



# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

ANNOUNCING:

## 2022 Synod Convention

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### The Joy of Empty

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### ELCA & ELS

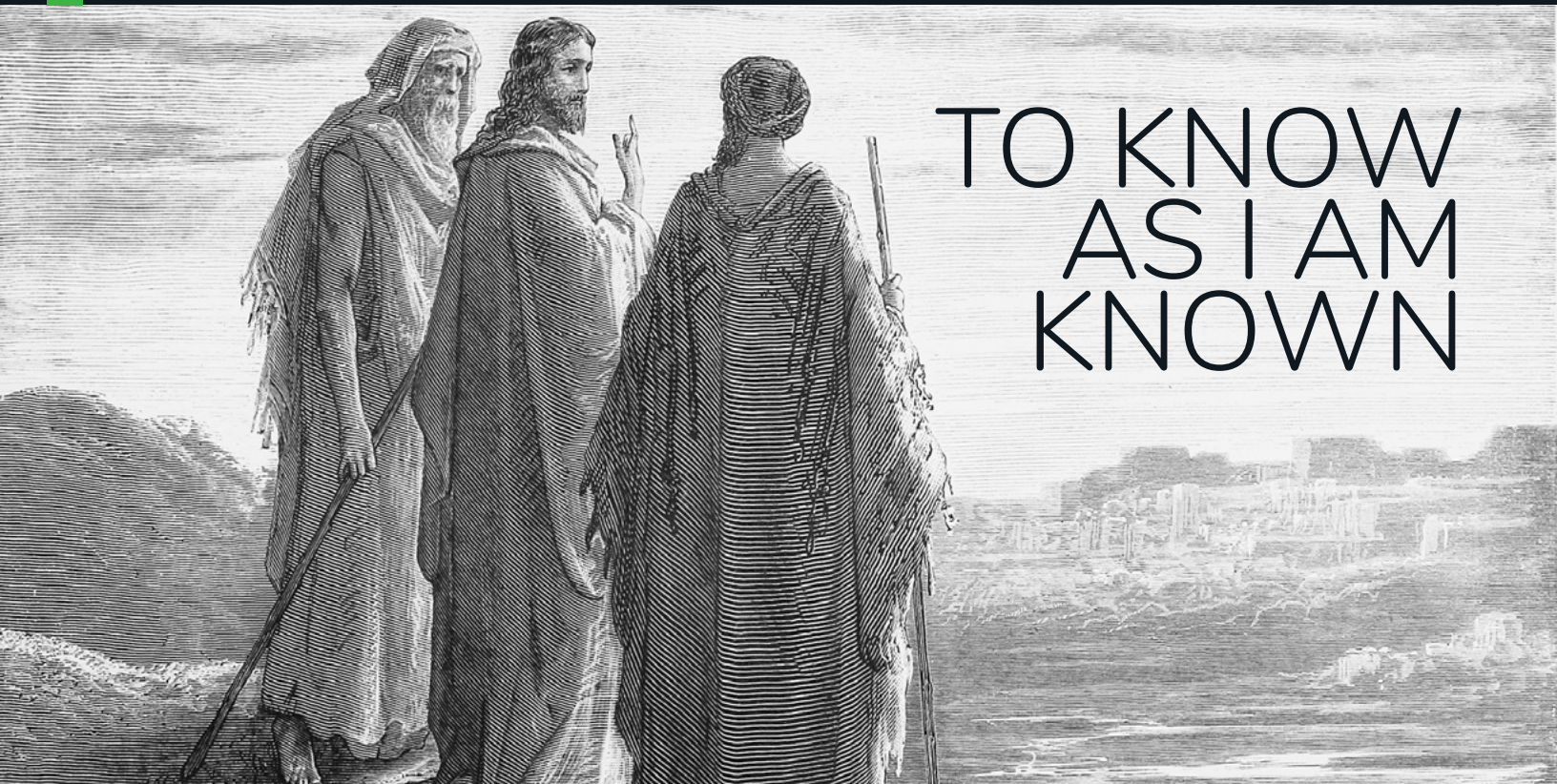
*What's the difference?*

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SONGS OUT OF ZION: PART II

### Like the Golden Sun Ascending

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# TO KNOW AS I AM KNOWN

The disciples encounter Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

In the recounting of the passion of Jesus, we are confronted with many theological questions like: “Are you the Christ?” (Matthew 26:63); “Is it I, Lord?” (vv. 22, 25); “What is truth?” (John 18:38). They came from believers and unbelievers alike. Even Jesus posed some: “Have you not read ... ‘I am the God of Abraham, ... of Isaac ... of Jacob?’ He is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32); “If then David calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?” (v. 45).

When Adam and Eve still possessed the perfectly created image of God, they knew God perfectly. None of these questions would have come from their hearts and minds. Since the loss of the image of God, you will hear believers often say: “When I get to heaven, I am going to ask God such and such...” But in truth, that will not happen. In heaven, the image of God will be perfectly restored for us. We will know God fully as we have been fully known by Him (1 Corinthians 13:12).

In early December 2021, my mother, Marion (93), died. I learned to love theology from the many sermons and lectures Mom gave at her Tuesday ironing sessions. She grew up attending a Lutheran elementary school and was instructed and confirmed in her baptismal faith at Gospel Lutheran Church, Milwaukee. For Jesus’ sake, she now knows fully, even as she has been fully known. What a comfort to think that all the times in this life when we attempt to apply the revealed knowledge of God to our various life experiences, we must properly resolve any questions that arise by concluding the will of the Lord will be done. We trust the everlasting and perfect wisdom of God and know that His hidden will is always good and right for us.

*“For now we see through a glass, darkly;  
but then face to face: now I know in part;  
but then shall I know even as also I am known.”*

(1 Corinthians 13:12, KJV)

Now I continue to see through a glass darkly, knowing only in part, anticipating the day when Mom and I, along with you, will know God fully through His Son, Jesus Christ. That shameful loss of the perfect knowledge of God was so evident among the disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening. Jesus had revealed to them that as our Savior, He must suffer and die and that on the third day He would rise again. But they were downhearted because they had not seen Jesus themselves. They only heard reports that there were those who saw the empty tomb and that Peter saw the resurrected Lord.

Jesus said to them: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25). We possess the revealed will of God in the inspired words of the prophets and apostles. Continue to love these words as the basis of all your theological thoughts and discussions so that your hearts burn within you as it did for the Emmaus disciples. The resurrected Lord Jesus, who bore the punishment for all your sins and rose to life defeating your death has secured for you the everlasting day when perfect theology will be restored for you as well. No longer will you need to trust that the hidden will of God is always good and right for you. You will know it without the many confounding questions that now come to mind. Love your Catechism theology as did my mom. Soon you too will know fully.

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# The Joy of Empty

by **REV. KYLE MADSON**, Editor  
*THE LUTHERAN SENTINEL*, Norseland, Minn.

 **Read:** Mark 16:1-8

Most often when a thing is empty, it isn't cause for excitement. When the gas tank is empty, we're desperate for a gas station or, worse, we're stranded. When the pantry is empty, we're scrambling to find food. No one throws a party for an empty bank account.

It's not that these women at the Easter tomb wanted Jesus to die—especially so brutally, so unjustly. It's not as if they relished the exercise of “putting lipstick on the pig,” so to speak... putting nice-smelling herbs and oils on a body that was, by every measure of experience, soon to be decomposing... But their dear friend Jesus—He was dead (“Jesus, the Nazarene, was crucified”). So they had a very basic, very normal expectation—to find His grave full. If you go to your loved one's grave, though you didn't want them to die, you also expect to find their grave undisturbed—as full as you left it at their burial.

These women expected their trouble this Sunday morning to be rolling the very large stone away from the very full tomb and getting through the emotions of embalming the very abused body of their very dear, very dead Jesus.

Instead, they are disturbed by the disturbed grave. They are alarmed by the white-dressed messenger and his news: **The Jesus they were looking for, the one crucified on Friday and most certainly laid here, in this tomb, in death... “He is NOT here.”**

The messenger appeals to the forensic evidence: **“see the place where they laid him.”** It's empty. The evidence of experience argues loudly. Empty is bad. Empty isn't how tombs are supposed to be. When we put death in them, death is supposed to stay put. That's how death goes. This is the experience we all know, too—lowering a casket six feet down as tears well up—that's the experience of death we know. The tears acknowledge experience... that there is a permanency to tombs we are powerless to change. We don't get to expect them at Easter dinner...

And the Easter angel doesn't require the women to dismiss experience. He simply requires them to take in ALL the evidence. **You're looking for the man, Jesus, who was 1) most certainly crucified to death and 2) whose body was most certainly laid to rest here. You experienced His death and His burial and that experience led you back here...**

But there's more! The emptiness tells the rest of the story. The crucified and buried One is NOT HERE. **HE IS RISEN!** The death that we have experience with—the death that claims our dying bodies and our loved ones' bodies into graves—that death has no hold on the One who was laid here. Because that One is more than the Son of Mary. He is the Son of God—THE PROMISED CHRIST!

This empty tomb is dripping with joy for you and me. The Devil's spawn—sin and death and hell—they laid claim to the body of Mary's Son, Jesus. But in doing their worst upon Him, they found God's best—His own Son!

The empty tomb is full! Full of joyful news! It means the One who was crucified and buried is God's Man—the Christ whose suffering and death were long promised—suffering death that is fully sufficient for your sins and mine.

It means the Father has accepted this sacrifice as payment in full. The Father wrote the test and called on His Son to take it. As Jesus died, He announced that the “work” was complete. And here, in raising Jesus from the tomb, the Father concurs! **WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. Your sins ARE forgiven you.**

It's full of joy! It means that the ravenous appetite of death and the grave has itself been swallowed up by Jesus' death. **O death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is your victory?** (1 Corinthians 15:55). The tomb's emptiness is full of life—full of fruit for you and me. Jesus is, as St. Paul proclaims, **the first-fruits!** (1 Corinthians 15:20). He is bringing every believer in Jesus with Him—through death of the body and the grave—to life! His coattails are long and broad, and He is bringing His own with Him!

Christ's empty tomb means faith in Christ is NOT empty. Faith can be empty. In fact, faith in anything else except Jesus the Christ **is empty**. But Jesus' shed blood and his stranglehold on death—that is the concrete footing of saving faith.

This is one time when emptiness is full of joy!  
**“He is not here. He is risen.”**  
The joy of that emptiness is for you!

**Romans 2:15 states:** “They [Gentiles who do not have the law] demonstrate the work of the law that is written in their hearts, since their conscience also bears witness as their thoughts go back and forth, at times accusing or at times even defending them” (EHV). This passage indicates that the conscience relates to matters of God’s Law (“accusing” . . . “defending”).

**Does the term “conscience” also relate to personal preference in matters of *adiaphora*, namely, matters which God does not command or forbid?**

## Answer:

The apostle Paul eloquently speaks of the conscience as the interpreter of the law written down on human hearts. The conscience both “bears witness” to what God demands in His Law and sits in judgment over our behavior. After the fall into sin, however, the conscience no longer provides a totally reliable witness concerning the will of God. The conscience can err—and often does. An erring conscience may permit behavior that God has clearly forbidden, rationalizing sin. An erring conscience may also forbid something that God has clearly allowed. For this reason, we turn to the Scriptures as the only place where God has fully revealed His unchanging will for our lives.

Yet Scripture, while it addresses most things, does not address everything. The term *adiaphora* (ah-dee-ah-for-ah) refers to matters where God has neither commanded nor forbidden what to do. In these areas, which are relatively rare, we let our consciences guide our actions.

In the Bible, the subject of *adiaphora* especially comes up in Paul’s discussions about the eating of meat in Romans and 1 Corinthians. In those days, most meat sold in the markets had been used in a pagan sacrifice to an idol. Yet eating meat was not a problem for most Christians. The majority of Christians understood that an idol was just a statue and that the gods those idols represented did not really exist (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). Since Christ had fulfilled the ceremonial law, God’s people were now permitted to eat all kinds of foods (Acts 10:10-16).

Yet for some recent converts to Christianity, eating meat bothered their consciences because they thought that doing so made them complicit in committing idolatry. So, if they did so, “their conscience, being weak, [was] defiled” (1 Corinthians 8:7, EHV). Their weak consciences caused them to feel guilty about something for which there was no reason to feel guilty.

Saint Paul urged the believers in Rome and in Corinth to be accommodating. He wanted those who were strong in their faith to lead the weak into a better understanding of the Word of God without giving

offense so that the weak wouldn’t feel needlessly guilty. At the same time, Paul instructed those whose consciences were easily bothered to keep from accusing as sinful those who could eat meat with a good conscience. He said, “*The one who eats everything should not look down on the person who does not do so, and the one who does not eat everything should not judge the person who does, because God has accepted him*” (Romans 14:3, EHV).

In those rare cases where God has neither commanded nor forbidden us to do something, there is room for personal preference. Yet there is a difference between “conscience” and “personal preference.” Personal preference has to do with “What I would rather do?” “Conscience” wrestles with the question: “Is this right in the sight of God?” Someone’s personal preference may be to sleep in on Saturday morning, but their conscience reminds them of all the work that needs to be done. To “dress up” personal preference as a matter of conscience would be a sinful violation of the Second Commandment because that person is dragging God’s name into the matter. (Martin Luther’s treatment of the Second Commandment in his Large Catechism addresses this in greater detail.)

Nor can Christians continually hide behind a weak conscience to avoid growing in their understanding of God’s will. When believers’ consciences are strengthened through God’s Word, they will leave their former way of understanding behind.

As much as we try to keep our consciences clean, we are going to fail because we are sinners in need of a Savior. In the end, the best cure for the conscience is the promise of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, received in our baptisms, which gives all of us the pledge of a clean conscience before God (1 Peter 3:21).



**Do you have a question for Pastor Van Kampen?**

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# The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



# The Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*What's the difference?*



by **REV. K. J. ANDERSON**, ELS Doctrine Committee  
**HERITAGE LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Apple Valley, Minn.

The church names, sounding so much alike, are often confused. When reduced to their popular abbreviations, ELS and ELCA, the confusion only grows. Peeling back the covers, we can see some important similarities and some even more important differences.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the largest Lutheran church body in the United States. ELCA is the result of a giant merger of Lutherans back in 1988. In that year, the old Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) all merged. At the point of merger, the new church body numbered nearly 5.5 million members. In comparison, the next largest Lutheran body at the time, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, numbered less than 2.5 million. The WELS was about 450,000. The ELS numbered about 25,000.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) did not enter the merger. In fact, the ELS traces back its origins to 1917, which was the year of an earlier, mega-Lutheran merger. That merger brought together a large majority of Lutherans of Scandinavian tradition, including the old Norwegian Synod. But a few of the pastors and congregations of the old Norwegian synod rejected the new merger for doctrinal reasons. In 1918, these holdouts constituted the continuation of the old Norwegian synod. Known as the “Little Norwegian Synod” for years, this church adopted the title Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1956. Our church body, our ELS, is the continuation of that old synod.

Our ELS is rich in Norwegian culture and tradition, from lefse and lutefisk dinners to our forms of worship and hymns. This culture we share with many in the ELCA. The predecessor bodies to ELCA were also steeped in Norwegian and Scandinavian tradition. Sadly, that’s where the similarity ends today. Regarding Christian doctrine and practice, we are very far apart.

The ELCA is a member of both the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches and participates in many ecumenical endeavors. It has declared itself in full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ since 1997; the Moravian Church and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America since 1999; and the United Methodist Church since 2009. Under these arrangements, the ELCA and each of the churches with which it is in full communion recognize the authority of each other’s clergy and performance of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion, and members of each church are free to worship and commune in the other. Female ordination, practiced by all three predecessor bodies in the 1970s, was recognized from the beginning of the 1988 organization of ELCA.

ELCA has also been very progressive regarding the issue of sexual orientation. Since the 1991 Churchwide Assembly (the general meeting of ELCA congregations), the ELCA has affirmed that homosexuals are “individuals created by God” who are welcome to participate in congregational life. Subsequent assemblies resolved that human sexuality is an issue that warrants study and theological reflection. After rejecting a resolution in 2005 that would have allowed the ordination of homosexuals in noncelibate monogamous relationships, the Churchwide Assembly in 2009 voted to permit church members in “lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships” to join the clergy. In response, more than 200 congregations left the ELCA the following year. Former ELCA members were among the founders in 2010 of the new North American Lutheran Church (NALC), which claimed 18

founding congregations and quickly attracted others. NALC now numbers over 144,000 members in 420 congregations. Meanwhile, the ELCA has continually declined in membership, from 5.5 million in 1988 to an estimated 3 million today.

The ELCA has 65 synodical leaders known as bishops who are elected to six-year terms. In 2021, the church elected its first openly transgender bishop, Megan Rohrer, to serve its Sierra Pacific synod. Rohrer was the first transgender person to hold the role of bishop in any major American Christian denomination.

The ELS has been confronted with the same societal and cultural pressures over the years. By the grace of God through faithful leaders and members, our doctrine has remained unchanged since the synod’s inception. Unlike the progressive ELCA and her fellowship church bodies, we believe that doctrine does not change. Doctrine, simply put, is the teaching of Scripture. The Scriptures do not change; therefore, our doctrine does not change. *“I am the Lord. I change not”* (Malachi 3:6). *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”* (Jesus, Matthew 24:35). We share this solid stance on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions with our sister synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

What would it take to unite these two divergent church bodies? We can only unite in complete agreement in the Word of God. ELCA theologians bristle at the terms “inerrant” and “infallible” Scripture. To them, the Word of God must change in understanding and application, even as the times change. So also the Lutheran confessional documents of the Book of Concord—which have historically identified true Lutherans—are described as faithful expressions of truth in their time. But today they, too, stand in need of new interpretation and modern application. We disagree. We stand on the Lutheran Confessions as true and accurate explanations of the unchanging Word of Scripture. We stand on Scripture, no matter how difficult or unpopular, as the unchanging truth of God in the world. On this basis alone, we can consider working at unification of our church bodies. Under present conditions in ELCA, it is difficult to imagine the arrival of that day anytime soon.

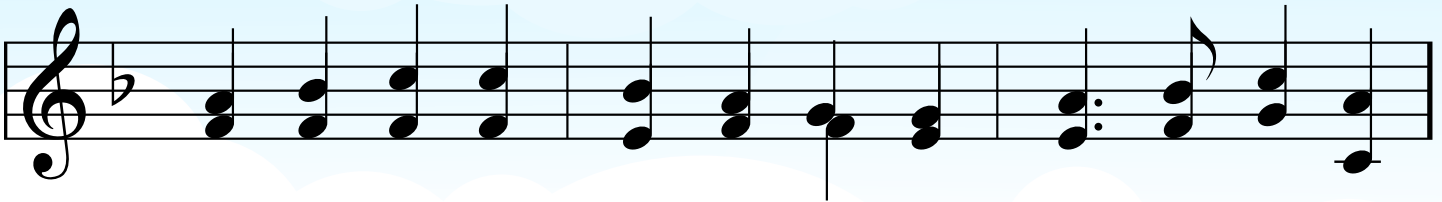
One last thing. Many ELS members have friends and family in ELCA congregations. Many of the older generation especially do not agree with the progressive beliefs and practices endorsed by ELCA. Some personally believe very much like you and me. They would fit well in an ELS church. But history, tradition, family connection, or sense of obligation makes it very difficult to leave one’s church. One hangs on to the memories of what the grand old church once was and to dreams of what might be in a better, clearer day to come.

# Songs out of Zion

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## Like the Golden Sun Ascending

87 87 77 88



by **REV. PETER FAUGSTAD**, Contributing Writer  
**SAUDE, JERICO & REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCHES**, NE Iowa

The phone rang at **Lois Jaeger's** desk in the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center. On the other end of the line was a local Lutheran pastor (not of our fellowship). He was trying to track down an obscure old hymn that an elderly member had requested for her funeral. The pastor thought someone at Bethany may have heard of it: "*Like the Golden Sun Ascending*."

He called the right place.

"*Like the Golden Sun Ascending*" is one of our greatest Easter hymns. Every stanza shines with the brightness of Jesus' resurrection, and every stanza brings comfort in the face of death. The first stanza paints the picture of a beautiful sunrise. The dark sky gives way to a brightening eastern horizon glowing with purple and pink hues. Then the golden sun appears, casting its glory over the earth and causing the darkness to take flight. This was the effect of Jesus' resurrection over the darkness of death. When He left the grave on Easter morning, death was conquered.

Death was no weak enemy. The hymn describes death as a "dismal, dreadful cave" (v. 1), a "dungeon dark and deep" (v. 3), a yawning mouth opened wide (v. 4), and

a "hideous grave" (v. 8). There is no human power that can defeat death. We can eat right, exercise, and get the best medical care available, but we are still going to die. When it is death vs. the sinner, death always wins. But death faced a new enemy, a strange opponent. The third stanza of the hymn describes it:

*For my heart finds consolation  
 And my fainting soul grows brave  
 When I stand in contemplation  
 At Thy dark and dismal grave;  
 When I see where Thou didst sleep  
 In death's dungeon dark and deep,  
 Yet didst break all bands asunder,  
 Must I not rejoice and wonder?*

Jesus' disciples thought it was all over when He died on the cross. The rolling of the stone over the entrance of the tomb was it. Jesus was dead; they were on their own. The Jewish religious leaders actually gave more thought to Jesus' resurrection than His own disciples! Those leaders had the tomb sealed and a guard posted because they didn't want to risk the retrieval of Jesus' body. They accounted for everyone outside the tomb, but not for the One inside it. Jesus destroyed the bands of death. He broke free of those chains, and they are still broken.



Because Jesus rose from the dead, believers in Him will also rise. The hymn expresses this confidence again and again:

*Death hath now no power o'er us,  
Thou hast conquered in the strife. (v. 2)*

*Death itself is transitory;  
I shall lift my head in glory. (v. 5)*

*Satan's arrows all lie broken,  
Death and hell have met their doom;  
Christ, Thy rising is the token:  
Thou hast triumphed o'er the tomb. (v. 6)*

*Sin and death shall not o'erthrow me  
Even in my dying hour;  
For Thy resurrection is  
Surety for my heav'nly bliss. (v. 7)*

The eighth stanza of this hymn contrasts the wretchedness of death with the glory of Jesus' victory and promise. I can't think of another hymn that presents the contrast so vividly and so bluntly:

*Unto life Thou shalt arouse me  
By Thy resurrection's pow'r;  
Though the hideous grave shall house me,  
And my flesh the worms devour;  
Fire and water may destroy  
My frail body, yet with joy  
I shall rise as Thou hast risen  
From the deep sepulchral prison.*

This is nothing else than the confidence expressed by Job (Job 19:25-27) and by Paul (1 Corinthians 15:35-57). It doesn't matter how long we lie in the grave. It doesn't matter what state our body is in on the last day. Jesus will raise us up again and “*will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21).

This excellent hymn came from the pen of **Thomas Kingo**. The son of a linen weaver, Kingo was born December 15, 1634, in Slangerup, Denmark. He finished his studies to become a pastor in 1658. He was a gifted writer and published a collection of poems in 1665 that became widely known in Denmark. Well-regarded for his work, he was appointed a bishop in 1670, a member of the Danish nobility in 1679, and a doctor of theology in 1682. “*Like the Golden Sun Ascending*” was published in 1689 in a hymnbook commissioned by **King Christian V of Denmark**. The hymnbook was revised and reissued in 1699 with eighty-five of Kingo's hymns included. Kingo died just after the turn of the century on October 14, 1703.

The melody joined to Kingo's Easter hymn is “*Werde Munter*.” It was written in 1642 by a German composer and violinist named **Johann Schop**. Schop was a good friend of the hymnwriter **Johann Rist**, and he originally composed this melody for one of Rist's evening hymns.

“*Like the Golden Sun Ascending*” was translated into English by **George Alfred Taylor Rygh** in 1908. Rygh served as a member of the committee that produced the 1913 *Lutheran Hymnary*. Thirteen of his hymn translations are included in the 1996 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELH).

Sir Thomas Kingo is perhaps the greatest hymnwriter from Scandinavian lands. The ELH contains sixteen of his hymns. Along with his Easter hymn, some of his most familiar ones are: “*I Pray Thee, Dear Lord Jesus*,” “*He That Believes and Is Baptized*,” “*O Jesus, Blessed Lord, to Thee*,” and “*On My Heart Imprint Thine Image*.” Most modern Lutheran hymnbooks include a few verses of “*Like the Golden Sun Ascending*,” but only the ELH has all ten verses. In the parish I serve, we typically sing it in two parts on Easter Sunday—the first half before the sermon and the second half after. It is also fitting as a Communion hymn or, as the pious elderly lady realized, a funeral hymn.

The last stanza is the perfect conclusion to this hymn and a beautiful recounting of the Lord's grace toward us:

*For the joy Thy birth doth give me,  
For Thy holy, precious Word;  
For Thy Baptism which doth save me,  
For Thy blest Communion board;  
For Thy death, the bitter scorn,  
For Thy resurrection morn,  
Lord, I thank Thee and extol Thee,  
And in heav'n I shall behold Thee.*

by **DR. ANDREW DAS**, Contributing Writer  
**ST. TIMOTHY LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Lombard, Ill.

# A SUPERNATURAL MARK ATTESTING THE SCRIPTURES!



HOLY  
BIBLE

When we share with others about our sinfulness and the need for a Savior from sin, we are sharing what the Bible teaches. Sometimes people wonder in our modern age why we should even be concerned about the Bible or its worldview. Given all the other sacred texts and religious traditions out there, why turn to or trust the Bible? It's a question that people were asking even in the times of Moses and the prophets!

People often don't realize that the Bible bears an utterly unique supernatural mark, a mark that sets it apart from any other literature in our world. Moses explained to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18:21-22 what distinguishes God's true revelation: "*You may say to yourself, 'How can we recognize a message the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the LORD's name, and the message does not come true or is not fulfilled, that is a message the LORD has not spoken*" (CSB). In Isaiah 41:21-23: "*'Submit your case,' says the LORD. 'Present your arguments,' says Jacob's King. 'Let them come and tell us what will happen .... Tell us the coming events, then we will know that you are gods.'*" In other words, when the

prophet shares a message, any prediction of the future must come true. This is what distinguishes God's Word from any other, whether the Koran, the Hindu sacred texts, or the Book of Mormon. Only God knows the future!

There have always been other, supposed prophets in our world. A popular prophet years ago was Nostradamus. He lived in the sixteenth century, overlapping with the Reformers. He published a book in 1555 with 942 poetic four-line stanzas predicting future events. Nostradamus's wording is typically vague, and so his followers debate among themselves which events he was "predicting." Twentieth century academics, however, were able to demonstrate that one stanza of prophecy allegedly predicting the death of King Henry II of France—a stanza unique in its specificity—never actually appeared in print as part of Nostradamus's works until 1614, fifty-five years after the event had already taken place. The rest of the prophecies are so general in their wording that they can be applied to any number of possible events. That's why Nostradamus's work has proved for many a terrible disappointment.

The biblical authors made prophecies about the future as well, but their prophecies are far more concrete. Certainly the biblical prophets anticipated the coming of the Messiah throughout their writings, but they also made very specific claims about what would take place in the future for the cities and nations of their day. Such claims about what the future holds can be tested! Among the many cities and nations are Tyre, Sidon, Edom, and Samaria—and much is said about each of them. For now, let's focus on each one's eventual (and permanent) fate.

In the case of Tyre, the sixth century BC prophet Ezekiel in his twenty-sixth chapter talks about how waves of nations (and not just Babylon) will come against the city (26:3). It would be destroyed and never rebuilt (26:14, 21), but fishermen would spread their nets over the site (26:5). There is a later city (still) located down the coast from the original Tyre, but the ancient, commanding city is indeed in ruins with a small fishing village located over it. Prior to Nebuchadnezzar's attack on the city in the sixth century BC, Tyre would create a fortification on an island a half mile

from the main city in the Mediterranean as a refuge from the invaders. The island city was then itself conquered in the centuries after the mainland city was destroyed. Alexander the Great first flattened the island in the fourth century BC, and later the Muslims in 1291 demolished it for the centuries to come. The original city on the mainland was never rebuilt.

Sidon, on the other hand, is the opposite case. The prophet Ezekiel (28:20-23) talks about the blood on Sidon's streets with the sword on every side. Tyre ruled the smaller Sidon, and yet Ezekiel never prophesies Sidon's extinction. Three times the city fell to the Crusaders and three times to the Muslims in the Middle Ages, but the city thrives today after one of the bloodiest histories of any ancient town. If one had to pick which of the two cities would endure, surely it would be the greater, more powerful Tyre. Defying natural expectations, Ezekiel instead predicts that Tyre would never be rebuilt, but Sidon would remain—and Ezekiel's predictions proved correct.

Several prophets talk about Edom, with its capital at Petra. Jeremiah (49:17-18) says it will never again be populated. Ezekiel (25:13-14) imagines the land as desolate, and so it is. The Muslims destroyed the land of Edom in AD 636, but only after the Jewish John Hyrcanus in the second century BC forced the last of the original Edomites to be circumcised.

Hosea (13:16) prophesied that Samaria would fall. The prophet Micah (1:6) added that the city would become a heap of ruins, its stones poured down into the valley, with vineyards planted over the bare foundations of the city. Sabaste is the ancient Samaria, and all that remains are gardens, cultivated there for centuries and planted over the ruins. The foundation stones are rolled down in the valley.

What is the likelihood that three of the four cities would become desolate? What is the likelihood that a particular one of the four cities would remain? And this is quite apart from the many other details in these prophecies! Additionally, there are concrete prophecies about other cities and nations. The cumulative case is quite staggering. A scientist, Peter Stoner, did probability calculations to make the incredible point. He estimates the probability for the various prophecies about Tyre at 1 in 75,000,000, Edom at 1 in 10,000, and Samaria at 1 in 40,000.

The Bible bears a unique and demonstrable supernatural mark. When prophets proclaim a humanity steeped in sin and desperately needing to be reconciled with the God who created the universe, faith in that message is well warranted by the evidence. When the prophets predict the rise and fall of cities and nations, history has confirmed the details they foresaw. When the prophets tell us of a coming Savior, who came exactly as they foretold, we realize that we are dealing with a sort of literature unlike anything else in our world. That does not mean people will heed the message. As Abraham told Lazarus in Jesus's parable, a person could come back from the dead and many would still not believe (Luke 16:31). Nevertheless, the Scriptures clearly attest themselves as God's message, and it is good news for the whole world. Indeed, a man did come back from the dead.

- **Presenting evidence** for the truth of Christianity
- **Critiquing worldviews** that oppose Christianity
- **Fortifying believers** with a proper interpretation of Holy Scripture
- **Engaging unbelievers** in conversations leading toward the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness in Christ



#### Websites:

Center for Apologetics and  
Worldview Studies:  
[blc.edu/apologetics](http://blc.edu/apologetics)

ELS Evangelism Resources:  
[els.org/resources/evangelism](http://els.org/resources/evangelism)

#### Recommended Reading:

Ralph O. Muncaster, *Examine the Evidence: Exploring the Case for Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004).

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences: A Textbook of the Evidences for the Truthfulness of the Christian Faith for Conservative Protestants* (Chicago: Moody, 1957).

Peter Stoner, *Science Speaks: Scientific Proof of the Accuracy of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1963).

# Mors Impia

(Impious Death)



by **REV. JACOB KEMPFERT**, Contributing Writer  
**GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Saginaw, Mich.

Morticians, like the doctors preceding them, used to make house calls. Before the widespread burgeoning of hospitals in the 20th century, death frequently occurred in the home. And before the popularity of funeral homes, undertakers went to the deceased instead of the deceased being brought to them. In the home, the body was dressed, embalmed, and then casketed for a visitation in the family parlor room before the funeral service at a church.

Can you imagine hosting a visitation for a loved one in your home? Yet even 100 years ago, this was a common practice in America. This is why funeral homes were first called funeral “parlors” — that’s the room where visitations took place. It’s also why in 1910 the Ladies’ Home Journal began calling the gloomy “parlor” the “living room” instead. Ahh! How invigorating! Death was removed from the family home and placed in the hands of professionals. A handbook for funeral directors from this time period captures this shift of attitude well: “Anything we can do to lift the horrors of the old customs will be appreciated by our friends.”<sup>1</sup>

With widespread removal of death from the home, paired with extensive improvements in lifesaving technologies available at hospitals, the American view of death became a denial of death. Death was no longer a common inevitability. Now it was a medical failure. Loved ones no longer died because they were mortal, but rather because the doctor failed at healing them. We live among home and family but die among strangers in a strange room. And so we assume death should not strike our home—death is out there, in the hands of other people.

Having removed death from our daily life, we tend to think of it only in materialistic and scientific terms: death is a natural process, just one stage in the life cycle of a biological organism. “Death is natural,” we assume, and attempt to comfort ourselves with that thought.

But it’s curious that, despite the soothing reassurance that “death is natural,” it’s standard practice at visitations to make the embalmed body look as lifelike as possible, as if the deceased were merely sleeping and about to awaken, as if death were nothing but a placid and restful continuation of this earthly life. And I wonder how often our society uses cremation not only for its practical considerations, but also to serve as an avoidance of the reality of death by reducing the corrupted body to a manageable urn of ashes.

Please note that I’m not claiming these practices are themselves wrong. Both can be done to the glory of God in public confession of Christ’s resurrection of the body at His return. Rather, I wonder how often they’re employed because the dead aren’t allowed to show that they’re dead, and the living must attempt to comfort themselves by “dressing up” death to be something it’s not, denouncing it as a medical failure or entirely avoiding the fear and repulsion felt in death’s presence. Don’t these innate reactions to death betray an unheeded insistence that death should not, in an ideal state of nature, exist?

Though we may deny it and claim death is “natural,” holy Scripture affirms the opposite. When God finished His creative work and saw it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31), death did not exist. God did not create it. So how and why did death appear in God’s perfect creation? *Sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned* (Romans 5:12). Sin “gives birth to death” (James 1:15) and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Death is wholly unnatural, impious, alien to God’s creation. We don’t die because we’re mortal and it’s natural for us to do so. We die and are mortal because we are sinful, and because of our sin, we deserve to die. Likewise, we don’t deny death just because it’s been removed from our daily lives. We also deny

death because death is the clearest and most conspicuous evidence of our sin. No amount of death-with-dignity can fully assuage the guilty conscience in the face of such terminal condemnation.

But death is not what our gracious God desires. “*I take no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,*” God says (Ezekiel 18:32). Humanity was created for life, not for death (Genesis 1:28). For us, death is a personal tragedy, but for God, death is a cosmic tragedy—and one that His love for us would not let stand. *Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:24-25).

Christ Jesus never denied or avoided death. When prophesying His own death, Jesus says again and again, “It is necessary.” Despite His agony unto death in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37-44), Jesus perfectly submits to His death when He must suffer it according to the Father’s will. On Good Friday, Christ dies so “that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15). The devil’s kingdom, built on our fear of death, is trampled into dust. In Christ’s death, the devil’s head is crushed (Genesis 3:15).

*But God proves His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). On the cross, Christ shed His holy blood, the lifeblood so pure that it eats away and dissolves every spot of sin. In His holy death, Christ puts impious death to death so that the dead must come back to life (Matthew 27:52-53). How much more then does His Easter resurrection annihilate death by swallowing it up in eternal victory! Christ has put impious death to open shame, and so sanctified and purified it that it now is nothing less than our entrance into His loving arms in life everlasting.

In love for you, Christ “has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep....For as in Adam they all die, so also in Christ they all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22). He went into the grave before you and so sanctified your own grave, and then shattered your death’s chains by rising from the dead. In your Baptism, you even now partake of everlasting life as your promised inheritance: “*Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die*” (John 11:25-26). In the face of impious death, we confess along with Peter, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68), and “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16).

by **REV. CHRISTIAN EISENBEIS**, Contributing Editor  
**FIRST TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Marinette, Wisc.

# CROSSING PATHS

## ON THE ROAD TO JERICHO

PART TWO

### Joshua and the Commander of the LORD's Army (Joshua 2:8-13)

4th and Goal with two seconds left. Election Day and the polls have closed. Tomorrow they will announce if you have earned that promotion or won that scholarship—or if they're giving it to someone else. Two pairs of hands are folded. Two voices call out to God: "Give us the victory, O Lord! You're on our side, aren't You?"

It would be nice, Joshua thought, if the Man standing on the road to Jericho opposite him was not opposed to him—especially since His sword was drawn! "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" Joshua asked (5:13b NKJV).

Joshua received a curious reply to his "either-or" question. The Man said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (v. 14a). Joshua could see that much, but where had the Man come from? And to do what? Who was He, anyway?

The capital letters are a clue, if our Bible translation uses them; but if not, there's still plenty of evidence to solve the mystery.

*"Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant'"* (v. 14b)? The Commander did not rebuke Joshua for his words or actions (compare Revelation 19:10, 22:8-9). He said, *"'Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.' And Joshua did so"* (v. 15). The Commander spoke to Joshua just as the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6); the same Lord who had spoken to Joshua after Moses' death and promised, *"Just as I was with Moses, so will I be with you"* (Joshua 1:5).

Now that His identity was clear, the Commander made His mission clear, too. He pointed to Jericho, which *"was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua: 'See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor'"* (6:1-2). At that moment, the walls of Jericho were still standing, but the battle was already won. The Commander had come from heaven to achieve a great victory on earth

and to give that victory to people who could never have won it for themselves.

Pontius Pilate looked up and saw a Man from Nazareth standing before him. Was He really the King of the Jews and therefore an enemy of Rome? Whose side was He on?

Jesus stood before Pilate as Commander of the Lord's Army—an army He had ordered to stand down when He was arrested (Matthew 26:52-54)—and as Ruler over a kingdom not of this world. "If my kingdom were of this world," Jesus said, "my servants would have been fighting" (John 18:36, ESV). When Pilate said, "So, that's a 'yes,' then? You are a king?" Jesus replied, *"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"* (v. 37, NIV).

Jesus stood, risen and victorious, before His disciples on the Mount of Olives. They asked Him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6)? You're on our side, aren't You?" In reply, Jesus sent them out to bear witness to the truth: the truth of who He is and what He has done for sinners.

*"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 15:57). The Commander of the Lord's Army is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Risen and Ascended Savior. He stands before us today in Word and Sacrament, and through those means of grace, He shares the blessings of His victory with sinners like you and me. That doesn't mean we win every contest against those opposed to us. But by His life and death, Jesus has vanquished our true enemies: sin, death, and the devil. He calls us to faith so that His victory might become our victory. He calls us to serve and obey Him, to bear witness to His truth and declare His praises to the world.

"Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there's none other God; He holds the field forever" (ELH 250:2).



Photo credit: David Norris

*“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word”*

June 26–30 | Bethany Lutheran College | Mankato, Minnesota

Announcing: \_\_\_\_\_

the 105th Convention of  
The Evangelical Lutheran Synod

the 7th Annual Meeting of  
The Lutheran Schools of America, Inc.

the 66th Annual Meeting of  
Bethany Lutheran College, Inc.

Schedule: \_\_\_\_\_

**June 26 | Synod Sunday**

4:00 Synod Sunday Service

5:30 Dinner (free will donation)

**June 27 | Monday**

9:00 Opening Convention Service

**June 28 | Tuesday**

10:00 Election of President and Vice President

1:30 Convention Essay

5:00 Communion Service

**June 29 | Wednesday**

1:30 Convention Essay

**June 30 | Thursday**

8:00 Unfinished Business

## MEETING MY BROTHERS & SISTERS:

# Heritage Lutheran Church

## Apple Valley, Minnesota

by **REV. K. J. ANDERSON**, Contributing Writer  
**HERITAGE LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Apple Valley, Minn.



**Heritage Lutheran Church's** congregation traces its beginnings to 1968 when members of Hiawatha Lutheran Church of Minneapolis began holding services at a junior high school in suburban Burnsville. Hiawatha pastor Carl Wosje served this group, followed by Rev. F. Weyland. The congregation was formally organized in 1971 as a mission congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and joined the synod that same year. The original church building, now used as a multipurpose room, was built and dedicated in 1973. In 1995, the present worship sanctuary was added. In 2008, additional school rooms, a gymnasium, and an entry narthex were added.

Heritage Lutheran School began in the fall of 1993. A kindergarten program was added for the 2001 school year. We have three large, bright, well-equipped classrooms as well as a full-size gym where the children are able to learn, grow, and discover. Children do not need to be members of the Heritage congregation to enroll in our Preschool or Kindergarten programs.

Heritage Lutheran Church has been served by the following pastors:

- **Erling Teigen** 1970-1977
- **Howard Behrens** 1977-1980
- **Steve Petersen** 1980-1984
- **Roger Dale** 1984-1992
- **David Hoyord** 1993-2003
- **Karl Anderson** 2003 to present