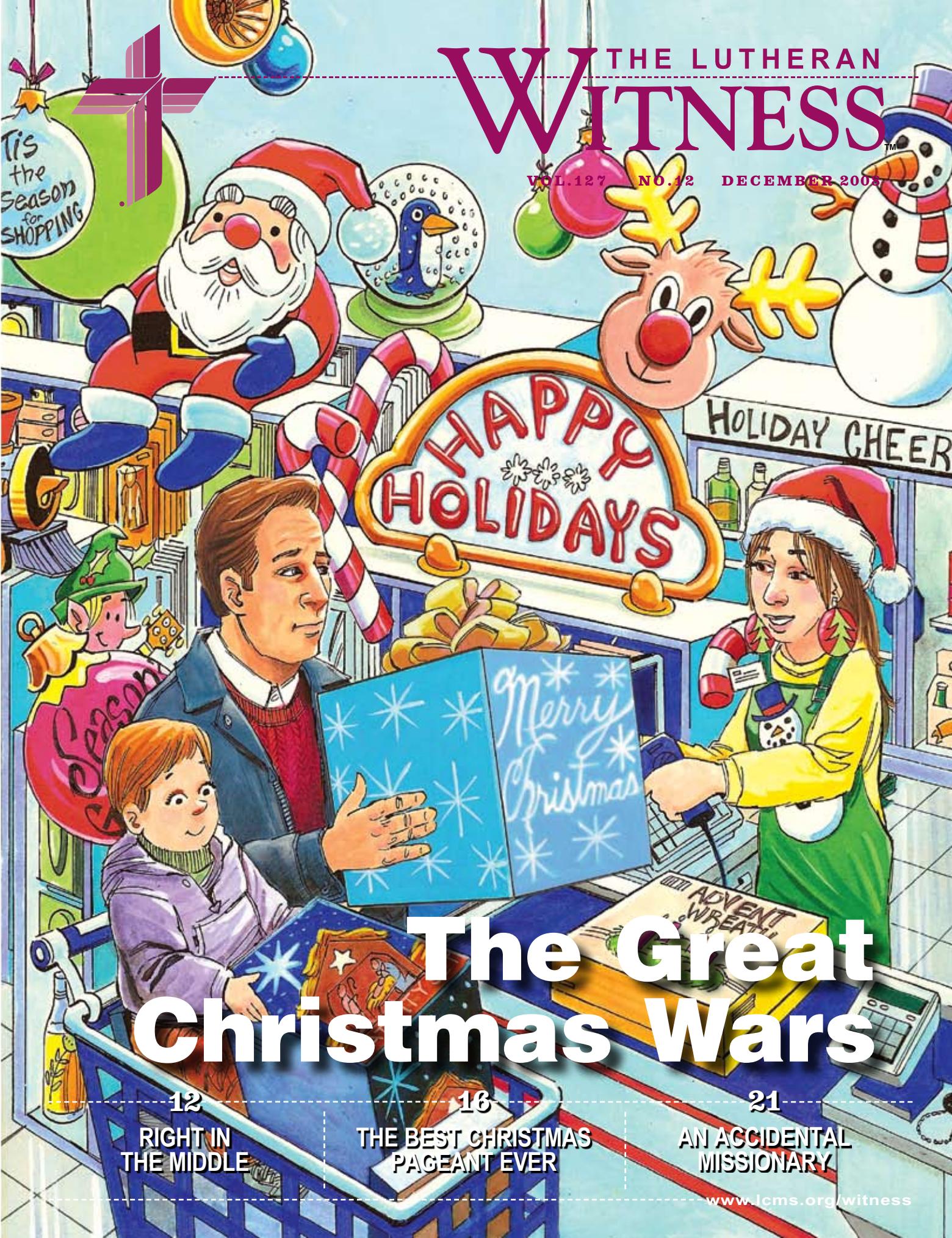




THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

VOL. 127 NO. 12 DECEMBER 2003



The Great Christmas Wars

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RIGHT IN
THE MIDDLE

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THE BEST CHRISTMAS
PAGEANT EVER

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AN ACCIDENTAL
MISSIONARY



The Fear Factor

It's easy to rejoice when there's good news; it's not so easy when the news is bad.

We're happy when the price of gasoline is closer to \$2 a gallon than \$4. Word of a birth is great news—the Lord has given the gift of new life! Conversely, it's hard to rejoice at news of a death, or to learn that a loved one has been diagnosed with cancer or some other terrible disease.

Much of the news we have heard in recent days is bad news. The economy is shaky at best. Armed conflict continues around the world. Terrorists still threaten our well-being. It's understandable that such news could make a person fearful. How ironic it is, then, when we read in Luke 2 about the angel of the Lord announcing the birth of a Savior, that such *good* news is not met immediately with rejoicing, but fear!

What were the angel's first words? "Fear not!" Then he said, "For behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11 ESV).

Psychologists regularly report that during holidays, including the Christmas season, people's emotions are not necessarily—certainly not exclusively—positive and joyful. Holidays are a time of reflection on the past, on good times and bad.

Sometimes, reflections on the bad times overshadow the good.

Thoughts may turn, for example, to the good times we enjoyed in Christmases past with loved ones who no longer are with us. Such reflections on the death of someone near and dear certainly can put a damper on an otherwise joyous occasion.

What's more, uncertainty about the future can make us fearful. Even at Christmas, we can experience the fear

and anxiety that often accompany uncertainty about our economic well-being, job layoffs, the declining value of our home or pension fund, et cetera, et cetera.

In the midst of such uncertainty and fear, we do well to heed the words of the angel: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

We, like the angels and the shepherds, know that the baby in the manger is none other than Jesus the Christ, Savior of the world and Lord of the universe. He is the One who now invites us, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not

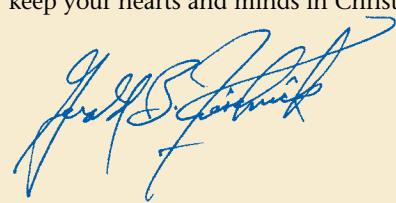
be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself" (Matt. 6:33–34). He proclaims that He has come that we may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Christ's words of comfort and assurance, especially in times of fear and uncertainty, give us hope and joy!

During this Christmas season, may your hearts and homes be filled with the sometimes quiet, sometimes exuberant joy of this blessed time of year. Terry and I send our love, best wishes, and

Christ-filled Christmas greetings from our home to yours. And may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!



During this Christmas season, may your hearts and homes be filled with the sometimes quiet, sometimes exuberant joy of this blessed time of year.


Jerry Kieschnick
 John 3:16–17
 Lives Transformed through Christ, in Time . . . for Eternity!
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To the Reader

December. It's hard to believe that we are approaching the end of one calendar year and the beginning of another. That with Advent upon us, we have embarked on another journey of faith through the church year (e.g., Series B in the three-year lectionary cycle of our *Lutheran Service Book*). Wasn't it only a short while ago that we were preparing for Christmas 2007?

It's hard to believe, too, all the well-intentioned obligations we have probably placed upon ourselves again in the run-up to our celebration of Christ's birth two millennia ago in Bethlehem, obligations that, as Diane Strzelecki points out in this month's "Lifeline" contribution, sometimes distract us from the real focus of our celebration—that God sent His only Son, Jesus, in human form, to live among us and win for us what we could not—salvation and eternal life with Him in heaven.

Elsewhere in this issue, Dr. David Loy and Dr. R. Reed Lessing reflect on the cultural contredemps that Christmas has engendered in our contemporary society and on the lessons we can glean from St. Matthew's contributions to the Christmas story. Also, Kathy Reed recalls a faith-sharing opportunity in Peru, and Bonnie Matzat highlights how a simple family Christmas tradition offers an everyday opportunity to share our faith across generations. Online,

we offer a "Classic Witness" feature by Dr. Paul Maier that provides insight into the world into which Jesus was born.

This month also marks the conclusion of the 127th year of publication for *The Lutheran Witness*. We hope you have found our efforts during the past year rewarding, and we look forward to serving you in the coming year by continuing to bring you stories that strengthen, inform, and enhance your faith-life, your family life, and your life in your congregation and community.

From all of us who work on *The Lutheran Witness*—David, Vicky, Bob, Jim, Carla, Karen, and myself—we wish you and your family a joy-filled Christmas season. We pray that our heavenly Father will lead, comfort, and bless all of us during this wonderful time of year. With Martin Luther, we rejoice that we have indeed been given a marvelous, life-sustaining Christmas gift:

*Come here, my friends, lift up your eyes,
And see what in the manger lies.
Who is this child, so young and fair?
It is the Christ Child lying there. (LSB 358)*

*Merry Christmas,
James H. Heine
Managing Editor*

The Lutheran Witness



Your *Lutheran Witness* staff:
front, left to right: James Heine,
managing editor; David Strand,
interim executive editor and
executive director, Board for
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production coordinator.
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Providing Missouri Synod laypeople with stories and information that complement congregational life, foster personal growth in faith, and help interpret the contemporary world from a Lutheran Christian perspective.

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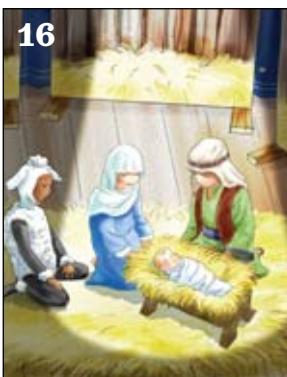
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Nearly every day God provides each believer with opportunities to share the life-giving message of salvation.

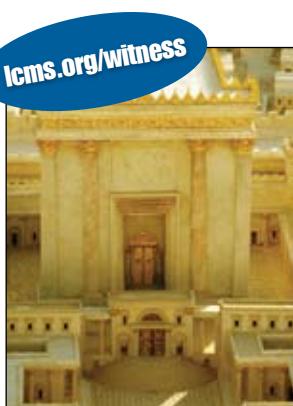


Web EXCLUSIVE!

BEFORE THE WORD BECAME FLESH

A *Classic Witness* online feature
by Paul L. Maier

God used nations and men during the time between the testaments to prepare His perfect time for the birth, life, death, and resurrection of His Son.



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Christmas Sitting Down

Sometimes in the rush to celebrate Christmas, we misplace our priorities

In early December 2007, I fell down my (thankfully carpeted) stairs, spraining my right foot and ankle severely. My Advent gifts included crutches and an orthopedic boot; these accoutrements, in addition to multiple ice packs, would become my best friends over the next six weeks. They certainly made it a Christmas to remember.

Thankfully, I had set up the Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving. And even though I couldn't drive for the next six weeks, I knew the remainder of my Christmas shopping could be completed via Internet.

On the other hand, daily chores were a challenge. The simple task of unloading the dishwasher became an exhausting project. No more pirouetting from dishwasher to cabinet, tossing the plates into their places like Frisbees. I would roll my desk chair into the kitchen, stack the dishes carefully on the counter, then balance gingerly on my good leg and place them, one by one, on the shelves.

It was then I noticed the dings and chips on almost every dish, a result of my usual practice.

I began to notice the dings and chips in my relationships, too. How many times had I rushed my kids along so I could move on to something else? My bum leg forced me to sit still and really listen to their concerns and answer their questions.

How many times had I excused myself from (I thought) a tiresome conversation with my husband? Now I hung with it (and with him) because it was too much effort to grab my crutches and hobble away.

I could sense that God again was doing something awesome amidst adversity. Yet with Christmas and all its activities, expectations, and obligations

approaching, I was uneasy. Shouldn't I be baking seven dozen cookies for the church staff? Shouldn't I be at the mall buying just the right gift for the choir director and my cousin Annie? How would I continue the timeworn tradition of replacing every knick-knack, towel, and dish with a similar item that

But when friends and family learned of my situation, they were happy to help. My parents took the girls on our annual excursion to the Chicago Botanic Garden for the Christmas train and flower display. A good friend helped me with some larger purchases for the girls.

God swept my feet out from under me, so to speak, in order for me to get over it. To not be so dependent on my strength, to ask for help, and most important, to once again focus on the "Eternal Word made flesh and bone / So we could be restored" (LSB 362).

And as my ankle healed, I realized that choosing not to act is harder than being unable to act. The pace is addictive; the "to do" list, long. Once the crutches and orthopedic boot were gone, would I be so willing to sit with my family? to revel in the presence of my Father and His Son? to "be still" (Ps. 46:10)?

To be honest, it was easy to slip into my familiar pace once I was back to "normal." I attacked my lists with the same vigor I had before my injury. But when the time came to sit still and listen—to my Savior, my kids, my husband—I had no second thoughts about what I "should" be doing.

I pray that this Christmas will be different, too. I pray it will be a time to sit still. Not because I have to; because I want to. The teachers might still get their presents and the church staff might still get their cookies, but not at the expense of the true peace and joy of the season.

*For when the time was full and right
God sent His only Son;
He came to us as Life and Light
and our redemption won. (LSB 362:2)*

Diane Strzelecki is an editor-at-large for *The Lutheran Witness*. She is a member of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Palatine, Ill.



Supporting church workers

I want to thank *The Lutheran Witness* for highlighting the great work of healing being offered to the workers of our church body. Kim Krull's October article, "Recharging with Grace," was outstanding and will hopefully point our pastors, church professionals, and congregations to a fine resource that is certain to enhance church-worker retention.

Both church workers and congregations need to know the value of this grace-filled resource. I have been working with Dr. Eckrich for the last seven years to plan, coordinate, and host a three- or four-day retreat each year for our fourth-year seminarians. To date, there have been five retreats in the last five years as these men, with their wives, prepare to receive their first call.

Usually, when each couple arrives, they enter the retreat with some reluc-



tance, either because it is not graded or required or because they have not had exclusive time together (without their kids) in years! By the first afternoon, they recognize that they are permitted to relax, reflect, and rejuvenate with their spouse. The spiritual, emotional, and relational healing through meditative, biblical devotions and song; modest exercise; and excellent material on proper health, relationship-building, and financial planning is definitely worth its salt.

The spiritual, emotional, and relational healing through meditative, biblical devotions and song; modest exercise; and excellent material on proper health, relationship-building, and financial planning is definitely worth its salt.

*Rev. Timothy R. Puls
Assistant Vice-President
for Church Relations
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

Those of you who have lived under the burden of debt may understand why this can weigh on one's mind. It was only recently that I observed firsthand how a pastor and his family were struggling to pay for college and seminary student loans. When one member of the congregation became aware of the pastor's situation, that member stepped forward and paid, in full, the pastor's education loans.

worth its salt. After three or four academically, emotionally, and financially demanding years at seminary—and often also raising a family—this retreat is truly restorative and rejuvenating.

*Rev. Timothy R. Puls
Assistant Vice-President
for Church Relations
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

What if every congregation in our Synod showed respect for and appreciation of their pastors (and called church workers) by helping them pay their outstanding education loans?

Currently, tuition, housing, and related fees for Concordia, River Forest, cost just under \$30,000 per year. Many of our pastors leave college with large student loans. Seminary expenses for three years and interest on college loans can be crippling to the budgets of our pastors and church workers.

When one compares the salaries of our church workers with the salaries of most college graduates, it seems to me that we owe those who serve us spiritually to be free from education debt. Please take a moment to ask your pastor and your church workers if they are still paying student loans. Then pray about how you can organize an effort to lift the load of student debt from them.

*Dale F. Wolff
Altamont, Ill.*

Different priorities

The prevailing assumption running through "Priests in Voting Booths" (October 2008) is that the world oil supply will soon run out. I've heard estimates that the United States alone has enough oil in its own territory to meet its needs for 150 years, if we would just get serious about drilling it. Uwe Siemon Netto does a fair job of theoretically differentiating the kingdoms of the right and the left and then violates it by taking a doctrinaire position on a debatable issue. I, for one, will take other concerns and priorities into the voting booth Nov. 4.

*Ronald Stelzer, Senior Pastor
Our Savior Lutheran Church
Centerreach, N.Y.*

On target, and not!

I want to compliment you for the creative use of two different images to make one image on the cover of the October *Lutheran Witness*. It was done well!

*Rev. Glenn Zander
St. John Lutheran Church
McMinnville, Ore.*

Please look at page 13 of the October *Lutheran Witness*. Perhaps this page looks nice to the artist who composed it. To me, it is camouflage of the printed word. On page 12 I read, "large-type materials." On page 13, you hide the print in an assortment of color.

Please note: I did not subscribe to a puzzle magazine! Black on white has

always been the easiest to read. Give a hoot for those of us born in 1921.

Henry A. Shave
Peach Bottom, Pa.

P.S. Please make room for comments from old gourches like me: veteran World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Bow hunter. Camouflage has its place. The opposite of camouflage belongs in a publication.

Read more letters to the editor at LCMS.org/Witness. We welcome letters that comment on articles in *The Lutheran Witness*. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send letters to "Letters," c/o *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to *Lutheran.Witness@LCMS.org*. Please include your name, postal address, and telephone number.



Official periodical of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through the Board for Communication Services, Dennis A. Clauss, chairman; David L. Strand, executive director.

Staff: David L. Strand, interim executive editor; James H. Heine, managing editor; Vicki Schaeffer, senior designer; Robert Sexton, marketing manager and advertising sales; Jim Stange, production coordinator; Carla Dubbelde, editorial manager, district editions; Karen Higgins, editorial assistant; editorial office: 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; (314) 996-1202, Ext. 1228.

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Published 11 times per year by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Individual subscription \$22.00 per year. Organized congregation subscriptions and district editions offered at reduced rate if submitted through local churches.

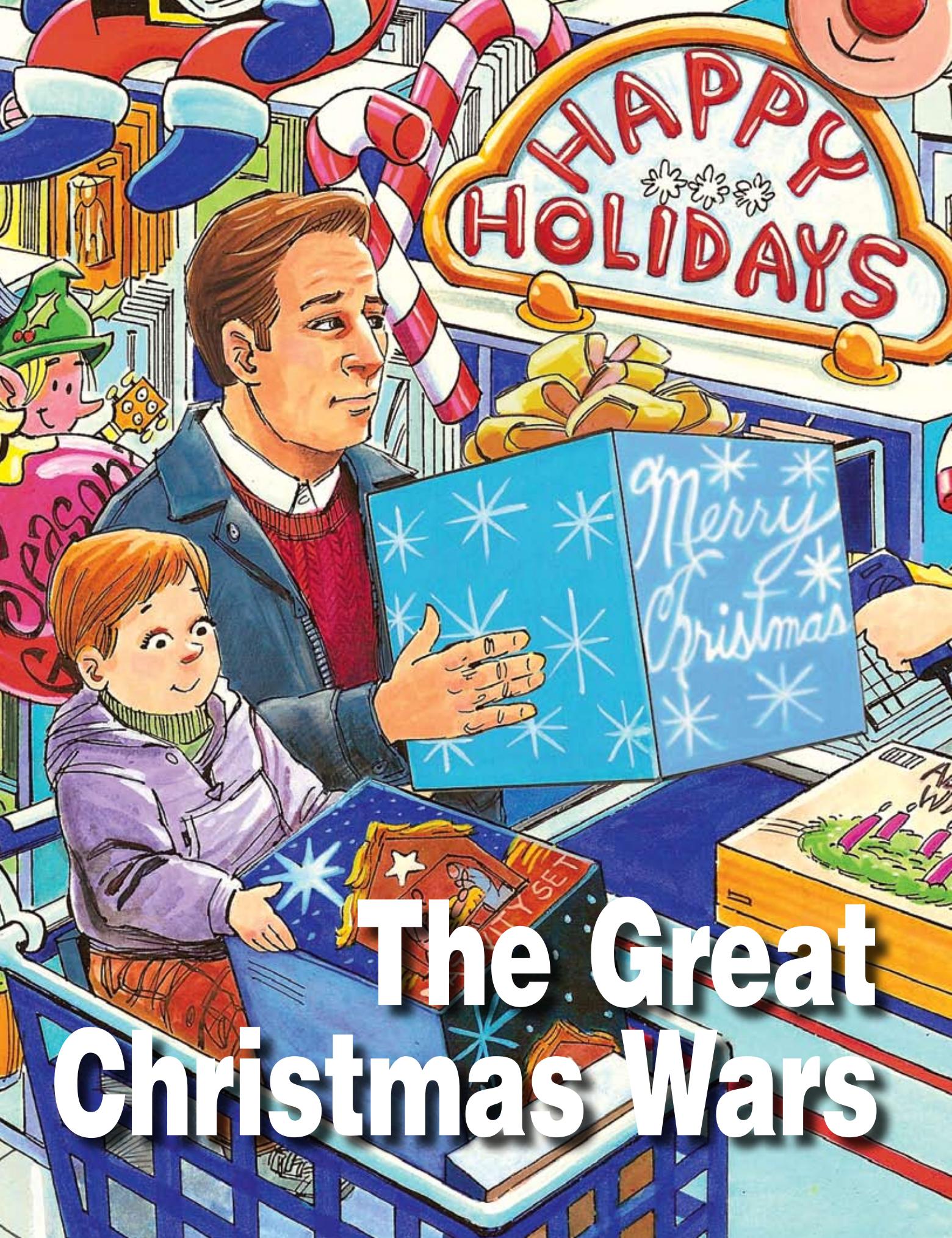
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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1-888-THE LCMS (843-5267) www.lcms.org
e-mail: LUTHERAN.WITNESS@lcms.org

Member: Associated Church Press
Evangelical Press Association
December 2008 (ISSN: 0024-757X) Vol. 127, No. 12

Cover illustration by Ed Koehler



The Great Christmas Wars



The Great Christmas Wars are not a new phenomenon, and they are not just an American phenomenon.

The shooting in the Great Christmas Wars is well underway—again. Store after store tells its sales clerks to chirp *Happy Holidays* rather than *Merry Christmas*, while conservative Christian organizations mobilize the troops for a frontal assault on this change from the traditional greeting of the season.

Time was when the Christmas wars were fought mostly on the turf of county courthouses, city parks, and school halls. In the past few years, the fighting also has invaded the checkout lines at countless retailers across the nation.

Christians have mobilized for the fight, ready to defend the holiday to the death. Ted Olsen of *Christianity Today* tells of standing in a grocery store and hearing a clerk wish a customer “Happy Holidays.” The customer shot the poor clerk a deadly look and then wished her “Merry Christmas” in a tone that was anything but merry (*Christianity Today*, December 2007, p. 18). The war is on.

The question is this: *Who's defending what and why?* The other question: *Do Christians need to fight this war at all?*

Nothing New

A familiar Old Testament passage answers both questions. The Great Christmas Wars are not a new phenomenon, and they are not just an American phenomenon. Right smack dab in the middle of the Old Testament we see another episode in the Great Christmas Wars. It turns out, how you feel about Christmas has a lot to do with how you feel about Christ, and how you feel about Christ has a lot to do with whether you believe He is God-with-us. For those without faith, the promise of God-with-us is an alarming threat, but those with faith find great hope in the promise that “the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel” (Is. 7:14 NIV).

This well-known passage from Isaiah is part of a larger story. It tells about Ahaz, king of Judah, a descendant of King David. During his reign, the geopolitical realities confronting Judah were harsh. The Assyrian Empire to the north and east had its eyes on Egypt, which lay south and west of Judah. Now, to get from north and east to south and west, you had to go through—guess what—Judah. Of course, you also had to go through Israel (that is, the Northern Kingdom—the 10 tribes) and Syria, both of which were angling to hold off Assyria. And the timing was right. Assyria was dealing with political problems elsewhere and couldn't devote its military attention to these little fish. So Israel and Syria decided they would move into Judah, remove King Ahaz, who sat on the throne of David, and put in their own man as king. Then they could hold off Assyria—or so they thought:

“Now the house of David was told, ‘Aram has allied itself with Ephraim [that is, the Kingdom of Israel]’; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind” (Is. 7:2).

Now there's already a problem here. God had long before promised the people of Judah and Israel that He would protect them from all their earthly enemies if they would obey the covenant He made with them at Mount Sinai. Yet here stands King Ahaz, shaking like the branches of a wind-blown tree. Why? Because he trusted neither God nor God's promises. His approach to the world was all about power and politics. He had no room for a God who promised to protect His people. It was too impractical. It was too inconvenient, because it meant giving up power and giving up sin. So Ahaz

did the only thing he could think to do:

"Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, 'I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.' And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria" (2 Kings 16:7–8).

In fact, Ahaz actually traveled to Assyria, and when he came back, he put an Assyrian altar to an Assyrian god in the Lord's temple. He sold out to the geopolitical realities because he did not trust God the Lord to keep His promises.

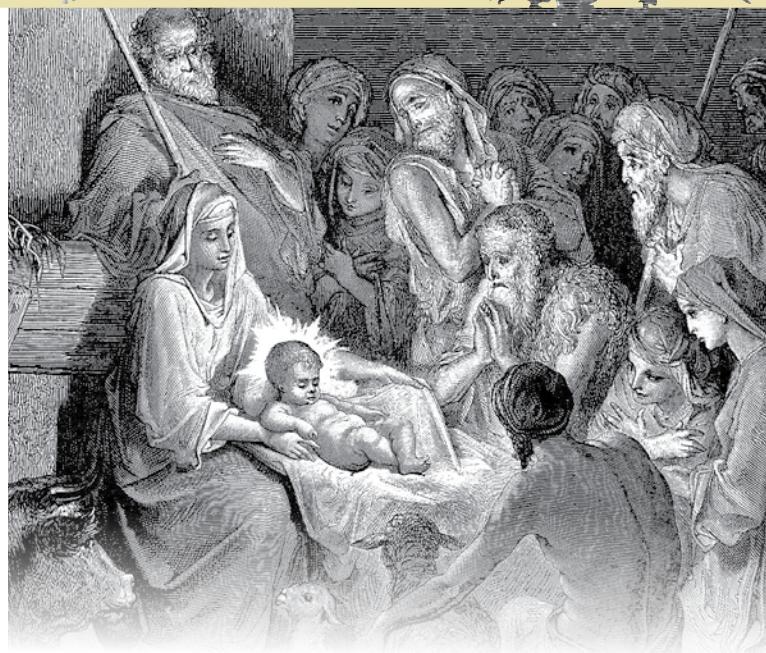
Enter Isaiah

That is roughly where Isaiah enters the picture. In the middle of the crisis, Isaiah arrives with God's promise to rescue the people of Judah. Ahaz wouldn't listen. So "the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the LORD your God for a sign'" (Is. 7:10). Ahaz played all pious and said, "I would never test the LORD by asking for a sign, because the LORD forbids it."

Those are nice sentiments, but when the Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign, and he pretended his piety wouldn't allow it, he was just disobeying God. He was acknowledging that getting a sign from God would be too inconvenient. It would expose his sin and his unbelief. Well, God exposes his sin and unbelief anyway. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel."

There's the sign. A virgin gives birth to a son.

What kind of sign is this? That depends. For Ahaz, it's a sign of God's wrath. It's a sign that God is fed up with Ahaz and his lack of faith. Ahaz has asked the Assyrians for help, so God is going to give Ahaz what he asked for: The Assyrians will come. But this is not going to be a pleasant partnership with Papa Pileser, kind king of the



Assyrians. This is going to be heartache and suffering, poverty and punishment. For those who do not believe, Immanuel, God-with-us, means God has come to punish the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him (Ex. 34:7). For those who want to rule themselves and their own lives, Immanuel, God-with-us, means God is coming to strike them down for rebelling against Him, King Most High. But for those who trust God, Immanuel, God-with-us, means that God will come to rescue them and be their Shepherd and their King, so that they no longer have to suffer under their own sin and the sin of arrogant, self-serving, faithless kings like Ahaz.

Which brings us back from the Great Christmas War of King Ahaz, which Ahaz lost and God won, to the Great Christmas Wars of our own day. Who's defending what, and why?

A Question of Faith

Let's start with those who have waged war against Christmas in our culture. Why do they get so hot about the issue? It really comes down to the question of faith. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ cannot and will not submit to His rule and reign as God in this world. The message of Jesus Christ is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). Naturally, the unbelievers in our world are fighting against Christmas. They do not believe in our Savior, and so the preaching of Christmas challenges them, as it challenged Ahaz. The old, sinful human being



But for those who trust God, Immanuel, God-with-us, means that God will come to rescue them and be their Shepherd and their King, so that they no longer have to suffer under their own sin and the sin of arrogant, self-serving, faithless kings like Ahaz.

The Great Christmas Wars are fought first and foremost on the turf of our heart, where the giving, forgiving Christ Child works with the Holy Spirit to create saving faith.

wants to be king in his world. He wants to make the laws that he follows; he wants to decide for himself whether he has done right or wrong; and he wants to judge for himself what penalties he should pay, if any, for any supposed wrongdoings. If the message of Christmas is that a virgin has conceived and borne a Son, and His name is Immanuel, that is, God-is-with-us, then it means there is a higher authority in the world. It means God has come and is laying claim to our lives and telling us what we should and should not do. It means He is telling us whether we have done right or wrong, and He is telling us what the just penalty is, namely, eternity in hell. If Christmas is really about the birth of God into our human flesh and blood, then there are only two responses: to turn away from sin and bow down and worship the newborn King, or to reject God's law and live how we want to and run away from the newborn King.

So, do Christians need to fight this war? Well, yes and no. Yes, we need to fight this Great Christmas War in the way that Ahaz should have. We need to fight the sin in our own hearts. We need to repent and turn away from sin and turn our lives over to Him who was born into our human flesh and blood to redeem us from sin. The Great Christmas Wars are fought first and foremost on the turf of our heart, where the giving, forgiving Christ Child works with the Holy Spirit to create saving faith. The Christ Child came and lived a life of perfect faith and obedience, because we do not and could not. He was born under the death sentence that we deserve as rebels against God, and He died under that death sentence in order to clear your name and mine and Ahaz's—and the name of every corporate executive and lawyer and politician who tries to remove the name of Jesus from public life. Remember, the Great Christmas Wars are fought first in your heart, not in someone else's, and apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we also would be just like Ahaz and just like those who wage war against Christmas in our own day and age. "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" (Rom. 3:22-24). If Christians are on God's side in this war, it is only because God Himself came into this world and picked us up by the collar and hauled us out of enemy territory and gave us new hearts and new minds. We can't claim any credit, because "when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy" (Titus 3:4-5).

Our Hope

And that brings us to the hope we have through faith in this wonderful promise that "the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel." God in Christ came to earth to wage this war Himself, because we were hopelessly lost and fighting for the enemy. Now that He has rescued and redeemed us, He is still Immanuel, God-with-us, even "to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). We don't need to fight the Great Christmas Wars on Christ's behalf. He's still here, and He is fighting these wars for us, and He's quite capable of winning them Himself. In fact, He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18). No one is going to take Christ out of Christmas, because no one can remove our King from His throne. The Great Christmas Wars are already won. God saw to that when the virgin conceived and gave birth to a son, who is God-with-us. So if your neighbor or the cashier wishes you "Happy Holidays," don't pull out your petitions and boycotts. Instead, take the opportunity to share the good news of Immanuel, God-with-us. Reply with a joyful "Merry Christmas" or say, "I'm celebrating the birth of Christ."

And do it with a happy heart and a genuine smile.

Dr. David W. Loy is pastor of Zion Lutheran Church,
Bolivar, Mo.







Right in the middle

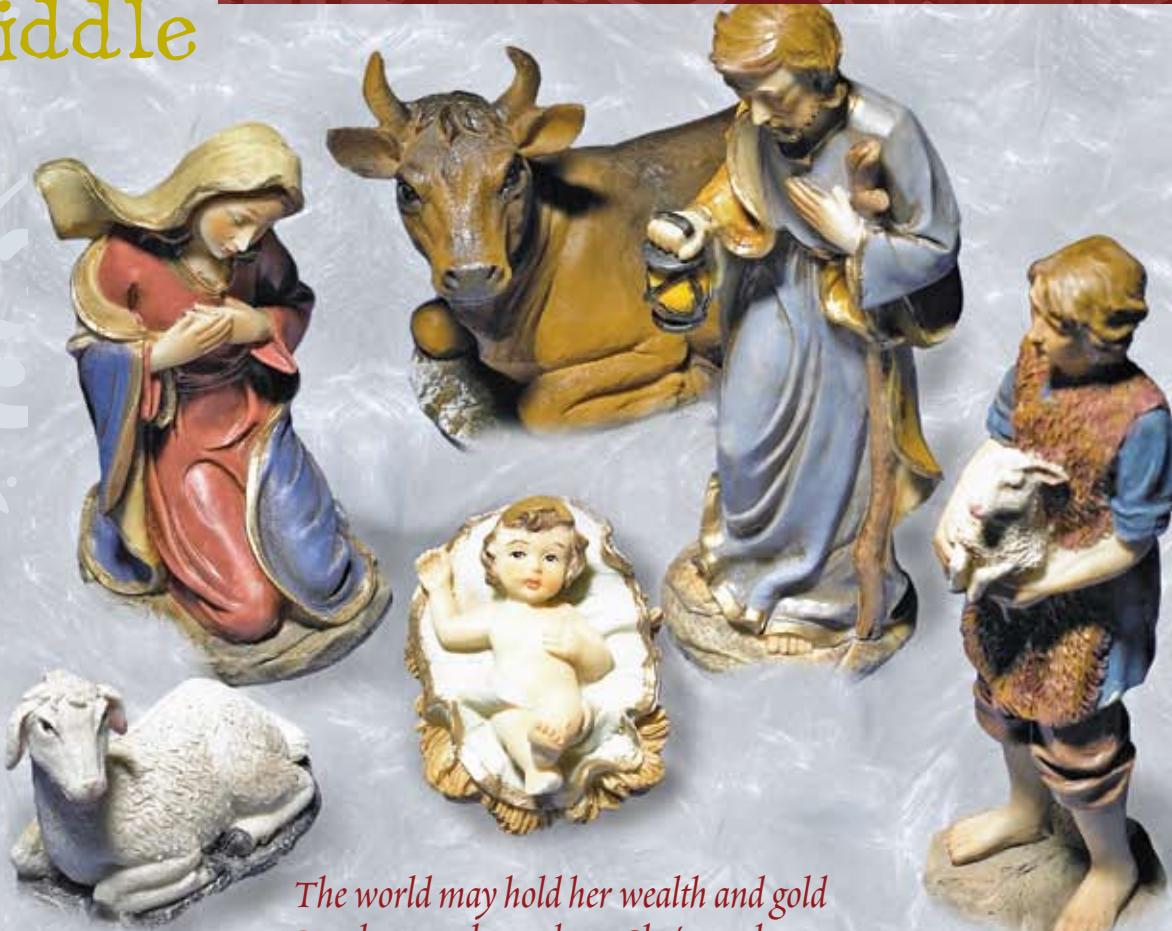
A family Christmas tradition provides a wonderful teaching opportunity.

It was Christmas-decorating day at our house, and Sarah, our three-year-old granddaughter, was spending the afternoon with us. She was following me around, trying to patiently wait for the important moment when she would be asked to help. I had told her I was saving a very special task for her—setting up the nativity scene.

Over the years, our four children have taken turns placing baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the angel, the shepherd, and the animals in their rightful places on the end table in the family room. From year to year, I had trouble remembering whose turn it was, but they certainly didn't. "You did it last year!" one of them would say. "It's my turn this year."

Now it was going to be Sarah's turn. Her eyes sparkled when I handed her the well-used box and told her to open it.

"What's inside, Grandma?" she asked.
"You'll see," I replied.



*The world may hold her wealth and gold
But thou, my heart, keep Christ as thy true treasure.*

She opened the lid carefully and lifted out one of the figurines, wrapped in the same tissue paper used for the past thirty-some Christmases. Her little fingers gently removed the paper.

"It's an angel, Grandma," she announced.

"It's Mary. It's Joseph. It's a shepherd. It's a lamb. . . . It's Baby Jesus!" Sarah exclaimed as she unwrapped each piece.

"What's this?" she asked as she held up a piece of red felt and some angel hair.

"Put them on the table, Sarah. Then you can arrange the figurines on top," I said.

Following my instructions, she put the piece of red felt on the table and placed the wispy angel hair on top. She glanced at the figurines spread out on the carpet and quickly picked up the baby Jesus. "He needs to be right in the middle, right in the front, Grandma," Sarah proclaimed. "Mary and Joseph need to be near Him. The angel needs to be near Him, too. I don't know where to put the animals. The shepherd wants to be close to Jesus. They all need to be near the fire so they can stay warm." She was talking to herself, not expecting any response, as she tried to decide where to place the various figures. I stood back to watch.

For the next several minutes Sarah moved the nativity-scene figures around. I noticed, however, that she never moved the baby Jesus. Finally she was pleased with her arrangement.

"Grandma, come and see," she called. I walked to the table. She pointed out each of the figurines and then proudly said, "Look where baby Jesus is. He's right in the middle, right in the front, where He belongs."

What a secret she already knew at the tender age of three! The position of most of the nativity-scene participants didn't really matter. The angel could be on top of the coasters or on the table near the others. Mary could be to the right of the manger or to the left. The shepherd could be in front of the sheep or in back. What mattered to Sarah was the placement of baby Jesus. She knew that He needed to be right in the middle—right in the front, where He belongs. In the nativity scene—and in our hearts.

Whether we are three or well beyond three, we pray with Paul Gerhardt (LSB 372) that the Holy Spirit would help us keep our Savior, the most precious Christmas gift ever, "right in the middle."

*The world may hold
Her wealth and gold;
But thou, my heart, keep Christ as thy true treasure.
To Him hold fast
Until at last
A crown be thine and honor in full measure.*

Bonnie Matzat is a retired teacher and a member of Concordia Lutheran Church, Kirkwood, Mo.

Bringing a Nativity Set to Every Home



Rose Fremer's favorite childhood Christmas memory centers on her family's nativity set, a time-worn crèche and figurines set up each year by her mother. For Fremer, the set upheld her Sunday School lessons and made the rich mystique of Jesus' birth more accessible to her.

As an adult, Fremer, who with husband Al is a member of St. James Lutheran Church, Montague, Mich., was troubled by a cultural outlook that nativity-set displays in public settings were potentially "offensive." Her solution: bring more of them into family homes. With the goal of "a nativity set in every home," the Nativity Set Ministry (www.nativitysetministry.org) was born.

The five-year-old ministry is a Michigan nonprofit organization supported by the Michigan District LWML's Lakeshore Zone. Donations are used to buy sample sets for churches starting their own nativity-set ministries

and to purchase African-American and Hispanic sets, which, Fremer says, are hard to find.

Fremer travels the country to champion the cause. Her presentations at churches, preschools, and other Christian organizations highlight ways to augment existing gift ministries with nativity sets, noting that it doesn't need to be a costly addition.

"Inexpensive sets can be purchased at hobby stores or dollar stores, at Christmas sales, or online," Fremer says. "I don't want to promote collector's items. I want to provide teaching aids that encourage children's interaction."

Rev. Daniel Schumm, pastor of outreach and discipleship at Carmel Lutheran Church, Carmel, Ind., is an enthusiastic supporter. Carmel added a nativity-set ministry to its Christmas gift programs a few years ago.

"When we began casting the vision of the ministry, we encouraged

With help from a Michigan LWML Zone, Rose Fremer encourages congregations and individuals to include nativity sets in their 'Christmas baskets.'

At the LWML Michigan District convention in July, Rose Fremer (center) presented Birdia Hambright (left), of Peace Lutheran Church, Detroit, with two dozen African-American nativity sets. At right is Fremer's assistant and godchild, Emily Fritz of St. John's Lutheran School, La Grange, Ill.

members to hit after-Christmas sales," he says, noting that the response was enthusiastic.

"On one hand, we give presents that might delight a child for a moment, but our goal is that a child would hold onto the set and make it part of his or her Christmas each year," Schumm says.

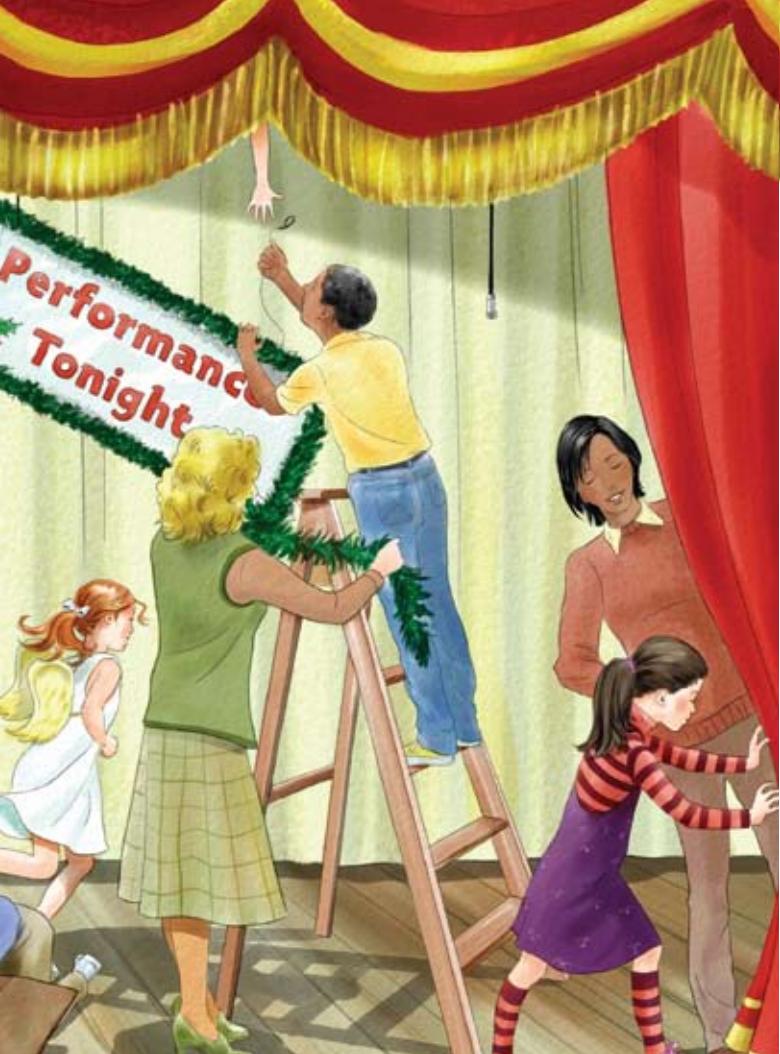
Recently, Fremer heard from Debbie Luytjes, preschool director at St. John's Lutheran Church, Grand Haven, Mich. Luytjes reported that her afternoon daycare children were telling each other the Christmas story while "playing" with their classroom's nativity set.

"It shows the power of the Word incarnate," Fremer says.

Diane Strzelecki is an editor-at-large for *The Lutheran Witness* and a member of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Palatine, Ill.



the Best Christmas Pageant Ever



Ah, December. The Christmas season is upon us. It's time to begin planning for the church's annual children's program.

And you know how the events will unfold, *again*. Several boys will be conscripted to wear bathrobes and pretend they know something about being shepherds. A dozen girls will gleefully volunteer to be angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. Crate Paper and glitter will be combined to create colorful crowns for the Magi, who will undoubtedly sing off-key, "We Three Kings of Orient Are."

Illustration from *The Wonder of Christmas* © 2008 Concordia Publishing House.
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Others will be drafted to join the ranks of choirs who through the ages have memorized the lyrics to "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," and "Joy to the World." Then, to unleash the greatest controversy since the church picnic was rained out, a boy and a girl will be chosen to play Joseph and Mary. Add to this cast a newborn baby, an innkeeper, a few straggly sheep, and presto, the program will be just about ready to launch!

But one important component is missing. Who will direct the pageant? After a thorough search, a director is "specially selected" and then given this mandate: "Keep the bathrobes one color, make sure everyone remembers their lines, and please, no angels with crooked halos this year!" Four weeks of rehearsals and costume-making will lead up to the night of nights. Anticipation fills the air! The unstated goal is that after everyone reverently sings "Silent Night," they will return home saying, "This year's program was the best yet!"

Another Christmas Pageant

Everyone—or nearly everyone we know—is probably familiar with Luke's Christmas story. It's the foundation upon which we build all those wonderful pageants each year. But what about St. Matthew? His account appears first in the New Testament. What about his story? Should we expect anything less from Matthew's "Christmas pageant"? Why, if anyone can pull this story off without a hitch, would it not be an organized and efficient tax accountant like Matthew? In fact, as a "pageant committee," we have so much confidence in Matthew that we'll even allow him to begin with a genealogy (Matt. 1:1–16), an unusual way to begin a "pageant," to say the least.

Looking at his genealogy, we are amazed! Matthew begins by organizing his presentation of Jesus by employing three groups of 14 (Matt. 1:17). In all likelihood, Matthew's 3×14 pattern is a play on the name of David, whose Hebrew consonants *daleth waw daleth* add up to 14 (*daleth* = 4, *waw* = 6). This indicates that Jesus is the Davidic son, three times over. Quite impressive theology!

Studying his gospel more broadly, we see that Matthew plans to structure his narrative to highlight our Lord's five teaching blocks (5:1–7:29; 8:1–11:1; 11:2–13:58; 14:1–19:1; and 19:2–26:1).

"The old timers will love it," we exclaim with great joy. "They will be reminded of Moses' five-part book that we affectionately call the Pentateuch." With great anticipation the church meeting concludes on this high note. "If anyone is going to direct a 'lights out' Christmas presentation, it is going to be Matthew!"

But at the next meeting we look at Matthew's genealogy with greater scrutiny. Within moments the committee is shocked. Matthew has placed four huge eyesores in the

program! Their names are Tamar (Matt. 1:3), Rahab, and Ruth (Matt. 1:5), and a certain “wife of Uriah” (Matt. 1:6). How dare Matthew spurn the conventional wisdom of the day by letting women into his genealogy! One committee member sighs in frustration, “Well! If he has to include women, why not invoke the names of our three lovely matriarchs—Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel?” Another person adds this caustic critique, “Doesn’t Matthew remember that lineage is traced through men, not women? And that the function of a genealogy is to give solemn honor to the final descendant, Jesus? Matthew breaks both of these time-honored rules!” A vote is taken, and it is unanimous. Stop the presses!

The chairman then asks the inevitable question, “Who picked Matthew to direct this program in the first place?”

Someone grabs a Bible and reads from Matt. 9:9, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and He said to him, ‘Follow Me’” (ESV). The room becomes quiet. The reading continues with these words of Jesus, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:13b).



Matthew's Christmas Cast

Matthew's unlikely Christmas cast of sinners begins with Tamar. She is first mentioned in Gen. 38:6: “Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.” God kills Er because he was wicked (Gen. 38:7). Following levirate law, Judah gives Tamar to his next son, Onan, who refuses to impregnate her. The Lord takes his life as well (Gen. 38:10). Upon the birth of his next son, Shelah, Judah instructs Tamar to wait at

her father’s house until Shelah grows up. At that time he will become her husband. Throughout Gen. 38:1–11 Tamar says absolutely nothing. She simply goes along with the plans of others. Her passivity, however, is about to come to an end.

After a period of time Judah’s wife dies. This leads to one of the shortest business transactions in the Bible (Gen. 38:12–23). Judah propositions a disguised Tamar. She asks for payment. He promises a young goat. She demands a pledge. They have intercourse. She conceives. They both go their way.



Then one day Judah discovers that Tamar is pregnant. His response? “Bring her out, and let her be burned” (Gen. 38:24b). On the way to her execution Tamar produces shocking evidence, proving that the father of her twins is none other than *Judah* (38:25). Tamar is vindicated, not only by Judah (38:26), but also through the birth of her twin boys, named Perez and Zerah (38:27–30).

Tamar dressed up like a prostitute; that’s bad enough. But hold on to your hat, because Rahab was a prostitute (Joshua 2:1). And

adding insult to injury, Rahab was a dreaded Canaanite. So despised were these inhabitants of the Promised Land that, when Zechariah pictures the glories of the age to come, he states, “There will be no longer a Canaanite in the house of the LORD” (Zech. 14:21 NIV).

In some texts (e.g., Is. 23:8; Ezek. 16:29; Zeph. 1:11) the word *Canaanite* denotes “salesman/merchant.” In contrast to Israelite society that was founded upon the gift of land for everyone (e.g., Num. 26:53–56; 33:53–54; Joshua 13–19), Canaanites supported economic activity that confiscated land from the poor and gave it to the rich (e.g., 1 Kings 21). Yet, in spite of her sordid Canaanite connection, Rahab the prostitute is commended for her faith (Heb. 11:31) and for her works (James 2:25).

It was bad enough that Canaanites worshiped the abominable deities called Baal and Asherah, but Moabites paid homage to the detestable god Chemosh, who went so far as to demand child sacrifice (cf. 2 Kings 3:26–27). And, horror of horrors, Matthew ushers the next person on stage, who goes by the name

“Ruth the Moabite,” a title she receives not once, but six times (Ruth 1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). Earlier in Israel’s history, Moses made it clear that “no Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever” (Deut. 23:3 ESV).

Ruth, like her predecessors Tamar and Rahab,



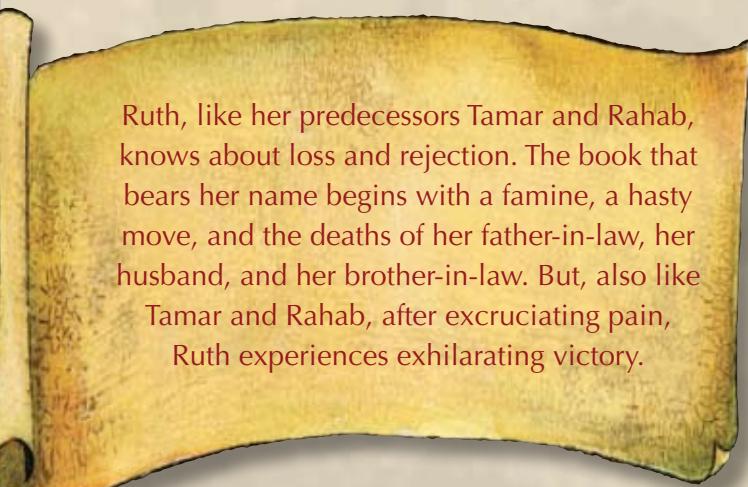


knows about loss and rejection. The book that bears her name begins with a famine, a hasty move, and the deaths of her father-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law. But, also like Tamar and Rahab, after excruciating pain, Ruth experiences exhilarating victory. The genealogy at the end of the Book of Ruth, which may have been one of Matthew's sources, connects Ruth with Israel's great king, David (4:18–22).

Matthew's list of "questionable" women related to Jesus ends with "the wife of Uriah" (Matt. 1:6). Like her female predecessors in Matthew's genealogy, her story also begins in tragedy. It was springtime and David, instead of going to war, strolls on the palace roof. He beholds a beautiful woman bathing and, in staccato-like fashion, finds out her name, sends for her, takes her in, and the two have sex (2 Sam. 11:1–4).

Sometime later Bathsheba sends a three-word message to the king: "I am pregnant" (2 Sam. 11:5). Again, acting with decisive bravado, David orders her husband, Uriah, to return from the battle. Little does Uriah know that his refusal to have sex with his wife becomes a sentence of death (2 Sam. 11:6–21). In the next episode Nathan the prophet makes it clear that David is the guilty man (2 Sam. 12:7). But Bathsheba suffers also. Both her husband and baby die. Late in life, vindication comes. Another son, Solomon, becomes Israel's third king (1 Kings 1).

Tamar dresses up to look like a prostitute and is accused of adultery. Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute. Ruth is a Moabite and one night goes to the threshing floor, something no "nice" woman would do (cf. Ruth 3). And Bathsheba not only bathes openly, but is later instrumental in the death of Adonijah (1 Kings 2:19–25). In spite of their sin, all four of Matthew's women are delivered by extra-ordinary circumstances. Tamar is saved from burning at the stake,



Ruth, like her predecessors Tamar and Rahab, knows about loss and rejection. The book that bears her name begins with a famine, a hasty move, and the deaths of her father-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law. But, also like Tamar and Rahab, after excruciating pain, Ruth experiences exhilarating victory.

Rahab is delivered from Jericho's demise, Boaz spares Ruth from famine and death, and Bathsheba lives long enough to see Solomon become one of the wisest men ever to live (cf. 1 Kings 3).

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba demonstrate how God chooses "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" and how He chooses "what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). Their presence in Christ's lineage foreshadows Jesus' love for other outcasts such as a Roman centurion's servant (Matt. 8:5–13) and a Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt. 15:21–28).

At the heart of Matthew's genealogy is this grand gospel: Jesus loves people who are victims as well as perpetrators of family dysfunction and deceit (Tamar), who feel used and worthless (Rahab), who bury loved ones and endure the pain of leaving their homeland (Ruth), and who are used by others for pleasure only to witness the death of so many dreams (Bathsheba). In the end, these four women's lives are amazing testimonies to what Joseph told his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20a).

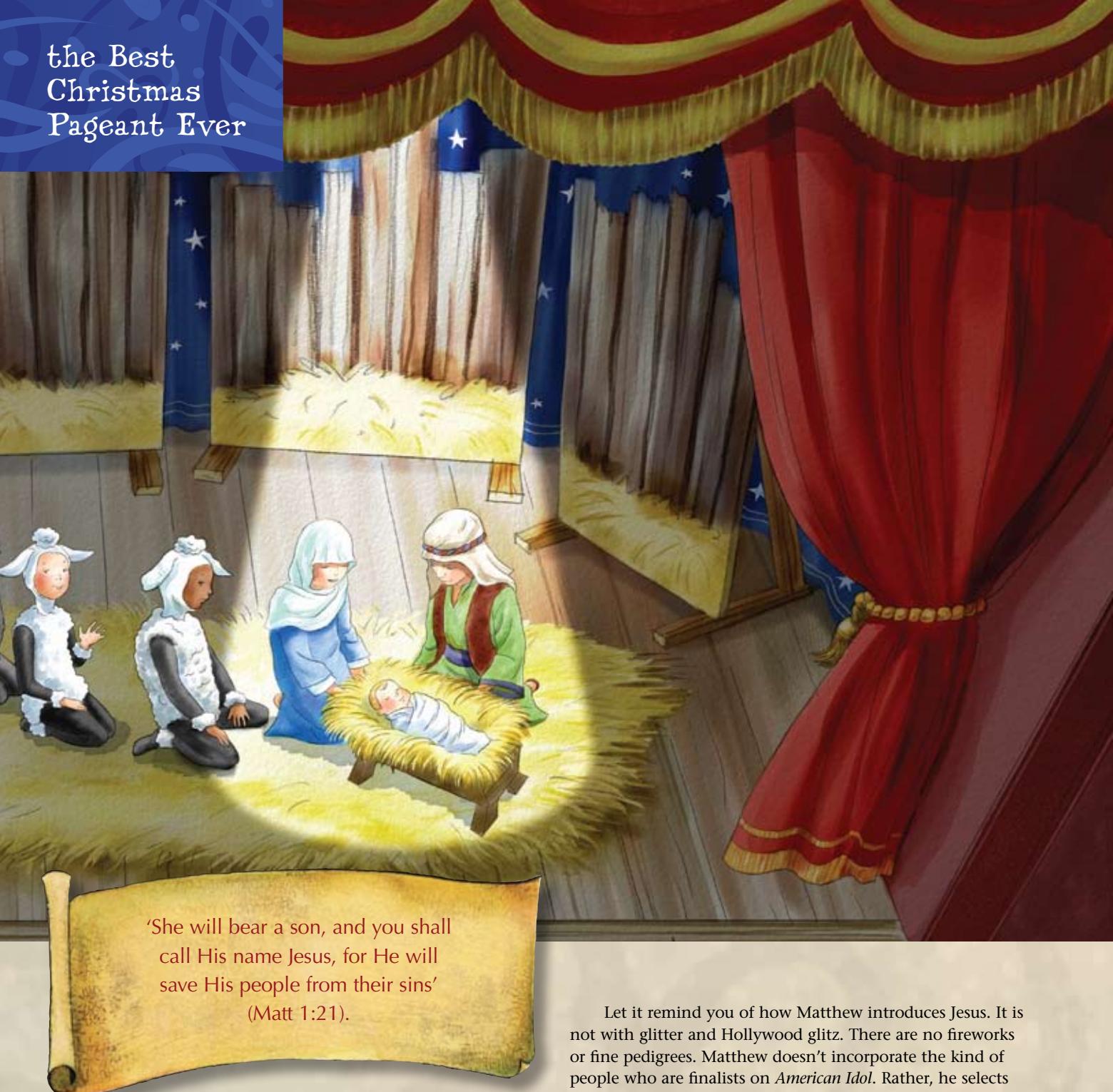
So Matthew knew what he was doing all along. Could this be the reason he includes this saying of Jesus, twice? "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matt. 19:30; cf. 20:16).

Mary also knew about this good news that turns everything upside down. In Luke 1:52, she sings of her God, "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate." Just like Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, Mary's life began with extreme disgrace and angst. "She was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly" (Matt. 1:18b–19). But Mary's life was vindicated. She became the very mother of Immanuel, God-with-us (Matt. 1:23; cf. Is. 7:14).

The Purpose of Matthew's Genealogy

Matthew's Christmas genealogy prepares us to follow his narrative and revel in the multitude of his messages of grace. Jesus chooses fishermen instead of Pharisees, sinners instead of Sadducees, and whores instead of Herodians. Climactically, he chooses thorns for His crown instead of silver and gold, and spit and blood instead of sweetness and light. His choices lead to torment and torture and darkness and death.

And this led to the greatest shock of all. "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said" (Matt. 28:5b–6a).



'She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins'
(Matt 1:21).

Jesus is Life overriding death and making all things new. "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Matt. 21:42; cf. Ps. 118:22–23).

Let's face it. Try as we might, this year's Christmas pageant won't be *exactly* perfect. Isaiah 9:2 may be misquoted, the Babe's swaddling clothes may slip off at an inopportune moment, the Christmas tree may remind us of Charlie Brown's sorry-looking stick, and the innkeeper may forget his lines, *again!*

That's okay.

Let it remind you of how Matthew introduces Jesus. It is not with glitter and Hollywood glitz. There are no fireworks or fine pedigrees. Matthew doesn't incorporate the kind of people who are finalists on *American Idol*. Rather, he selects four broken and outcast women, who in so many ways are just like us. No wonder he records this stunning promise just after his genealogy: "She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Thank God for annual Christmas pageants.

Thank God all the more for the one inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by a man named Matthew!

Dr. R. Reed Lessing is director of the graduate school and associate professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

by Kathy Reed

Sometimes,
when we're
least prepared,
we are called
on to witness
to our faith.

An Accidental Missionary



An Accidental Missionary

I didn't mean to be a missionary.

In fact, I was quite self-conscious and would have preferred to have avoided the situation completely, but God had other plans.

You see, I was in Peru, fulfilling a 30-year dream. I wanted to spend time in villages high in the Andes. My group had already visited Cusco, the old capital. Now we were trekking for a week on a rarely used trail to Machu Picchu.

As a surprise, our guide arranged a blessing ceremony by a local shaman. We were staying in a remote "community": one school building, one soccer field/cow pasture, and a solitary adobe wall. People had hiked in over the mountains from miles around to enjoy the benefits of our day of community service—running a medical clinic; giving away clothing and toys to kids; providing area schools with paper, pens, and other supplies; and making adobe bricks.

The blessing began with the shaman selecting three perfect cocoa leaves and blowing prayers through them to the four directions. He then began to prepare a gift for the mountain goddess. He placed a hand-woven blanket on the grass; then he laid down a square of floral gift wrap—a natural theme to coincide with the natural mountain. Gifts were carefully arranged on the paper: cotton to represent the clouds, wool for the provision of the sheep so critical to Peruvian life, and various types of candy. The assortment of candy was necessary because the mountain spirit is female, and of course, all women love candy. Then the shaman approached each of us with a basket of cocoa leaves.

We were arranged in a semicircle. Each of us was to take three perfect leaves for our personal prayers to the spirit. When the shaman approached me, I took my three leaves though my mind was screaming that I could not participate. Even just pretending to offer prayers to a mountain spirit went against everything I believe and had been taught about my Christian faith. Yet how could I refuse? We had been told that our entire group must participate for the most effective blessing. I would be spending the next week intimately living and trekking with my new comrades, and if I didn't participate—well, I had visions of being blamed every time something went wrong. Even worse, the blessing included the entire community for about 20 miles around, and most of the residents were watching the ceremony with great interest. How could I

Preceding page: Machu Picchu. Inset: Kathy Reed.
Lower left and upper right: The shaman conducting his ceremony.
Center: An overnight camp high in the Andes.

offend these people I had come to help?

One by one our group members approached the shaman, extending their cocoa leaves and whispering their prayer requests. One by one the shaman prayed over them. I watched as my turn came closer. I searched frantically for a way out of the mess. Finally—inspiration! As the woman two people down from me went up for her prayers, I discreetly stepped back and moved around the semicircle to take a picture. I watched as my friend next to me took his turn, then, seamlessly, my friend on the other side followed. Success!

The Shaman finished the personal prayers. Then he wrapped the mountain spirit's present. He carefully folded the paper just so, wrapping it with colorful cloth, to prepare a very tight bundle. He then announced that to make the blessing complete, he must bless each and every one of us. He began to go around the semicircle again, pouring a small amount of sage-infused oil on participants' hands before carefully touching each participant's



knees, chest, back, and forehead with the package. Rats!

This time I had hope—my photo guise had worked so well before, I decided I'd try it again. Again, as my turn approached, I slipped behind the group, moved back to my original position and took a picture. Again, no reaction from anyone. Yahoo! I was home free!

As the shaman blessed the last member of our group, Jose, one of our guides, called out "Kathy! Kathy! Come and get your blessing! Kathy, don't you want your blessing?"

I expected all sorts of fallout: Stunned disbelief from the parents, elders, and children of the local community. Teasing becoming accusation from fellow trekkers if anything went wrong over the next week. Public shunning.



I was aghast and forced myself to gently, nicely reply, "No, but thank you," as I smiled.

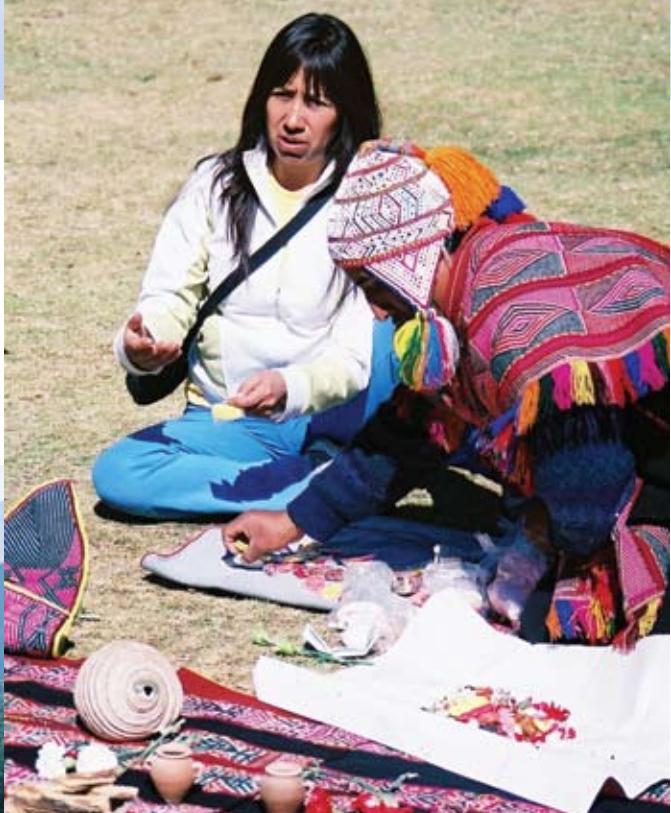
"Kathy, Kathy, you need to do this so we'll have good luck. Won't you come and take your turn?"

Again, a gentle "no, thanks" with a smile.

I expected all sorts of fallout: Stunned disbelief from the parents, elders, and children of the local community. Teasing becoming accusation from fellow trekkers if anything went wrong over the next week. Public shunning.

None of that happened. The local community had no reaction. And instead of avoiding me, my new friends on the trek approached me. Quietly, discreetly, one by one, they found moments to ask why I didn't participate in the blessing. They sought to understand why I felt the "harmless" and "fun" ceremony conflicted with my faith. They were curious about what I believed about God.

Each of these conversations was unique, depending on the individual's beliefs and questions. In general, I shared that I believed in the God who created all things, both in the heavens and here on earth, and that praying to these things



He created would not only be pointless, as God is the One truly in charge, but even worse, would be offensive to Him—a sin—and distract me from Him and His ways. I summarized my beliefs by stating that I am certain I will one day be with God in heaven because I believe Jesus Christ's death on the cross is payment for everything that can separate me from God.

When several of my new friends mentioned that all the world's religions basically teach the same thing, I explained that my understanding is that in all religions but one, the individual must act in order to save himself, and he is never sure if what he has done is enough to achieve his desired fate. Only in Christianity do we have the certainty and security of knowing our ultimate fate. This certainty lies in simply believing in what Jesus, the only Son of God, did for us. I chose my words carefully, knowing that some of my friends' non-Christian churches applied different meanings to the terminology used in true Christian churches.

Never would I have initiated those sorts of discussions. Instead, God used my most publicly horrifying moment so that my new, non-Christian friends *wanted* to learn more about my faith and sought out opportunities to do so.

No, I did not plan to be a missionary on that trip. I just was doing the best I could to discreetly, respectfully handle a difficult situation. And God used it to open doors.

**Kathy Reed is a member of Messiah Lutheran Church,
Grand Junction, Colo.**





Sharing the Hope We Have

Jesus told His disciples that He “came to seek and save what was lost” (Luke 19:10 NIV) and, ever since, He calls His faithful followers in every generation to join Him in the sacred mission of sharing the hope, peace, forgiveness, and joy that comes through faith in Jesus alone!

There are those days and times when we actively, intentionally, and willingly engage in conversations of grace, asking God to bless His Word as we speak it and to bless those who hear it. There are other days when we don’t initiate these “faith talks,” but God intervenes in ways that make it clear to us that He is giving us the opportunity to gently, lovingly share the hope that fills us as believers in Christ.

In either case—whether we intentionally initiate the conversation or find ourselves as “accidental missionaries”—we want to be prepared to give a winsome, joy-filled witness.

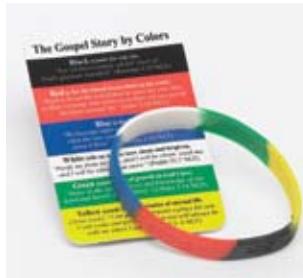
Unique and “special” moments may indeed provide us with the opportunity to share our faith. At the same time,

we also want to be watchful and ready for those everyday faith-sharing occurrences which so often seem to slip by unnoticed until we look back at them, wishing we had been more eloquent or regretting that we said nothing at all.

The apostle Peter reminds all believers, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience” (1 Peter 3:15–16). The apostle Paul charged his friend, the young pastor, Timothy, to be “prepared in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2) to proclaim the Word of God, correcting, encouraging, and instructing with patience and care.

It may not always seem easy to share our faith with others, but we certainly don’t want to miss the divine opportunities that God Himself places before us in the people with whom we interact every day. So, all believers—pastors, professional church workers, and laity—will want to be ready

If not every day, then *nearly* every day, God provides each believer in Christ with opportunities to share the life-giving message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.



to tell others about Jesus, about God’s plan of salvation, about what He has done to rescue us from sin and eternal death, and about the full life of faith He gives to us now and in eternity.

As Kathy Reed, the author of the accompanying story observed, “Each of these conversations [is] unique, depending on each individual’s beliefs and questions.” And so, too, our witness will be thoughtfully and appropriately “tailored” to meet the heart questions of our hearers.

Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and pray that God would help you to see, and seize, the opportunities to bring a message of hope and salvation to a friend, associate, neighbor, family member, schoolmate, or “casual daily contact” by confessing Him before them.

If not *every* day, then *nearly* every day, God provides each believer in Christ with opportunities to share the life-giving message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. There are dozens of personal evangelism tools (PETs), tracts, and other resources to help individuals, schools, and churches “be prepared” to do so. Many of these can be located on the *Ablaze!* Web site. Visit lcms.org/ablaze and click on the button for “Resources.”

For more information, ideas, suggestions, and help in being “prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you,” contact your LCMS district office or reach us (World Mission) at the LCMS International Center, 800-433-3954.

Rev. Scott Snow is the national director of outreach for LCMS World Mission.



Note: The "official notices" are published for a single purpose only: giving notice of a result, namely, changes in the Synod's membership rosters by the addition or deletion of the names of individuals and congregations. It is not always appropriate that reasons for the changes be identified in the published notices. Since a change can occur for any of a variety of reasons, no assumptions may be made merely from the fact that a change has occurred.—Ed.

Official Notices—From the Districts

REV. STEVEN ESSENBURG, Detroit, Mich., was appointed circuit counselor of Circuit 20—Detroit East Circuit, replacing REV. ARNOLD BRAMMEIER, who resigned as circuit counselor. REV. DAVID BURGESS, Detroit, Mich., was appointed circuit counselor of Circuit 21—Detroit Central Circuit, replacing REV. MARK GRIFFIN, who resigned as circuit counselor.—Rev. C. William Hoesman, president, LCMS Michigan District.

Official Notices—Colloquies

DAVID TIMM, Brunswick, Ohio; ALEMAYEHU O. WEDAJO, Lancaster, Pa.; DONALD C. YERGEY, Allentown, Pa.; MARK G. KIESEL, North Babylon, N.Y.; JACKSON S. JAYLAH, Las Vegas, Nev.; BRUCE K. MEIER, Eugene, Ore.; HANS OLOF ANDRAE, Jeanette, Pa.; BEJAMIN F. QUAMSON, South Holland, Ill.; and ERROL L. MONTGOMERY JR., Monroe, La., have completed all requirements for the Pastoral Colloquy Program through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible for a call.—Dr. William R. Diekelman, Chairman, Colloquy Committee, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

WALTER BREINER JR., Summit Hill, Pa., and CARL L. BECKWITH, Fultondale, Ala., have submitted their applications for the Pastoral Colloquy Program through The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. LAVONNE DOLLIVER, Plano, Texas; CHRISTOPHER FRITSCHE, San Angelo, Texas; STEPHANIE GOEDECKE, Spring, Texas; KATHLEEN HARRIS, San Angelo, Texas; ROBERT McEWIN, Tomball, Texas; and JASON MURRAY, Warren, Mich., have submitted their applications for the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through *CUEnet*. JULIANE OLSON, Heron Lake, Minn., has submitted an application for the Director of Christian Education Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn. KRISTI LARSEN, Waconia, Minn., has submitted an application for the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn. Correspondence regarding their applications should be directed within four weeks after publication of this notice to Dr. William R. Diekelman, Chairman, Colloquy Committee, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

NATASHA BOWLD, Laurel, Md.; STEPHANIE PITTOCK, Springville, N.Y.; and ERIN HEEMANN, Timonium, Md., have completed the Director of Christian Education Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call. JENNIFER McADAMS, Elgin, Ill., has completed the Director of Christian Outreach Colloquy Program and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call. KRISTIN MEYER, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Stephen C. Stohmann, Director of Colloquy, Concordia University, 275 Syndicate St. N., St. Paul, MN 55104.

LISA L. SHARP, Staunton, Ill., and JULIE A. STRASSER, La Grange, Ill., have completed all requirements of the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Mark A. Waldron, Director of Teacher Colloquy, Concordia University Chicago, 7400 Augusta St., River Forest, IL 60305-1499.

ALICIA CRESPO, Jacksonville, Fla., and DEBRA LEE, Great Falls, Mont., have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Brian L. Friedrich, President and CEO, Concordia University Nebraska, 800 N. Columbia Ave., Seward, NE 68434-1599.

Official Notices—Requests for Reinstatement

DOUGLAS G. MOFFATT, Maricopa, Ariz., has applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. LISA BARTELL, Wilton, Iowa, and CARLA J. TRAUNUM, Olympia, Wash., have applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than Jan. 5, 2009.—Dr. Raymond L. Hartwig, Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

Official Notices—Audits

The audits and summary budgets of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Foundation have been completed and are available upon written request. Please direct your request to the following:

Lutheran Church Extension Fund
Sunset Corporate Center
10733 Sunset Office Drive
St. Louis, MO 63127-1219

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
Foundation
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

The audit for the year ended June 30, 2008, and the program budget summary for fiscal year 2008/09 of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have been completed and are available upon written request. Requests for the audited financial statements and program budgets of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod should be sent to Charles Rhodes, Accounting Department, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122.

The audits and summary budgets of the Synod's 35 districts have been completed and are available upon written request. Write or contact your district office directly. The address of each district is published in the *Lutheran Annual*.

The audit of Concordia Publishing House has been completed and is available by contacting directly the following:

Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
314-268-1000

Positions

The Lutheran Witness welcomes notices for positions available at affiliated entities and Recognized Service Organizations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., Dec. 20 for the February 2009 issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.

Consider a Director of Christian Education (DCE) Intern!

What is a DCE Intern?

A DCE intern is a student preparing to become a capable servant of the Lord in parish education, whether it is education with children, youth, families, or adults. Some interns have special skills and interests in the areas of outreach, music, etc.

A DCE intern is a student who is preparing to be a lifespan educational leader for a congregation. The DCE is trained in Lutheran theology, parish education administration, human development, education theory, classroom teaching, leadership, and team ministry.

A DCE intern nurtures a personally maturing faith in Christ grounded in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

What can your congregation do for a DCE Intern?

Congregations with a DCE intern provide a learning environment for the DCE to gain ministry experience. The congregation that is dedicated to effective Christian education and desires to raise up a future church professional will do well in the internship program. The congregation provides quality supervision through an ordained pastor or certified minister such as a DCE.

What can a DCE Intern do for your congregation?

The DCE intern will be actively involved in the leadership of the congregation in such areas as the following:

- Adult education
- Youth education
- Youth and children mentoring programs
- Family education
- Recruiting and equipping volunteers for children's, youth and/or family ministry
- Initiating educational programs that address the needs of a congregation
- Team ministry
- Organizing youth, adult and/or family retreats
- Planning and leading youth and family servant events
- Developing mission outreach opportunities to link the church with its community

For more information contact one of the Concordia Universities currently offering DCE Internships:

- Concordia University, Portland, Ore.: 503-493-6231, www.cu-portland.edu
- Concordia University Texas, Austin, Texas: 512-313-5106, www.concordia.edu
- Concordia University, Irvine, Calif.: 800-229-1200, ext. 1764, www.cui.edu
- Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill.: 708-209-3604, www.cuchicago.edu
- Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn.: 651-641-8892, www.csp.edu
- Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, Neb.: 800-535-5494, ext. 7437, www.cune.edu

Reaching Out for Help

My husband and I have been married 20 years. Ten years ago I was unfaithful to him, but he is unaware of it. I have repented of this sin and have never repeated it, nor would I. I haven't told my pastor, either. Do you feel it's important for me to confess this to my spouse? To my pastor? I truly love my husband, and to tell him would cause him heartache. I know I should have thought of that before, but I didn't.

You have obviously been living with tremendous tension over the past 10 years, marked by guilt, fear, and uncertainty. The fact that you are now willing to reach out for help is a step in the right direction, proof that God's Word is active in your life, leading to repentance and, if possible, to making amends.

While nothing you say or do can change the choice you made then, there are important truths to keep in mind. Marital infidelity is a manifestation of sin, and it affects Christian and non-Christian couples. I make this point for the benefit of our readers who may also be struggling with this or similar damaging decisions around intimate relationships. You have repented and can be sure of God's promise: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us"

(Ps. 103:12 NIV). Of course, our poor choices inevitably affect those closest to us, even if they aren't aware of them.

Your struggle about whether to tell your husband comes out of your love and concern for him. This puts you in a dilemma: To continue withholding the secret means maintaining your unspoken betrayal and causing ongoing anguish for you; to tell him would likely "cause him heartache" and perhaps lead to the deterioration of your relationship.

It is impossible to predict how your husband would react, should you choose to tell him of your affair. To be sure, such a revelation would be traumatic for most husbands. I would counsel you to confess to your pastor, through whom you can hear clearly the forgiveness you already hold dear in your heart. Your pastor can also offer guidance on how to proceed in conversation with your husband.

Dr. Leslie (Jack) Fyans is a clinical psychologist and member of the Ministerial Health Committee of the LCMS Central Illinois District.

Send your questions to Family Counselor, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Please include your name and address.

NOTICES

The following institutions of the Concordia University System are seeking candidates for the positions below:

Concordia University Irvine seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **Nursing, Business**.

Concordia University Wisconsin, seeks to fill the following faculty position: **Psychology**.

Concordia University Chicago, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **Two Teacher Education, Political Science, Social Work**.

For more information about this and other CUS positions, including complete job descriptions, qualifications, and application process, visit <http://www.lcms.org/cusjobs> and click on "Positions Available at Our Campuses."

Anniversaries

The Lutheran Witness welcomes notices of no more than 50 words from LCMS congregations about their upcoming "milestone" anniversaries. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., Dec. 20 for the February 2009 issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.

First, Little Rock, Ark., will celebrate its 140th anniversary with a special service at 10:30 a.m., Dec. 14. Rev. Paul Jilg, emeritus, will be guest preacher. Rev. Dean Bauer, pastor, will serve as liturgist. A reception will follow.

St. Mark, Conroe, Texas, will begin its year-long 50th anniversary celebration on Jan. 11, 2009. Former pastor Rev. Alvin H. Lange will preach. After a potluck, members will mark Bibles for Texas prison inmates. Contact the church office at 936-756-6335 or stmarkconroe@consolidated.net.

In Memoriam

Obituary information is provided by district offices to the Synod's Office of Rosters and Statistics. Any questions about content should be referred, therefore, to the appropriate district office.—Ed.

ORDAINED

ALBRECHT, PAUL GERHARD; May 12, 1936, Bay City, Mich., to Aug. 27, 2008, Superior, Neb.; son of Rev. Gerhard and Margaret (Paustian) Albrecht; colloquy, 1993. Served 1993–2008. Ministry/parish: Superior, Neb.; Nebraska District circuit counselor 1994–2002, 2004–2006. Survivors: Carol (Kohl) Albrecht; sons:

Michael, Kevin; daughters: Kristie Conner, Kim Drogemueler. Funeral and interment: Sept. 1, 2008, Superior, Neb.

BOETTCHER, DONALD LEE; Nov. 18, 1943, Spencer, Neb., to Sept. 22, 2008, Neligh, Neb.; son of Arthur and Mary (Galbraith) Boettcher; colloquy, 1994. Served 1995–2005. Ministries/parishes: Springview (Burton), Newport, Neb.; retired 2005. Preceded in death by his children, Brandon, Marci, Marni. Survivors: Norma (Johnson) Boettcher; sons: Brent, Joshua, Jeremy; daughter: Angela Tauber. Funeral and interment: Sept. 25, 2008, Spencer, Neb.

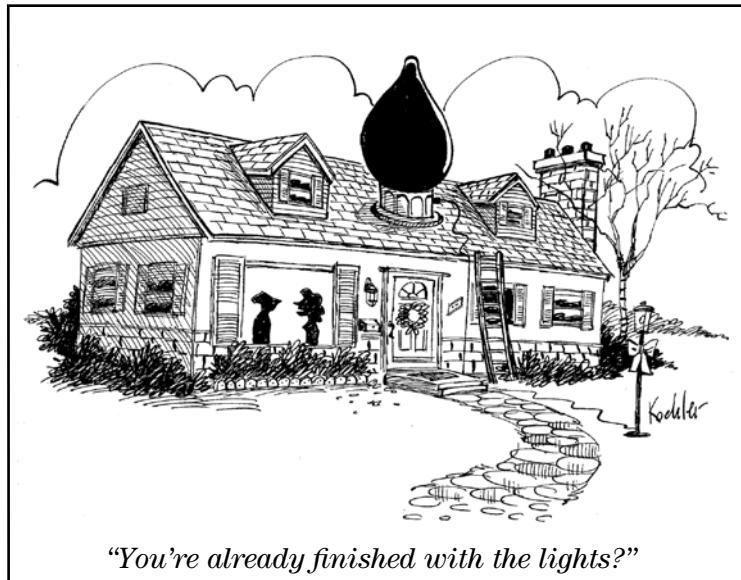
EBELING, HENRY C.; Feb. 19, 1921, Milwaukee, Wis., to Sept. 4, 2008, Milwaukee, Wis.; son of Henry and Laura (Troeller) Ebeling; graduated St. Louis, 1946. Served 1947–1984. Ministries/parishes: Hicksville, Laurelton, N.Y.; Bayonne, N.J.; Yuba City, Calif.; Waukesha, Kenosha, West Bloomfield, Wis.; California-Nevada-Hawaii District circuit counselor 1958–1960; English District circuit counselor 1968–1970; South Wisconsin District circuit counselor 1980–1982; retired 1984. Preceded in death by his wife, Audrey (Muehl) Ebeling. Survivors: sons: Timothy, Jonathan, Eric; daughter: Laurie. Funeral: Sept. 8, 2008, Milwaukee, Wis.; interment: Sept. 8, 2008, Big Bend, Wis.

SCHREIBER, RICHARD JOHN; Aug. 27, 1957,

Christmas Bloopers Your Spellchecker Won't Catch

- The Festival Choir will present experts from Handel's *Messiah* today at 2 p.m.
- We ask your help if you play an instrument, sin, or do liturgical dance.
- The Christmas decorating party begins Sunday at 2 p.m. Bring your saws to cut trees and willing hands.
- The purpose of this party is to foster Christian fellowship and fun.
- The Tired Sunday in Advent.
- Pastor John will deliver the Advent message.
- Each Wednesday during Advent, the congregation will gather for prayer, meditation, and preparation.

From *The Big Book of Church Humor*



"You're already finished with the lights?"

Good Will or Goodwill?

My granddaughter and I were visiting a store the week before Christmas. Happy and looking forward to the big day, she was singing quietly, "Glory to God in the highest. Glory to God in the highest. Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace to men of good will."

"Goodwill!" she exclaimed suddenly. "I don't like that word. That's where they take all my toys!"

(Each year before Christmas her parents gathered up all the children's old toys and donated them to Goodwill Industries.)

Barb Hinrichs
Bethel Lutheran Church
Lawton, Iowa

Aitkin, Minn., to Sept. 8, 2008, Minneapolis, Minn.; son of John and Clara (Mueller) Schreiber; graduated St. Louis, 1983. Served 1983–2005, 2007–2008. Ministries/parishes: Zap, N.D.; Deer Creek, Minn.; Dayton, Ogden, Iowa; Milford, Neb.; Webster, Danbury, Cable, Wis. Funeral and interment: Sept. 13, 2008, St. Paul, Minn.

WILLE, JULIUS G.; June 10, 1930, Watertown, Wis., to Sept. 8, 2008, Mountain Home, Ark.; son of August and Edna Wille; colloquy, 1982. Served 1982–1991. Ministries/parishes: Taylorville, Ill.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Central Illinois District missionary 1989–1991; Rocky Mountain District circuit counselor 1988–1989; retired 1991. Survivors: Joan (Wuestenberg) Wille; son: Rev. John; daughters: Joan Lunderburg, Jean Henderson. Funeral and interment: Sept. 13, 2008, Watertown, Wis.

COMMISSIONED

BAYER, LESTER RALPH DR.; Dec. 23, 1923, Janesville, Wis., to Aug. 19, 2008, Austin, Texas; son of Erhard and Olga Bayer; graduated River Forest, 1946. Served 1946–1992. Schools/ministries: Greeley, Colo.; Temple, Austin, Texas; St. Louis, Mo.; Bronxville, N.Y.; retired 1992. Survivors: Lois (Beck) Bayer; sons: Tim, Mike; daughters: Pam, Lynn. Memorial service and interment: Aug. 22, 2008, Austin, Texas.

GOLDENSTERN, CLARENCE E.; June 22, 1928, Chicago, Ill., to Dec. 23, 2007, Kankakee, Ill.; son of Clarence R. and Elizabeth (Meister) Goldenstern; graduated River Forest, 1950. Served 1950–1993. Schools/ministries: Chicago, Rockford, Palatine, Danville, Lake Zurich, Chebanse, Ill.; retired 1993. Preceded in death by his wife, Mary (Borth) Goldenstern. Survivors: sons: Paul, Timothy, daughter: Beth Lindstrom. Funeral and interment: Dec. 29, 2007, Chebanse, Ill.

LEINBERGER, CAROLYN R. (JUD); Aug. 6, 1947, Beardstown, Ill., to Aug. 9, 2008, Jacksonville, Ill.; daughter of Robert and Wanda (Staake) Jud; colloquy River Forest, 1998. Served 1998–2008. School/ministry: Jacksonville, Ill. Survivors: David Leinberger I; stepsons: David II, Karl. Funeral: Aug. 13, 2008, Jacksonville, Ill.; interment: Morgan County, Ill.

MAUCH, JEANNINE A.; April 17, 1944, Fremont, Neb., to July 27, 2008, Scribner, Neb.; daughter of Oscar and Viola (Backhus) Mauch; graduated Seward, 1966. Served 1980–2003. Schools/ministries: Yonkers, N.Y.; Plainview, Neb.; retired 2003. Funeral: July 30, 2008, Norfolk, Neb.; interment: July 30, 2008, Scribner, Neb.

MEISSLER, MERWYN LAMBERT; Feb. 15, 1938, Abilene, Kan., to July 20, 2008, Brenham, Texas;

son of Rev. William and Martha (Kohrs) Miessler; graduated River Forest, 1961. Served 1961–2001. Schools/ministries: New Orleans, La.; St. Charles, Mo.; Melrose Park, Ill.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Brenham, Texas; retired 2001. Preceded in death by his son Michael. Survivors: Glenda (Borth) Miessler; sons: Mark, Bryan, Christopher; daughter: Robyn Miessler-Kubanek. Memorial service: July 27, 2008, Melrose Park, Ill.; interment: July 29, 2008, St. Louis, Mo.

SCHMITZ, WALTER K.; Aug. 22, 1939, Milwaukee, Wis., to Jan. 30, 2008, Addison, Ill.; graduated River Forest, 1961. Served 1961–2001. School/ministry: Waverly, Iowa; retired 2001. Survivors: Suzanne (Radtke) Schmitz; sons: Dan, Dave; daughter: Julie Robinson. Funeral and interment: Feb. 2, 2008, Addison, Ill.

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Christmas from the Angle of Angels

by Terence Groth

Angels play such a prominent role in the story of our Lord's birth that we might even tell the Christmas story from their perspective.

The evangelist Luke sets the stage with the story of John the Baptist's birth in Luke 1:5–25.

John's parents, the childless Zechariah and Elizabeth, "were both well along in years" (vv. 7, 18 NIV) when the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah with surprising "good news" (v. 19). God had chosen them to have a special son who would "be a joy and delight" to them and cause many to rejoice (v. 14). What role was John to play in God's long-awaited plan? vv. 16–17

Gabriel indeed announced good news. But more was to come. Luke goes on in 1:26–38 to tell how Gabriel also paid a visit to a young virgin named Mary. She lived in the small town of Nazareth and was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of the great king David (vv. 26–27). The angel shocked Mary with this news: Like Elizabeth, she too was going to have a child. Who would Mary's child be? v. 32a

What would Mary's child do? vv. 32b–33

Since Mary was a virgin, how was this to happen? vv. 35, 37

What bold statement of commitment did Mary make to Gabriel that demonstrated her faith in his astounding message? v. 38

Giving us more of the behind-the-scenes insight, the evangelist Matthew relates the involvement of "an angel of the Lord" in assisting Joseph (Matt. 1:18–25). We can only imagine the struggle Joseph must have had when his betrothed Mary "was found to be with child" (v. 18). While Joseph labored to determine an appropriate but gracious response, he also was visited by an angel—in a dream (v. 20). This angel too had a startling message. How did the angel explain Mary's pregnancy? vv. 20–21

How was Joseph's faith and obedience demonstrated in his response to the angel's direction? vv. 24–25

Meanwhile, as Luke continues the Christmas story (Luke 2:8–20), he takes us to the night Jesus was born. Once again angels are on the scene. To what unlikely characters did an angel gloriously appear near Bethlehem? vv. 8–9

As usual, the angel tells his hearers, "Do not be afraid" (v. 10). And again Luke underscores that, true to the meaning of *angel*, this "messenger" brought "good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (v. 10). What was the angel's good news? v. 11

As a grand finale for Christmas Eve, the single messenger was suddenly joined by "a great company of the heavenly host" (v. 13) who enthusiastically praised God. What was the angels' happy chorus? v. 14

After the angels returned to heaven, how did the shepherds show they really believed the angels? vv. 15–20

The apostle Paul hints that angels are present whenever believers gather in worship (1 Cor. 11:10). Then certainly they fill our churches during the Christmas season when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and theirs. Most assuredly on Christmas Eve they join with us in singing the hymn they copyrighted, "Gloria in excelsis Deo" (Luke 2:14). Absolutely they rejoice to hear their (God's!) good news announced again. Do you ever wonder: what does *our* celebration of the Christmas story look like from their angle? May it be blessed from every angle with God's grace and joy!

Rev. Terence Groth is an assistant professor of theology at Concordia University Nebraska.