

# *The Lutheran* **WITNESS**

JANUARY 2005

VOL. 124 NO. 1

## **SCIENCE** AND GOD'S **WONDROUS WORKS**



**Also: God Is Able**

**Confessing and Forgiving at Home**

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# The Lutheran WITNESS

A MAGAZINE FOR THE LAYPEOPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

JANUARY 2005

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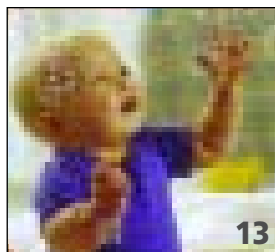
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## Confessional Lutherans

Perhaps [the article] will encourage members of our congregations to look at our confessions and see what makes Lutherans the heirs of the apostolic faith.

*Rev. Rob Jarvis  
Morris, Minn.*

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK DR. SAMUEL Nafzger for his article about being a confessional church (“What Is a ‘Confessional Lutheran Church’ Anyway?” Nov. ’04). Perhaps it will encourage members of our congregations to look at our confessions and see what makes Lutherans the heirs of the apostolic faith.

But I have to respectfully disagree when he says “the internal synodical disagreements have not, for the most part, been directly about the basic teachings of the church.” I’m afraid they have. We are debating whether faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. The Yankee Stadium event brought this issue to public light.

Many issues are splitting our Synod, and the only way we can start to heal is to address them with as much candor as possible.

*Rev. Rob Jarvis  
Morris, Minn.*

FOR FAR TOO LONG, THE MISSOURI SYNOD has been walking a Scriptural tight rope, failing to take necessary disciplinary measures against those pastors and congregations that knowingly stray from the Word. This inaction by those in authority has resulted—and will result—in all manner of theological problems. The Synod’s doctrinal inconsistency is causing frustration and lowering the morale of some very fine pastors.

*Jack Pierce  
Mattoon, Ill.*

THE ARTICLE ABOUT BEING A “CONFESSIONAL” church says that the LCMS is “made up of some 6,160 *theologically united* congregations.” This may have been true 40 years ago, but it

might be more correct to say that it’s “made up of some 6,160 congregations whose *constitutions* say they are theologically united.” My personal experience is that what is preached from the pulpit in many congregations is far different from the doctrine put forth in *The Book of Concord* and so carefully stated in each church’s constitution.

*Marvin Borchelt  
Roswell, N.M.*

## The Muhlenbergs

MR. FEYERHERM WAS RIGHT TO NOTE that the Muhlenbergs played an important role in our nation’s formation. But the story of this family, as seen from the work of the patriarch, Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, also shows what can happen when our confessions—to allude to Dr. Nafzger’s article in the same issue—are discarded and ignored.

At the time of Henry Muhlenberg, nonconfessional Lutherans often subscribed to pietism, which included living up to the demands of “holy living.” Muhlenberg warned his followers against skinny-dipping in the Schuylkill River, hunting for pleasure, scientific experiments, tea parties, dancing, and telling jokes. Emphasizing conversion more than Baptism, he worked to improve relations with the Reformed churches led by Michael Schlatter and undermined the more confessional Lutheran Ministerium of New York.

It was in reaction to such pietism that the LCMS and other confessional synods were formed. Their

founders’ emigration to the United States marked a radical departure from the type of American Lutheranism pioneered by the Muhlenberg family.

*Andrew Yox  
Mount Pleasant, Texas*

## African saints

PRAISE GOD FOR LCMS WORLD RELIEF/ Human Care and Rev. Matthew Harrison’s ongoing advocacy for works of mercy in West Africa (“Disarming Hearts,” Nov. ’04). Pastor Harrison is right: Flowing from God’s Word, the Spirit shakes us to “fight, work, and pray,” as Luther urges.

The headline to Pastor Harrison’s sidebar article, “Africa ... and Martin Luther,” reminded me of another Luther quote. Commenting on Ps. 68:31, the Reformer writes, “And it is a well-known fact that no one has ever demonstrated greater zeal in coming to God than the dear fathers in the deserts of Egypt and Ethiopia.” Some Christians today continue to commemorate the men Luther specifically names: Macarius (on Jan. 15) and Anthony (on Jan. 17).

Christ’s cross moves us to suffer compassionately with suffering sisters and brothers globally. With *Ablaze!* as a motto and Luther as a teacher, we go fired up by the example of faith and good works offered by present and past African saints.

*Rev. John Nunes  
Chicago, Ill.*

## By definition ...

IN THE OCTOBER “LETTERS,” BYRON KERN objects to President Kieschnick’s encouragement of support for a Federal Marriage Amendment, because “marriage is not the business of the federal government under the U.S. Constitution.” Hello? That’s why it was called the Federal Marriage Amendment to the Constitution!

*Rick Strickert  
Austin, Texas*

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## ***'No greater love ...'***

I WAS SADDENED WHEN MY SISTER, WHO still lives in Wenona, Ill., and is a lifelong member of Zion Lutheran Church there, called to tell me about the church fire ("National News," Sept. '04). I would like to tell you some things about the picture and article you printed.

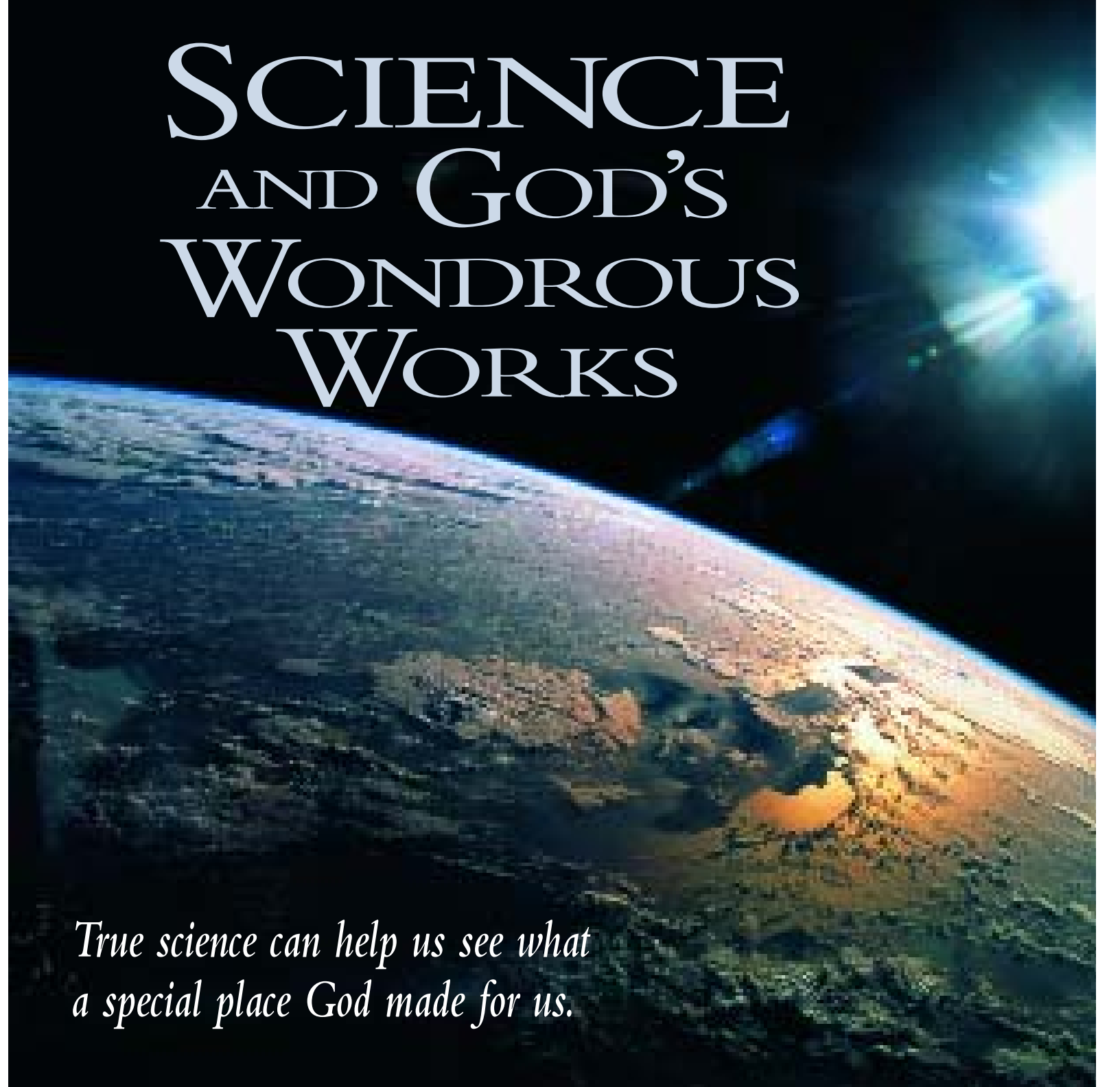
The picture of Christ in Gethsemane was spared, as you reported. This picture was donated by my grandmother, Amelia Strauch, as a memorial to her second youngest son, who was killed in a B24 bomber crash in 1944. Grandma was a very, very poor widow who raised 11 children by herself, with hardly any income. Her youngest sons, Arthur and Robert, enlisted in the Air Force and Marines, respectively. It was Arthur who lost his life in that bomber crash. She used his government insurance to commission and purchase that painting.

Recently, I learned about the circumstances of that plane crash. A letter was written in 2002 to a cousin by a witness to the tragedy. I quote from his letter: "The bombardier, Lt. Arthur Strauch, worked to free Cpl. Danekas from the nose turret. Danekas was trapped in his turret because a strap had caught in the rotation ring and gear and the turret was frozen in place. They managed to free him moments before the pilot lost control of the aircraft. By then, Cpl. Danekas was back by the bomb bay doors and was able to bail out. Lt. Strauch was still in the nose of the plane when it went down."

Uncle Art was like an older brother to me, and for all these years I didn't know what a hero he was. But that picture always reminded me of him and all he meant to me. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend." That was Art.

My father, Rev. Herb Himmler, was pastor at Zion for many years. My mother, Ella, was Art's sister. I understand that the painting is being restored at this time. Just thought you might like to know.

*Marv Himmler  
Utica, Mich.*



# SCIENCE AND GOD'S WONDROUS WORKS

*True science can help us see what  
a special place God made for us.*

by John Gault

**I**s science a great blessing from God? Or is it an attempt to put man above God? If the answer isn't always clear, it's likely because different meanings are given to the word "science."

As the word is used by those of us who call ourselves "scientists," science is a method; it is not a collection of facts, theories, and "laws." My answer, then, is that true science is a real blessing. But like many of God's gifts, it can be misused.

## *Listening to God*

The "scientific method" had its beginnings in the work of Johannes Kepler, a Lutheran astronomer who was born in Germany in 1571. He is the first person to correctly describe the paths of the sun, planets and

stars across the sky. However, his contribution was much greater than correctly predicting the orbits of the planets. He was the first to use what has become known as the scientific method.

Like many great ideas, Kepler's contribution seems both simple and obvious after the fact. He said the final test of whether or not a theory or idea is correct is nature—the physical world.

Kepler also said the only valid way to test a theory is to do a measurement (an experiment). If the measurement gives the expected result, the theory being tested is correct; if not, the theory is wrong. That's an important advancement, considering that before Kepler's time, the way to prove an idea correct was to cite an accepted human authority, such as Aristotle.

Seen from the viewpoint of a scientist who is a Christian, science is a way of listening to God as He “speaks” to us through nature. This explains why science has given us so many blessings. Listening to God always brings blessings!

A further advantage of the scientific method is that it allows any person who so wishes to repeat the experiment and confirm for himself whether or not the theory is correct.

With Kepler's approach, arguments about which theory was best could be settled quickly and indisputably, allowing scientists to concentrate on the next problem. His work set the stage for Galileo and Newton and the rapid developments brought on by modern science.

### *The hand of God*

Science is no substitute for the study of God's Word in the Scriptures, of course. Science can only complement the Scriptures, reinforcing and clarifying the love and care taken by God to construct the physical world and the physical laws that govern us.

But the closer we investigate the physical world, the more we see the hand of God at work. The apostle Paul, in Rom. 1:20, writes, “For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal

power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

The more we study the physical world, the more evident is the intri-

*The more we study the physical world,  
the more evident is the intricate system  
the Creator has built for us.*



cate system the Creator has built for us. Science enables us to glimpse some of the many complex relationships and processes that God put in place for our good—and we know there are many we have not yet seen. Examples are the fungus He puts on the roots of corn to help it grow, and the gravity that holds our atmosphere to the Earth. Life on Earth would not be possible without these and many other things far too numerous to list, most of which we have not yet discovered or do not understand.

The greater the detail in which we investigate the world around us, the more apparent the examples of God’s love for us and the careful planning that went into making our world.

### *Limited knowledge*

Scientists are sinners, and the knowledge they gain can cause them to become arrogant. For Adam and Eve, the enticement of the forbidden fruit was their belief that eating it would give them knowledge.

There are some scientists today who do not believe the universe was created by God. One who does not believe cannot see God anyplace. Scripture has many references to fools who say there is no god (Ps. 10:4), and certainly the fact that one is a scientist does not prevent him or her from being this type of a fool.

Our present knowledge of God’s physical laws is very limited. Take gravity, for example. We say the reason a book falls is because of gravity. Using our knowledge of gravity, we can send a space probe from Earth and land it on Mars. However we have no idea how the book “knows” which direction it must fall. We do not

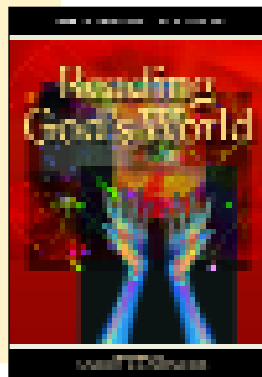
know how the book and Earth communicate.

We don’t understand how gravity works, except to say that it is by God’s will. Thus, science teaches

### **Reading God’s World**

This book explores vital connections between science, Christian faith, and vocation in the postmodern world.

This collection of essays, edited by Angus Menuge, provides a portrait of and a vision for Christians engaged in science professions. Contributors bring their work experiences and higher-education credentials to the topic, discussing ways scientists have approached their tasks from the perspective of Christian faith and reverence for the created order. It is available from Concordia Publishing House. Call (800) 325-3040.



*Advances in knowledge through scientific research reveal ways to improve lives and health. Biotechnology, for example, has brought tremendous productivity gains in agriculture, helping farmers feed humanity.*

that we are far from understanding nature, that God is great and we understand very little of His creation.

Some see the Biblical account of creation as an area of conflict between science and the church. Those who see a conflict do not understand the limits of science, nor do they understand the futility of trying to fit something like creation into the mind of man.

There is no scientific theory of creation! The method of science can only function after all the “stuff” of the universe has been created and the laws that govern it have been established. In fact, one of the most fundamental laws of physics states that the physical laws do not change in time.

### *Measuring age*

It is true that when science measures the age of fossils, planets, and stars, the ages obtained are millions, and, in some cases, billions of years. These measurements are constantly being revised, and the theories behind them undergo continual adjustment. Unlike the unchanging truth of Holy Scripture, knowledge in science is constantly changing.

The fact that these measurements are made by error-prone, sinful humans and that they are based on theo-

ries that are also subject to error means that we can be certain none of the knowledge gained through science is perfect. This does not mean, however, that the measurement of Earth's age as 4 billion years is the result of bad science.

There are many different measurement techniques that give this same answer. Science must report the answer that the experiment gives. The dating given is the best that science can do at the present time. It is certainly possible that some future discovery will render all our scientific ideas about the age of Earth and the universe wrong, but the science that produced these measurements is the same that has produced the technological world in which we live.

So, these measurements are "good science" by human standards, and the confidence level of the scientific community in them is high. Measuring the age of a rock as millions of years does not necessarily put science in conflict with the biblical account of creation, however, no matter how it might seem at first glance.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod teaches that "God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Gen. 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word, and in six days" ("Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod"). Science measures the "age" of a rock; it does not measure when it was created.

In the biblical account of creation, Adam and Eve are created as adults (perhaps with an age of 25 years?). In the same way, it may be possible that as few as 6,000 years ago, God created an "adult" world—one with an age of 4 billion years. Were this the case, all scientific measurements will give Earth's age as 4 billion years. Science cannot distinguish between a creation that

took six days or one that *appears* to have taken 15 billion years (the astronomical age of the universe).

We humans need to admit that we simply don't understand creation.

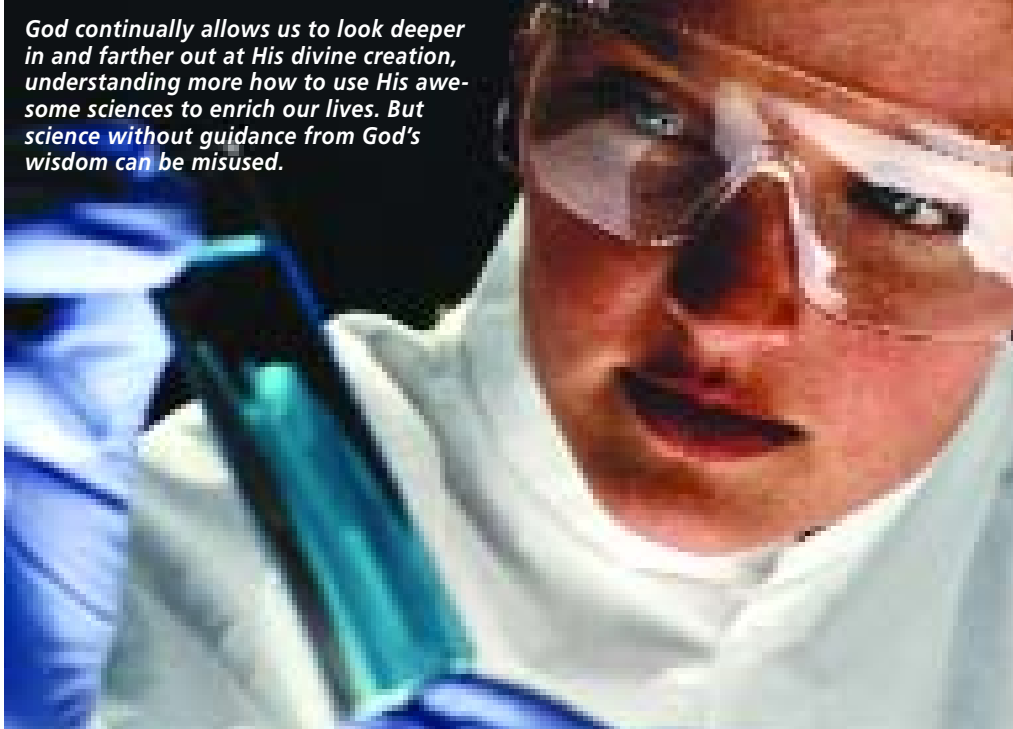
God is Lord of time. "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8).

There is no limit to the amount of work God can do in a single day. It

place He built for us. God-centered science also can help us understand how to be good stewards of the natural world.

I have spent much of my life studying science. Every article I read increases my awe of the marvelous universe God has created.

I also see the finger of God constantly pushing creation in our favor. Scientists, like many others,



*God continually allows us to look deeper in and farther out at His divine creation, understanding more how to use His awesome sciences to enrich our lives. But science without guidance from God's wisdom can be misused.*

is impossible for science to distinguish between an adult world that God created 6,000 years ago and one that He built over time using the laws we now see in place around us. But we can be absolutely certain that God created everything in the universe, including the fossilized dinosaur bones whose age we measure to be 100 million years. For us to expect to understand how He did this is complete folly on our part.

### *God's wondrous works*

Science that is God centered and truly listens for His "voice" as expressed in the physical world can help us better see how special a

often have done a very poor job of witnessing and telling people about the wondrous works of God. We could do better—including giving witness to the greatest work of all (and one that is revealed not in creation, but in God's Word), that of sending His Son to die so that we humans, God's special creation, might have true life.



*Dr. John Gault is professor of physics at Missouri Valley College and a member of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, both in Marshall, Mo.*



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# HANDICAPPED LUTHERANS

*Matt may have Down syndrome, but he is not handicapped when it comes to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

by Ray Schkade

**W**hy are so many congregations in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod failing to reach lost souls for Christ?

Is it because there are no lost in their communities? Hardly.

Is it because the Holy Spirit has lost His power to convert sinners? Absolutely not!

The early Christians took seriously their task from Christ to be His witnesses to the lost. They had no witnessing handicap, no speech impediment, no fear to tell the Good News of Jesus even in the face of death threats. Their passionate response to the command to stop their witnessing for Christ was a clear example for us, “We cannot help speaking of what we have seen and heard.” They “proclaimed the Word wherever they went.”

## *What’s the problem with so many Lutherans and Lutheran churches today?*

They may have been lacking in wealth, power, security, influence, and authority—but when the heathen world heard their passionate witness concerning Jesus the Christ, the Holy Spirit turned the world upside down.

So what’s the problem with so many Lutherans and Lutheran churches today?

Permit me to suggest what I consider to be the problem: Handicapped Lutherans!

My dictionary defines “handicap” as “a hindrance or impediment.”

Being spiritually mute when it comes to daily witnessing opportunities is a handicap that has crippled our

church and diminished our passion for saving the lost.

I am thrilled and ashamed. Thrilled that I have seen many doors open for the work of the Spirit in my personal witnessing. Ashamed of my past Lutheran handicap of silence as I think back to the years of lost opportunities.

I am retired after more than 12 years as a parish pastor and some 30 years as a district evangelism executive. My wife, Kathryn, and I live in the small country town of Giddings, Texas, where we belong to Immanuel Lutheran Church. Our associate pastor, Rev. Matthew Hoffmann, asked me to work with him in evangelism. How exciting for me to work with a young pastor with a passion for reaching the lost and is making evangelism the number-one priority of the congregation with the full support of our senior pastor, Rev. John Davis.

I asked 28-year-old Matthew Siegmund to be my evangelism team partner. When we joined Immanuel,

I noticed this young man who always welcomed us with a big smile, and he and I established a warm friendship during Sunday morning Bible class.

Although Matt has Down syndrome, it was obvious that he is *not* a handicapped Lutheran. He is always ready to give a witness concerning his trust in Christ and his love for Christ’s church.

What an inspirational partner Matt is. This Christian man lives in the country with his parents, John and Eunice, some 10 miles from Giddings. He has two jobs in Giddings, one in a grocery store and the other at a public school.

I have never met anyone who is so well known and so well respected in a community as Matt. I told him that I would be his campaign manager to be the mayor of Giddings, since everyone knows and loves him. He just laughed and reminded me that the present mayor is

**Matthew Siegmund, left, and the author plan their evangelism calls. When Matt was featured in an article in the Giddings Times & Voice two years ago, he talked about his love for sports, for his work and the people he meets. He also told the reporter, "I like going to Communion for forgiveness of my sins."**

a friend of his. What an honor it is to be with this honest, genuine child of God who always has a smile and is ready to give a witness to anyone who will listen.

In order to be ready for an evening of calling, he walks from the workplace to his grandparents' home, carrying a change of clothes. He is ready and waiting when I pick him up.

Matt and I have become an effective evangelism team, partnering with the Holy Spirit as we share Christ with prospects.

One of our first calls together was to a young man who had recently moved to Giddings. He warmly invited us into his home, and he told us that he previously had had a bitter experience in another denomination, but he knew nothing about the Lutheran Church. He had never been baptized. At just the right moment, Matt witnessed about the importance of Christ in his life, and he shared his experience when he underwent heart surgery. He spoke about the comforting presence of Immanuel's pastor in the hospital room and the confidence he had that Christ was with him during the surgery.

The Spirit of God moved this unchurched man to attend adult instruction class, and he has

expressed his desire to be baptized.

During the months we have been calling, four unchurched people have accepted the invitation to attend adult instruction, and two have started attending the congregation's young married couples group.

*Matt is always ready to give a witness concerning his trust in Christ and his love for Christ's church.*

Matt gained greater admiration from me when it quickly became apparent that no matter what previous plans he had, *everything* is secondary to visiting unchurched prospects. Matt is a sports fanatic, a walking sports encyclopedia, a fan who never misses a televised base-

ball game ... unless he receives a phone call to make an evangelism visit. There is no hesitation in his enthusiastic "Yes," even during the World Series.

I believe God is using Matt to teach me a thing or two about per-

sistence in witnessing. One evening, we encountered a locked gate, preventing us from making the call. I told Matt that we would need to call the family and make an appointment for a visit on another day. But his sense of urgency for witnessing to the lost prompted him to suggest we



*Matt Siegmund welcomes Angele Fitzhenry and her son, Kade, to church on a recent Sunday morning. Angela and her husband, Derek Fitzhenry, joined Immanuel Lutheran Church after a visit from the evangelism team. Derek coaches the Giddings High School football team and Matt is the team manager.*



request to use the phone at the near-home of a family he knew and ask to visit that evening.

I rejected his suggestion, convinced that postponing the visit was a better plan. But now my conscience was pestering me. Did I postpone the call because my plan was better, or because I didn't have the nerve to be as bold and courageous as Matt? Was God teaching me, through Matt, that while I have made progress in overcoming my Lutheran handicap, I still have a way to go?

A prominent church leader once said: "The greatest obstacle to the evangelization of the world is professing, creed-proclaiming Christians who have ... the form of religion without the power thereof, Christians who think that belief is enough ... Christians who are far more concerned to spend time in

sweet fellowship with each other than they are to spend their lives in seeking to touch and heal those outside the faith. An uninvolved orthodox piety is a heresy."

Years ago, a devoted Christian U.S. senator in a speech to church leaders emphasized the importance of each Christian's personal witness. "What is most needed is individual, personal involvement in situations where we demonstrate the concern and compassion Christ imparts to us. We must engage ourselves personally in sharing with others our experience of God's love. ... The church was never meant to be a fortress that protects its members from the perils of the outside world. Rather, the church is nothing more than those believers who gather to strengthen and encourage one

another for their involvement with the world."

Dear Lord, thank You for the gift of eternal life through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. We request divine healing for all of us in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who are suffering from the handicap of silence in our failure to witness to lost sinners. Perform the miracle of witnessing boldness with each of us, give us a passion for reaching the lost for Christ through our witness in word and deed. In Christ's name and for the sake of the lost. Amen.



*Ray Schkade, former pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas, and Texas District executive director of parish services, is now retired in Giddings, Texas.*

# THE FORGIVEN FORGIVE

by Armand J. Boehme

What do we mean when we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us"?

Does this mean that *as* we forgive others, Christ will forgive us? Does this mean that *if* we forgive others, Christ will forgive us? Does it mean that only those who are forgiven by Christ are able to forgive others?

What did Jesus mention *first* in this petition (read Matt. 6:12), our need to be forgiven, or the forgiveness we give others?

What do each of the following verses say about why even Christians need forgiveness?

Ps. 51:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Eph. 2:1-3 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 7:18-20 \_\_\_\_\_

What do these verses tell you about how the forgiveness of sins was won for us?

1 John 1:7 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 2:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 2:24 \_\_\_\_\_

Titus 3:5-7 \_\_\_\_\_

We don't receive God's forgiveness of our sins *because* or *after* we forgive others. That would be a theology of works. Rather we receive God's forgiveness because of *Christ's saving work*—His sinless life, death, and resurrection.

Christ's saving work is the cause of the forgiveness we pray for in this petition. And God gives penitent sinners that forgiveness in Word and Sacrament.

How does the forgiveness that Christ earned for us actually become ours? The following verses give us the answer.

Matt. 26:26-28 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 2:38 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 1:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Eph. 2:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

What, according to Luke 23:34, was Christ's prayer for those who nailed Him to the cross?

What was Stephen's prayer for those who were stoning him to death?

Acts 7:59-60 \_\_\_\_\_

What does Christ tell us to do, even for *our enemies*, in Matt. 5:43-44?

What has Christ done for us— we who were His enemies because of our sins?

Read Rom. 5:8-10 \_\_\_\_\_

If we fail to share God's loving forgiveness with those who have sinned against us, what does God tell us we risk losing in Matt. 6:14-15?

What does God want His forgiven people to do according to Eph. 4:31-32? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the source of such Christian living and forgiving according to the end of Verse 32 in Ephesians 4? \_\_\_\_\_

We don't earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, Christ's sinless life, suffering, death, and glorious resurrection have earned forgiveness for us. God forgives sinners like us solely because of His grace and mercy centered in what Christ has done for us. However, God does warn us that we can drive His forgiveness out of our hearts and lives by willfully failing to forgive those who have sinned against us (Matt. 6:14-15 and 18:31-35).

Christ's perfect forgiveness pardons our imperfect attempts to forgive others. It is Christ alone who is able to forgive perfectly and to change our unforgiving heart to make it loving and forgiving. Living by faith in Christ, we are enabled to forgive and love even those who have sinned against us, trusting in His grace to forgive and pardon us for all eternity.



Rev. Armand J. Boehme is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Waseca, Minn.

## NEW RESOLUTIONS ... OR NEW OPPORTUNITIES?

Every January brings a rash of New Year's resolutions. Some will see relative success. Others are doomed for failure. After all, except for particular health reasons, *who really wants to give up ice cream?*

As one ponders New Year's resolutions, one might conclude that new *resolutions* should be given less priority, and more attention should be given to new *opportunities*. Despite the word "new," new *resolutions* often are based on what we already know and have a past focus that may or may not change in the future. New *opportunities*, on the other hand, have a forward focus and are guaranteed to be new because they are yet to be revealed.

Opportunities have an element

*May God truly shower us  
with new opportunities in  
this new year—including the vision to  
see them and the courage to seize them.*

of surprise. They do not have such baggage as, "We've never done it that way before." After all, a real opportunity is something that has never before been done at all. So as we begin this new year, I appeal to you, the people and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, to commit to pursuing *new opportunities* for the mission of our Lord.

Opportunities are revealed by God and stem from the newness granted in Christ. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). The new-

ness of Christ causes us to look at the world around us in a new way—looking for opportunities to let our light so "shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

Every day is a new day with new opportunities. However, if we are not attuned to look for the opportunities God provides for witness to His name, we can become stuck in our old resolves and miss the surprise opportunities He places before us. For individuals, this may be the opportunity to speak an encouraging word from our gracious God to someone in turmoil, or to befriend someone who does not believe in Jesus. For congregations, this may be an opportunity to reach out to

new families or even new people groups who have moved into the community.

- The Magi saw a new opportunity when they "saw his star in the east" (Matt. 2:2) and

came to worship Jesus.

- Jesus saw a new opportunity at the wedding in Cana "when the wine was gone" and later said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water" (John 2:3,7).

- Peter saw a new opportunity when the Lord revealed to him concerning the men sent by Cornelius, "Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (Acts 10:20).

- God continues to provide new opportunities in mission today, for individuals and for congregations, to further the kingdom of God.

A major emphasis for our



church recommended by the Mission 21st Century Task Force and adopted at our LCMS convention last summer is for our congregations to view themselves as "mission outposts" in this country. To do so will require understanding that God has placed new opportunities for mission all around us in an ever-changing culture.

It is my hope and prayer that this new way of looking at a congregation's role and purpose in our society will move beyond resolution and blossom into opportunity. I pray by the power of the Holy Spirit that we will rise up as the redeemed people of God in Christ, grasping every opportunity to share the Gospel message of Jesus, who "makes everything new" (ref. Rev. 21:5).

May God truly shower us with new opportunities in this new year—including the vision to see them and the courage to seize them. To God alone be the glory in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior and Lord!

**Jerry Kieschnick**

*Lives Transformed through Christ,  
in Time ... for Eternity!*

John 3:16–17

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