

Trinity Te Deum

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Greetings and Blessings in the Name of Our Lord, Jesus Christ!

Advent and Christmas are upon us and with that comes a time of repentant joy at the birth of the incarnate Christ and the hope of the 2nd coming when He returns to judge the world. This time of the Church Year is one of dichotomous intrigue as we look to the manger with joy, but also to our own sinful natures for which our Lord came down from heaven in order to absolve. Without our sinfulness, there would be no need for Jesus to come into the world. But our first parents made it so that His sacrifice as the promised seed of the woman would offer reconciliation for the entire world by His death on the cross. We need not look any further than that for the reality of who we are and why He has come into the world.

As I look to write this newsletter, I have struggled to find a topic that captured me in such a way that I felt the need to address it for you. And then I came across (yet another) group of people who call themselves confessional Lutherans, and yet deny one of the most basic doctrines of what we hold to be true according to the Scripture and the Confessions. It baffles me how so many who claim this confessional status can openly state that they hold to the entirety of the Book of Concord of 1580 (which properly contains the Unaltered Augsburg Confession), but then out of the other side of their mouths deny the doctrine of objective justification. For those that may not be fully versed on what I am talking about, let me explain briefly what I mean by *objective justification*, and then also *subjective justification*.

Objective justification is the truth taught in Scripture that Jesus Christ, by His vicarious atonement (His all-atoning sacrifice on the cross), died for the sins of the entire world. John the Baptizer proclaims in John

1:29, and we along with Him in our liturgy, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” The Apostle also writes in his first Epistle, 2:2, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Paul, in Romans 3:23-25, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith.” Jesus’ taking of our punishment for the penalty of sin is a gift of the Gospel that is offered to all people. He died for every man, woman, and child of all times and places.

Subjective justification is the truth taught in Scripture that the benefit of Jesus’ vicarious atonement applies only to those who have faith in Him. The forgiveness of sins which He won by His blood only applies to those who, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, have received faith that His redemption is for them. Here we can cite the same passage from Romans 3:25 above, which closes, “to be received by faith.” Paul says also in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Again, the Apostle, in Galatians 2:16a, “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” And, again, in Philippians 3:9, “Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” Jesus’ death on the cross atoned for the sins of the world, but the free gift is applied only to those who have faith that His atonement is theirs. But this only is itself a gift, that we have been given faith because of His grace alone and are declared righteous only for the sake of Jesus.

As I began addressing, these two clear doctrines of the faith are widely confessed by the Lutheran Reformers in the Book of Concord of 1580, so to state

that one holds to the truth of the Confessions, and yet deny objective and subjective justification, is a false confession of faith. In regard to objective justification, Article III of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord states in paragraph 57, “As mentioned above, the obedience not only of [Christ’s] one nature, but of the entire person, is a complete satisfaction and atonement for the human race.” In the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article I, Luther quotes John 1:29 and Isaiah 53:6 (referenced above) as he defends the article of justification. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII, paragraph 8, states, “We teach that the sacrifice of Christ dying on the cross has been enough for the sins of the whole world.” Solid Declaration, Article XI, paragraph 28, “If we want to think about our eternal election to salvation helpfully, we must in every way hold strongly and firmly to this truth: just as the preaching of repentance is universal, so also the promise of the Gospel is universal, that is, it belongs to all people.” At the risk of boring you into submission, I will cease my references there, but there certainly are many more. Clearly, the Confessions to which we subscribe ourselves as Confessional Lutherans, which we believe, teach, and confess, show the truth of the universality of justification. It is offered to all, and is only so offered because of the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the bloody cross of salvation.

As for subjective justification, this too is found in numerous places. The Apology, Article IV, paragraph 48, “The faith that justifies is not merely a knowledge of history. It is to believe in God’s promise. In the promise, for Christ’s sake, forgiveness of sins and justification are freely offered. And so that no one may suppose that this is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to want and to receive the offered promise of forgiveness of sins and of justification.” In the Solid Declaration, Article VI, paragraph 20, “[The Gospel] teaches that God’s Son, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the Law’s curse and has atoned and paid for all our sins. Through Him alone we again enter into favor with God, receive forgiveness of sins through faith and are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and are eternally saved.” And, most succinctly, the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, “People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4).”

That Christ objectively died for the entire human race is clearly evidenced throughout Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions. To deny the objective nature of justification, that is, its universality for all sinners, is to deny the truth of Scripture that the Confessors fought to protect. The Calvinists have proposed the idea of limited atonement for centuries in denial of this Biblical truth. As those who truly hold to the truth of what is confessed in the Book of Concord of 1580, we cannot allow this Calvinist heresy into the church. It pollutes the Gospel and denies what has been revealed to us by the Lord in His Holy Word. I pray that the Holy Spirit would work in the hearts of all who call themselves “Lutheran” that deny the truth that Christ died for the sins of all people, and not just those who believe. Belief applies the gracious gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation won by Christ in His vicarious death, and through that faith we are justified by His grace alone, but it is indeed offered to the whole world. We must preach to the world that Jesus died for the sins of all, and pray that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those who do not yet know that truth, to do as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:4, and fulfill His desire that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Jesus came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary in order to redeem the world, to buy her back from the clutches of sin, death, and the devil. That is the most important truth of this season. The first Advent of Christ is all about the fact that we are so depraved and incapable of being righteous, that it was necessary for our God to come down and pay the price He knew we could not pay. As we prepare for the celebration of Christmas and the springing forth of the shoot from the stump of Jesse, we give thanks to the Lord for His grace which has given us eternal life for the sake of Christ, who has come into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. To God be the glory, forever and ever.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Yours in Christ,



The “Gen Z” Bible

Like many of you, I grew up in a time when slang words were a part of our everyday language. The 1970s brought us words like “groovy” and “far out.” The 1980s produced gems like “rad” and “gnarly.” The 1990s were filled with kids everywhere saying “as if,” “booyah,” and “my bad.” The list could go on, but that would take more than one article to dive into. When we used these slang terms growing up, they were periodically thrown into the rest of our normal vocabulary for emphasis or fun. It didn’t replace the function of language, but only added a little “flair” to the way we spoke. Today’s slang, I must be honest, I don’t understand (nor do I want to). It has so overtaken the language of young kids that they are almost speaking a new and very different language that abandons all sensibility. Anyone who has talked to me about this topic knows that I absolutely loathe the use of this moronic speech, and I am thankful that my children have avoided being sucked into it.

For those that may be a bit lost, here are a few examples of what I am talking about. When they want to say that something is bad, instead of saying it’s bad, they say that it is “skibidi toilet.” When someone is charming, they have “rizz.” If they are lying, then they are “cap.” Don’t even get me started on this ridiculous “6-7” nonsense. I have zero desire to go any further into the malarkey, but you get the gist. My point in bringing this up, is that some of you may not know how this has made its way into the “church” today. There is actually a new “Gen Z Bible” that has rewritten the Scriptures using this diabolical slang. Here are a few examples:

John 1:1-5 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. No cap, that’s the ultimate vibe. The same was in the beginning with God. Straight up, they were homies from day one. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. He created everything, fr. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. His energy was pure light, lit vibes only. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. The light was shining, but the dark was sus, didn’t get it.

Genesis 1:1-8 – In the beginning, God created the whole vibe: heaven and earth. 🌌💡 The earth was lowkey a blank canvas 🎨 dark, empty, and kinda spooky. But

God’s Spirit was just floatin’ 🌀 over the waters like, “Watch this.” 🌊 God goes, “Let there be LIGHT!”

💡💥 And boom, instant glow-up. No cap. God peeped the light and it was good, so He separated the light from the dark. Savage move. 🧐 He called the light Day and the dark Night. That was the first day, periodttt. 🌞🌙 Day 1 = DONE. ✅ God said, ‘Let’s create some space in the water to vibe,’ and that’s what happened. 🌀 So God made that vibe space 🌊 and split the waters, and it was totally lit. 🔥 He named the vibe space Heaven 🌌, and that was the second day, fam. 🚀

John 19:25-30 – Standing by the cross was Jesus’ mom, her sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, just vibing. When Jesus saw His mom and the disciple He vibed with, He said, “Woman, check out your son!” Then He told the disciple, “Yo, that’s your mom now!” And from then on, that disciple took her home. After this, Jesus knew everything was done so the scripture would be fulfilled, and He said, “I’m thirsty, fr.” They had a vessel full of vinegar, and they soaked a sponge in it, put it on hyssop, and offered it to His mouth. After He took the vinegar, Jesus was like, “It’s finished,” then bowed His head and ghosted.

I can’t imagine you aren’t completely horrified like me. But this is the goal of the modern church. It seeks to take the ways of society and make them the things of God. How miserably they fail at it is irrelevant. It is pervasive and being used to present things in a way that violates the truth of what is written in Scripture, and we must mark and avoid it like any other false teacher. Sorry, kids. I know that our kids here know better, but there are so many in the world that don’t, and they are being suckered into this kind of nonsense as it is normalized throughout what is presented in the world as the “Christian church.” I will be the first to tell you that no Bible translation is perfect, but this one is so far from the truth of what is written in the original language that it ought not even be considered to be the Scripture. It is nothing more than someone’s personal summation of what the Word says, and a very poor one at that. The context of Scripture is more than just the words that are on the page, but also the reverence that they are due. And this silliness flies in the face of any reverence to the Lord, in complete violation of the Scriptures it claims to translate. Hebrews 12:28-29, “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let

us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

This is an unfortunate by-product of the complete loss of reverence and awe in the worship life of the church at-large. When we cease to follow the commands of God to worship Him as He has instructed us to do, Satan weasels his way in and belittles it in every aspect he can manipulate. And this “Gen Z Bible” is nothing more than a belittling and minimizing of God’s Means of Grace. Satan has attacked the Means of Grace from the very beginning, and continues to do so in every way possible still today. He convinces people that the Sacraments are symbolic, or not even necessary at all, and now that the Word of salvation is nothing more than a toy to be played with as we see fit. Stand firm in the truth of what the Lord has given us as we continue to battle the attacks of the devil against the true Church. We must never give in to the lackadaisical mentality that everything is subject to our desires. God’s Word is all powerful and authoritative, and so we use translations that are as close to the original as we can get out of respect for that truth. For the same reason we stick to the traditional liturgy of the Church, which we can trace back to the Scripture itself as the source.

The only hope that I have is that, just like the slang words of our youth, these too will one day pass on, but there will always be more to come in the next generation. I pray that our youth find the truth of what it means to stay true to the Word and abide in the truth of Christ. Christ is found in his Word and in the Sacraments He has instituted for our benefit, to bring us the forgiveness He has won on the cross, and that language will always be universal. No amount of linguistic manipulation can change that reality, and nothing can take that away from you who are kept in the faith of Him who died to redeem the world by His gracious gift.



‘Lo, How A Rose E’er Blooming’: A Hymnwriter Shares His Favorite Christmas Hymn

by Stephen P. Starke

This article was originally published in the December 2017 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*.

*Of the Father’s Love Begotten, From Heaven
Above to Earth I Come, All My Heart Again Rejoices,
Once in Royal David’s City, Silent Night, Joy to the
World...*

How does one begin to choose a favorite from the treasure trove of Christmas hymns and carols?

We are blessed with enough good Christmas songs to keep us singing merrily throughout all the 12 days of Christmas, but for me, there is one hymn that must always be sung on December 24 for it to feel like Christmas: “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming.”

The title of this lovely hymn (*LSB* 359) grows out of a prophecy from the 11th chapter of Isaiah: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit” (11:1). In this passage, Isaiah presents us with a graphic image: from a seemingly lifeless stump springs a tender shoot. The prophet’s words are a wonderful foreshadowing of the work of Christ, who comes to bring life out of death.

The hymn was first published with 23 stanzas under the German title “Es Ist Ein Ros Entsprungen” in *Alte catholische geistliche Kirchengeslinge* (Cologne, 1599). Originally, the “rose” in stanza 2 was interpreted as Mary, until Michael Praetorius in *Musae Sionae* (1609) changed the interpretation to point instead to Christ as the rose, thus placing the hymn even more fully in harmony with biblical imagery.

A bit of regional flavor is incorporated into this hymn: The words “amid the cold of winter” reflect more of a Germanic northern hemisphere experience of Christmas, while the words “when half-spent was the night” attempt to pinpoint the hour of Jesus’ birth, a time which is unknown to us. Do these intrusions ruin this hymn? Not for me. It may have been cold that Judean night of the first Christmas, and Jesus could very well have been born at the darkest hour of night as the dawning Light of the world. Here, I believe, is where poetry offers us something different from strict prose and straight-up dogma. The hymn writer uses words to paint a picture for the worshiper. The poet can use words of tenderness — “With Mary we behold it / The virgin mother kind” — and yet the gentle words bring us right back to Scripture (IS. 7:14). Carefully chosen words call upon our senses of smell and sight — “This flow’r whose fragrance tender / With sweetness fills the air, / Dispers with glorious splendor / The darkness everywhere” — to make the image grow more vivid in our minds.

Since Jesus comes as Savior, and since the manger ought never be too far removed from the cross, this hymn, like any good hymn, continues to lay out a faithful telling of Christ’s Person and work: “True man, yet very God, / From sin and death He saves us / And lightens ev’ry load.” One wouldn’t expect to stumble upon the two natures of Christ in a hymn like this, but with five simple words the hymn writer and faithful translator plainly lay out this creedal truth. What has Jesus done? He has saved us from sin and death. What does Jesus continue to do? He makes every load and burden lighter (Matt. 11:28-29).

A good hymn is never made up of words alone. It is a true marriage of text and tune. In the case of this hymn ES IST EIN ROS (Rhythmic) is a tune that well supports its underlying message that Christ was born to die. How so? The tune has a slightly melancholy character to it. Phrases one and three of the tune end with the tonic chord of D minor, which is the relative minor key to F major, the key in which the tune appears in *Lutheran Service Book*. Then a change occurs. Phrase six ends with a D major chord, changing the F natural to an F sharp, thus removing that melancholy chord from the tune.

ES IST EIN ROS is a rounded bar form tune (AABA) and has the characteristics of a Renaissance madrigal. Since the meter (the number of syllables in

each line of text) of the hymn is 76 76 6 76, the tune allows that single 6-syllable line to have its own unique set of notes: 76=A, 76=A, 6=B, 76=A. The tune sounds wonderful when sung by an unaccompanied choir, allowing the rhythmic subtleties and fine part writing to be more clearly heard. It can certainly be sung accompanied as well, but such an accompaniment ought to be delicate and not bombastic.

The text comes to a wonderful conclusion in the final stanza with a prayer to the newborn Christ Child, beautifully evoking the mystery of the Incarnation that we celebrate each Christmas:

O Savior, child of Mary, (*true man*)

Who felt our human woe; (human nature) O Savior,
King of Glory, (*true God*)

Who dost our weakness know: (divine nature) Bring us
at length we pray (*our petition*)

To the bright courts of heaven,

And to the endless day.

Image: “A Wreath of Flowers for the Baby Jesus,” Carl Rahl, 1812–1865. Public domain.

The Name of Jesus for You

Written by Rev. Joshua Miller

The name of Jesus holds us fast.

“And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Luke 1:30-31).

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21).

What’s in a name? When it comes to the name of Jesus, everything! In the church year, January 1 is not New Year’s Day. Instead, the new Church Year starts on

the First Sunday of Advent. But that does not mean January 1 is without importance, for it's this day that the Christian Church celebrates the naming of Jesus.

Like every other Jewish boy in the first century, Jesus was both circumcised and named on the eighth day after his birth. These two events, circumcision and naming, went together. A Jewish boy was circumcised to signify being a part of God's covenant people of Israel, and his name was given to show that God's covenant (God's promise to be the God of and for his people) was applied to the newborn boy personally. Usually, the name that was given to the boy was also meant to signify something of God's being God for that boy. (For instance, the name Jonathan means "God's gift," and this name would signify how God is the give of life for this boy.)

When it comes to Jesus, everything about his identity is wrapped up in his name. This name was given even before Jesus was born. Luke tells us that the angel Gabriel told Mary to name her son Jesus when he announced the virginal conception of the baby in her womb.

In his gospel, Matthew tells us that an angel also gave Joseph this same instruction for naming the son of Mary. But, to Joseph, the angel adds a note about the meaning of this name. "You shall call his name 'Jesus,' for he will save his people from their sins." The name of Jesus means "God is salvation," and the angel tells Joseph that the son of Mary is to be named Jesus because this baby will save his people from their sins. In other words, Jesus will be and do what his very name says. Jesus is and will be the God who saves.

In Holy Baptism (which Paul tells us in Galatians replaces circumcision), we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and therefore we are baptized into the name of Jesus. And for us, the name of Jesus actually does what it says! For as we are baptized into Christ, we are eternally bound to his name and what it means for us. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. In baptism, the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won through the cross and empty tomb is given to each one of us personally in time and space. Through baptism, we are not simply brought into a new covenant with God. Rather, we are actually saved from sin, as the name of Jesus and its meaning is applied to each of us. Although this happens only once in our lives (and for many of us before we are even aware of it), the

benefits of both Holy Baptism and the name of Jesus continue to envelope us and bless us our whole lives.

In a sermon he preached on New Year's Day of 1952 in the Gustavus Adolphus Cathedral in Gothenburg, Sweden, Lutheran Bishop Bo Giertz beautifully proclaimed the truth of what Christ's saving name means for us:

You are baptized in the name of Jesus. You were brought to Him once, and He blessed you. You were called by His good name. That means that you became His. Your life was left in His hands. You take part in all the blessing that lies in the good name of Jesus. He will clean the stains you get on your clothes [i.e. the sins you commit]. He will pay your debts. He will follow you throughout your life, give you His hand in death, and answer for you in eternity. You should only trust Him and hold fast to Him. You receive the name of Jesus, written upon your forehead, so that you will encounter life, temptations, sin, suffering, and death with this security. And your name has been written among those who belong to Jesus in the great book of life, the book where the good name of Jesus is written above all the other names, as their best friend, their advocate and guarantor."

Article taken from: <https://www.1517.org/articles/the-name-of-jesus-for-you>

The following article is about a compilation book of excerpts from Martin Luther's Christmas sermons. I highly recommend you get a copy of it!

It's Beginning to Sound a Lot Like Christmas: Revisiting Martin Luther's Christmas Book

An Article by John T. Pless

12/20/20

Luther's Christmas sermons remind us that unless Christ is proclaimed FOR YOU, He is not preached.

A book I like to revisit this time of year as Advent moves us toward Bethlehem is *Martin Luther's Christmas Book*, which was originally compiled by Roland Bainton in 1948. Bainton (1894-1984) was a British-born Yale professor of Church history. His Luther biography, *Here I Stand*, was the book that introduced many of my generation to the life of the Reformer. I first heard Bainton speak

shortly after I was confirmed in 1967. He was a man small in stature with a wisp of white hair and wire-rimmed glasses. Yet, when he opened his mouth to speak, the voice of Luther sounded forth. To this day, I still recall that voice when I read his *Martin Luther's Christmas Book*.

By this time in Advent, the homiletical wells of many preachers might be running low if not empty. If that is the case, a little time spent with this book might well prompt your imagination and stimulate meditation on the story of Christmas. Drawing on Luther's sermons and postils, Bainton weaves together excerpts in seamless vignettes that portray the distress of Mary, the misgiving of Joseph, the perplexity of the Magi, the cunning of Herod, and the humility of the shepherds as he writes us into the narrative, so we are brought to marvel at the miracle of the God who lies embedded in a feedbox. "There is such richness and goodness in this Nativity that if we should see and deeply understand, we should be dissolved in perpetual joy" (page 15, all citations are from Roland Bainton, *Martin Luther's Christmas Book*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House).

Here are but of a few of the gems Bainton has retrieved from Luther. In the meditation on the Annunciation, Luther cites St. Bernard who listed three miracles from Luke's text. First, that God and man had united in Christ. Second, that Mary would conceive without the aid of a man. Third, that Mary would have the faith to believe this mystery would be accomplished in her. Luther sees this third miracle as the greatest. "The Virgin birth is a mere trifle for God; that God should become a man is a greater miracle; but the most amazing of all is that this maiden should believe that she, rather than some other virgin had been chosen to be the mother of God... Had she not believed; she could not have conceived" (15). So, also for us: "This is for us the hardest point not so much to believe that He is the son of the Virgin and God Himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours" (16).

Then there is Mary's song as she confesses God has filled the hungry with good things and the rich, He has sent away empty:

"You have got to feel the pinch of hunger in the midst of scarcity and experience what hunger and scarcity are, when you do not know where to turn, to yourself, or to anyone else but only to God, that the work of God may be God's alone and of none other.

You must not only think and speak of lowliness, but come into it, sink into it, utterly helpless, that God alone may save you. Or at any rate, should it not happen, you should at least desire it and not shrink. For this reason, we are Christians and have the Gospel, that we may fall into distress and lowliness and that God may have His work in us" (21).

Christmas is the recognition of God's strength in weakness, His power to save amid our helplessness. There is nothing artificial about Luther's Christmas preaching. He recognizes the rawness of life, the bitterness of unfulfilled dreams, and the incapacity of human beings to create their own peace and good will. God works in the depths. In the words of Bainton, "The manger and the cross are never far apart for Luther" (5).

Joseph is not left out of the picture. "Joseph had nothing to go by save the Word of God and he accepted it. A godless man would have said it was just a dream, but Joseph believed the word of God and took unto him a wife" (23).

Luther often works the doctrine of vocation into his Christmas preaching. In reference to Augustus Caesar decreeing the enrollment for taxation in Luke 2:1, Luther says, "Every Christian, therefore, should let Augustus administer his realm - should not hinder but help" (27). Luther recognizes that some may object saying, "Government is not good. Since Christ did not wish to be a king, it is not good to govern" (27). Luther dismisses this as pious nonsense:

"If you wish to do just as Christ did, you will have to be born of a virgin, raise the dead, walk on water, take no wife, have no gold, nor any manservant or maidservant. You might as well say, 'Nobody can be a Christian who has a wife or household, who is a peasant or a tailor, because Christ had no wife, trade, nowhere to lay His head.' Piffle to such confounded nonsense. Christ was a preacher. That is why He declined civil government. I am a preacher too, and I decline it too. But I do not condemn it as wrong. It is wrong for me because I am not called to it... Christ remains a preacher, Augustus an emperor, and the shepherds remain shepherds" (28).

The connection with vocation is especially striking in Luther's preaching about the shepherds. "They stayed in their station and did the work of their

calling... next to faith, this is the highest art – to be content with the calling in which God has placed you” (35). The shepherds did not shave their heads and join a monastery but returned to their daily work of tending sheep (see 44).

Cutting through the sentimentality of his congregants who might reason to themselves that if Mary and Joseph had come to Wittenberg, we would have done better than those cold and inhospitable people in Bethlehem, Luther says:

“There are many of you in this congregation who think to yourselves: ‘If only I had been there! How quickly I would have been to help the Baby! ...Yes, you would! You say that now because you know how great Christ is, but if you had been there at that time, you would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. Childish and silly thoughts are these! Why do you not do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor. You ought to serve him, for what you do to your neighbor in need, you do to the Lord Christ Himself” (31).

Luther’s wonderment at the marvel of Christmas shines throughout. “Our God begins with angels and ends with shepherds” (40). Again:

“God is amazing. The Babe in a manger, not worthy of a cradle or a diaper, and yet He is called Savior and Lord. The angels sing about Him, and the shepherds hear and come and honor Him whom no maid serves as He lies with an ox and ass. If I had come to Bethlehem and seen it, I would have said: ‘This does not make sense. Can this be the Messiah? This is sheer nonsense.’ I would not have let myself be found inside the stable” (41).

Like Mary we are to ponder these things in our hearts. “When I die, I see nothing but sheer blackness except for this light: ‘Unto you is born this day... a Savior.’ The Savior will help me when all else fails” (43).

Where is this Lord to be found? He is wrapped up in the Word of the Gospel: “The swaddling clothes signify the preaching of the Gospel; the manger signifies the place where Christians come together to hear the Word” (44). We

are not left out. We are the oxen and asses. “The ox and the ass stand for us” (42). The star is not enough to get the Magi to Jesus: “Why did the star not take the Wise Men straight to Bethlehem without any necessity of consulting the Scriptures? Because God wanted to teach us we should follow the Scriptures and not our own murky ideas” (52).

C.F.W. Walther reminded would-be preachers over a century ago that they should be “helpers of joy.” Luther is certainly such a helper in his proclaiming Christ at Christmas time. As my own teacher, Norman Nagel, was fond of reminding us, “There is always more with Jesus.” Grace upon grace, one blessed gift after another to bring comfort to those who sit in darkness, absolution to the conscience of those who tremble at the enormity of their sin, and peace to aching hearts lacerated by the brokenness of this fallen creation. Luther’s Christmas sermons remind us that unless Christ is proclaimed FOR YOU, He is not preached. These pieces from Luther so skillfully arranged by Bainton and supplemented with sixteenth-century woodcuts, urge us to preach Christ not as ecclesiastical Ebenezer Scrooges who are stingy with the Gospel out of fear it might be abused as “cheap grace” but as helpers of the perpetual joy that belongs to the children of God. This slim book of 72 pages serves that goal.

Article taken from <https://www.1517.org/articles/its-beginning-to-sound-a-lot-like-christmas-revisiting-martin-luthers-christmas-book>

Trinity Lutheran Church

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Articles with no author are written by him.

DECEMBER 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3 YOUTH CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM ADVENT VESPERS 7:30 PM	4	5	6
7	8	9	10 YOUTH CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM ADVENT VESPERS 7:30 PM	11	12	13 YOUTH X-MAS GIFT WRAP
14 BUS CAROLING 1:00 PM & CHILI DINNER 5:00 PM	15	16	17 YOUTH CONFIRMATION 5:30 PM ADVENT VESPERS 7:30 PM	18	19	20
21	22 YOUTH ICE SKATING 1:00 – 3:30 PM	23	24 X-MAS EVE CANDLELIGHT CAROL SERVICE 7:30 PM	25 X-MAS COMMUNION SERVICE 10:00 AM	26	27
28	29	30	31			

JANUARY 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6 YOUTH CONFIRMATION 4:00 PM	7 BIBLE STUDY 7:00 PM	8	9	10
11	12	13 YOUTH CONFIRMATION 4:00 PM ELDERS MEETING 7:00 PM	14 BIBLE STUDY 7:00 PM	15	16	17
18	19	20 YOUTH CONFIRMATION 4:00 PM VOTERS MEETING 7:00 PM	21 BIBLE STUDY 7:00 PM	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
PASTOR ON VACATION UNTIL FEBRUARY 2 ND						