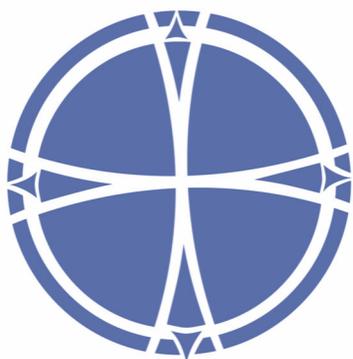


Special Thanks

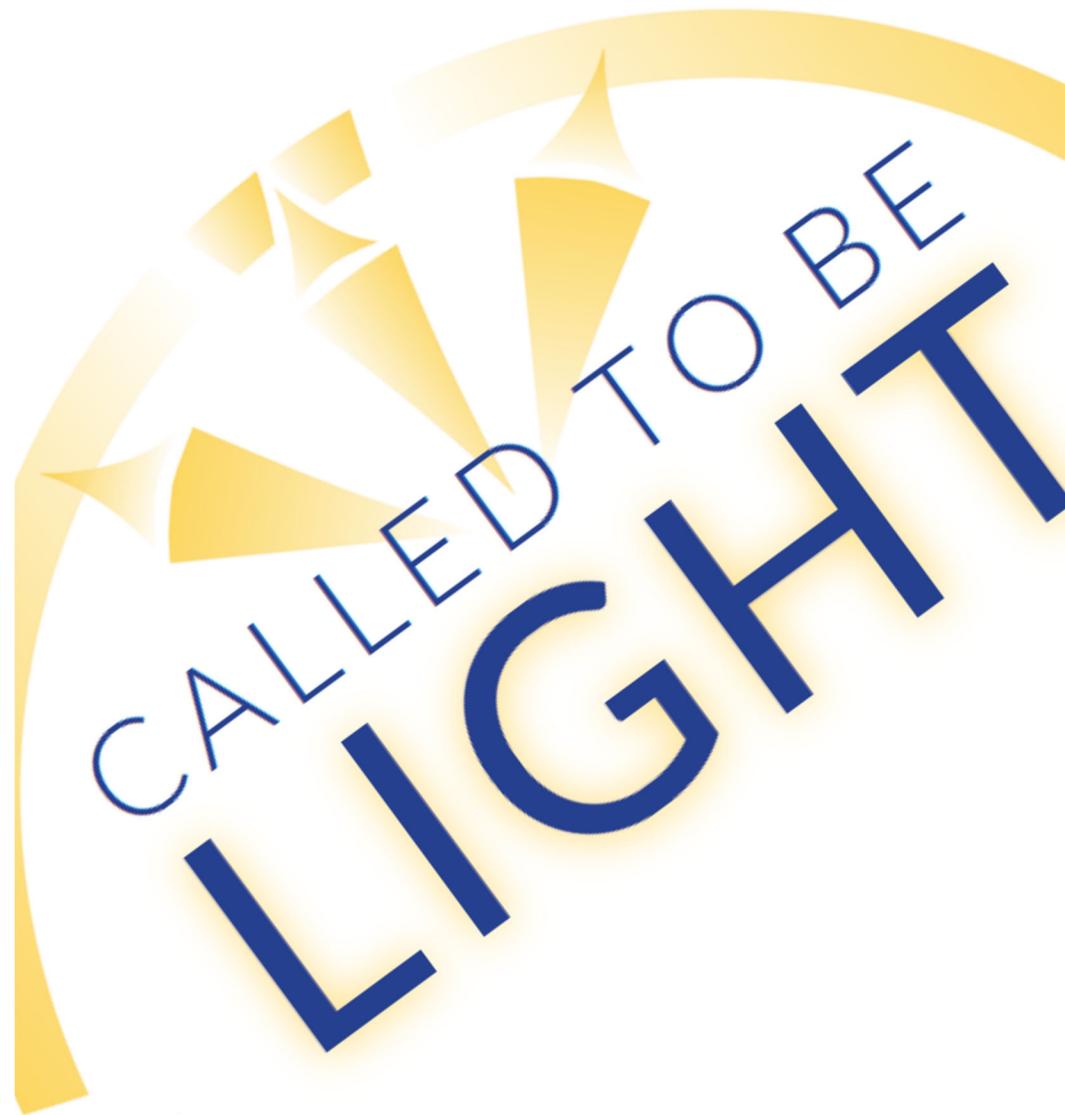
To all those who contributed to this volume:

Rev. Ken Ballas, Parma, OH
Rev. Dan Berteau, Manchester, NJ
Rev. Chris Cahill, Lodi, OH
Rev. Troy Countryman, Viera, FL
Rev. Jim Douthwaite, Vienna, VA
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SELC

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod



DAILY DEVOTIONAL READINGS!

in Preparation for the SELC District Convention

JANUARY 16-19, 2025 + LAKE MARY, FLORIDA

No One Excluded

Isaiah 49:6/Acts 13:47

January 1, 2025

“I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

Isaiah first penned these words about our Saviour, saying it was too little just to save Israel. Our Saviour is greater than that! His light and love would shine upon all nations, all people, from one end of the earth to the other. Salvation for Jew and Gentile, young and old, white and blue collar, rich and poor - everyone! Whoever you are, whatever you have done, wherever you live, the light and love of Jesus is for you. No one excluded.

That was Isaiah’s message, which became the Apostle Paul’s message as he proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles, and now it is our message. The SELC has churches in many different places. The inner city, country lanes, poor communities, and rich suburbs. We have churches over 100 years old and less than 1 year old! Churches filled with gray hair and others filled with infants. Yet the message in all is the same - Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus’ forgiveness is for you. He has come to help and to save everyone.

When the Apostle Paul spoke these words, he was speaking to Jews who didn’t believe that and were opposing him. There are people today who object as well, thinking some people too sinful, too evil, that it is too late for them. There are even people who think that about themselves because of what they have done and how they have lived. What a joy and privilege to be able to tell them that Jesus’ forgiveness is for them! Jesus’ died for every sin and every sinner, so there is forgiveness for every sin and life for every sinner. May this light from Jesus’ cross shine forth in all our churches and from all our people to the ends of the earth!

We pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for your forgiveness every day. Thank you for the privilege to speak your forgiveness to others. Amen.



Convention Prayer

Blessed living Super-Apostle and Epiphany Lord Jesus, You have done “all the heavy lifting” regarding any good that Your forgiven and redeemed children have ever undertaken to accomplish in the Holy Name for Your blood-bought Church and deeply troubled world. We humbly but confidently ask Your special undeserved blessing upon our forthcoming convention proceedings at Holy Cross, Lake Mary (affectionately and deservedly also known perhaps locally as “Pastor Paul Hoyer Family Country”) concerning which so many throughout our beloved far-flung borderless district, synod, congregations, and individuals have tirelessly been at work these many months. You, Lord, know who all of them are as we now anonymously thank You in their behalf.

As we thank you for their labors of love and for their often unsung families members, we cannot also help but remember Your global persecuted Church especially in Third World nations of the world in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. And though we may not in fact experience with others the direct actual trauma from abuse from drug cartels or gang violence, we all face as You spiritual struggles in varying degrees as when one member of the body suffers, all suffer as You are knowingly with them and with each of us. Bless also our increasingly divided North American nations especially during these times of political transition.

Drawn to Your victorious cross and open tomb, we thank You for the “holy contagion” of the mutual encouragement from fellow members of the household of faith. Bless all widows and orphans and single parents in the raising of their precious children as well as those who teach and learn in public or parochial schools. Protect the unborn from rash diabolically-motivated decisions as we firmly believe that You, Lord Jesus, are infinitely stronger than the devil and all his minions.

This weekend especially we pray that we make proper use of Your Spirit's gracious “tool box” including those who may be inclined to operate with little more than a “survival mentality” that tends to depend almost exclusively on available financial resources rather than on Your Gospel means of grace.

Continue to guide all elected or appointed leaders and church officers throughout the district and synod. Forgive our possible negative examples of missed opportunities, misdirected loyalties, or relatively Gospel-less idolizing of man-made institutions, instead lifting high the cross and elevating our living Servant-Messiah Jesus Christ that our every thought be subject to obeying Him. Finally, by Your indwelling Spirit empower each of us to witness by word and need more boldly to fulfill our ascended Lord and King's **prediction to be Your** living martyred witnesses beginning where we live and are and to the ends of the earth and every nation before Your promised glorious return! You could have utilized Your holy angels to share the saving message except for the fact that angels do not have a Savior. The good angels don't need one, and the evil angels don't want one. Only people have a Savior! Above all, may the children of this world only continue to see **Jesus** in all that **we are called upon** to say or do. For it is in His precious holy Name that we do pray. Amen. (Rev. Kenneth Ballas)

To Reflect His Love...cont'd

surprise that **our primary, God-intended life-purpose** be to serve and teach countless men, women and children who as yet remain *outside* the pale of **Christ's blood-bought Church** (Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11; Matthew 28:19; Romans 10:17; 1 Timothy 2:4; **Hebrews 11:39-40**; 2 Peter 3:9).

Thus it also behooves our beloved SELC District family of privileged lay or pastoral delegates and guests who represent so many others “back home” to *encourage one another* by reinforcing our Holy Cross, Lake Mary's God-pleasing, people-loving ongoing 2025 convention mission theme that **through the Church** the “salvation beat” continues on into eternity (see Hymn 940, **LSB**).

Despite having this free gift of salvation rationally explained in uttermost detail, consider faithful missionary-apostle Paul's sermon summary description at Pisidian Antioch about a holy and loving God's embracing an imperfect people incapable of even beginning to save themselves as **illogical** (see **Acts 13:38-41** which occurs just before our convention theme verse). This converted former fearsome enemy of first century believers **and crucified and risen Lord** (yet self-acknowledged “foremost of sinners”) was mercifully and brilliantly singled out by our glorified **ascended** Servant-Messiah Christ temporarily to experience a life-changing **blinding light** in order to add a once notorious “Saul of Tarsus” to His team of Gospel witnesses also to the **Gentile world** (see **Isaiah 49:6**; Acts 9, 22 and 26; Romans 1:16; chapter 15; Galatians 2; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; 15:1ff.; 1 Timothy 1:15).

At the same time, **theologically**, the pan-biblical doctrine of **justification by faith** remains the only everlastingly positive reality for those able to heed the Spirit's gentle but powerful promptings to believe. For are not these the ways of our otherwise inscrutably loving God? Reading Isaiah 55 contextually, one major difference between us former *unregenerate* humans and God is that, though we may still hold misguided grudges, our gracious covenant God not only abundantly pardons or forgives our missed opportunities or feeble excuses for not being better witnesses but also **recalling us to be bearers of salvation** for the **spiritual healing of all nations** (Revelation 7:9-17; 22:2-3).

Again, the primary reason for our earthly existence as His redeemed children, however, remains that each of us having by God's grace **caught the vision**, reflect His wondrous love to an otherwise seemingly hopeless world (Matthew 5:14ff.; 28:19; Luke 2:32; John 3:16f.; **8:12**; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:15ff.; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 4:19).

How *specifically* does our relatively small North American SELC District Church Family fit into our holy and gracious Lord's grand scheme of things? Others more gifted than I are well prepared to help answer that question as that is also one of many reasons why so many cheerfully work (often behind the scenes) to see to it that we continue to enjoy and benefit from these spiritually enriching biennial conventions before our ever-living and loving Brother-Savior's promised glorious return! Thanks be to God!

The Ends of the Earth

Acts 13:47

January 2, 2025

“For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles [nations, ethne], that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Where exactly is “the ends of the earth?” The Scriptures speak many times about taking the Gospel there, so it would be good to know where exactly it is! We often imagine that it must be very far away, and that's because we all think of ourselves as being at the middle of the world. We're at the center; everyone else lives a long way off!

When Acts was written, however, the center of the earth was Jerusalem – at least for Jews and Christians. That's where our Lord was crucified for us, was buried for us, was resurrected for us, and it's not far from where Jesus ascended for us to the right of the Father. For the first disciples, “the ends of the earth” was where we now live.

We have hymns that speak of taking the Gospel “abroad” (LSB 829) or to the “heathen nations” (LSB 396). That might lead us to think of the Lord's mission as something that happens at “the ends of the earth” or amongst “others.” But we are at the ends of the earth, and it's our family, friends and neighbors who are the “others” who need the Gospel light. It is as if, while we were sleeping, our homes and churches were picked up and moved to “the ends of the earth” and right into the mission field.

Being a missionary is hard. It's easier to be a Christian when you're surrounded by others who share your faith. But being a missionary comes with a great reward: that of seeing the Lord intimately at work in us and around us. The Lord wants us to live joyfully with him here at “the ends of the earth,” where his light shines just as brightly as it does at the “center of the world.”

We Pray: Merciful Savior, we thank you for your infinite patience and love in dealing with your people, of which we count ourselves. Use us in your service, that we might draw others into your kingdom. To your praise and glory we ask this. Amen.

Vessels of Light

Acts 13:47

January 3, 2025

Gathering under the theme “Called to be Light,” we do so just shortly after having remembered the nativity of the One who is the Light of Light, Jesus Christ, come to be our Savior.

Back in my early days I used to do a lot of scuba diving. I was certified to scuba in the open water of the ocean, to wreck dive, to deep dive, and to night dive. Of all of these, I enjoyed the night diving most. Going out into the cold dark water on a cloudy night might seem ominous. And it would have been, if not for an underwater lantern strapped to my wrist that illuminated everything to which it pointed. The bright beam of light would pierce through water to reveal all kinds of life teeming ever before me. When the light was turned on, the marine life would be ever drawn to it. In Acts 13:47, St Paul tells the church that we are called to be vessels of Light. He says: “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” We live in an ocean of darkness, with all kinds of people swimming through life aimlessly without hope. Yet into this great sea of darkness, God has deigned to make us lanterns of light, so that the brilliance of His Light will be shone upon those we meet, “that salvation be brought to the ends of the earth.” It may seem daunting at times to shine the Light into the darkness of our world, but we do so with courage, knowing that the warm beam of light and love will always do what God intends. So go ahead. Flip your lantern on and see how God will draw His creatures to Himself.

The God who breathed this world alive, and who sustains it day by day; Whose hands flung stars into space, and controls our destiny...Says, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”
The God who filled the ocean depths, and set tides on their way; Who caused mountains to be raised up, and set the rainbow in the sky...Says, “I have called you by name, you are mine.”
The God who made the fertile earth, and seed within to sow Whose artistry creates butterflies, and the early morning dew Says, “You are precious in my sight.” (based on Isaiah 43:1-7)

To Reflect His Wondrous Love

Acts 13:47

January 15, 2025

Acts 13:47: “For so the Lord has commanded *us*, saying, “I have made *you* a **light for the Gentiles** [**nations**, Gk. **ethnee**], that *you* may bring **salvation to the ends of the earth.**”

Dear SELC (and North Dakota?) Family Representatives and Guests, Along with privileged participants at our *January district conventions*, would that others of us also seize/recapture the significance of 2025's SELC gracious host, Holy Cross, Lake Mary, Florida's **mission theme!** It was in the Creator's masterful sculpting of multi-universes that we also *hear* His first recorded *spoken* “**Let there be**” (a single word in our Hebrew Bibles) which initially resulted in the **essential miracle of light** (Genesis 1:3; note also the inspiring poetic genius of Hymn 914, **LSB**) together with New Testament evangelist St. John's profoundly magnificent Christmas/Epiphany seasonal reminder of the inseparable connection between light and life as seen specially in the *doubly essential* uncreated incarnate Son of God or “Word made flesh” in John 1:1-18).

In humanity's historic development both before and after the Noahic Flood, our earliest ancestors were told to “**be fruitful and multiply**” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). Similarly, succeeding generations were also expected to pass on this and other teachings to their offspring (Genesis 12:3; Deuteronomy 6:7; Psalm 145:4). Sadly, for millions living in today's deeply troubled world, our convention theme remains meaningless. Though none of us was born “**Christian**,” many of us were thankfully **reborn** in the Holy Spirit's often misunderstood gift of **baptism** (Psalm 51:4; John 3:3 and 5; Titus chapter 3).

Though *theology* (or cogently concise practical *application* of a particular richly loaded biblical text) is usually not found in isolated individual words, minutes spent with a Bible concordance surveying key terms like “**called**,” “**light**,” “**nations**” or “**Gentiles**,” “**salvation**” (and, yes, the pronoun “**you**” in a “packed” NT epistle like 1 Peter) is likely apt to reap a treasure trove of life-related, purely Scriptural, not only “secondary,” insights however helpful such resources may be. To avoid “spinning our wheels” in such luxurious plenty one may move both backward and forward from the present back to the dawn of history from our present position pausing at what even our increasingly secular Western world's AD/BC calendar's enduring focal point and beginning of the Christian era. Unfortunately, experience teaches that even relatively few Christians today actually bother to look up let alone actually read suggested biblical references.

Thus there is but **one people of God** on “both sides of Christ's Cross” with the result that believers in both testaments are in reality “*products*” **of our blessed Lord's saving mission...**someone faithfully told someone else who eventually introduced us (now predominately Gentiles!) **to our sinless Brother-Savior Jesus.** Therefore, it should come as no

Called To Be Light

Read Acts 13:47 & Psalm 36:5-9 January 14, 2025

My mother was an artist. She worked with all kinds of materials, but she loved oil paints on canvas. I remember growing up, sitting in the basement in her corner studio with her easel painting away. I was always amazed at how the pictures would come alive, though I could not fathom how her random movements could produce such amazing vistas. Sometimes I would ask her about a particular shade she used, and she would explain how the color she used made the flower or shrub or moonlight on the lake pop.

Unfortunately, her first born son was born with a relatively common deficiency. About 14 million Americans suffer from color blindness. Those without this disability think all we see are in shades of black and white, or maybe some grays tossed in, but most people afflicted with color-blindness do see in color but struggle with certain shades and distinguishing certain colors. The most common being red-green-brown, or RGB color-blindness. For me, unless it is a very bright green for instance, green appears to be a shade of gray to me.

About 2015 a new item hit the market, EnChroma, a pair of glasses that worked to correct the vision of those afflicted with RGB color-blindness. The PBS reporter who tested them out said she just sat there in awe staring at a Mountain Dew can noticing for the first time ever the several shades of green, and then later at the botanical garden staring at the moss and noticing for the first time ever it was not just dull brown but filled with shades of red, yellow and brown.

What an amazing ability we shepherds have been given by our gracious God. We are called to be the EnChroma for the world. For reasons known only to God, He has called out from His people certain of us to be His shepherds. Called to be the bearers of a illuminating light, the light of His amazing grace. I suspect that was in the mind of John Newton when he wrote those words, “once I was blind, but now I see.”

And as His chosen means to be carriers of His grace, He pours out this calling of grace upon us, His appointed shepherds. His word tells us that His grace is to be distributed. His grace is social. His grace is portable. His grace is meant to be shared with people. His grace cannot be confined to Sunday mornings, or within the four walls of a church. Jesus loved to be with people, dining with sinners and tax collectors, and I am sure, anyone and everyone who was curious. His salvation, His grace, makes the world bearable each and every day. His grace is life. We go, we share, we bring His light to a world in great need of that light.

We pray: Jesus, You are Savior, Christ and Messiah. Your every word shines a light brightly. Lead us by that light to share Your steadfast love with the nations today and all our days. In the name of Christ, amen.

A Candle in the Darkness

John 1:5 January 4, 2025

Acts 13:47: "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles [nations, ethne], that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (ESV)

Your church may buy altar candles from the A.I. Root candle company – so does mine. I went to their retail shop near us in early November to try to buy a set of candles for our church's Advent wreath. I was successful, but not before I wandered through a vast array of knickknacks, seasonal decorations, and hundreds of candles of all shapes, sizes, and colors.

No matter how pretty a candle looks, it's just a blob of wax until you light it. The purpose of a candle is to carry a flame and give light. Just one candle is enough to pierce the darkness - but really, do you go to a Christmas Eve candlelight service to see the light of just one candle? The light is so much brighter, the darkness so much less, when the flame of that one candle is shared with dozens or even hundreds more. John's Gospel says that, like those candles, Jesus “shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

Sometimes the darkness (of sin) does seem really dark, and the light of one candle seems really weak. But did your Sunday School ever sing “This little Gospel light of mine” with gloomy faces and no energy? The light of that Gospel was shared with us kids by our parents and grandparents, Sunday School teachers and pastors, and all kinds of light-sharing “candles” before them, back to the Apostles and Jesus. And whether we kids knew it or not, when we sang “All around the whole wide world / I'm gonna let it shine” we were singing a prayer that we also might be “a light for the nations.”

We pray: Holy Spirit, let the light of Jesus shine in me wherever I go, to whomever I meet. Amen.

The Most Wonderful Thing

Acts 13:47

January 5, 2025

Let's be honest. Living in the darkness is so much easier than living in the light. Right? When a guy is living in the darkness, he believes he can do whatever he wants because he is protected by the cover of darkness. And while there is a chance that he might be caught, it doesn't dissuade him still from doing whatever he wants. Pick your commandment to disobey and wait for the sun to set and all will be well. To our human nature, this is the simplest and (let's face it) most fun way to live. Who doesn't enjoy spreading the lie about that person you don't like anyways? Who doesn't mind lying on the tax forms? Who finds it difficult to want what the other has so much that you will do whatever it takes to get it?

Let's be honest. Living in the light is very challenging. Right? It means all those things mentioned above that you want to do in the dark cannot be done at all, because if you do, all will see and all will know. And so, instead of disobeying the "Thou shalt" and the "Thou shalt not" we have to obey and obeying is never something that to our human nature sounds like fun. Living in the light exposes all of our sinfulness and evil desires.

But Satan lies to us. It is he that declares what is done in the darkness is so much easier and funner than that which is done in the light. I mean, think about it ... What is so fun about always having to look over your shoulder to make sure that no one is looking at you. What is so fun about coming face-to-face with the one you have spread the lies about? What is so fun about that constant desire for more and more and more constantly eating away at you?

Jesus speaks the truth to us. What appears to be hard, is, in fact, the much easier life. Is it not a wonderful relief when you are not speeding as you pass the policeman on the side of the road. I enjoy waving at him because I know he won't be waving me down. (And that's kind of fun!)

The world is cast in darkness. The world cannot even find its way out of a paper bag. The world is blinded by the light because it is not used to such bright beams. What a glorious opportunity and wonderful responsibility that we, the followers of the Light, have to this darkened world. They watch us and they see a more better way. They watch us and see how we Christians love each other. They watch us and see the forgiveness that our Jesus grants us when we do talk a walk on the dark side.

Indeed, called to be lights to the people is the most wonderful thing in the world. For your Jesus' light shines through you to them.

We pray: Dear Jesus, I want to walk as a Child of Light.

The Word Continues

Acts 13:47/Isaiah 49:6

January 13, 2025

"For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" From Isaiah 49:6/Acts 13:47

God's Word comes true one hundred percent of the time. Not most of the time. Not 99 percent of the time. It comes true 100 percent of the time. It did. It does. It will. The Apostle Paul witnessed that in many ways. When Paul's teaching of Jesus was rejected by the Jews, he proclaimed the Good News to the non-Jews, the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit enabled Paul to see this as a fulfillment of what Isaiah had foretold, "*I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

To be sure, that's a specific Word addressing a specific situation. You are not the Apostle Paul and you do not have his particular assignment. We live 2000 years later on the other side of the globe. But the Word of the Lord continues to go forth. Most of the readers of this are Gentiles, non-Jewish people. In other words, your forefathers were godless pagans. Maybe it was only a generation or two ago – maybe it was many – but God's Word has gone forward in the lives of people following Him in their daily vocations. You have received blessings from those who have gone before you. We trust that Word to continue to work and do what it does. It even works through our failures and weaknesses. God's Word cannot be chained or stopped. It is trusted. In that security and confidence we receive God's gifts and encourage, love, forgive, and pray for those around us, starting in our homes.

We pray: Lord grant us to believe, confess, and live in the power of your Word. In Jesus name. Amen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Called to be Light". The word "Called" is written in a large, flowing cursive script. "to be" is written in a smaller, simpler font above the word "Light", which is also written in a large, flowing cursive script.

He Calls Us Light

Isaiah 49:6/Acts 13:47

January 12, 2025

“For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 13:47)

Everyone has heard of the Grand Canyon, but not everyone is familiar with Palo Duro Canyon, even though it is the second longest and deepest canyon system in the United States, second only to the Grand Canyon. It's located in the panhandle of Texas, just twenty-five miles from downtown Amarillo. I've been there...once...for a youth retreat at a Lutheran Camp. What I remember most about that retreat was that, at night, it was pitch black where we were on the canyon floor. However, on the rim of that canyon, hundreds of feet above us, was a lighted cross, shining for all who were at that moment dwelling in the deep darkness below.

It was the prophet Isaiah who first recorded the verse above, a verse in which the Father addresses His Son and declares that it was too small a thing for Him to simply save the people of Israel; rather, the Father would send His Son to bring salvation to all people of all nations (Isaiah 49:6). Simeon, taking the infant Jesus in his arms, declared “My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel (Luke 2:30-32). During His time on earth, Jesus fulfilled the whole law and will of God for all people of all time. Jesus also declared, “And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). On the tree of the cross, Jesus paid for the sin of the whole world. That cross shines forth across the ages, drawing the nations out of the darkness of sin, death, and the power of the devil into His marvelous light and the joy and peace of salvation through faith in Him.

THE Light of the World has called us, His people, the light of the world. To us is given the command and the privilege to share Jesus with the nations, that the message of salvation through Him alone may extend to the ends of the earth. For so it is written, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

We pray: May we be found joyfully proclaiming Jesus, the glory of His cross and the triumph of the empty tomb, until His salvation reaches to the very ends of the earth. Amen.

With Lamps Ablaze

Acts 13:47

January 6, 2025

Acts 13:47 tells us: “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the nations, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

The church of the first century was undergoing a serious makeover. God was bringing to fruition the New Covenant as instituted by His Son, Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. They needed Him to shine a light on their path constantly to ensure they were on the right road. It's a narrow one. Like the wise virgins, they needed their lamps to walk down the path of righteousness. They were preparing to change the world, and since the day of Pentecost, the Spirit ensured they stayed awake. Their lamps ablaze, they kept spare flasks of oil, ensuring that the light of the gospel was shared to any and everyone who listened. They showed signs and wonders that Jesus is the Messiah, our King and High Priest. Even when their lamps had to be trimmed, their oil never ran out. The Lord was so intimate with them by the grace of the Holy Spirit Who dwelt with them, and Who resides with all who are one flesh in Christ by virtue of consuming in faith His very body and blood, so as to continue in all the teachings passed down to them by the Lord and master, in Word and Sacrament, that, again, the whole earth, consisting of both Jew and Gentile, would be moved. The whole earth, from shore to shore, would be lit up, trimmed, shaken, filled up again, pruned, and grafted to the Vine. The door of heaven would be opened, and the eternal light that needs no celestial body, no sun, moon, or star, would shine forth; all by the mere promise of the resurrection of our Lord for all, so that everyone who believes in the Son of Man would not perish but have eternal life. This message shone from the faces of the disciples, and it shines in ours. For we too, for our generation, are the light for the nations that the Lord commands with a great cry and even with the sound of a trumpet; He's risen. Our sins have been paid for, that makes us immortal now; for those who have ears, let them hear. The Lord is coming. He won't be long now. We look to the East, for the Sun of righteousness will rise for one final glorious day for judgement, that is the sentence of salvation for all who have heard His voice, listen, and confess, 'Abba, Father, hallowed be Thy name, and hallowed is Your Son, the name that is above every name. You shine forth, and bless all upon whom Your rays descend.'

We pray: Father, shine forth, again, through Your Son, the Light of the World, into our lives and into the lives of all we touch, because we not only absorb Your light but reflect it to all who see Your love shining from our own faces by Your Spirit Who is eternally gracious through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

A Light to the Nations

Acts 13:47

January 7, 2025

The dark can be a scary place. In total darkness, just one pin prick of **light** is more than enough to give hope and direction. A surprised and hope-filled cry goes out in the darkness, “I see it. Move toward the **light!**”

Two thousand years ago, the Magi, people who were by definition Gentiles, heard the Spirit-breathed promise of the Scriptures and were drawn to the **Light**. More incredibly, they were drawn to the One Who is The **Light** of the world.

It is fitting as we gather together for our SELC District Convention that we have just celebrated The Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ. Epiphany rejoices, along with the Gentile Magi, that the Savior of the Nations has come to “shine brightly” for all nations, for all people. Jesus, the **Light** of the world, has come to save us. Because of our sin, we dwell in darkness and death, but He’s come to save us! It gets better. Not only has He come to save us, but also our neighbors.

In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the promise they first heard and believed from the prophet Isaiah, “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a **light** for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 13:47 ESV)

More and more, I marvel that God graciously invites us to “Join Jesus on His mission” (credit to Greg Finke for the term). Paul and Barnabas joined Jesus on His mission, and they simply continued what God first promised through the prophet Isaiah.

The Father loves us into life, and then the Son asks and equips us by the Holy Spirit to show and tell. His sends His disciples to be salt and **light**. God says to His people, “I have made you a **light** to the Gentiles.” There is a simplicity and continuity here. Jesus invites us to join Him on His mission to seek and save the lost. Jesus reminds His disciples (that includes you and me!), “You are the **light** of the world.” (Matt 5:14) The SELC is a “District without borders” and we embody that as we *show* and *tell* of Jesus, the **light** of the world.

In closing, I’m certain I’m not alone in loving the hymn “Thy Strong Word” by Martin Franzmann. The hymn boldly proclaims Jesus as The Word, The **Light**, and Savior of the World. I think verse two brings it all together well:

Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness,
Dark as night and deep as death,
Broke the **light** of Thy salvation,
Breathed Thine own life-breathing breath.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise to Thee who **light** dost send!
Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia without end!

His Grace Is Portable

Read Acts 13:47 & Psalm 36:5-9

January 11, 2025

“For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

We have just emerged from the at times frantic, but always joyful, holidays. From Thanksgiving, the recognition by our very secular world of the need for thankfulness, through the season to prepare us for the arrival of the Christ child, our Advent, Christmas Day and the celebration of the greatest event in human history, followed by the stories of Anna, Simeon and the Magi. For many in our world, they have had their fill of all things faithful, stories of Jesus the babe in the manger, and other celebrations. We may find that many people are quite ready to “return” to their lives free from all things relating to Christ. After all, God willing, they will jump back into that shortly when Easter arrives and the winter holidays in a year’s time. Now it is time to get back to the real world.

Thus, what more powerful words to be heard today by God’s appointed shepherds. For us as well, it is back to the routine, preaching, teaching, visiting, counseling, whatever may come. Yet, we have been given more than a command. In order to do those pastoral works, we first need to be showered with something special. God’s grace. Not just grace for the day, but grace for a lifetime. We identify that peculiar type of grace as a calling. We do not know why God has chosen us to be His co-workers in the work of grace, certainly not because any of us merit it. But He has.

And as His chosen means to be carriers of His grace, He pours out this calling of grace upon us, His appointed shepherds. His word tells us that His grace is to be distributed. His grace is social. His grace is portable. His grace is meant to be shared with people. His grace cannot be confined to Sunday mornings, or within the four walls of a church. Jesus loved to be with people, dining with sinners and tax collectors, and I am sure, anyone and everyone who was curious. His salvation, His grace, makes the world bearable each and every day. His grace is life. We go, we share, we bring His light to a world in great need of that light.

We pray. Jesus, You are Savior, Christ and Messiah. Your every word shines a light brightly. Lead us by that light to share Your steadfast love with the nations today and all our days. In the name of Christ, amen.

What's Your Availability?

Acts 13:47-48

January 10, 2025

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." Acts 13:47

I'm sure that neither Paul nor Barnabas had the Gentiles in mind when they were called by Jesus. Yet Jesus, in His timing, revealed to them that the Gospel was also for the Gentiles.

Thus, they were sent. Compelled by the good news of God's salvation for the world, here they are, heeding and answering God's command to bring the Gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles and the Jews.

Mission work can at times appear to be daunting. We take one look at our current culture and it becomes clear that being all things to all people (1 Cor 9:19-23) so that we might win some, is a large task. So large that it can be hard to know where to start such an adventure on our own.

To make our burden greater, Satan loves to whisper in our ear that we don't have the skillset to do the work. But consider this saying, "God isn't interested in your ability as much as He is interested in your availability." God has promised us the necessary words as we go (Luke 12:12), and He promised we'd never go it alone. (Matt 28:20)

So since we have the God of every resource, let us give thanks and praise Him for His love for all people. Let us give thanks for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, the one who has made all the difference for our salvation and everlasting life. God has provided, and will continue to provide.

He only says go. He'll do the rest. Have faith. The God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob goes with you. Amen.

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." (Acts 13:48)

We pray: Gracious Lord, thank you for including me in the promise you made to Abraham. Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit to bring me to faith. By that same Spirit lead and guide my witness to your love in Christ. Amen.

Called to Be A Light

Acts 13:47

January 8, 2025

Paul and Barnabas declare to us: "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the nations, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

So most of us have already taken our Christmas trees down, depending on how lazy we are; we've tossed them to the curb, stored them back in our basement or attic, chopped them up into fire wood, maybe stripped it of its pines and made it into a cross ready for Easter, or maybe some of us have kept the tree up, whether it's in the same spot or we've move it around, it's now decorated to fit the new season; now it's a Valentines Day Tree. But as funny as that last one is, it's kind of truer to the Spirit of Christmas which is that the true Spirit of Christmas never stops. The Word of the Lord endures forever. Just so, we carry on celebrating Epiphany, until Transfiguration, then we come to Lent. Can we make up a Lent tree, I wonder? That's kind of where the cross comes in! Do we light up the cross? We probably wouldn't light it up like a Christmas tree, but we'd do well to put it in the spotlight. Why not? And every time we light up one of these cross trees, just as Jesus is the Light of the world, we could be His lights as we share the purpose of why Jesus went to His cross tree; to die for the sins of the world, just as we did over the Christmastide. Jesus was born to die for us. The Spirit and the message of Christ continues to be shared as the light of His gospel is confessed from the hearts of every believer that knows He is risen from the dead, from the Christmas tree to the cross tree, to the doorframes of our homes as we welcome visitors into our humble abode, albeit separated by hedgerows surrounding our properties to mark our living space. When we invite guests into our homes to share God's love, we tear town those barriers, something we appreciate as the SELC (the district with no borders), and the love of God continues to shine from us, just as He commanded. We are lights to the world as we go out from our homes to the workplace, to our school, to the community center, and to our churches, sharing the bright hope that lives within each and every one of God's children, beaming with joy, as God's brilliant light bursts forth.

We pray: Father, thank You for sending to us Your Son, the Light of the World, so that we too could be a light to the nations, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

A Light to the Peoples

Acts 13:47/Isaiah 49:6

January 9, 2025

Speaking of the promised Messiah, Isaiah says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”-Isa. 49:6

These are the very same words Paul spoke to both Jews and Gentiles alike in Antioch as he made the case for the mission he had been given from Jesus to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. But that God me thinking: What does it mean for us today to be “*made a light?*” I suppose it means that we were once living in darkness, that we were once covered in sin and, as a result, separated from God. But now, we are light. Peter echoes this sentiment we he reminds that we are a “royal priesthood” and “holy nation: that has been “called out of darkness into his marvelous light” in order to “proclaim the excellencies” of our Almighty God (1 Peter 2:9).

But we aren’t made a light just for ourselves. Peter, as we’ve just seen, tells us that now that we’ve been called out of darkness we have a job to do. Paul says the same thing when he’s speaking to the Jews and Gentiles of Antioch. He says:

”I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” – Acts 13:47

No, we’ve not been made a light for ourselves. We’ve been made a light for the *Gentiles*. Another way to say that is to say we’ve been made a light for the *people*. For just a moment, I’d like for you think about the places where you spend most of your time. If you’re like me, much of your time is spent at home with your family, and, most likely, with your brothers and sisters in Christ at church. But what about that *third* place that you spend your time? Maybe for you it’s school or work. Maybe it’s the gym or the grocery store or the golf course. Those places are the places we are sent to, the places where the people are the God wants us reach.

Think about it like this: the light shines pretty brightly for you at home and at church, but what about the places where *people* are? What about the *third* places in your life? In those places, there is often a dark veil of confusion and conflict that covers the lives of the people who reside there. A dusky pall of sorrow and suffering that overshadows their hearts. A foreboding gloom that accompanies the trials and temptations they endure.



A Light to the Peoples...cont’d

And we know all about these things because, though we’ve been made a light, though we’ve been baptized and called out of darkness, we still deal with the same kinds of things that other people do. The confusion over morality and conflicts in our relationships. The sorrows of losing loved ones and the suffering of prolonged illness. The trials of losing a job and the temptation to fill the void or cover the hurts with the desires of the flesh. Yes, we know these things as well as the people in our *third* places do, but there’s an important difference. We face the looming darkness of life in our broken world with the hope of Jesus and the promise of the resurrection.

And this is how we have been made a light to the people. This is what it means for us to be sent out to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. There are people all around us, at school or at work, at the gym, the grocery store, or the golf course who are wandering and languishing in the darkness, if only we take a moment to notice them. There are people all around us, looking for love in all the wrong places, longing for peace that will endure, thirsty for a hope they can touch, taste, and see, if only we take the time to talk to them and to love them.

This is what it means for us to be a light to the people. To carry the light that lives in us, Jesus Christ, into their darkness and show them who he is and what he does. To tell them about a love so deep that it took him to the cross for all our sins and failures. To show them that true, lasting peace, comes in a restored relationship with their Father in heaven. And to point them to a real, everlasting, eternal hope in the life of the world to come where pain and sorrow and darkness and tears are no more.

Friend in Jesus, this is what it means to made a light to the people, and that is, indeed what we are. So let us be just that not just in our homes and in our churches, but most especially in those places where the people are.

We pray: Heavenly Father, through your Son Jesus, our Lord, you have made me to be a light for the people around me. Help me to pay attention to who you place in my path and to notice those who need to hear about your love, your peace, your grace, and your mercy, all of which are mine for the sake of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

