that lighted Nativity scene in the neighbor's yard will motivate them this year. Who knows?

Think of Christmas as a giant evangelism movement, and we just need to separate the chaff from the wheat so the true meaning is never lost.

We often say God works in mysterious ways. So the next time someone complains about Christmas coming too early, we should think that maybe it hasn't come early enough.

Joe King is a member at Ascension, Sarasota, Florida.

