

THE LUTHERAN 

MARCH 2014

AMBASSADOR

An open stone coffin is the central focus, set within a rectangular shadow cast on a field of autumn leaves. The leaves are in various shades of green, yellow, and orange, suggesting a late autumn or early winter setting. The coffin is made of dark, weathered stone and is open, with the lid resting to the right. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

SAVIOR
IN THE
SHADOWS

Stepping off the sin cycle

BY ANDREW KNEELAND

Bad habits die hard. Just two months have passed in 2014, and I'm sure most New Year's resolutions have been kicked to the curb for some time now. If you're still accomplishing what you set out to accomplish, good on you! But you're in the minority. It's hard to keep up a good habit.

I have lots of bad habits. I don't read as many books as I'd like to, I don't exercise as often as I should, and I don't drink nearly enough water. But there's one habit that's worse than all the others. It's the same one the Israelites struggled with thousands of years ago: the sin cycle.

Throughout the Book of Judges, a pattern emerges when you look at the history of God's chosen people. The Israelites would stray from Yahweh and turn to the pagan gods of their influential neighbors. And every time they wandered away, another nation would make their lives miserable. But when the Israelites remembered their God, He would look on them with mercy and compassion and raise up a judge to deliver them.

And then the Israelites would throw out their false idols, return to worshiping the one, true God, and enjoy years of peace and rest. But, inevitably, the cycle would start again. And again, and again.

But for as consistently as Israel rejected God and turned to the false gods of the cultures around them, God was even more consistent in His love for the Israelites.

We're just as faithless as those Israelites were thousands of years ago. We may not literally assign deistic powers to a stone statue, but there are certainly other things our culture tells us are more important than our God. Is the goal of life to get a higher income? A faster car? A more popular social life?



No. But we've bitten into these lies and let them dictate our life and our decisions so much that we fall into bondage to these sins, just like the Israelites. Oh, how that must break God's heart!

It often took many, many years, but eventually the Israelites realized their sin and need of a deliverer. They might have thought that they could rescue themselves from their bondage, but only One had the power to deliver them.

In Hebrew, the word for "deliverer" is *yasha*. That's the root of the name *Yeshwa*, which means Jesus. And "delivering" is exactly what

Jesus does.

God delivered His people many times in the Old Testament through the work of the judges. Israel fell into bondage many times, but God was always more than willing to welcome His people back with open arms.

God has also provided a way for us to be saved and delivered from our oppression. It's a free gift, and the work has already been done. By being born as a man, living a perfect life, and dying on a cross meant for us, Jesus made a way for us to find peace with God.

It's easy to fall into the habit of sin. It can quickly become a lifestyle. But just as God delivered His people in the Old Testament, so also God is able to deliver His people today from the sin cycle.

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On the cover: "Elijah," original art by Elise Hylden, was created for Ambassador Publications' seventh grade curriculum, which is currently in production.

March 2014 >>

THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR vol. 52, no. 3

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The Lutheran Ambassador (USPS 588-620 ISSN 0746-3413) is published monthly by the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. AFLC headquarters and publications office is at 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. Phone (763) 545-5631; fax 763-545-0079.

For subscription changes and information: The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441. 763-545-5631 or e-mail at luthamb@aflc.org.

Subscription rates:
\$19 a year, Group Rate, U.S.
\$20 a year, Individual, U.S.
\$22 a year, International
Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing office.

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Lutheran Ambassador, 3110 E. Medicine Lake Blvd., Plymouth, MN 55441.

The world takes us to a silver screen on which flickering images of passion and romance play, and as we watch, the world says, "This is love." God takes us to the foot of a tree on which a naked and bloodied man hangs and says, "This is love."

—Joshua Harris

The theology of the cross is not a cerebral thing; it profoundly affects our Christian experience and existence, making demands upon our whole lives and turning theology into something which controls not just our thoughts, but the very way in which we experience the world around and taste the blessing and fellowship of God himself.

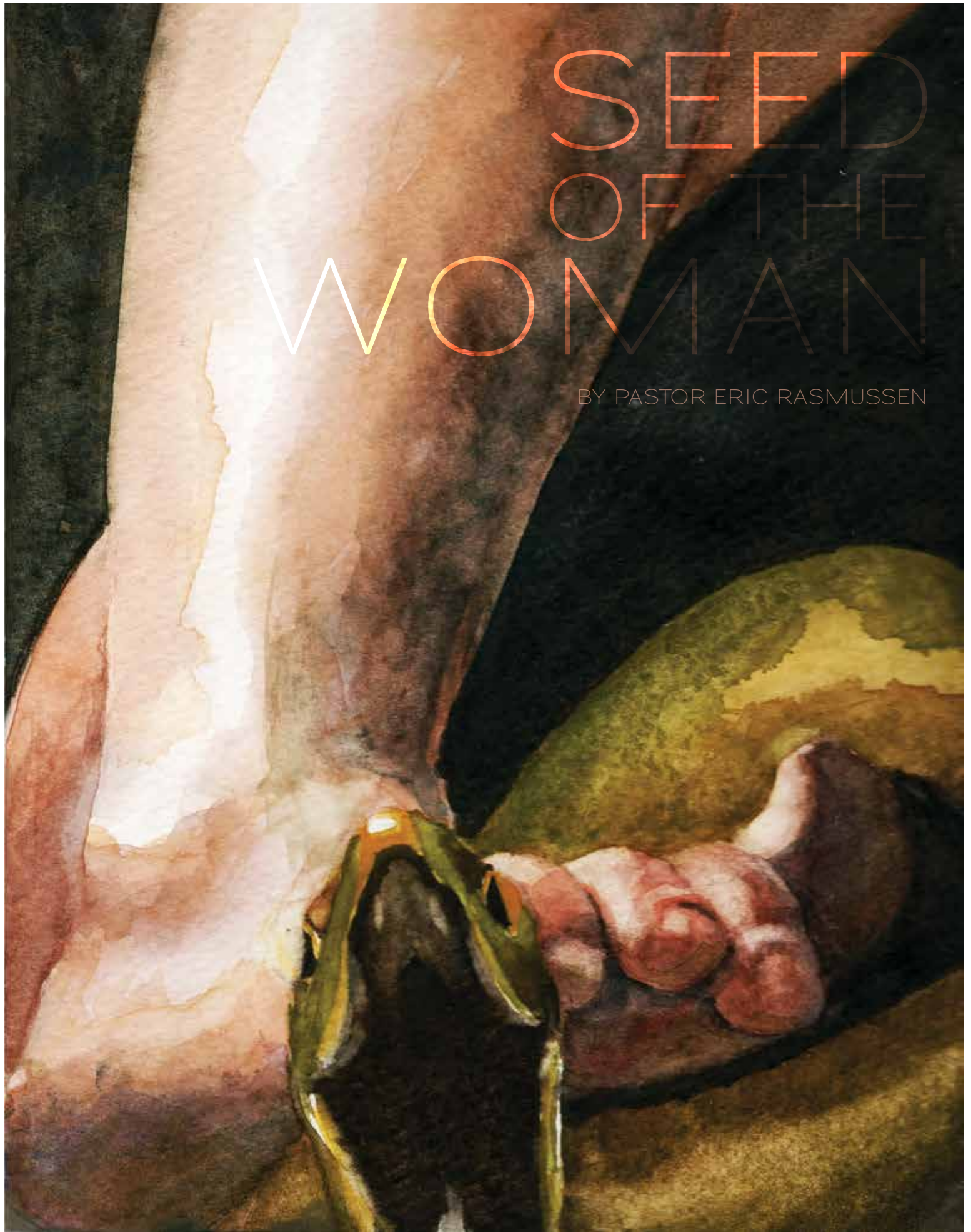
—Carl R. Trueman

Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us—a crucified God—must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world.

—John Piper

Christ's death is the Christian's life. Christ's cross is the Christian's title to heaven. Christ "lifted up" and put to shame on Calvary is the ladder by which Christians "enter into the holiest," and are at length landed in glory.

—J.C. Ryle



SEED OF THE WOMAN

BY PASTOR ERIC RASMUSSEN

AND I WILL PUT ENMITY
BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN,
AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND HER SEED;
HE SHALL BRUISE YOU ON THE HEAD,
AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIM ON THE HEEL.
GENESIS 3:15

At first glance, it is hard to find the gospel in these words of judgment spoken by God to the serpent in Genesis 3. This evil, vile creature had just caused irreparable damage for all of humankind by tempting Adam and Eve to sin. And now, God is rightly judging the serpent.

This may not seem like a grace-filled verse at first glance, but this very first judgment—spoken to the serpent—is filled with grace for us. Read the verse again. We don't see Jesus' name here or any mention of the cross. But both are here, written in the shadows, there for us to dig out.

This verse is called *protevangelium* or “first Gospel,” and when we dig into the words and the context, we see why. As we dig, it becomes more and more clear that this verse not only contains good news for us, but it is actually a clear and concise statement of who Christ is and what He accomplished for us on the cross. In fact, Charles Simeon, an influential English preacher, called this verse “the sum and summary of the whole Bible.”

The first and really most important gospel word in our text is “seed” (used in the NASB). Other versions, such as the New International Version and the English Standard Version, translate this word “offspring,” but “seed” is literal. As we dig deeper, we note that “seed” in this verse is singular—meaning one offspring. This is the same word in Genesis 22:18, where God speaks to Abraham, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed ...” Again the word is singular, speaking of one offspring, one seed.

We know that Adam and Eve had more than one child, and Abraham and Sarah's descendants are as many as the stars in the heavens. These verses are not talking about their many descendants. No, both Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 22:18 are talking about one seed—Jesus. Both the Apostle Peter in Acts 3:25-26 and the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:8-16 declare that the singular seed of the woman is, in fact, Christ. This makes Genesis 3:15 the first mention and promise of a Savior.

As we read this first gospel, we not only see the promise of a Savior, but we see a glimpse of His finished work on the cross, as well. The word “enmity” in our text can be translated “hostility” and “hatred.” This speaks of an endless conflict between God and Satan. More correctly, this conflict lies between the seed of the serpent, that is, Satan, and the seed of the woman—Christ. We are in a hostile battle, but the good news is that Christ is on our side. He is fighting on our behalf. Our ally is more powerful than our adversary.

Perhaps the best thing about this verse is the picture of Christ's

victory. “[Christ] shall bruise [the Serpent] on the head.” I like the visual of the language in the New International Version: “[Christ] will crush [Satan's] head.” To me, it sounds stronger and more conclusive. I don't claim to know from experience, but snake handlers will tell you that you need to control the head when capturing a snake. That is where the poison is; that is where it can hurt you. And the verse says that the seed, Christ, will “crush” the serpent's head—declaring the victory.

Declaring the victory in the midst of the battle may seem arrogant and presumptive, but the Scriptures use this victory language not only in the present and the future, but also in such a way that declares that the battle is already won. Romans 16:20 declares future victory: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” John 16:11 declares Satan's judgment in strong, already-accomplished language: “the ruler of this world has been judged.” Hebrews 2:14b also declares the victory: “through death He [Jesus] might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” And Paul confirms the victory in I Corinthians 15:57, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, guarantees our victory. While the irreparable damage done by the serpent in the Garden of Eden can't be undone, excused, or ignored, it has been ultimately overcome by the seed of the woman.

The message of Genesis 3:15 does not end there, though, because while Christ's work is complete, the battle still rages. It rages subjectively for the hearts and souls of humans everywhere, and it rages in our daily battle with sin. Satan, while ultimately defeated, is still fighting—person by person, home by home, and church by church. He continues to use the very same tactics as he did in the garden. He continues to tempt believers, and he continues to cause people to doubt and question both God and His Word. But just as the serpent's tactics haven't changed, so also our God hasn't changed from ages past. His promise of a Savior and His promise of the victory in Genesis 3 remain just as valid today as the promise was to Adam and Eve thousands of years ago.

Rasmussen, who is the associate pastor at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn., is the president of the 2015 FLY Committee.

“The Snake Crusher,” original art by Elise Hylden, was created for Ambassador Publications' upcoming seventh grade curriculum.

MAKE A FIERY SERPENT, AND SET IT ON A
STANDARD; AND IT SHALL COME ABOUT,
THAT EVERYONE WHO IS BITTEN,
WHEN HE LOOKS AT IT, HE WILL LIVE.
NUMBERS 21:8

The brazen serpent is one type—or shadow—of Christ in the Old Testament.

A type is an Old Testament person, object, law, or event that clearly parallels the person of the Messiah.

All such types are not complete. Instead, these types can only point people to Christ. In fact, they never complete the picture of the One they foreshadow; instead, they give us a brief glimpse into an aspect of Christ's nature.

A shadow is a representation cast by light of an object that has substance. Think of a young child in the late afternoon sitting in the shadow of a tree. Curious, he starts at the farthest end of the shadow until he gets to the tree, the substance of the shadow. These shadows of Christ prompt us to search the Scriptures for their source, where we find Christ who is the substance of all Scripture.

The shadow, or type, of Christ in the brass serpent is a powerful picture of God's gracious redemption of sinners through the cross of Christ.

The cause behind the raising of the brass serpent was the grumbling of the Israelite people. They did what many of God's people do when they forget the goodness of the Lord. Israel had seen God's gracious provision for them for 40 years while they wandered the desert, but Numbers 21 recounts that they wanted more, something different. They were discouraged and disappointed, and they spoke against God and Moses (Numbers 21:5). Then "the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (Numbers 21:6).

Disappointment and discouragement arise from our sinful nature and its fleshly appetites. It might be sins of the flesh that leave us wanting more, or sins of pride that seek promotion and self-glory. It might be sins of the spirit that lead us astray, looking for more exciting and relevant spiritual satisfaction.

After the affliction by the serpents, the Israelites said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us."

And Moses interceded for the people.

The cure was simple and unusual. God said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live" (Numbers 21:8).

It didn't make sense to them, and it probably doesn't make sense to anyone unfamiliar with the cross of Christ. But for those of us who know the rest of the story, the symbolism is unmistakable.

Restoration for the Israelites came through God's promise that if anyone was bitten by a serpent, they were to look at the brass serpent on the pole and be healed.

I wonder how the brazen serpent would be received today. Imagine two friends, Adam and Eli, sitting together in Adam's tent one afternoon. Suddenly Eli cries out, "Adam, help me, I've been bitten by a serpent! Quick, call for the physician! Do something!"

Adam replies, "Eli, all you have to do is step outside and look at that brass serpent on the pole."

Eli cries out in pain, "Are you crazy? What good is that going to do?"

Adam responds, "That's what God said we should do."

But Eli moans, "That doesn't make any sense. Just get some medicine or someone to help me."

Eli's response seems similar to many who reject the very real and present help of Christ offered to a fallen world.

When talking with an unbeliever who complains about his miserable life and how he feels so lost and empty, Christians will likely say, "Look to Jesus."

But the unbeliever might say, "That's no good, I need real help."

Then there is the Christian who has lost faith because of some besetting sin and the problems this world have thrown at him. When counseled to look (again) to Jesus, in his current state of mind he, too, might think it is useless. But only in doing so can he be drawn out of the darkness into the light of God's amazing grace.

The substance of this shadow and the cure for our sin are seen in the words of Jesus when speaking to Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

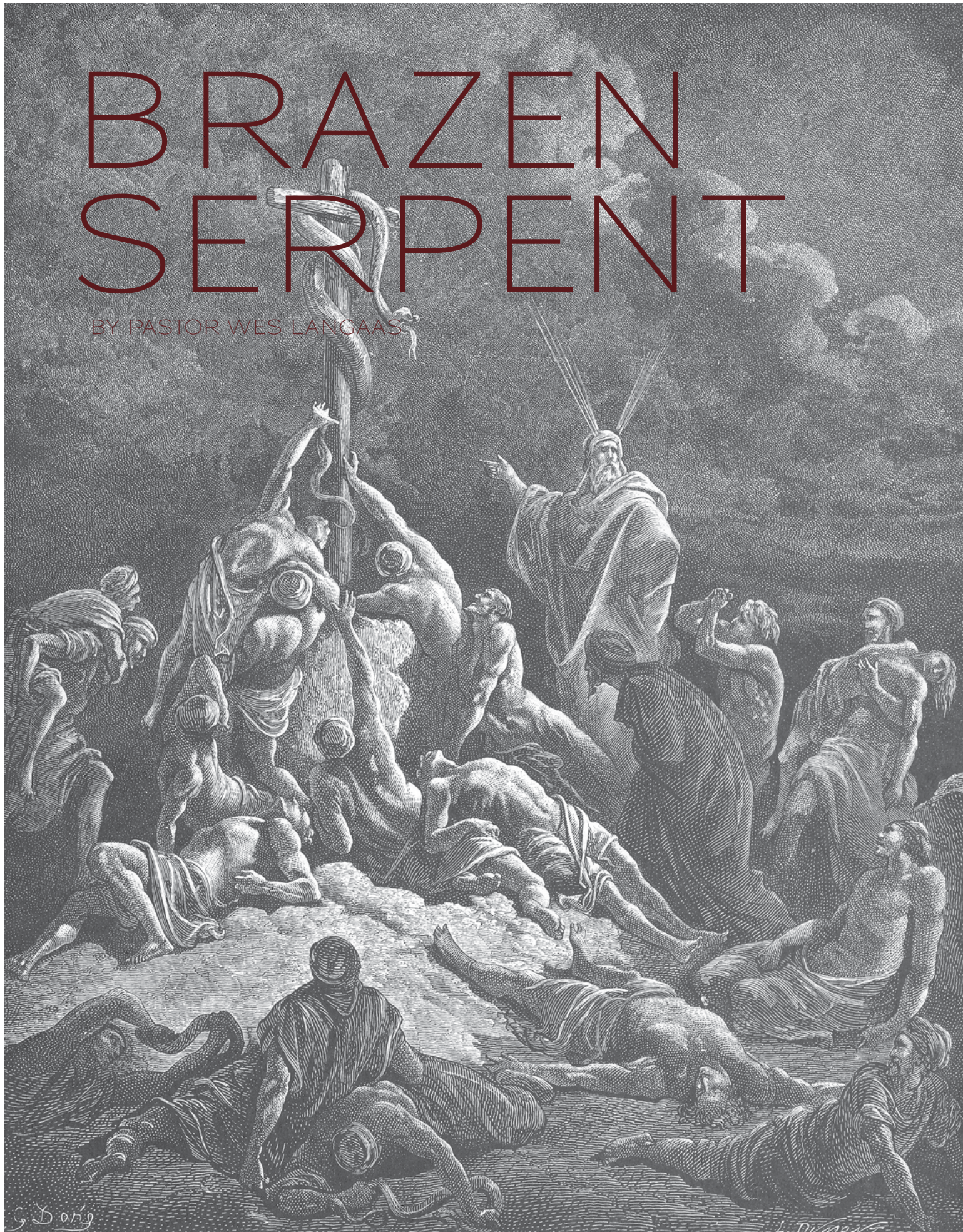
These words are a comfort for us today as we look back at Christ lifted on the cross, Christ crucified and risen. Maybe none of us have suffered as Israel did for 40 years (it just seems that way at times). But we all have our own trials and tribulations in this world. At times we are content to just live in the shadows of life. But an old hymn says, "Standing somewhere in the shadows you'll find Jesus ... and you'll know Him by the nail prints in His hands" (*Standing in the Shadows*, by E.J. Rollings).

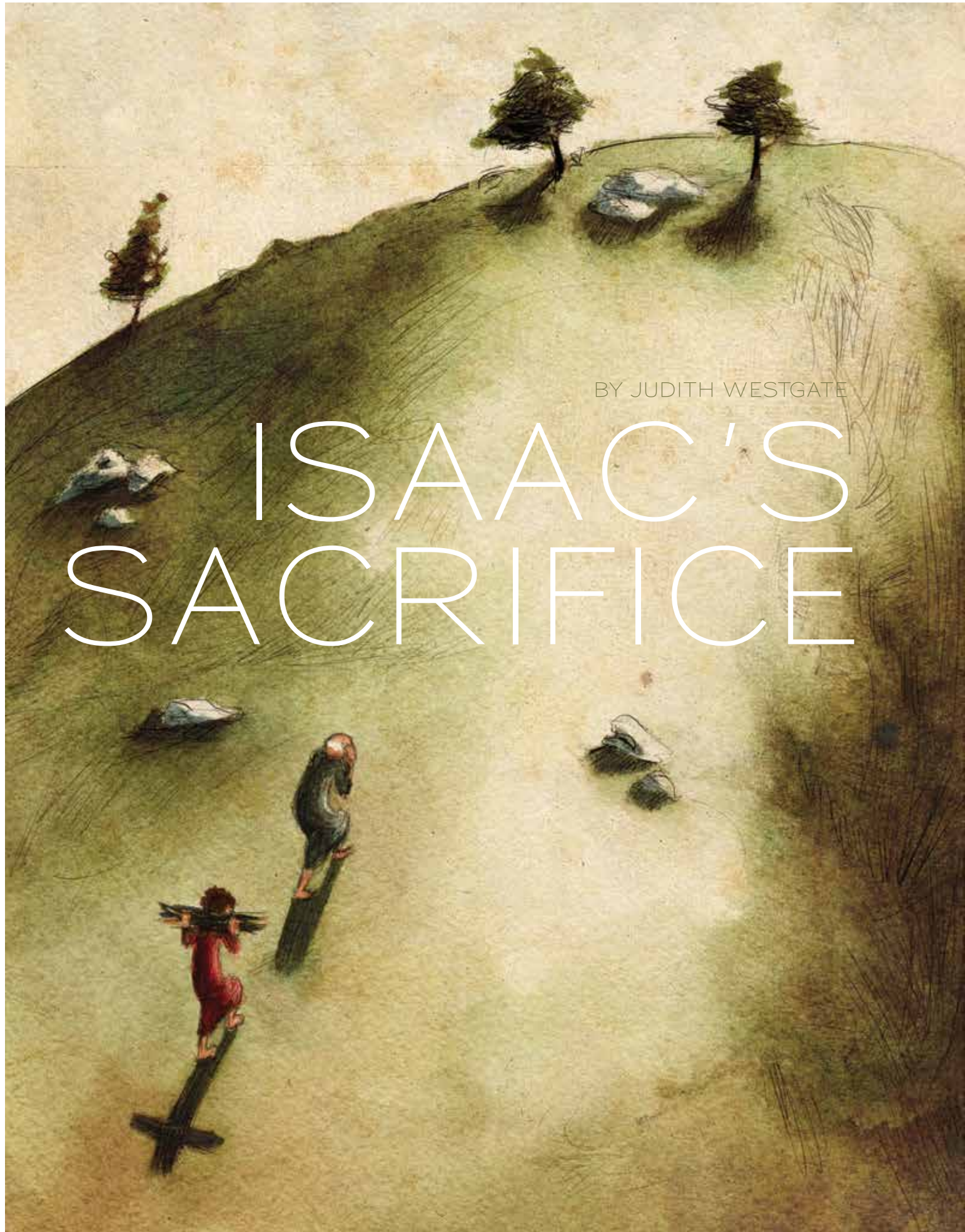
It is the wounds of Christ, offered for our sake and for our sin, that ultimately provide comfort for the soul in seeing His victory over the devil, the world, and even our own flesh. Only when looking to Jesus can we see the fullness of God's grace, grace that is sufficient for each day. So we keep walking by faith, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Then we know that one day there will be no more shadows, that faith will be sight, and it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

Langaas, now retired, lives in Karlstad, Minn.

BRAZEN SERPENT

BY PASTOR WES LANGAAS





BY JUDITH WESTGATE

ISAAC'S SACRIFICE

TAKE NOW YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON,
WHOM YOU LOVE, ISAAC, AND GO TO THE
LAND OF MORIAH, AND OFFER HIM THERE
AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE
MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I WILL TELL YOU.

GENESIS 22:2

It is easy for me to see Christ foreshadowed in the life of Isaac. Isaac was a wonder, a son resulting neither from the design nor desire of man, but a miracle of a son from an impossible mother. Through him, the Lord had said, “all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Again, the Lord had told Abraham, “through Isaac your descendants shall be named.”

The miracle of Isaac’s birth and the promises received by his parents made clear that God had a plan and purpose for this man, one that would be for the good of all people yet to be. How impossible, then, that His chosen one would need to die before anything had been accomplished. Yet, in faith, Abraham woke early and began his journey without delay.

For many the image of Isaac at this time is that he was still a child. Scholars have placed his age as young as 10 and as old as 37. Most believe he was at least 16. He was at least old enough to have the strength needed to carry the wood for the impending sacrifice. Isaac carried the wood, the heavy burden of sufficient wood to burn a man’s body to ashes. He went, as Jesus would go, carrying His cross, with quiet acceptance and without complaint, carrying the instrument of his own death.

We know that Jesus knew what would happen to Him in Jerusalem. But we are not told when Isaac realized that he was the intended sacrifice. We read that Abraham saw the place of the sacrifice from a distance and then he and Isaac began that long walk.

“So the two of them walked on together” (Genesis 22:6).

Then Isaac asked his father what would be sacrificed, and Abraham offered those prophetic words, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (vs. 8). This was followed immediately by, “So the two of them walked on together.” The repetition of the phrases implies that some time was involved in their long walk. Was it during this walk that Abraham explained to Isaac what God had demanded of them?

We are only told that at last they stood upon the mountain at the place indicated for the sacrifice. Abraham was more than 100 years old, and Isaac was a man in the full strength of his youth. Had Isaac chosen to resist, he could not have been forced into this sacrifice. Just as Christ was a willing sacrifice so that the will of the

Father would be fulfilled, Isaac also submitted to his earthly father and his heavenly Father, so that the will of the Father would be fulfilled.

Submissively, Isaac allowed himself to be bound and placed upon the altar. As Abraham raised the knife, the sacrifice was truly complete. Had God not miraculously intervened, Abraham would have completed the dreaded act. Isaac had already willingly laid down his own life, submitting to being bound and placed on the altar. Praise be to God who provided the ram for the sacrifice, as Abraham had said God would do. “Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son” (vs. 13).

Now my view of Isaac changes. Rather than seeing in him a foreshadowing of Christ, I see in him a foreshadowing of me. As he was bound, unable to help himself, I was bound by sin and subject to death, unable to free myself. The death that was Isaac’s has been placed on the ram. Christ, the substitute to take my place, is provided by God alone. It is nothing that I could cause to happen; it is a gift, pure and free. The joy of Abraham and Isaac should be kindled again in my soul as I read these words and see myself as the one rescued.

Christ is now revealed in the ram, the sacrifice chosen by God, sent by God, and given in the fullness of time, to take the place of all condemned to die. Isaac, rescued from death, lives a life renewed in the death of the ram. We also, rescued from eternal death, live lives renewed in the death of the Lamb of God’s providing.

Abraham foretold it, “God Himself will provide the lamb.” With the meaning hidden through the centuries, these words found their completion in Jesus. Let us never fail to “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Westgate is a member of St. Matthew Lutheran, Millertown, Pa., where her husband, Pastor Jim Westgate, serves.

“Isaac,” original art by Elise Hylden, was created for Ambassador Publications’ upcoming seventh grade curriculum.

THE BLOOD WILL BE A SIGN FOR YOU ON
THE HOUSES WHERE YOU ARE, AND WHEN
I SEE THE BLOOD, I WILL PASS OVER YOU.
NO DESTRUCTIVE PLAGUE WILL TOUCH
YOU WHEN I STRIKE EGYPT.

EXODUS 12:13

The shadow of the Passover lamb reaches back to the first Passover in Egypt. In Exodus 12, the Lord gave instructions to Moses and Aaron:

Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ... The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ... it is the LORD's Passover. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.

In preparation for the Hebrew slaves to be liberated from Egypt, God sent one plague after another. Each of the plagues was a judgment upon one of the Egyptian gods, until the ultimate plague was released—the death of the first-born. It was called Passover. For the final plague, God would send the angel of death to kill the firstborn in every family among the Egyptians. But for the Hebrews, their homes would be spared. The angel of death would pass over their homes if they followed God's instructions. Each family was to choose a lamb to bring into their home. And on the 14th day of Nisan, the head of each home was to slay the lamb. The blood of this lamb was to be used to mark the doorway, on the top and both sides of the doorposts.

For many years, I have conducted a Seder meal on Maundy Thursday prior to the worship, which includes the Lord's Supper. It is rich with meaning to see Christ in the Passover Seder. Seder means "order," and the meal provides an orderly way to remember the story of God freeing His people from slavery in Egypt, just as it parallels our freedom from slavery to sin, death, and the power of Satan. On the Seder plate is the shank bone of the lamb. The bone has not been broken, "... you shall not break a bone of it" (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). We see a parallel to the death of Christ, as recorded in John 19: 31-34 when the Jews ask Pilate to break the legs of all three men hanging on the crosses at Golgotha. The soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals who were crucified with Jesus, but when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead,

they did not break His legs.

Jesus was the ultimate Passover Lamb. He was born in Bethlehem, the town known for raising lambs for the temple sacrifices and for the shepherds who first heard of the birth of the Savior. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John declared, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Returning to Exodus 12:13 we read, "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

Imagine with me the head of each house in Egypt marking the home's doorway. The bowl of blood would be placed at the base of the doorway. Hyssop would be doused in the blood and raised to the top of the door. Again, the hyssop would be dipped in the blood and each of the posts marked. Do you see the sign that has just been marked on the doorway? It is the sign of the cross.

The angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites, because the blood formed the sign of the cross on their doorposts. Remember verse 13: "the blood will be a sign." The Passover Lamb was the shadow of the Lamb of God, the Son of God, nailed to the cross. It was the blood of a lamb, in the sign of the cross, that saved the Israelites from death and ultimately brought the final blow to Egypt, freeing Israel from their years of slavery. It was the Lamb of God, nailed to the cross, who shed His blood to set us free from slavery to sin.

In Egypt, the first born of every man and beast died, while the blood of the lamb saved the homes marked with the cross. On Calvary, the first born Son of God died. Judgment was executed upon Him so that we would not need to experience the same judgment. "But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Since thinking about this message, I've been excited about looking at the Passover Lamb and the sign of the cross afresh. I've notice my soul humming and hearing the words of Elizabeth Clephanes' hymn, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus":

I take, O cross, thy shadow For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than The sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by, To know no gain or loss,
My sinful self my only shame, My glory all the cross.

Peterson serves First Lutheran, Oklahoma City, Okla.

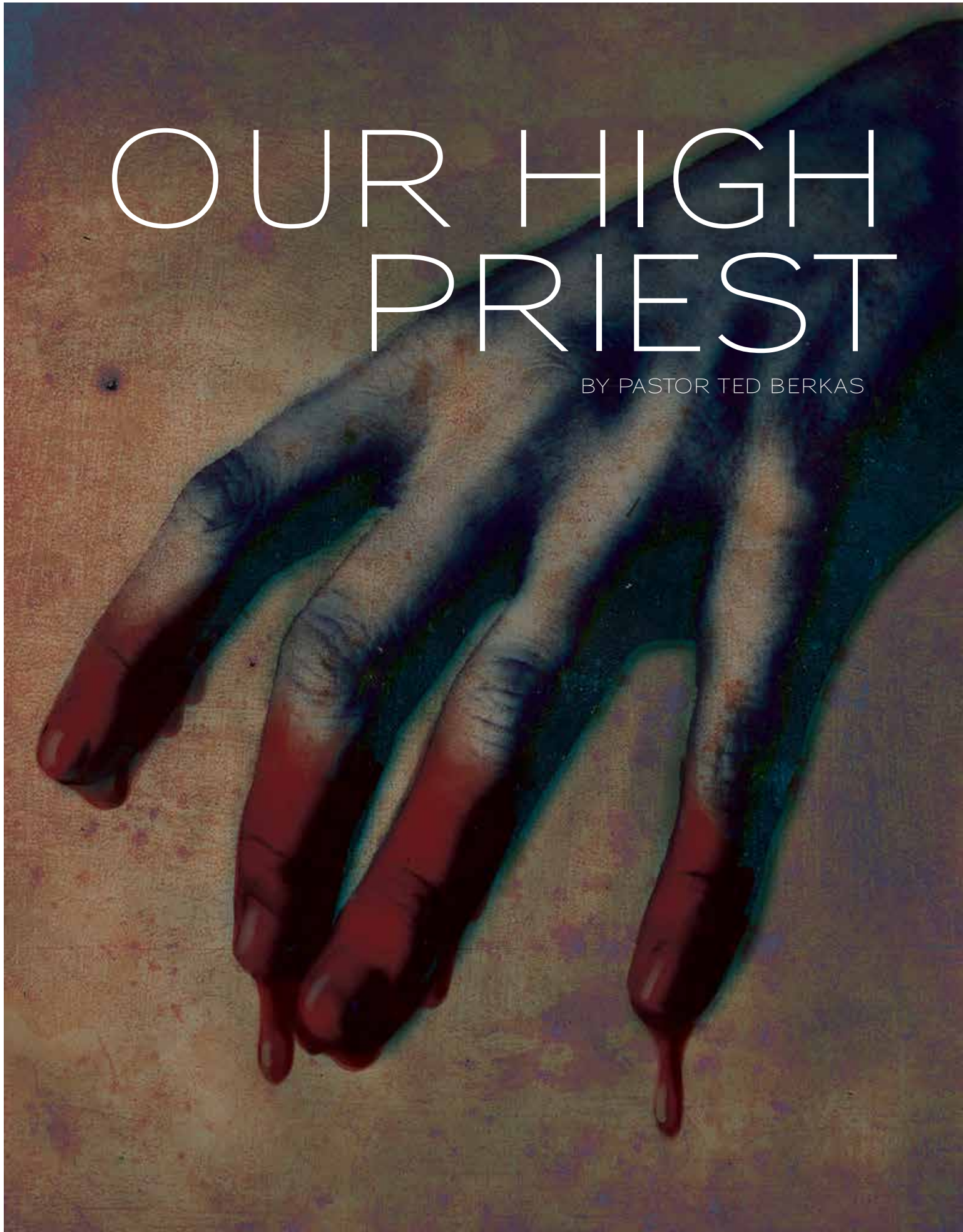
PASSOVER LAMB

BY PASTOR GERALD PETERSON



OUR HIGH PRIEST

BY PASTOR TED BERKAS



SO CHRIST ALSO DID NOT TAKE UPON HIMSELF THE
GLORY OF BECOMING A HIGH PRIEST. BUT GOD SAID TO
HIM, "YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BECOME YOUR
FATHER. " AND HE SAYS IN ANOTHER PLACE, "YOU ARE A
PRIEST FOREVER, IN THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."

HEBREWS 5:5-6

If one goes back to the old theology books, he will find it spelled out somewhat in the wording of a bygone era, but contained therein is the summary statement of our redemption in Christ:

The redemption of the human race is the spiritual, judicial, and the most costly deliverance of all men, bound in the chains of sin, from guilt, from the wrath of God, and temporal and eternal punishment, accomplished by Christ, the God-man, through His active and passive obedience, which God, the most righteous judge, kindly accepted as a most perfect ransom, so that the human race, introduced into spiritual liberty, may live forever with God (David Hollaz, 1646-1713).

Translated into a basic Sunday school concept we learned as children, the above statement says, "Jesus died for my sins." And because He died and rose again, He brought reconciliation with a just and Holy God. And that is what makes Him so precious to the believer. Guilt needed to be removed, a ransom needed to be paid; an equivalent needed to be rendered for the offenses committed; satisfaction needed to be met. And Jesus, our great High Priest, willingly fulfilled that need.

Because Jesus was a good man, perfect in all His ways and in His keeping of the Law, and because Jesus was the Divine Being, His sacrificing of Himself for the transgressions of mankind satisfied God's requirement of justice.

So small thing, that, for sin separated me from God by an enormous chasm. An infinite God was offended by sin, and because sin is an offense against an infinite God, it deserves infinite punishment. Our sin therefore requires an infinite price of satisfaction for which Christ alone, having the infinite nature, could satisfy.

As our Priest, Christ declares us accepted in the beloved. The Good Shepherd has lain down His life for the sheep. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins. Believe that, and the cross becomes tremendously significant. The old chorus "My Redeemer," by Philip P. Bliss, says it well:

Sing, oh sing of my Redeemer
With His blood He purchased me;
On the cross He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt and made me free.

The fracture having been mended by the healing touch of Jesus, the rehabilitation continues under the care of His continuing intercession on my behalf with the Heavenly Father. A duty of a priest is to pray for his people. Pastors in a congregation ought to spend much time and thought in concentrated prayer for their people. How good to know that Jesus prays for all. "Intercession is nothing else than the application and continual force, as it were, of redemption, perpetually winning favor with God" (Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*).

The saving work of Christ was in one sense completed at the cross, but in another sense it continues in its unfolding as, one by one, individuals come to a saving faith in Christ. "Consequently He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

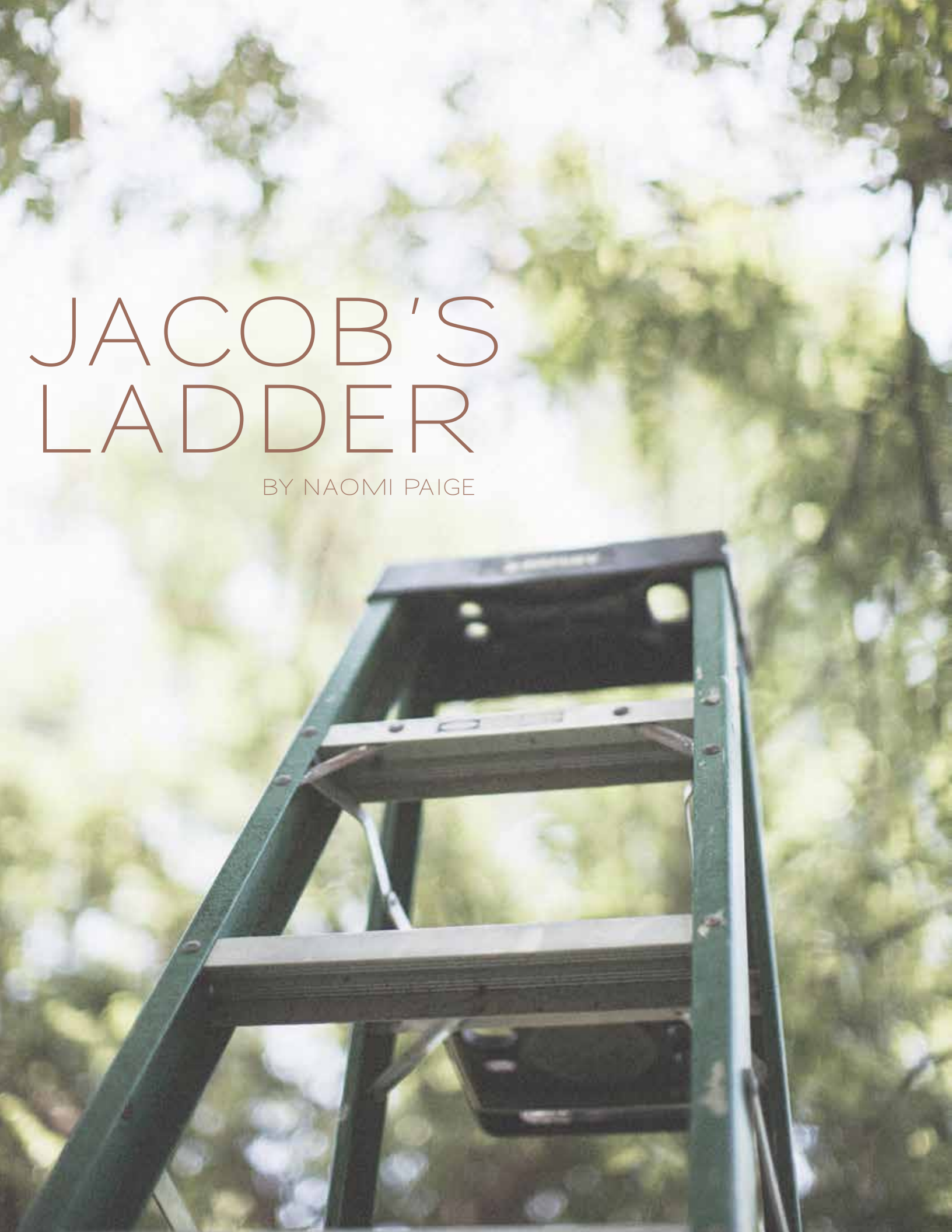
Just think, today, this very hour, Jesus is praying that you will be kept and brought home to the blessings of eternal life with God. You have a representative appearing in the very presence of God to speak there on your behalf. Jesus understands the temptations and the ups and downs you face here on earth. He sympathizes and He pleads with the Father for you. What a loving, faithful Savior. What a dedicated Priest we have.

Berkas is a member of Emmaus Lutheran, Bloomington, Minn. This article is excerpted from the Nov. 20, 184, issue of The Lutheran Ambassador.

"High Priest," original art by Elise Hylden, was created for Ambassador Publications' seventh grade curriculum, which is currently in production.

JACOB'S LADDER

BY NAOMI PAIGE



AND HE DREAMED, AND BEHOLD, THERE
WAS A LADDER SET UP ON THE EARTH,
AND THE TOP OF IT REACHED TO HEAVEN.
AND BEHOLD, THE ANGELS OF GOD WERE
ASCENDING AND DESCENDING ON IT!

GENESIS 28:12

Can I come up in your fort?" I would plead.
"Not unless you can climb the tree without any help," my two older brothers would call down.
They seemed to have good intentions, probably because they would have to take part of the blame if I fell on the way up the tall tree to their cool hangout.

For days I would look at that tree fort, with the first branches well above my head, and think that it would be impossible to get up there on my own. There was no way I could experience all of the fun they were having unless I had a means to get there. I needed a ladder.

One day I called my dad at work to ask him if he would help me get a ladder, and he said, "I will take out the ladder this weekend so that you can see the fort."

I waited and waited until the promise of Saturday morning came, so excited to finally see what the fort was like. My dad took out the ladder and brought it down to the fort. There my brothers waited at the top to show me everything in it. The fort was amazing—even better than I thought it would be. But most of my joy came from just sitting in the presence of my two role models in their secret place.

In Genesis 28 recounts the story of Jacob, who received a vision from God about a ladder. But Jacob did not realize the depth of this vision and the promise it entailed—the promise of a Ladder.

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not

leave you until I have done what I have promised you.
(Genesis 28:10-15, ESV).

In this passage, the Lord says to Jacob, "In you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed." By saying this, the Lord is giving Jacob the promise that someone will come from his family who will save the world, becoming an eternal blessing. As God brings this dream to Jacob, He also establishes the purpose of the person who will come. By using the picture of a ladder that connects earth and heaven, God promises to send someone who would come to mediate between God and man. For us and for Jacob, the only way that we can experience the joys of heaven is if we have someone to mediate and become the perfect ladder for us. Jesus, God's perfect Son, who came in the flesh, is the only person who could take on our sin.

Jesus fulfilled Jacob's dream when He came to earth. In John 1:51, Jesus links himself to the fulfillment of that promise by saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." What does this mean? As Jesus came to earth, He became our substitute for sin. That substitution enables Him to speak on our behalf, mediating between God and us. He is the only way that we can reach the joys of heaven.

Jesus has come to be the perfect ladder, giving us the means to be saved. To become the way to heaven, He had to endure suffering. Isaiah 53:12 says, "Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors." We are the transgressors, the blinded sinners for whom He intercedes. As we stand before God in judgment, Jesus makes the way, interceding for us by taking the punishment for our sin.

During this Lenten season, we remember the suffering that Jesus went through to make a way for us to go to heaven, to become our perfect ladder. So many years ago, I waited for the promise of my dad to bring the ladder so that I could experience the joy of that fort. Today, I can rejoice in the promise God has given me by providing Jesus to be my perfect ladder to heaven.

Paige is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Minneapolis, Minn.

Why I cook soup

BY JOAN CULLER

Lent is a time when we focus on spiritual discipline. Many congregations have a weekly soup dinner, reminding us to be content with simplicity. As I was assembling soup ingredients to put into my crock pot one morning, I realized that I love to cook soup, and I started to wonder why. Here's what I came up with.

Soup is easy to make. Just mix the ingredients in a large container and let them simmer. Measurements don't have to be exact, and it doesn't take constant attention to get it right. Most soup recipes are forgiving.

Soup has a creative element. Of course every soup has some basic ingredients; you could not make chili without tomato sauce. However, within simple parameters things can be added (to use up leftovers), or omitted (whoops I forgot something!), or even substituted (one type of pasta for another, barley instead of beans). Soup can be seasoned to the individual taste and the broth can be thinned or thickened. It's up to the cook, and no pot of soup is exactly the same as the last one.

Soup allows you to be generous, because it makes a lot. When soup is on the dinner menu there is always enough to invite someone over, or send a jar to a neighbor or a friend.

Soup makes a good leftover meal. In fact, it tastes even better after sitting in the refrigerator for a day, allowing the flavors to mingle and blend.

Soup gives your house a wonderful aroma. Everyone who walks in knows you are cooking, and their taste buds instantly wake up in anticipation of a savory meal.

In thinking this over, it occurs to me that cooking soup has some things in common with our spiritual life. It is really not hard to master the basics. The recipe is simple and it's available for everyone. Attend worship and Bible study, pray, participate in a Christian community where you can serve God, and offer and receive encouragement from others.

Within those basics, there is quite a bit of leeway. Worship can be contemporary or liturgical. The congregation may be large or small. Bible study can happen in Sunday school, at an evening or afternoon study at our church, with neighborhood or community friends, or even individually. Prayer can be built into a regular routine or be spontaneous.

When these basics are observed, generosity follows naturally. Every one of us can find unique ways to serve our church and others. We can sing in the choir, teach Sunday school, fix things that are broken, donate to a special cause, help an elderly neighbor, or babysit for a young mother. We also find that God combines us with others in our congregation, giving each one a wonderful mixture that gets better and better as we grow together in faith.

Spiritual growth, like cooking good soup, leaves a sweet scent in the air. Visitors who walk into the church will immediately be aware of the liveliness and fellowship. They will sense the love of God and others, and be drawn in.

Culler is a member of St. Paul's Evangelical Free Lutheran, Hagerstown, Md., where her husband, Pastor Terry Culler, serves.



Green tree or chaff?

BY LINDA KORHONEN

"His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away" (Psalm 1 2-4).

During the cold winter months, it's encouraging to think about the beauty of a green tree in the summer. These signs of life give hope for the spring season ahead. So let's enjoy thinking about that in light of an interesting comparison made in Psalm 1. Though it is written about a "blessed man," its truth is profound for all of us.

Compare the characteristics of these two illustrations:

A living tree

- Has strong roots daily nourished by water, soil, and sun
- Grows and reproduces seeds that grow more trees
- Has the miracle of life within
- Has many living parts: roots, trunk, branches, and leaves
- Is stable and firm no matter what winds or storms come
- Is valuable and useful in many ways
- Has seasons of life and is fruitful in God's time and way

Chaff

(husks separated from the seed in threshed grain)

- Has no roots, no life, no use
- Is separated from the useful part
- Is dry and lifeless; has no effect for good
- Has no connection to life or surroundings
- Will scatter everywhere in any little wind
- Gives no protection and doesn't promote life
- Is thrown away, discarded

As I was reading Psalm 1 and pondering these things, I realized how easy it is for chaff to enter my thought life and my daily routine. Because of our old sinful flesh, we are prone to allow empty, worthless, unproductive thoughts and/or activities to

crowd out the important things. It saps us of spiritual energy and life-giving love and service to God and others.

How about you? Has chaff crept into your life? Is some activity taking precious time that could be spent on useful things? Are you letting false thoughts or accusations deprive you of sleep or positive attitudes or actions? Do you believe things that are not taught in God's Word? Is your view of yourself based on feelings rather than what God says?

Don't let your mind go there. Don't give Satan's lies even a moment of your time. Rebuke him out loud in the name of Jesus, if you need to, and plead the blood of Jesus to cover your mind and heart. Jesus is your refuge.

Are you nourishing your soul daily? Meditating on God's Word is one of the best ways to be solid in the truth. I've heard meditation described as "thinking God's thoughts after Him," or, "rechewing" Scripture like a cow chews its cud. Psalm 1:2 encourages us to meditate on God's Word "day and night." How is that even possible? It means a conscious decision to ponder and think about God's truths whenever we have the opportunity so that more and more, our thoughts are His thoughts. Sometimes that may mean chewing on a word or a phrase, or singing God's truth in a hymn or praise song, or listening to Scripture.

Memorizing may not be easy, but is valuable. There are little ways we can work it into our schedules, such as posting a chapter or verse on our bathroom mirror, or by our kitchen sink, or on the dash of our car. (Note cards work well for taking them with you and also for future review.) We can make use of times when we're doing other tasks to be reciting God's Word. Moms and dads, make it a fun family project. Reward your children for memorizing Bible verses. What we've hidden in our hearts can never be taken away from us.

I want to be like a living tree, don't you? I don't want any chaff in my life. Let's give special attention to this focus this year. Begin by writing down a verse right now.

Korhonen, Plymouth, Minn., is the wife of AFLC president, Pastor Lyndon Korhonen.

Sverdrup Society hosts annual forum at AFLC Schools



Members of the Georg Sverdrup Society convened on the campus of the AFLC Seminary on Jan. 31 for an annual forum titled, "Sven Oftedal: The Forgotten Founder." LEFT: Loiell Dyrud (from left), Pastor Martin Horn and Pastor Terry Olson take part in a discussion panel. TOP RIGHT: Brent Raan, a student at AFLTS, listens to the discussion. RIGHT: Andrew Olson and Alex Amiot listen to a presentation.



Missions Conference

Pastor Jeff Swanson, Naknek, Alaska, was the featured speaker during the AFLC Schools annual Missions Conference, held Jan. 26-30.



Putting a face on missions

BY PAUL HANDSAKER

If you were asked the question, “How is your congregation involved in missions?” how would you respond? I think of the faces of people in our congregation who are connected to missions. When I was growing up, Adelaide was a member of our congregation who had served in India in the early 1940s. I still remember her bringing a big snake skin and the accompanying story connected to it to a Sunday school session. These kind of stories help children connect to the idea of missions and put faces to where we send mission offerings.

Next I think of our own AFLC missionaries who visited our congregation regularly, beginning with John and Ruby Abel and continuing with Connelly and Carolyn Dyrud, Paul and Becky Abel, Jonathan and Tamba Abel, Todd and Barb Schierkolk, and Nate and Rhoda Jore. We have been privileged to have some of these faces in our home. What a joy it is when these faces come to mind and when we see them at annual conferences and WMF rallies.

In the 1980s Ron and Marcy joined our congregation, two faces that literally lived the word “missions” in every aspect of their lives. Ron took our Sunday school kids and young couples to the Door of Faith mission to deliver meals to the homeless in nearby Des Moines, Iowa. Ron and Marcy were very active in the Gideon ministry, faithfully serving in the local jail ministry, and also developed a vision for a halfway house for young women coming out of prison. Butterfly Freedom House is now a reality, and members of our congregation have been involved in the refurbishing of this house as well as enjoying one women’s meeting in the home. God has called Ron home, and Marcy just recently relocated to Arizona, two faces that are greatly missed.

Another face of missions in our congregation is Pastor Craig Benson, a member of the military who was deployed to Dubai and the Air Force Academy while he served us.

In 2008 God called Pastor Andy and Monica Coyle to our congregation. Two years later God called them away to begin a Bible school in Ukraine through East European Missions Network. We miss their faces but also see them as a very direct extension of our congregation. It was such a joy to have them spend a week with us last summer.

I currently serve on our AFLC World Missions Board, and in that capacity my wife and I see ourselves as two more faces of missions. We were privileged to travel in that capacity to Brazil. A trip like this thoroughly expanded our understanding of what it means to serve in another culture. Even though there was a language barrier in worship, it was a great blessing to raise our voices together to the same Savior. What a blessing to come back and share this work with our congregation. Because Glenn Mork serves on the World Mission board with me, he has become a face of missions in our congregation due to his connection with Hope Centers of Africa. Our church family has collected shoes and money for the water systems for this mission.

One of the greatest local opportunities we have had in the past years is taking VBS to the city park in our community. Each year we have encountered more children, touched more lives, and sowed the seeds of the gospel.

I challenge you to consider the faces of missions in your congregation. Are you one of the faces of missions? Have you made any connections to our AFLC missions and missionaries? What is your visibility outside of the doors of your congregation? Remember to cover with prayer all of the faces of missions in your congregation as they serve.

Handsaker, a member of Salem Lutheran, Radcliffe, Iowa, is the chairman of the AFLC World Missions Committee.



AFLTS grad installed as bishop in Mbulu Diocese in Tanzania

Pastor Nicolaus Nsanganzelu (center), a graduate of the Association Free Lutheran Theological Seminary, was installed Jan. 19 as bishop of the Mbulu Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Pastor Kevin Olson, who heads up the Ambassador Institute, represented the AFLC at the event, which had more than 1,000 people in attendance, including the former Prime Minister of Tanzania.

AFLC memorials: February

All Ministries

Anton Poekes

AFLBS

Barbara Laitinen Root

Ovidie Dyrud (3)

Ruth Claus

Werner Drefs

Ida Benson

Evilyn Foss

Ken Nash (3)

Elaine Thompson

Jeff Christenson

Eldon Soward

Barbara Root

General Fund

Ovidie Dyrud

AFLTS

Ovidie Dyrud (8)

Ardell Grothe

Edie Gudim

Ida Benson

Ken Nash

Evangelism

Ovidie Dyrud

Ken Nash

James Erickson

Home Missions

Westley Rumohr

Ken Nash

World Missions

Ovidie Dyrud (2)



New members at Newark Lutheran, Illinois

New members were installed recently at Newark Lutheran Church, Newark, Ill. They include (from left) Dan and Lesli Underhill, Pam and Dale Rowe, and Sharon and Tom Koch. Pictured at right is Pastor Luke Emerson. (Not pictured Karen Stevens)

IDENTITY

EPHESIANS 1:3-14

What defines you?

BY STEPH NELSON

How do you describe yourself? When you're first getting to know people, what are the key words you use to help them get a glimpse of who you are? Perhaps you define yourself by the things you do: student, artist, athlete, musician, writer, etc. Or maybe you're more likely to list words that describe what you're like: creative, funny, smart, kind, outgoing, etc. There are a lot of different ways we define ourselves, but there is one place where the core of our identity is found: in Christ.

The theme for the 2015 Free Lutheran Youth (FLY) Convention is *Identity*, based on Ephesians 1:3-14. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines identity as "the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is." While we are all given unique roles, responsibilities, gifts, and interests, those things cannot define us because they will change over the course of our lives. In contrast, we can know for a fact that the identity we have in Christ will not change because God and His promises will be the same "yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

In the Ephesians passage we find a detailed description of the characteristics that identify followers of Christ. According to the text, we have been chosen and "predestined to adoption as sons ... to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us" (Ephesians 1:5-6). God has not chosen to adopt us as His own because we deserve it or because we have earned it; rather, we are adopted because of the grace He has freely lavished on us. In addition to this we are given redemption and forgiveness through His blood. FLY 2013's theme of *Broken* focused on the

fact that it is "by His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5), and it is because Jesus was broken for us that we can be given this new identity in Him.

As we are planning the 2015 FLY Convention, our *Identity* theme is serving as much more than just a t-shirt design; it's the framework we're using to make every decision, big and small, about the week. We believe that this topic is something that each of us struggles with in one way or another, and we are excited to spend a week diving deeper into the two distinct ways Scripture describes our identity: first, apart from Christ we are eternally separated from God because of our sinful nature, and second, in Christ we are chosen, adopted, redeemed, given an inheritance as sons of God, and sealed with His Spirit.

FLY 2015 may still be more than a year away, but it is not too early to start praying and preparing for what God has planned for that week. Will you join us in asking the Lord to guide the planning process and start moving in the hearts of those He would desire to attend? We also encourage you to take time to reflect on where you find your identity and how that compares to the way your identity is described in Scripture. May the Lord strengthen you as you claim "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3), and we look forward to seeing you next summer!

Nelson, who serves as secretary on the 2015 FLY Committee, lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Housing options for the 2014 conference in Valley City, N.D.

The host committee for the 2014 Annual Conference have announced housing options available in the Valley City, N.D., area. The conference will be held June 10-13 at Grace Free Lutheran, Valley City.

Hotels and Motels

AmericInn

280 Winter Show Road
73 rooms blocked for AFLC or Grace Free; indoor hot tub and pool, fitness room, meeting room, complimentary breakfast, executive suites, cribs available.
701-845-5551 or 877-845-0007
www.americinn.com/hotels/ND/ValleyCity

Super 8

822 11th Street SW
30 rooms; family restaurant next door, outside outlets, cribs.
701-845-1140 or 800-800-8000.
www.super8.com

Wagon Wheel Inn

455 Winter Show Road
88 rooms; lounge, fitness room, meeting room, executive suites, laundry facilities,

complimentary continental breakfast.
701-845-5333 or 800-319-5333
www.wagonwheelinn.com

Valley City State University

Suites (2 rooms with a shared bathroom)
\$35/night for 1; \$28/night for 2
Linens are available for \$10.
Contact Kayla (701)845-7124
Email: housing@vcsu.edu

Bed & Breakfasts, Inns

Beste Mor Guest Inn

113 2nd Ave, Kathryn, ND
701-845-1995
www.mybestemor.com

Lakeside Bed & Breakfast

113 Lee's Subdivision, Lake Ashtabula
701-646-6759
\$110/night or \$750 week

Tower City Inn Bed & Breakfast

502 Church Street, Tower City
Contact Joanne: 701-749-2660
towerbedandbreakfast.com

President's House Guest Inn

VCSU campus
701-845-7122; www.presidentshouse.com

Sheyenne Riverbend Farm Inn

3716 117th Ave SE, Valley City
701-845-1377
www.riverbendfarm.com

Three Oaks Guest Inn

530 3rd St. SE, Valley City, ND
701-490-6000 or 701-845-4571

Victorian Charm Guest Inn

535 Central Ave N, Valley City, ND
701-845-0887; \$58 flat rate

Camping/RV Stations

Municipal Tourist park

Business Loop I-94
All hook-ups. Showers and water available.
701-845-3294

Wagon Wheel RV Park

I-94 exit 292, right on Winter Show Road
24 drive through sites with full hook-ups
701-845-5333 or 1-800-319-5333

Magnuson served AFLC churches in Aberdeen and Reva, South Dakota

Pastor Alvin Magnuson died Jan. 25 in Mesa, Ariz. Born June 28, 1930, in Graceville, Minn., he was the son of Albert and Ella (Mills) Magnuson. He married Lois Wilson on April 7, 1963.

He grew up on a farm north of Wheaton, Minn. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Greenville College, Greenville, Ill. He completed his seminary training at the Lutheran Brethren Seminary, Fergus Falls, Minn. He earned a Master's Degree in special education at Arizona State University, Tempe. Al and Lois felt God's call to work on the Navajo Indian Reservation and moved to Arizona in July 1965. He taught for the Bureau of Indian Affairs at Lower Greasewood, Dilcon, and Many Farms Boarding Schools. He also served as interim missionary pastor for three years at Navajo Lutheran Church, Many Farms, Ariz. In 1979 the Magnusons moved to Aberdeen, S.D., where Al worked in the Aberdeen Area BIA Office. In 1990, he returned to the parish ministry. He was ordained by the AFLC in 1993, and served AFLC churches in Aberdeen and Reva, S.D., until 2009.

He is survived by his wife; three sons, Eric Magnuson, Mesa, Harold (Gena) Magnuson, Mesa, and Douglas (Kristen) Magnuson, Phoenix; four grandchildren; and one brother, Darrel (Carole) Magnuson, Brandon, Minn.

Services were held Jan. 30 at 10 a.m. at Mountain View Funeral Home, Mesa, Ariz.

AFLBS Alumni Tournament

The Association Free Lutheran Bible School will host the annual Alumni Tournament on March 28-29 at Heritage Christian Academy, Maple Grove, Minn.

The basketball tournament will begin at 7 p.m. on Friday, and continue with games beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday. Both men's and women's teams are encouraged to register for the event. Contact Jarrod Hylden through email at jarrodh@afc.org.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES Jan. 1-Jan. 31, 2014

FUND	REC'D IN JANUARY	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$36,712	\$36,712	\$34,622
Evangelism	14,042	14,042	12,239
Youth Ministries	9,433	9,433	15,783
Parish Education	11,392	11,392	9,840
Seminary	28,180	28,180	25,406
Bible School	36,550	36,550	46,137
Home Missions	32,868	32,868	48,831
World Missions	48,628	48,628	44,036
Personal Support	35,886	35,886	42,382
TOTALS	\$253,690	\$253,690	\$279,277

Contact the individual departments for further information about specific financial needs.

Lenten and Easter Christians

Several years ago there was a fictional article in one of the Lutheran fraternal magazines about a man who was quite troubled by the absence of traditional Lenten services in his congregation. His pastor announced that they needed a more upbeat emphasis than the usual gloomy hymns and messages. The article reminded me of a conversation I had with an Estonian pastor who told me of an evangelist who said that he came to Estonia to

put a smile on the face of Christians. "What if we don't want to smile?" the pastor asked ... with a smile.

Yes, there is a heavy and gloomy spirit about most of our Lenten hymns:



Pastor Robert Lee

O Sacred Head now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down ... O darkest woe! Ye tears, forth flow! Has earth so sad a wonder ... What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul ... Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, see Him dying on the tree ... Ah, holy Jesus, how hast Thou offended, that man to judge Thee hath in hate pretended? By foes derided, by Thine own rejected, O most afflicted! ... Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut His glories in, when God the Mighty Maker died for man, the creature's sin.

Even the tunes for these hymns, rightly chosen, enhance the sorrow that the lyrics convey so well.

Perhaps one may speak of Lenten Christians with concern, as those who do not seem to know the joy and assurance of the forgiveness that was paid in full

at Calvary. They may include those who struggle to believe that they have been sorry enough, whose measurement of their own repentance always comes up short in light of the suffering and death of our Savior. Yet it is also a hymn writer who declares, "... could my tears forever flow." Even that would still not be sorry enough. The observance of Lent is not a price to be paid, but a grace-filled opportunity. How dare we try to purchase what God would freely give!

We need to be both Lenten and Easter Christians in order to be spiritually whole. A true Lenten journey takes us through the eyes of faith to the Upper Room, the Garden of Gethsemane, the residence of the Roman ruler, the palace of the puppet king, the house of the High Priest, the court of the Sanhedrin, the Way of Sorrows, and Golgotha—the place of the skull. Our souls need to hear again of the awfulness of our sin that demanded the suffering of our Savior. Only then are hearts and minds truly prepared to know the joy of Resurrection Day.

There's a real sense of law and gospel, sin and grace, in the journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. Lent prepares us to celebrate Easter with overflowing hearts. Now the hymns have a new theme, permeated with a spirit of celebration:

He is arisen, glorious word!
... Easter morrow stills our sorrow forevermore ... I know that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives! ... Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and

triumphs high, Alleluia! ... Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes; He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign.

It is said of the elderly John Newton, author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, that he once declared: "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior."

The observance of Lent is not a price to be paid, but a grace-filled opportunity. How dare we try to purchase what God would freely give!

"All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned each one to his own way; but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Let the *all* sink into our minds and hearts. *All* have gone astray, each one of us has turned to our own way, but *all* our iniquity has been laid on the Lamb of God, the perfect sinless sacrifice. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

There is the danger of unbalanced truth, and it does no one any favors when we try to skip Lent and rush to Easter. There is a reason for the arrangement of our traditional church year. The Man of Sorrows is the Risen Savior, and it is the message of both the Cross and the Empty Tomb that the Church is privileged to proclaim.

May we as both Lenten and Easter Christians know great sorrow and even greater joy as the fullness of the good news is received into believing hearts.

something to share

Our foe and our Defender

BY JULIE TWEDT

Did you know that the Great Horned Owl is also known as The Flying Tiger? Fearless, they're one of the few animals who will kill skunks and porcupines. Like every living thing, God created the owl with several amazing features, including feathers that are ragged on the ends, resulting in silent flight, and incredible hearing, enabling them to hear a mouse moving beneath a foot of snow.

My children and I had an eventful day this winter, working to capture a Great Horned Owl with a broken wing in our own backyard. If the raptor hadn't been injured, we wouldn't have gone anywhere near him, but we had an advantage because of his helpless state.

In our day-to-day living, we face a mighty foe whose goal is to rob us from the peace, joy, and certainty of God's love for us. I Peter 5:8 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." If you've ever seen a cat on the prowl, you know that they stay low to the ground, as silent as can be, just waiting for a single moment of weakness to pounce on their prey. It can be a pretty scary thought, knowing that the devil is sneaking up behind us in the same way, just waiting for that moment of weakness. But God promises to be our help in I John 3:8, "The Son of God appeared to

destroy the works of the devil." Thank you, Lord!

Satan will try to get us to turn away from Jesus and the finished work of the cross, but God never gives up on us. Satan will try to make us worry, but God will comfort. Satan will try to confuse, but God will make matters clear. Thoughts from Satan are discouraging, but God encourages. When Satan fills our hearts with fear, God reassures us.

The devil wants to separate us from God, but according to Romans 8:38-39 there is nothing that can separate us from God: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God's love will never let us go. Somehow, even in the broken state of our life here on earth, He can use us to spread His love and hope to others.

James 4:7 encourages us in our walk on earth, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The foe has been defeated and we have been given victory! Live in that victory and make Satan know his defeat.

Twedt is a member of Valley Free Lutheran, Portland, N.D.