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The Lutheran Beacon

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Epiphany Excitement in Allowing Every Thought to Remain Captive to Obey Christ!

by Pastor Ken Ballas, EM

“Arise, shine; for your light has come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you!” (Is. 60:1) Born of a virgin mother, our sinless Brother-Savior, Jesus Christ, entered our broken world single-handedly to dispel and destroy the darkness of sin and eternal death thereby successfully accomplishing His redemptive mission.

Our 2020 Epiphany seasonal worship began with the Magi's visit to the Christ-Child and His baptism by Jesus' cousin, John. In His transfiguration on a high mountain we once again receive further revelatory insights into the incarnate Son of God's person and salutary work (also see Deut, 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37). Culminating in His voluntary substitutionary innocent death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, Christ's spoken (and written) Word as much as His miraculous deeds contain and reveal exciting news indeed for believers of every age!

“Christian, be joyful and praise your salvation!” So begins one translation of J. S. Bach's festive soul-stirring Christmas Oratorio. Spirit-filled excitement over being part of our Heavenly Father God's redeemed forever family won't “turn us on,” however, if we mainly only find ourselves trying to live by a largely self-centered, law-driven daily habit of “taking our own spiritual pulse” or some similar felt-need to wonder, “How am I doing, Jesus?” — as if our blessed Lord who did everything necessary for our eternal salvation doesn't already know!

Without remotely wishing to suggest that the end always justifies the means, as baptized believing Christians who claim to live under the Spirit of Christ's liberating Gospel of forgiveness, only the devil wants us to preoccupy ourselves with the “right motivation” for each and every instance of sanctified Christian living for our merciful Lord whose we thankfully securely ever are – being unduly concerned perhaps about such an inconsequential matter as qualified charitable giving also being a legitimate tax deduction (Matt. 22:21; John 8:31-32; 10:29; Rom. 12:1ff.; 2 Cor. 9:7; 10:5; Gal. 5:1).

Most fitting for the entire Epiphany season is our living and loving Lord's apostle Paul's concluding doxology from his letter to the Romans:

Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest to all nations by the prophetic Scriptures according to the order of our eternal God for obedience to the faith—to the only wise God belongs glory through Jesus Christ forever and ever! AMEN. (Rom. 16:25-27)

PRAISE TO YOU, O CHRIST, WITH THE FATHER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT!

By Your baptism, temptation and bloody sweat, good Lord, deliver us! (Litany prayer)

Evangelizing Humanists

by Rev. Thomas Soltis, SELC Stewardship Department

Humanism

Humanism is a cultural/ideological mind set which seeks to better the lives of human beings through human involvement and interaction. God, however, is not a player. Humanism centers on humans benefitting humans. Communism's slogan, "Everything for man, through man for man's sake", is a classic example of atheistic humanism...quite the opposite from the Christian faith which emphasizes everything good comes from God and lives should be lived for God and the good of others for God's sake.

Humanist Churches

Humanism is not confined to Communism. Its secular nature is found among Americans, many of them millennials. Some humanists have even begun conducting worship services in an effort to create a better sense of community. During non-religious services, attendees sing together, listen to messages, encourage moral behavior, celebrate the power of humanity and observe holidays which do not involve God. Amanda Poppei, who leads a humanist congregation in Washington State, is endeavoring to reach millennials seeking community.

Community

The basic function of "community" is to bring people together. God created us to be social creatures seeking involvement with each other. The Christian Church is a community. It's defined as such in the third article of the Apostles Creed: "I believe ... in the holy Christian Church, the communion (community) of saints..." The word "saints" ("hagioi" in the N.T. Greek) means "holy, sinless, consecrated" and refers to all Christians who repent of their sins and believe Christ's Gospel. Christian saints find community within congregations. There they worship, receive God's Word and Sacraments, fellowship together and engage in Christian action. What a terrific place for millennials as well as people of any age to find solid community relationships with God and His truths central.

Evangelizing Humanists

Statistics indicate that 25% of young people said they didn't have religion. It's not that young people today are not seeking spirituality. Many are satisfying their spiritual needs in humanistic communities and programs rather than Christian congregations.

Young, as well as older people, are ripe for Christian conversion through "personal evangelism". The word, "evangelism", is derived from the Greek N.T. word "euangelium" which means "good news"— the joyous news of Christ's redemption, The Gospel message is effectively shared with humanists personally, person to person.

Personal Evangelism

A beautiful example of personal evangelism is found in Acts 16:13-15. Along the banks of a river at Philippi, St. Paul and his companions personally shared the Gospel with a dealer in purple cloth named Lydia. She and her family embraced the Gospel and were baptized. Yes! The Gospel can be personally shared with someone anywhere and everywhere - along the banks of a river, a grocery store, a factory, business office, school, club, whatever. John Martin, a member of Holy Trinity, Parma, OH, recently told me how he personally shared the Gospel with someone who opened the door for him at a medical clinic. A forty five minute conversation was launched with the simple greeting: "God bless you." Billy Graham, who passed away recently at the age of 99, vigorously proclaimed the Gospel. However, he did not depend on sermons alone. Those who stepped forward to make a commitment to the Gospel were immediately approached by Christians waiting in the wings for personal follow through.

PERSONAL EVANGELISM RESOURCE



For those who want to better share the Gospel love of Christ, the Missouri Synod program "Every One His Witness" (E1HS) will prove extremely helpful.

Contact: www.lcms.org/witness-and-outreach or www.facebook.com/LCMSE1HW

RELATED RESOURCE

www.selc.lcms.org - Stewardship Outreach - "Stewards of the Gospel"

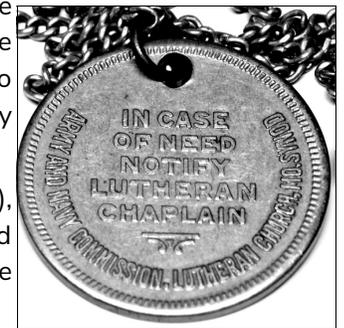
In Case of Need, Notify Lutheran Chaplain

by Elizabeth Garcia

During WWII, many young men serving in the Armed Forces wore Religious medals on their dog-tag chains. The Catholics had a variety of medals; the Episcopalians had the War Cross; and Baptist and Methodist medals occasionally pop up. The LCMS (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod) Army and Navy Commission provided round disks for servicemen to wear on their dog tags or separate chains. The front of the disk featured an Eagle in front of a cross, grasping the Christian and US shields in his talons, bearing the motto **"Loyalty to Christ and Country"**. On the reverse, it says **"In case of need, notify Lutheran Chaplain with "Army and Navy Commission, Lutheran Church, Mo. Synod"** running around the bottom edge. This disk was worn by thousands of servicemen during the war, as important to them as the identification tags hanging next to it. **So, how did a soldier or sailor get one?**



In June of 1935, the Missouri Synod Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, called into being the "Army and Navy Commission". The primary functions of the Commission were (1) to give ecclesiastical endorsement to pastors commissioned as chaplains in the Armed Forces, (2) to council chaplains, and (3) to minister to the spiritual well-being of LCMS servicemen on duty and in VA hospitals.



With the rise of numbers in the Armed Forces (following the Selective Service Act of 1940), the Commission's work expanded, branch offices being established in Chicago (US) and Winnipeg (Canada). A large-scale program was developed for the WWII years, complete with the motto "They Shall Not March Alone", and the LCMS disk appeared.

The Commission also developed a literature program for the serviceman's devotional life. During WWII, a Lutheran serviceman received a monthly copy of "Loyalty: Christ and Country", a printed order of service with a full sermon. Accompanying this was a lighter newsletter, "At Ease", which highlighted Lutheran missions, church and family news. By 1951, "At Ease" was replaced by "Double-Time", a small, quarterly, pocket edition of the news magazine, containing articles about Lutherans in service, their families, civilians overseas, etc. In the late 1950s, "Loyalty" was replaced by "Portals of Prayer". The hometown pastor provided the names of Lutherans in the services to the Commission, which then supplied the servicemen with resources.

At the end of WWII, the Commission maintained 47 Lutheran Service Centers and 44 Parish Centers in North America. Their records named approx. 135,000 US and 4,000 Canadian servicemen as belonging to the LCMS, SELC, and ELS. According to the records of the Army & Navy Commission, more than 4,000 of these men were killed or died in service during World War II.

As for the discs, they are shrouded in mystery, even among dedicated collectors. When were they produced, and how were they distributed? Were they given to the chaplains to distribute to the men at the fronts? Were they sent by hometown Pastors to anyone who wrote and asked for one?

It was very common for Pastors to organize correspondence between church members and servicemen. **Many pastors sent their church newsletters to the men serving abroad. Were these disks distributed with those mailings?**

The church, in general, has done a poor job at documenting its involvement with and efforts to sustain the much-needed faith of their fighting members during WWII. Interested collectors are reduced to discussions like "The LCMS medal that I have might be made of aluminum, implying production before 1941, when non-precious metals became a precious commodity." Pitiful, because this bespeaks nothing of the sacrificial and often life-threatening work done by these chaplains and their men. **The disks meant a lot to the men wearing them, and the memory of all involved has nearly been lost to time.**

If you know someone who can add information about these simple professions of faith, please send a note to ytfirimar@gmail.com.

As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up -- one on one side, one on the other -- so that his hands remained steady till sunset. (Exodus 17:11-13)

What's Happening at the Haven

by Diane Leining

December is always a busy and fun time here at Lutheran Haven. Christmas festivities are about starting with six (6) nights of taking our residents from Independent Living, Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing and our Memory Care to see Christmas lights in the nearby neighborhoods of Oviedo. A few open their homes and outside area to us to see their decoration close up and offer a bit of refreshments to our folks. You don't have to be a kid to get excited about all the colorful brightness of the holidays.



We hold Resident Meetings for our Independent Living every month, letting them know what's going on business wise at the Haven, and information is passed on to them pertinent to their daily lives. In December though, business goes out the window at this meeting and the Haven staff from different areas perform skits, stories, songs, whatever they want to "entertain" our residents. Some are a bit serious and many are hysterical, even if they were meant to be serious. The residents enjoy seeing us make fools of ourselves and we enjoy it too!

Our annual Haven Staff Christmas Party is always a great time of food, fun and fellowship! We eat a wonderful lunch, prepared by our Chef Joe and his staff, play crazy games, receive prizes and enjoy some down time together. This year, "A Charlie Brown's Christmas" reminds us of the reason for the season. Linus Van Pelt: Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about, "for behold, I bring unto you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord".



Our Independent Living Christmas Party was well attended with approximately 125 residents. We served delicious hors d'oeuvres, and the Paul De Ritter Quintet played traditional Christmas tunes and music to dance to; as well as audience participation songs that were a lot of fun! And just like middle



school, most of the guys didn't dance, but that didn't stop the girls from rocking out! We played games and Christmas attire was at every table. Again, our Haven residents know how to have a good time together!

On New Year's Day, the residents teamed together to have a day of fun to bring in 2020. They arranged several games, puzzles, food, gave away prizes and Father Time as well as the New Year's Baby showed up to join in the merriment. A good time was had by all!

At the Haven, a common thread runs through all we do all year long – Fun, Food and Fellowship! During the Christmas season, that is very prevalent, but one thing is for sure...we know that as we enjoy all these events, it is all in celebration of Our Savior's Birth! As a new decade begins, we are hopeful that the joy of Christmas stays in your heart forever! Happy New Year from the residents and staff of Lutheran Haven!

Are the Unborn Human?

by the Rev. Jason Braaten, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Tuscola, Ill.

It's easy to talk about your pro-life convictions among other Christians. We share a common source of authority—the Bible. But what happens when you talk to friends or teachers who aren't Christian, who don't see the Bible as a source of authority at all? In other words, how do we contend for life in a pro-choice world? Scott Klusendorf, in his book *The Case for Life*, gives us a great three-step process.

Clarify the issue. The heart of the abortion debate is often overlooked: Are the unborn human? Are the unborn full-fledged, living members of the human race who are just at the earliest stage of development? Or are they just blobs of cells? If the unborn aren't human, no justification for abortion is necessary. If the unborn are human, no justification for abortion is adequate.

Build a case for life. We meet pro-choice advocates on common ground, using a common source of authority: science. Here biology, specifically embryology (the study of embryos), are our friends. First, the Law of Biogenesis states that (1) life only comes from life, and (2) kinds produce like kinds. In other words, a human being outside of the womb must come from a living human being inside the womb. It doesn't magically turn into a living human being at the point of birth. Human beings reproduce human beings.

Second, those who study embryos have made it crystal clear: "The beginning of a single human life is from a biological point of view a simple and straightforward matter — the beginning is conception." Science has spoken. The unborn are fully human beings. The only thing that separates the unborn from the born are their size, how developed they are, their environment (inside or outside the womb) and how dependent they are. But these differences hardly make a case for the right to take a human life, even those who are not yet born.

Answer objections: After building a case on science, we answer any objections that our friends and teachers might have. Don't be dismissive, but take them seriously. We are to give the same respect to them that we expect them to give to us. And answer honestly. If you don't know an answer, say so, and promise that you'll look into it. Your goal is not to convince them right there. It would be great if they did, but that's not likely. Make your goal instead to challenge them just enough to get them to rethink their current position, especially this question: What are the unborn?

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Please continue to pray for healing for Pastor Ray Malec (Concordia, Northampton, PA)
after falling off a ladder at church and breaking his heel bone.

The Lutheran Beacon - see it in color at www.selc.lcms.org

Send your articles and photos to: gailpete37@yahoo.com

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