

THE 

JANUARY 2025

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

A classical painting of St. Matthew the Evangelist. He is depicted as an elderly man with a white beard, wearing a purple robe over a red garment. He is shown in a dynamic, reclining pose, looking upwards with his right arm raised and his left hand open. In the background, several cherubs are visible, and a bright light source in the upper right corner casts rays across the scene. In the lower right foreground, a dark eagle is perched on a rock, looking towards the saint.

THE
FOUR
GOSPELS



THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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What makes the Gospels special?

The Gospels have a special place in my heart. Even though we know all Scripture is breathed out by God and we confess that each biblical book is perfect and without errors, the Gospels seem particularly important.

Some churches acknowledge this with the practice of standing during the reading of the Gospel lesson each Sunday. Other congregations sing the “Alleluia” before the Gospel reading.

Maybe we feel this way because of those red letters commonly found in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All of Scripture is the Word of God, but those recorded words of Jesus are special to us. Or perhaps we recognize that our faith is foundationally historical: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are actual events that really happened. The Gospels are historical books that record these events and, according to John, “are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

One of the oldest ways Christians have visualized the four Gospels is through the “tetramorph.” This symbolic visual—see pages 6–7 for examples—includes the four creatures from Ezekiel’s vision in Ezekiel 10 and John’s vision in Revelation 4.

Each of the creatures represents one of the Gospels. The man symbolizes the Gospel of Matthew, with its focus on the humanity and physical lineage of Christ through Joseph. The lion is used to represent Mark because of the emphasis on Jesus’ royalty and status as the Son of God. The Gospel of Luke is visualized with an Ox to show Christ’s fulfillment of the sacrificial system. And finally, the Gospel of John is represented with an eagle to show the heavenly and eternal perspective of the “Word becoming flesh” (John 1:14).

Visuals are important to our Christian life. Being able to see truths illustrated directs our focus, teaches us the Bible, and encourages our faith. This issue of the *Lutheran Ambassador* will use the tetramorph to guide an exploration of the Gospels.

Pastor Jerry Moan introduces this theme by helping us think through some key questions: Why are there four Gospels instead of one? Why do Matthew, Mark, and Luke include rapid-pace action while John is slower and more meditative? What do we do when the Gospels seem to record events differently? As Pastor Moan shows us, we are blessed to have four Gospels!

Also in this issue are articles on each of the four Gospels. Pastor Steve Snipstead writes about Matthew, Pastor Steve Mundfrom has an article on Mark, Joan Culler writes about Luke, and Elise Knobloch explores the Gospel of John.

We pray these articles encourage you to spend some time in the Gospels this year.

Pastor Nick Schultz will be writing our “Building the Base” column in 2025, taking us through the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. Christians never outgrow the catechism, and these columns on the back cover every other month will help remind us of the simple truths of Scripture.

Clara Gunderson shares an Encouraging Word with us in our other semi-monthly column. She is an excellent writer, and we’re glad we can share her voice with our readers.

As always, please let me know if you have any feedback, concerns, or questions about the *Lutheran Ambassador*. I can be reached by email: LAeditor@afcl.org.

—Pastor Andrew Kneeland



Mark's Gospel is a reminder that the coming of Jesus changed everything. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he has defeated Satan, sin, and death for all time. The kingdom of God has been inaugurated and will be consummated when the Son of Man returns in glory. The invitation to enter that kingdom stands open to those who respond in faith. That is a message worth celebrating, and a message worth proclaiming! [Mark L. Strauss]

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Let not one day slip over without some comfort received of the Word of God.

[John Knox]

When Satan tells me I am a sinner he comforts me immeasurably, since Christ died for sinners. [Martin Luther]

The rulers of this world have often call themselves Great, Conqueror, Bold, Magnificent, and the like. The Son of God is content to call Himself Savior. [J. C. Ryle]

John flies like an eagle above the cloud of human weakness and looks upon the light of unchanging truth with the most lofty and firm eyes of the heart. And gazing on the very deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which he is equal to the Father, he has striven in this Gospel to confide this above all, to the extent that he believed was sufficient for all.


[Thomas Aquinas]





FOUR GOSPELS ONE JESUS

BY PASTOR JERRY MOAN



Puzzling questions intrigue us in the study of the Gospels: What are “gospels”? What should we make of the similarities and differences between these four accounts? Why are three of the four called *synoptic* Gospels? How should biblical narratives be interpreted and applied? Not every question can be addressed in a brief article, but offering a few definitions may be a helpful starting point.

What are the Gospels?

When we hear the word *gospel*, we tend to automatically think of the core message of salvation that Paul preached (e.g., Romans 1:16). But the word *gospel* carries additional connotations. The Greek word *euangelion* is reflected in our English term *evangelism*. The verb form *euangelizomai* means “to proclaim good news.” Our English word *gospel* comes from an Old English word *godspell*, which basically means “good news.”

Early usage focused on oral proclamation; the content of the message preached. The meaning of *gospel* broadened, however, to serve as a descriptive title for a special kind of written document—an inspired biography—such as the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

How is the word ‘gospel’ used in the Gospels themselves?

Mark’s Gospel begins with a heading that announces, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1, ESV). Matthew speaks of “the gospel of [or about] the kingdom.” So, the focus of the good news is about Jesus and his Kingdom. This focus leans on the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (40:9–10; 52:7), who proclaims the “good news” of God’s coming and reign in Zion. Jesus fulfills what the prophet Isaiah heralds.

What genre of literature are the Gospels?

Is it history, prophecy, narrative, poetry, or a hybrid-blending of genres? (A good example of a hybrid would be the Book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John, which is rightly regarded as a *narrative*—telling a captivating story—but which also blends *apocalyptic* and *prophetic*

material within an *epistolary* framework.) Identifying the genre of what we are reading gives us perspective in interpreting what we read. We intuitively have different expectations as we jump from the comic section of the newspaper to the obituaries or the sports page.

How should the Gospels be categorized? While some have maintained that the Gospels belong to a genre category of their own, the Gospels fit best within the category of ancient Greek biography—called *bios*—with a few qualifying distinctions.

What makes the Gospels unique compared to typical Graeco-Roman biographies?

One element that sets the four Gospels apart is the predominant influence of the Hebrew Bible. The Gospels announce the fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures. Their tone is one of proclamation, focusing on what Christ in his incarnation has ushered in. All human history points to and is consummated in Jesus, the Messiah.

The Gospels declare that Jesus is the inaugurator of God’s reign, his kingdom. He is the absolute centerpiece of the biblical message. Such a declaration exceeds the boundaries of what a normal Graeco-Roman biography would communicate. Not only is Jesus a celebrated figure from the past. He is actually still present with us as he promised. What a stunning picture of who our Lord Jesus is and what he has done on our behalf!

Why do we need the Gospels?

In a nutshell, we need the Gospels because the truth about Jesus is the message we need more than anything. Through the span of church history, the Gospels have played a central, foundational role in Christianity’s understanding and development. When you investigate the heart of early Christianity, you discover that the truths of who Jesus is, what he taught, and what he did keep bubbling to the surface.

We sing, “Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and His love,” because the truth about Jesus is what we need most. From the Gospels we gain a compelling sense of the Bible’s great story line—some call this the *meta story*. The big



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picture of Scripture is billboarded for us in the Gospels. The promise that Christ has fulfilled shines brilliantly in the pages of the evangelists. So does the biblical proclamation concerning the Kingdom of God. It is a key piece in the biblical storyline. Jesus is the King who establishes God's reign on planet earth.

We need the Gospels because God has wired us to connect through stories. Narrative truth engages our hearts and minds in a way unmatched by other types of literature. We need the Gospels because we desperately need to see our Lord Jesus with eyes of faith. We need to hear his voice and trust him as our Shepherd (John 10).

Why do we need four Gospels?

Wouldn't it make more sense to have one unified, authorized Gospel? This became a question for debate within the early Church. The opponents of Christianity instigated the problem—heretics such as Celsus, the Manichaeans, and others—who criticized the Church for embracing multiple Gospels containing apparent historical discrepancies, differences in tone and chronology, different wording, and the like.

How would the Church respond? One solution was to blend the Gospels together into one seamless narrative. A fellow named Tatian, a disciple of Justin Martyr, assembled what was called the *Diatessaron*—which means “through four, one.” It was a harmonized Gospel account of the life of Jesus. It, no doubt, seemed like a good idea at the time. But the Church ultimately rejected it. Augustine affirmed that God has given a fourfold Gospel witness for good reason, even when there are details we struggle to reconcile.

Truths are established by means of multiple eyewitness testimonies (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; II Corinthians 13:1). While one witness in Scripture provides sufficient foundation for our faith, God has seen fit to supply multiple witnesses, assuring us that all Scripture is fully able to establish and equip our faith (II Timothy 3:16–17).

Four Gospels were necessary to proclaim the truth of Jesus to different audiences at various times and places. Matthew wrote primarily for Jewish believers, while Mark penned his account with a Roman gentile audience in mind. This assumes that the four Gospels were written with differing purposes in mind. For example, Luke's Gospel aims to persuade an official named Theophilus by means of a two-volume record (Luke/Acts).

What are the blessings of possessing four Gospels?

From an apologetic perspective, what a blessing it is to have multiple reliable witnesses rather than just one. The fact that there are differences between the Gospels serves as a mark of their authenticity.

Possessing four Gospels is also a great blessing for the sake of historical completeness. Think what we would lack if we lost any one of the Gospels.

If we had no access to Luke, for example, we'd miss out on the wealth of details surrounding Christ's birth. The parables of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son would be foreign to us. If we lost Matthew, we would miss out on the significant visit of the wise men, the Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commission—along with a host of invaluable treasures.

John's Gospel records that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31, ESV). Praise God for the blessing of every "sign" preserved for us in the fourfold Gospel!

The blessing of having four Gospels is further reflected by means of the historical symbols attached to each volume: Matthew's message is captioned with the symbol of an angel or a winged man; Mark, with a lion; Luke, with an ox; and John, with an eagle. These four symbols, traced from the prophet Ezekiel through the Book of Revelation (by Irenaeus in the second century AD and others), stand as a historic recognition of the rich diversity contained in the Christology of the four evangelists.

Finally, consider the theological blessings of having four Gospels: Augustine observes how the three Synoptic Gospels (*synoptic* means "seeing together" or from a similar perspective)—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—reveal to us Jesus' earthly nature and deeds. Matthew and Mark particularly show Jesus as a king, while Luke shows him as a priest. John's focus reveals Jesus' divine nature (e.g., his prologue in chapter 1) and is largely supplementary to the other Gospels. The "beloved apostle" includes fewer of Jesus' actions and more of Jesus' teachings (e.g., the Upper Room Discourse in chapters 13–17).

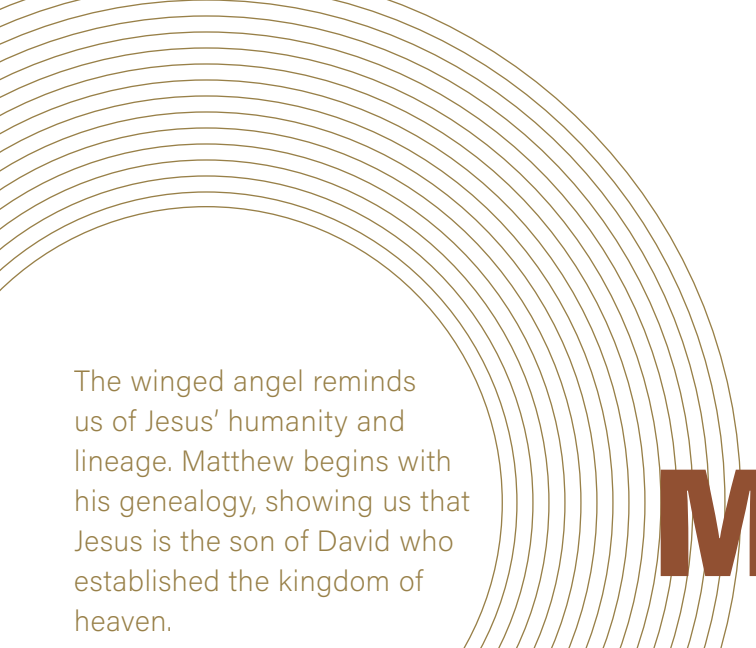
The four evangelists emphasize different theological truths that give us a fuller picture of who Jesus is and what he has done. The complementary perspectives are not a cause for anxiety; rather, they bring out the beautiful richness in the record of Jesus' life and ministry. That richness is a blessing indeed! The four Gospels proclaim one Lord—our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Moan serves Mount Carmel and Trinity Free Lutheran churches in McIntosh, Minn. Artwork: "The Symbols of the Four Evangelists" (pages 6–7), by Martin Schongauer, 1470–1491, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. "The Four Evangelists" (page 4), by Gilliam van der Gouwen, 1728, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

M a r k



J o h n



The winged angel reminds us of Jesus' humanity and lineage. Matthew begins with his genealogy, showing us that Jesus is the son of David who established the kingdom of heaven.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

BY PASTOR STEVE SNIPSTEAD

Three of my grandparents immigrated to America from Norway in the early 1900s. The fourth, my maternal grandfather, was born to Norwegian immigrants. That makes me 100 percent Norwegian. I used to think that made me special, like royalty.

One of my sisters recently had a DNA ancestry test. Turns out there is no such thing as 100 percent anything. Still, 93 percent Scandinavian is about as high as it gets.

The real stories about my ancestors show they were a far cry from royalty. Rather than being important people, my ancestors immigrated because they were at the economic bottom of their society: servants and farm laborers, ordinary real people looking for opportunity. They had hopes and dreams of a better life. They aspired to be landowners; what was not possible in Norway was possible in America.

If there were great individuals in our lineage, we would have made the most of it. You probably would do the same. We all like to think we come from proud and noble stock because that means that we share that heritage.

Our society has a growing interest in discovering our ancestry. But if you want to understand how important genealogy is to biblical people, you will have to magnify and intensify that feeling you have about your heritage many times over. In the ancient world, genealogy was destiny; with few exceptions, who you descended from determined who you were and what you could become. So, it's no surprise that Matthew starts the story of Jesus with the lineage of Jesus. What is surprising is who he includes in it.

Matthew's genealogy is strikingly unusual. He includes women, which is unusual for that time. But not just any women. Four out of the five are the kind of women who you would simply not want other people to know about. Three were sexually immoral; one came from a race of people who were despised historical enemies. Only Mary would fit the expected model of the morally upright woman, but she was a poor peasant girl of no special significance. These aren't exactly the kind of ancestors we would tell others about.

By mentioning them in his genealogy, Matthew forces us to relive some of the most sordid stories of the Bible. We have to ask, wouldn't it be better to forget the mistakes

of the past and move on? What does any of this have to do with the coming of the Christ?

What the genealogy does for us is to think about the Bible and the gospel in the way it was meant to be understood and not in the way most people see them. Most people see the Bible as a collection of inspirational stories and good moral examples that we should imitate. But you can't read the stories in this genealogy like that. By listing his lineage, Matthew forces us to look at the history of Jesus differently. Instead of, "Look how good these people are!" we should take Matthew's approach. We have to come to grips with heritages that include real people with their faults and failures. They are here to remind us not of past greatness but of our very real and present need of grace.

The heart of most religions is good advice, good techniques, good programs, good ideas, and good support systems. But the heart of Christianity is good news. Matthew's genealogy means this is about real people, real events. The Gospel of Matthew doesn't start with "Once upon a time" or "In a galaxy far, far away." It begins with, "This is the genealogy of Jesus Christ." That means that what comes next is history. It all happened. Jesus is not a metaphor, a religious ideal, or a principle. He is a real person born into our world.

What the Gospels tell us comes next is incredible enough that we need to be reminded that what we are about to read is very real good news. A child is born to save a world in jeopardy. He is a human hero with divine power who casts out evil, raises the dead, reconciles the betrayed, comes back to life, and will return again. No matter how deeply our sin holds us, how dark our time or situation, or how much pain is in the world, there is born into our world a hero who will save us and lead us. Someone who can and did truly make a difference. His father is Joseph, and his mother is Mary. Jesus has a history that is like ours and yet so different. The true God and true man come to save us from our sins. That is good news.

Snipstead is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont. Artwork: "Saint Matthew and the Angel," c. 1645–1648, by Simone Cantarini, National Gallery of Art.





THE G O S P E L O F **MARK**

BY PASTOR STEVE MUNDFROM

The fourth-century church father Jerome of Caesarea (c. A.D. 345–420), one of the four great doctors of the Church, summarizes early Christianity’s understanding of the Gospel of St. Mark:

Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, wrote a short Gospel at the request of the brethren at Rome, embodying what he had heard Peter tell. When Peter had heard this, he approved it and published it to the churches to be read by his authority, as Clement in the sixth book of his Hypotyposes, and Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, record. Peter also mentions this Mark in his first epistle. (*Ancient Christian Commentary, II: Mark*, xxvi.)

This historical record, although not as certain as Scripture itself, provides a good basis for understanding this Gospel. Mark based his account of Jesus’ ministry largely on the personal reports of the Apostle Peter. We know Peter to be a lively fellow with an impetuous, action-oriented temperament. His preaching of the gospel, as presented in Acts, was impactful for the hearers. Mark’s Gospel fits this framework well.

With such a background, we should not be surprised at the kind of Gospel Mark wrote. It is vivid and action-packed. Mark expertly draws the reader into the story. One characteristic of this Gospel is its attention to the action in Jesus’ life. While other Gospels contain longer sections devoted to the content of Jesus’ teaching and preaching, Mark tells considerably less of what Jesus actually said. Instead, he focuses on the effects of those words. “They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority” (1:22). Throughout the Gospel, Mark tells us about large crowds of people who, having heard about his teaching and healing, flock to Jesus for help with their own desperate needs.

Another characteristic of Mark’s Gospel is the detail of events that he provides. From the friends of the paralytic who “removed the roof above Him; and ... dug an opening” (2:4), to the report of Jesus in the disciples’ fishing boat “in the stern, asleep on the cushion” (4:38) as the storm rages, to his description of Jesus’ clothing at his transfiguration, “exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them” (9:3). Jesus’ story comes to life in Mark’s telling with striking details that strongly suggest Peter’s own personal, eyewitness recollections. Perhaps Mark adds his own eyewitness report of Jesus’ betrayal and arrest that time he

lost his clothes in a desperate attempt to evade capture by the authorities (14:51–52).

Another detail that Mark seems to enjoy pointing out is the strong reactions Jesus elicits with his ministry. Several times we hear about the disciples being terrified by what they see Jesus doing (6:50; 9:6). On more than one occasion the people see Jesus’ amazing actions, and they are “utterly astonished” (6:51; 7:37). One particularly significant kind of reaction is that of the demons and evil spirits who always succumb in humiliation to the greater authority of Christ. This kind of intense reporting comes at the reader in a moving, rapid-fire narrative that takes one “immediately” (used 12 times by Mark) from the first scenes of Jesus’ ministry to his arrest, crucifixion, and final victory.

Interestingly, Jesus continually tells the demons who are defeated as well as several sufferers who are healed to keep quiet about his work and identity. In Mark’s Gospel, an air of mystery surrounds Jesus. While the Gospel begins and ends with clear assertions about Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel (1:1, 11, 24; 15:32, 39), in between these momentous testimonies we meet people of all sorts who are mostly mystified about him. The disciples ask one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (4:41). His own embarrassed family wants to take him away, saying, “He has lost His senses” (3:21).

When the Son of God becomes a man and walks this earth, things get weird. He doesn’t fit people’s expectations. His ways are confusing to us. Not unlike the king who leaves the palace and travels the highways and byways of his kingdom. People are intimidated and fearful. Awkward situations abound. His regal majesty prompts strong responses—deep respect, intense jealousy, sincere humility. Passing before our eyes in the Gospel of Mark is the true Son of God. The Holy One of Israel. The Son of David. The King of Israel. In one of Jesus’ parables told by Mark, Jesus describes his own appearance in this fallen, sinful world: “He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son’” (12:6). Tragically, we did not. Not until he graciously redeemed us from our deep corruption and brought us through his faithful Word into the believing people of God. What a wonderful gospel message!

Mundfrom is a faculty member at the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary. Artwork: “The Evangelist Saint Mark,” 1605–15, by Joachim Wtewael, Rijksmuseum.

THE G O S P E L O F LUKE

BY JOAN CULLER

The first four books of the New Testament, or the Gospels as we call them, are difficult to categorize. They tell us about Jesus, but they are not strictly biographies, since so much of his life story is omitted. They are not strictly history, either, because there is little attempt to chronicle world—or even local—events of the time. They also fail to fit into any of the other genres found in the Bible, such as poetry (Psalms), wisdom literature (Proverbs), teaching (the epistles), or prophecy (Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc.). Martin Kahler, an early 20th-century biblical scholar, has described the Gospels as “passion (the short period before the death of Jesus) narratives with a long introduction.”

Before the Gospels were written, there was no such literary genre. They are unique works inspired by God, intended to tell us about the sacrifice of Christ and what that means for each of us. No wonder any Christian can tell you that the word *Gospel* means “good news.”

Just as the genre of Gospel is unique, each writer had a different perspective and purpose. Some of the early church fathers used the visions of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4:7 to symbolize the differing depictions of Jesus in each Gospel. These visions describe a creature that stands in the presence of God. Although the descriptions vary, each one includes the faces of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. The Gospel of Luke is traditionally associated with the ox.

In biblical times, the ox represented strength, service, and sacrifice. These qualities of Jesus are highlighted in the Gospel of Luke. A number of parables that are unique to Luke illustrate the concern of Jesus for the least and the lost. These include the parables of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the Publican, and the Rich Man and Lazarus. Luke has been called “the Gospel of the outcast” because in his writing he clearly illustrates Jesus’ intention to serve those who were considered outsiders. This would have been of special importance to Luke, the only Gospel author who was a gentile.

The overarching theme of Luke is the idea of “redemption history.” This concept views history not only as a record of what men have done but also as a divine drama encompassing the work of God directed toward the salvation of mankind. The genealogy of Jesus, listed in Luke 3:23–38, traces his lineage all the way back to Adam—the

only Gospel to do so. It’s an indication that God had been planning for the birth of Jesus and his saving work since the beginning of time. He would not be simply the Messiah of the Jews but the Savior of the world.

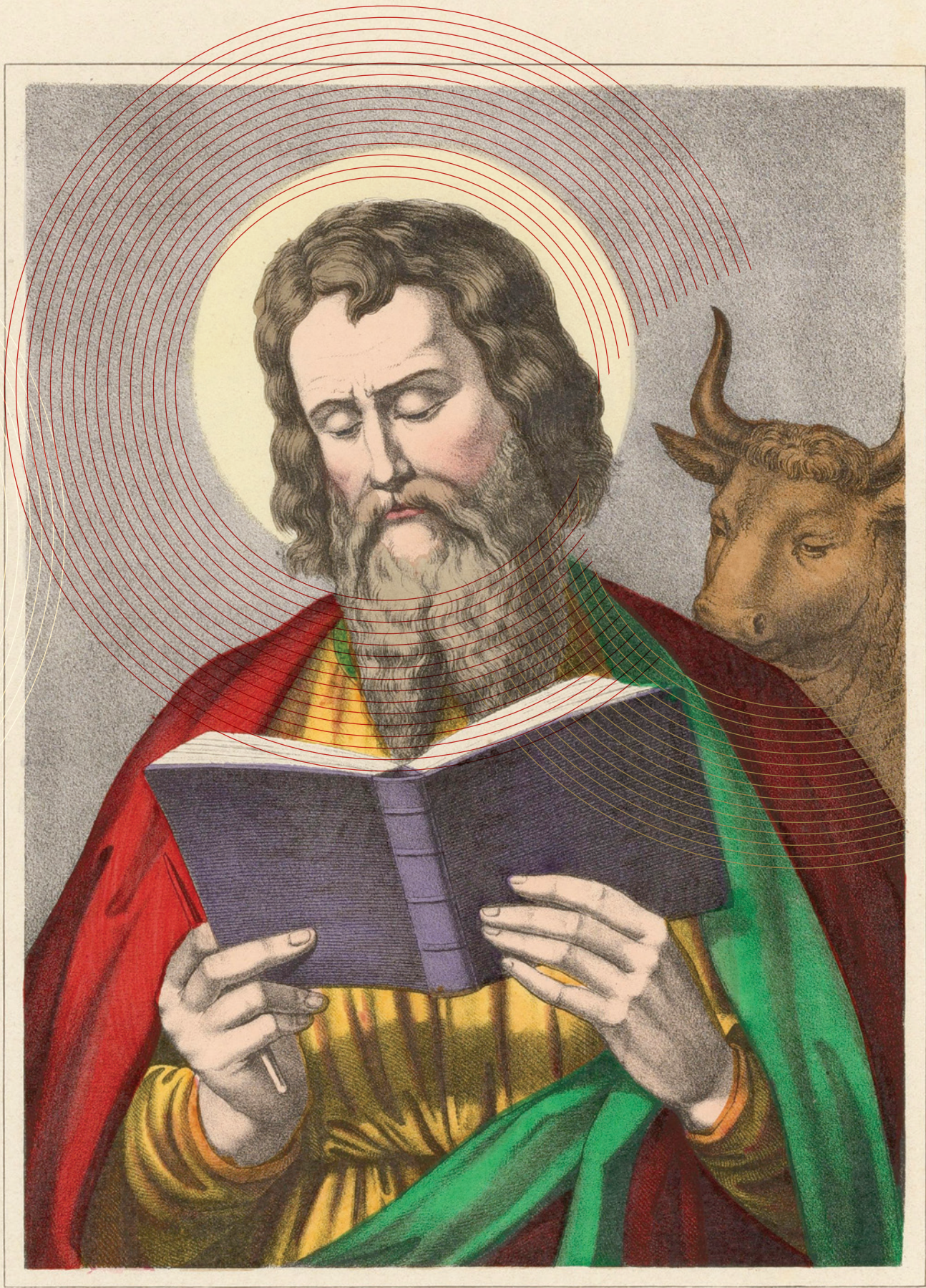
The Jews of the Old Testament were instructed to sacrifice animals, frequently oxen, as a “sin offering.” It was a way of atoning for disobedience to God and a reminder that sinners deserved the penalty of death. These sacrifices were temporary remedies and needed to be done over and over. They were “only a shadow” of the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf (Hebrews 10:1). He became the final sin offering that would reconcile men with God. The ox is, therefore, a fitting symbol for Jesus’ ministry of sacrifice and service, as described by Luke.

Jesus began his life in the manger of an ox (Luke 2:7). Luke is the only Gospel to mention this fact. In the Gospel of Matthew, the first visitors mentioned are the Magi. But in Luke’s account, the shepherds—some of the poorest and least regarded of men—are the first to recognize the significance of his birth. This emphasizes the priority Luke gives to Jesus as the Savior of *all* people, not simply the most deserving.

Luke also devotes a great deal of writing to what has been called “the journey to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51–19:44). As Jesus moves from place to place, readers are constantly reminded that Jerusalem (and his sacrificial death) is the goal (Luke: 9:51–56; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; and 19:28, 44). In a steady and deliberate way, as an ox might pull a plow or a cart, Jesus advances toward his divine destiny with strength and determination. As Luke tells us: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51).

Luke views the crucifixion of Jesus as the final fulfillment of the Jewish prophecies about the Messiah and a sign that the salvation of God has arrived. That salvation is available to all who respond in faith, whatever their past life, social status, or ethnicity. His is “an orderly account,” written “that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3–4).

Culler is a member of Alsace Lutheran, Reading, Pa. Artwork: “Evangelist Lucas,” anonymous, printmaker Charles Burkhard, 1870, Rijksmuseum.



Lith. C. Burckardt édit à Wissembourg (Alsace).

Déposé.

369.

Dépôt à Paris, 65, rue St. Jacques.

S^t. Luc.

St. Lukas.

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T H E G O S P E L O F

JOHN

BY ELISE KNOBLOCH

My grandma Isabelle played the most significant role in my faith during childhood. I spent many afternoons at her house, where we went on nature walks and talked about life. Grandma loved to point out wildlife on our hikes through her pasture. She particularly loved birds. She would point out beautifully adorned birds and marvel at God's creativity, and I would think, "Yep, it's a bird." I was unimpressed by what I deemed to be a common creature. There was one exception, however, one type of bird about which still I marvel: the eagle. An eagle sits on high, often unseen, until it majestically soars across the sky, making itself known. An eagle is set apart. Because of the imagery and symbolism that have been assigned to it, an eagle is elevated above that which is common to represent something special and noteworthy.

The Gospel of John is often represented by the symbol of the eagle. The eagle who soars above the earth is a fitting symbol for the Gospel that focuses on the divinity of Jesus.

John's focus on Jesus' divinity is unique from the other Gospels. Passages throughout detail that Jesus became flesh in its common, familiar nature, showing us the unfathomable love of God the Father. John records miracles, witness accounts, and Jesus' own statements to show us that Jesus not only shares the attributes of God, but as the Son of God, he offers the only way for humanity to share eternal life with his Father.

"Show us the Father" (John 14:8).

John begins his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (1:1-2). The Word, Jesus, eternal Son of God, was sent to earth to show the world his Father. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (1:18). As we use words to make our unseen thoughts known, the Word came to earth to show an unseen God to the world.

"I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One" (John 1:34).

In the same way, John used his Gospel to show the world Jesus' divinity. John wrote to prove that Jesus was the

Messiah and the Son of God so that "by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). He recorded witnesses who recognized Jesus as God, miracles that prove he is God, and Jesus' own statements about who he is.

One way in which Jesus revealed his divine nature is through the imagery of metaphors, which draw connections from something commonly known to something unknown, or less familiar. The Gospel of John records seven "I Am" statements made by Jesus to explain his divine nature and the role he would play in the salvation offered to all people. As the bread of life, Jesus sustains those he saves (6:35). As the light of the world, Jesus is the only source of spiritual truth (8:12). As the good shepherd, he cares for his people (10:11). As the true vine, he will forever be connected to nourish and sustain his people (15:1).

John also records how Jesus used the common to convey meaning to that which he expressed literally: "No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). Thus, he is the only way to eternal life with his Father in heaven as the gate for the sheep (10:7), the resurrection and the life (11:25), and the way and the truth and the life (14:6). These seven simple "I Am" statements recorded in John illuminate profound truths about the divinity of Jesus.

The familiar is not common, but divine.

I have known Jesus from my earliest memories with my grandma. In him I have a steadfast and reassuring familiarity. The Gospel of John reminds me that the familiarity of his love is available to all who believe, but it's anything but common. Though he clothed himself as a common man in order that humanity could see his unseen Father, he came as the set-apart, perfect Son of God to offer us eternal life.

While there is nothing divine about an eagle, its presence offers us a reminder of the majestic, set-apart gift from above in God's Son coming to earth.

Knobloch, a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., is the director of communications for Abiding Savior Academy. Artwork: "Saint John on Patmos," by Georges Trubert, 1480-1490, Getty Open Content.



HM regional conference.

Converge: Uniting Identity and Mission for 21st Century Ministry

A conference designed to help leaders process the open doors of opportunity through the lens of our identity as Free Lutherans.

Date and time:

Feb. 15, 2025
8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location:

Living Word Free Lutheran,
Sioux Falls, S.D.

Hosts:

AFLC South Dakota district
congregations

Schedule

8:30 a.m. Coffee fellowship
8:50 a.m. Devotions
9 a.m. **Session 1:** Exegeting Our Culture
Andy Coyle
10 a.m. **Session 2:** Embracing Our Identity
Micah Hjermstad
11 a.m. **Session 3:** Shaping Congregational Culture
Matthew Ballmann
Noon Lunch provided
1 p.m. **Session 4:** Ministry Contextualization
Andy Coyle

RSVP at aflchomemissions.org

Coyle, Rapid City, S.D., is the director of AFLC Home Missions.

Opportunity.

BY PASTOR ANDY COYLE

AFLC Home Missions is partnering with the AFLC's South Dakota District to offer a regional ministry conference on Saturday, February 15. This one-day conference will be hosted by Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D. The title of the conference is "Converge: Uniting Identity and Mission for 21st Century Ministry."

It is no secret that our society is changing at a faster pace than ever before. Polarization, radicalized individualism, secularism, and distraction have nourished a culture of distrust, isolation, discouragement, and spiritual confusion. There is a real sense of fragility at work in the psyche of people today. This is the door of opportunity at which the church finds itself poised. How do we minister effectively in this wild world? How can we be faithful without falling into isolation, paralysis, compromise, or excessive innovation?

This conference is designed to help leaders process the open doors of opportunity through the lens of our identity as Free Lutheran Christians. Our hope is also to give you tools that will sharpen your effectiveness and passion for sharing Christ. Presenters will be Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president; Pastor Matthew Ballmann, Home Missions Board member; and Pastor Andy Coyle, director of Home Missions. Each session will have a teaching time as well as designated time for small groups to workshop ideas for greater practical understanding and application.

All pastors, leadership teams, and those interested in thinking through ministry are encouraged to attend. Please go to aflchomemissions.org to learn more and RSVP.

AFLC Home Missions Update

Pastor Andy Coyle has recently resigned as pastor at Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D., to enable him to focus full time as director of Home Missions. Members of the Home Missions Board of Directors are excited for the future growth of the Home Missions ministry in the AFLC.



Supporting life.

BY KAREN PEDERSON

The first time a mom feels a baby move or flutter in her womb, it's an awesome experience knowing that life is growing inside of her. It's her baby, her flesh and blood. When moms get to see their babies through an ultrasound, they see life growing inside them. Statistics show that viewing an ultrasound can change a woman's mind about abortion and persuade her to choose life.

The Dakota Hope Clinic in Minot, N.D., is a pregnancy help center that many churches and people support financially and with baby gifts. Our Western North Dakota and Eastern Montana WMF district rally held a baby shower recently, and we filled a crib with gifts to give to the Dakota Hope Clinic. We put into action our concerns for young moms and their babies without support systems.

Christian women around our country are putting their love and concern into action to assist young moms facing the daunting task of raising a baby. These efforts encourage mothers at risk to let their babies live. At Elim Lutheran in Lake Stevens, Wash., members have a bassinet in their entry for people to fill with gifts that they give to their local pregnancy help center quarterly.

January is Right to Life month. Psalm 139 challenges and inspires us to protect life with phrases like, "You created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made ... My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth." Our heavenly Father knew us before we were formed. God created us and knows us intimately.

Jesus said to "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). God gives faith in baptism, but unless it is nurtured and fed, it can be lost. The Cradle Roll program can help new parents by giving them tools to nurture and raise their children in faith in the Lord. Cradle Roll has monthly cards, letters, and books that are sent out to these new parents to assist their children in the first three years of life until they are enrolled in Sunday school. Our WMF supports Parish Education and the Cradle Roll program, which is another way to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6).

I pray that this January and throughout the new year your WMF is finding ways to support young moms and use these programs in your community.



WMF advisory committee.

Are you a district WMF president? If so, you are a part of the WMF advisory committee which meets twice yearly—following the WMF Day at the Annual Conference and in an online meeting in February. The February meeting will offer oversight of the WMF and encourage each other in ministry. Please contact us with a representative from your district, either your district president or a designated representative.

• wmfpres@gmail.com

Pederson, a member of Zion Lutheran, Tioga, N.D., is the president of the Women's Missionary Federation.

The transforming gospel.

BY PASTOR MATTHEW ABEL

Life on the mission field is similar in many ways to life in the parish. Preaching and teaching, visiting and ministering to the young and old, and the healthy and sick are big parts of day-to-day ministry. Nevertheless, the mission setting brings some unique challenges. Here's an example.

It was early in the morning when I got a call from Lili: "It's my dad; he's in the hospital, and we think he's dying. Can you come pray for him?" After taking my children, Zoey and Ian, to school, I went home to prepare for the hospital call. The sick man, Don Amado, had also been suffering from dementia. "How do you minister to someone with dementia?" I thought. So I prayed as I put on my clerical shirt and collar, grabbed a Bible, slipped my small pastor's book into my pocket, and took off for the hospital. My prayers were for wisdom, confidence, and the chance to share the gospel.

I prayed for the rest of the family, too. Lili has come to our church on occasion and to the women's meetings often. Her son Gonzalo comes regularly to our kid's club. I know some of the family drama and that they disapprove of Lili's departure from the family religion—South American Roman Catholicism.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was greeted by Lili, her sister Mabel, her brother, her mother, and an aunt. We had to wait a few minutes while the nurses cleaned up the double-wide shipping containers that have been built into a new wing for inpatient hospital care. While we waited, they updated me on the situation. It was bad, and to make things worse, Amado had reacted badly to a medication. He was in and out of consciousness, trying to talk, but it was hard to make out what he said, and he was in pain. He had a stroke and an infection that they could not pinpoint.

The family was distraught and feared losing their father. While we sat waiting, Mabel called me aside and, with a worried look, asked me if I knew how to release someone from a saint. Confused, I asked for further explanation. In tears she explained that her father had devoted himself to "San la Muerte" (the grim reaper). Amado had been a coffin maker. When business was down, he would light candles to the idol of San la Muerte; several people would die, and he would be back in business. Now, on what seemed like his deathbed, Mabel was concerned about his salvation.

"Can a devotee of San la Muerte be saved? Can you release him from his idol?" she asked.

Pause the story. What worldviews surround you? What strange things do people around you believe? What false religion dominates your city? As we strive to reach our neighbors with the gospel, we must investigate these things often. On this day in particular, my theoretical knowledge of this religious practice became, let's say, less theoretical.

Don Amado looked at me intently with fear in his eyes as his family gathered around his hospital bed. We prayed the Lord's Prayer, and I read a couple of Psalms about dying, repentance, and the hope of forgiveness and resurrection. I held his hand and looked him in the eyes as I preached about repentance. I pleaded with him to renounce the devil and to trust in Christ alone. Amado cried like a baby. I, too, had tears in my eyes.

I was preaching to all of those around Amado, too. I reminded them that salvation is offered to each of us while we are alive. All who repent and believe the gospel are saved. Then, I sang a song about Jesus in Guarani. To my surprise, several people joined me. Then I prayed for salvation, healing, and peace.

Don Amado is at home, and his health is improving. The story isn't over. Pray for this mission field with its own unique challenges. Pray for Lili and her family. Pray for the miracles of faith, conversion, and transformation through Christ Jesus our Lord.



Abel, pictured above with his congregation and with his family, is an AFLC missionary in Villarrica, Paraguay.



Missionaries wanted.

BY PASTOR RON SMITH

The mission work in Alaska is defined by three distinct ministries combined into one effort to glorify God and to share the name of Jesus. First, Bay Broadcasting's mission focus is evangelism over the airwaves. Next, the Alaska Mission team strives to share the love of Jesus through in-person contact in Naknek, South Naknek, and many remote villages. And FLAPS shares the workload through aviation and many other duties, including preaching when opportunities arise.

Would you prayerfully consider a short-term mission trip to Naknek to teach vacation Bible school? Alaska is a great place for you to share your heart for children's ministry. Perhaps God is calling you or a team from your church to serve the villages in Alaska by teaching vacation Bible school. Pray, listen, then act; there is much for you to do in sharing the workload and the love of Jesus with others. There is so much for you to experience if you have never been to Alaska or have not been there in a long time.

Home Missions continues to seek a mission-oriented pastor and family whom God is calling to Alaska. Please join us in praying for this man and his family. If you are a pastor yourself, Home Missions would encourage you to pray about Alaska, discuss the work with family, and then reach out to Loren Tungseth or Jeff Swanson to pray about being a part of carrying the gospel of Jesus to souls in Alaska.

The Alaska Mission and the people of Naknek have been blessed with pastors who have spent time there over the last 18 months. Pastor Marlin Harris, Pastor Marshall Nessa, and seminarian Jeremy Larson have been an encouragement to Home Missions and to the souls in Alaska. Our trust in God's plan and timing gives the call committee strength in prayer and determination. The AFLC continues to need men called by God to share the good news of great joy with all the people.

For more information on the mission work in Alaska, check out our web page: aflochomemissions.org/alaska.

The Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14) shows the goodness of God found in the gospel message of Christ. The world is filled with excuses for why we can't hold to the truth of God's Word. Likewise, there are many excuses for why we can't respond to the Lord's call. In verse 23 we read, "Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'" I think of Alaska and its limited highways, the landscape filled with bogs, and the remoteness between villages. What excuse will you overcome for the gospel message of freedom and life everlasting to be shared by you, even in remote locations like Naknek and other villages in Alaska?

Alaska contacts.

For more information about volunteering at the Alaska Mission, or on the role of mission pastor, contact:

- **Loren Tungseth:**
218.205.6987
laurentungseth@gmail.com
- **Pastor Jeff Swanson:**
jeffswanson80@gmail.com

Alaska prayer requests.

- **The Alaska Mission team:**
Heather Hansen, Pastor Bob and Margaret Lee, Maggie Johnson, and Joshua Fish.
- **Volunteers and leaders:**
Serving on the Alaska VBS summer team or at The Net ministry.
- **Mission pastor:**
A full-time position serving the Alaska Mission.
- **Village outreach:**
Spreading the good news of the gospel to remote areas.
- **Provision:**
The financial needs of all three areas of the Alaska Mission.

Smith, who serves Grace Lutheran, Bruce, S.D., is a member of the call committee for the Alaska Mission.

AFLC Schools present Christmas concerts

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary hosted a weekend of Christmas concerts under the theme, “Behold Our God,” Dec. 6–8 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. The concerts featured the Free Lutheran Seminary Chorus, the Proclaim Choir, Concert Choir, handbell ensemble, and wind ensemble, all directed by Andrew Hanson. Dr. Wade Mobley, president of FLBCS, gave a brief meditation. A recording of the concerts can be found on the FLBC livestream at flbc.edu/live.

Concert to feature commissioned work

The FLBC Concert Choir will debut a new composition, *Trinity: Our God of Hope and Help*, during a special concert on Feb. 2. The Bible college was one of several organizations that commissioned this five-movement work written by composer Marianne Foreman. One of those works, “Gloria,” was performed by the Concert Choir in the recent campus Christmas concerts.

The Concert Choir will be joined by a string quartet, and the concert will include a congregational hymn sing focused on celebrating God’s care for us as revealed through the Trinity.

The concert will be held at 7 p.m. on Feb. 2 in Hauge Memorial Chapel. Registration can be found online at flbc.edu/event/trinityconcert.

Upcoming Events

◆ Spotlight: Missions

The annual Spotlight: Missions conference will be held Feb. 3 in Hauge Memorial Chapel. Pastor Andy Coyle, director of AFLC Home Missions, will speak on the theme of “Trinity.” The conference will have three sessions in the morning, with a final session at 7 p.m.

◆ Seminary Symposium

Dr. Reed Lessing, professor of Old Testament at Concordia, St. Paul, will be the featured speaker at the Seminary Symposium, Jan. 15–16, at the Free Lutheran Seminary. The theme, *Justification: The Righteous Shall Live By Faith*, will feature an evening session on Jan. 15 followed by two morning sessions on Jan. 16 led by Lessing. In the afternoon, sessions will be taught by Dr. Phill Hooper, Pastor Dennis Norby, and Dr. Jason Gudim. Visit flbc.edu/event/symposium2025 for more information and to register.





Clockwise from left: Members of the Seminary Chorus sing "Emmanuel (Hallowed Manger Ground)." Members of the Concert Choir sing "Vinite Adoremus." The combined choirs concluded the program with "Behold our God." Dr. Wade Mobley, president, gave a brief meditation. Members of Proclaim Choir. Members of Concert Choir. Grant Osweiler plays in the wind ensemble. The handbell ensemble opened the concert with "O Come, O Come, Immanuel." Nate Wilhelm, a member of Concert Choir, sang a solo in "One Jehovah."

PEOPLE & PLACES

Pastor Andy Coyle has resigned as pastor of Shiloh Free Lutheran, Black Hawk, S.D. His role as director of AFLC Home Missions has expanded from part-time to full-time.

Pastor Richard Larson has resigned from Abiding Faith Free Lutheran, Ortonville, Minn.

Pastor Ryan Tonneson was installed Dec. 1, 2024, at Good Shepherd Free Lutheran, Cokato, Minn., with Pastor Micah Hjermstad, AFLC president, officiating.

Pastor David Lusk was installed Dec. 9, 2024, at Christian Free Lutheran, Wheatland, Iowa, with Pastor Jason Holt, AFLC presidential ministry associate, officiating.

AFLC Development hires vice president, admin

The AFLC Department of Development has hired Mark Sivertson for the new position of vice president of Development. Sivertson, who is a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., has previously worked with the AFLC Foundation. Sivertson will leave his position as the senior vice president of trust and wealth management services for American Bank and Trust and will begin his new position on Jan. 20.

Additionally, Angel Luttmann has been hired as the Development department's administrative assistant. Luttmann, a member of Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., has extensive managerial experience in the implementation of telehealth services. She will begin Jan. 27.

Both Sivertson and Luttmann will work remotely from their homes in Sioux Falls. Pastor Tonnes Pollestad continues to serve as director.

Support the AFLC's magazine

The Lutheran Ambassador is free for all subscribers. Our ministry is subsidized by your gifts. Thank you! For information on giving, visit our website at aflc.org/lutheran-ambassador.

NOVEMBER MEMORIALS

Bible College
Ruth Claus

FLAPS
Pastor Paul Nash

General Fund
Garnett Holm

Parish Education
Linda Nelson

World Missions
Marilyn Jacobson
Pastor Alvin & Francis
Grothe



Linda Nelson

Linda (Grahm) Nelson, 66, of Vergas, Minn., died Nov. 16, 2024. She was the wife of Licensed Pastor Dean Nelson.

Born Nov. 26, 1957, in Perham, Minn., she was the daughter of Gerald and Rosella (Kading) Grahm. She graduated from Pelican Rapids High School in 1976 and from NDSU with an associate's degree in computer programming. She married Dean Nelson Sept. 13, 1975. She worked as a computer programmer for various companies and also worked/volunteered at ministries in various roles: Maranatha Free Lutheran (Glyndon, Minn.), Youth for Christ Parent Life Ministry, AFLC Parish Education, the AFLC bookkeeping office, Calvary Free Lutheran (Fergus Falls, Minn.), and WMF leadership. She was a founding member of Maranatha Free Lutheran and attended several other congregations, eventually becoming a member of Calvary Free Lutheran.

Surviving are her husband; one son, Pastor Barry (Kyrie) Nelson; three daughters, Kelly (Daniel) Keinanen, Amber Nelson, Jessica (Ryan) Stockman; four sisters, Gloria Nyland, Ruth (Joseph) Baity, Dolores (Paul) Hugo, Helen (Jeff) Guille; one brother, Gordon Grahm; and 11 grandchildren.

The service was held Nov. 22, 2024, at Calvary Free Lutheran, Fergus Falls, Minn. Burial was in Pelican Valley Cemetery, Pelican Rapids, Minn.



Marilynn Johnson

Marilynn Johnson, 96, of Shakopee, Minn., died Dec. 5, 2024, at All Saints Senior Living, Shakopee. She was the wife of the late AFLC Pastor Walter Johnson.

Born Jan. 7, 1928, in Buck Creek, Iowa, she was the daughter of Robert and Viola Pries. She married Walter Johnson in 1949 in Chicago. She received a nursing degree from Iowa Lutheran School of Nursing and worked as a nurse for several years. They served many churches across the Midwest, where she volunteered as a Sunday school teacher, vacation Bible school teacher, and with several church choirs.

Surviving are four sons, Mark (Cindy) Johnson, Gregory Johnson, Pastor David (Vicki) Johnson, Larimore, N.D., and Stephen (Julie) Johnson; one brother, David Pries, San Jose, Calif.; 17 grandchildren; and 25 great-grandchildren.

The service was held Dec. 13, 2024, at King of Glory Lutheran, Shakopee, Minn. Burial was in Lands Lutheran Church Cemetery, Zumbrota, Minn.

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-November 30, 2024

FUND	REC'D IN NOVEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	% OF SUBSIDY	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$38,817	\$386,734	84	\$380,981
Evangelism	9,922	105,360	77	102,231
Youth Ministries	12,894	134,544	87	123,097
Parish Education	17,728	172,336	92	133,471
Seminary	19,674	250,965	88	245,520
Bible College	30,550	584,768	124	358,206
Home Missions	34,722	313,508	74	286,029
World Missions	38,316	374,396	77	353,637
Personal Support	58,573	728,401	94	701,163
TOTALS	\$261,195	\$3,051,013	90	2,684,334

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

Time.

BY CLARA GUNDERSON

January is an appropriate time to reflect on the past as well as the future. Solomon wrote about the proper timing for everything in Ecclesiastes

3:1–8: “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every matter under the heaven—

A time to give birth and a time to die;

A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

A time to kill and a time to heal;

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

A time to weep and a time to laugh;

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.

A time to search and a time to give up as lost;

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;

A time to be silent and a time to speak.

A time for war and a time for peace.

One word catches my attention just now: *appointed*. It suggests to me that there is someone in the role of decision-maker, one who declares just what time is the right time. Solomon takes away any mystery of this in verse 11: “He (God) has made everything appropriate in its time.”

The time of old age has got me! It crept up so slowly I didn’t recognize it until

suddenly, I am 90 years old! That doesn’t mean that it is my time to die, but the phrase, “a time to die,” has haunted me this past year as eight very dear people passed away. Yes, some were old. But there were others who weren’t. I would gladly have taken their places and let them live to old age. But the sovereignty of him who makes everything good in its time has spoken.

I have felt the hand of God on me all my life. Marriage and the birth of each of our children came in his time. My husband and I were already well into our 30s before the Lord’s time for us to go to Bolivia as his witnesses came. Years later, we transitioned back to the States and served various congregations—all in his appropriate timing. King David felt this same sense of God’s leading as he cried out, “My times are in your hands” (Psalm 31:15). David placed his life under God’s control.

My life under the Lord’s control has been a very good life. I know I’m not 5’ 7” anymore. I have hearing aids, dim eyes, and a shaking hand as I thread a needle. I can’t walk four miles anymore, and I may forget your name next time we meet. And sometimes my heart is full of fear, not trusting fully in the heart of my Lord.

I recently came across an article I had saved for a needy time. Have you read Hannah Hurnard’s book, *Hinds Feet on High Places*? It’s an allegory on the Christian life based on Habakkuk 3:19. The main character, Much Afraid, is on her life journey, finding herself weak, fearful, and unable to climb to the high places

(victorious living). She asks the Shepherd to carry her. Being a mother, I would gladly have done that! But the Shepherd replies, “I could carry you all the way up to the high places Myself instead of leaving you to climb there. But if I did, you would never be able to develop hind’s feet and become my companion and go where I go.” Much Afraid, like me, found life hard with difficulties she didn’t expect.

In the chaos of life, we want the Lord to intervene, to remove all the suffering. He answers us in Habakkuk 2:3, “For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hurries toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it delays, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay long.”

Looking back at the strong woman I was all those years ago, I can downplay any limitations now because the Lord is still in control, and there is so much he lays on my heart that he wants me to bring to him in prayer. He daily reminds me in his Word of what he wants of me: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

I never want to lose sight of the beauty of a life surrendered to the Creator. Everything in my life has had its beginning and its end, except my eternal life. Begun 91 years ago, it will never end. My weakened knees are standing firmly on God’s promises ... 10,000 years and then forevermore!

Gunderson lives in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

BUILDING THE BASE \ \ THE LORD'S PRAYER \ Part 1

Regarding the Lord as holy.

BY PASTOR NICK SCHULTZ

*Our Father who art in heaven.
Hallowed be Thy name.*

How great is our God? He is pretty awesome. Not only does he invite us to pray to him, but he invites us to believe he is our true Father and that we can approach him as his beloved children. He understands just how feeble and inept we are at accomplishing anything apart from him. So, he has given us words and the form of what our prayers may take in the Lord's Prayer. "Therefore," Martin Luther says in his *Large Catechism*, "there is no nobler prayer to be found upon the earth than the Lord's Prayer. We pray it daily, because it has this excellent testimony, that God loves to hear it."

So, what exactly are we praying for in the Lord's Prayer?

First, we pray that the Lord's name would be "hallowed." Outside of the Lord's Prayer, I'm willing to guess that not many of us use the word *hallowed*. Hallowed means

to make holy or honor as holy. In Ezekiel 36, God teaches us that his name is holy regardless of how we regard it—whether as holy or as common. And so, we cannot make God's name holy, but what we pray for is that we would regard God's name as holy among us.

There are two ways we regard God's name as holy. First, when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and second, when we lead holy lives according to that Word.

God's Word makes things holy (John 17:17); therefore, the pure teaching of God's Word is of first importance. When God's Word is taught, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit to create and build up faith in Jesus Christ for those who hear it. This faith in Jesus makes precious eternal human beings holy before God. We are a new creation, having been born again of water and spirit (John 3:5). Our holiness before God is fully dependent upon Jesus. When we believe in him, not only is God's name holy among us,

but we ourselves are made holy.

As new creations in Christ, Christians are given new hearts and a new spirit. In Ezekiel 36:27, God promises to, "Put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." New creatures do new things. This is the second way we regard God's name as holy, by leading holy lives according to God's Word. These holy lives are marked by obedience to God's commands to the best of our ability and by fulfilling the law through love and good works done for our neighbor.

When our teaching or understanding of God's Word is false or when we sin against God and do not follow his commands, we still have the invitation to pray and confess our sin to God. He is our dear Father who is quick with mercy and rich with grace in Christ Jesus.

*Schultz serves St. Olaf Lutheran,
Chamberlain, S.D., and Pukwana Free
Lutheran, Pukwana, S.D.*