



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

## ABORTION AND THE SEASON OF EASTER

In early March, the federal government overturned a ban made by the previous Howard government in 1996 that prohibited Australian foreign aid to support abortion in overseas nations. At the time Alexander Downer was Foreign Minister.

The current Labor Foreign Minister Stephen Smith announced the change after a government review and pressure from both Labor and coalition MPs. Australian tax-payer money will now be used to fund murders, just as it is in our own country today.

This time of the year, through the Lenten and Easter seasons, we remember the walk our Lord made that led Him to the cross. We remember His dying and suffering for us, and on the third day triumphantly rising from the grave. But all this could not have happened if at first He had not been born.

Early in his gospel, Luke foretells the birth of Jesus (1:26-37). Paying close attention to this section of Scripture, you soon realise that Luke is not talking about the birth of Jesus, but His conception. This observance is called "the Annunciation" because this news was announced to Mary by God's angel. The Annunciation marks the beginning of Mary's pregnancy, a very special pregnancy. Mary was pregnant with God.

The Angel Gabriel promises two things to Mary: "You will be with child" - that is, conceive, become pregnant, and "You will give birth to a Son" (v.31). He also says, "The holy One to be born will be called the Son of God" (v.35).

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to become the mother of a child, Mary was also told that Elizabeth had conceived, so she hurried to pay a visit to her aged relative. Mary journeyed from her own city of Nazareth to the hill country of Judea. Elizabeth calls Mary, "the mother of my Lord" (v.43). Elizabeth is saying that Mary is at this very moment of their meeting the mother of the Lord God. But it is also worthy of note that, since Mary left immediately to visit Elizabeth, Jesus was no bigger than the point of a pin and maybe had not yet implanted in Mary's uterine wall! This is who Elizabeth is referring to as her Lord and God.

Mary was pregnant with God. She had to be. Our salvation depends on it. Psalm 51 tells us that we were conceived and born in sin (v.5). Isaiah tells us that all the good deeds we do are nothing but "filthy rags" (64:6). Paul tells us that the wages of our sins is death (Rm 3:23)

and all we deserve is the wrath and punishment of God (Eph 2:3).

Beginning with His conception, Jesus passed through all those stages for us. He took our place in the womb and in birth, redeeming us from our sinful beginning. He took our place as He lived His life for us by covering the filthy rags of our deeds with His perfect deeds. He took our place on the cross, redeeming us from the punishment of Hell. He took our place in the grave and rose again, redeeming us from the sting of death and giving us sure and certain hope. If we understand that Mary was pregnant with God, then that gives an even greater meaning to such passages from Hebrews that tell us Jesus was made like us in every respect - right down to developing in the womb - except that He was without sin. (2:14; 4:15).

We can learn something else from Mary's pregnancy. It teaches us of God's great love for human life. God was involved in the conception of His Son and He was involved in yours too. Scripture says that His hands knit you together in your mother's womb (Ps 139:13). His hands shaped and formed you in the womb (Isa 44:2). You are not the product of some biological assembly line, but individual persons made by God Himself. That gives your life value, and this value does not depend on how well you can see, hear, walk, talk or think, or on how you look or feel, or even on your health or the absence of suffering in your life. You are valuable to God because He has made you and has loved what He has made so much that He was conceived in a womb, born in a stable, suffered on a cross, and buried in a tomb. Then He rose again to say "Yes" to it all, to say "Yes" to you, to give you His victory over death and the grave. We remember this great sacrifice for us through the seasons of Lent and Easter. God has so much love for mankind that He has paid such a high price for you with His precious blood. He has redeemed you. God loves life from the moment of conception. Life is the work of His creating hands. Life is the work of His redeeming hands.

As we look at God's great love for life, as we see how every life from the moment of conception is a life created by God, for which Jesus Christ died, how can we not love life? Yet in our own country we have limited our love to those who are born. It appears that the unborn are forgotten. Even Christians and Christian churches have fallen prey to thinking that a baby in the womb is somehow less worthy of our love. In fact, according to many in the medical profession, in the first three months



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

of a child's life, the child is called a "foetus," which apparently is not human. Many churches make such comments as: "Abortion, well, that's a political issue that doesn't belong in the church." "Abortion is a social problem, and we are just here to spread the Gospel." "Abortion, well, I'm personally opposed to it, but I must defend the right of a woman to choose." Many have bought into the lie of this "choice" without taking the time to consider what this choice does to a child created by God, for whom Jesus died.

God loves life from the moment of conception. So how can we also not love life from the moment of conception? However, our love cannot stop there. Standing up for the value of human life must be more than being against abortion. It also means loving everybody. It means being "For Life" in all stages and conditions. It means having compassion on those caught up in difficult situations and on those who have made mistakes. It means doing all we can to prevent people from getting into these situations. We need to treat our young people with respect and help them understand that they can make good, God-pleasing choices. They can choose to love their future spouses right now before even knowing who they are, by saving themselves for that person in marriage. When mistakes happen, we need to react with compassion, not condemnation. There needs to be loving, Christian support.

There is another area that calls for a great deal of Christian compassion. There are a tremendous number of women and men who are filled with guilt, despair, and hopelessness because of an abortion decision. Abortion seems such a quick, easy answer. The great abortion lie says, "You really don't have any other choice, but don't worry, it won't hurt much, and it will all be over soon." We can see three lies in this thinking. There are alternatives to abortion, alternatives that give life. Abortion hurts a lot. It hurts physically, it hurts emotionally, and it hurts spiritually. It will not be over soon. Currently, approximately 90,000 abortions are performed in Australia each year. This compares with approximately 250,000 live births a year, meaning there is around one abortion for every 2.8 live births. More abortions occur in the 30-34 year old age group than in the 15-19 year age category, indicating that the high rate is not necessarily a factor of sex education. There are 811 abortion-providers with 205 public hospitals providing abortions. Some "career" abortionists are raking in Medicare rebates – 11 doctors do more than 2,000

Medicare-funded abortions each year; that's an average 38.5 abortions a week or nearly 8 per day (if a 5 day working week). The pressure to have an abortion in our society is extremely great. There is pressure from husbands, boyfriends, parents, friends, and even counsellors. So many women entering abortion clinics really do not want to be there. That is why the emotional and spiritual consequences of an abortion are so high.

People who are hurting because of wrong choices do not need the condemnation of the church or of the pro-life community. They need compassion. They need to hear over and over again the love of God in sending Jesus, who would save His people from their sins. These issues are causing a lot of pain and a lot of hurt. They give God's people tremendous opportunity, not just to stand up and call wrong things wrong, but also to declare with compassion what God has done in Jesus to bring hope to those who have done wrong things. What better time of the year can you have than right now, in the Easter season, to tell of the glorious, redeeming work of the Saviour, Jesus Christ?

PZ

## RESEARCH ON STEM CELLS FROM HUMAN EMBRYOS

President Obama's recent approval of scientific experimentation on stem cells from human embryos raises serious ethical questions.

If you were told that you were going to suffer from Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, or diabetes, would you agree in advance to accept medication developed from stem cells that were derived from human embryos? Such stem cells, you would be told, result from in vitro conception, and were otherwise going to be discarded.

Research on adult stem cells has already provided proven results. Stem cells from adult blood, bone, marrow, fat, and so on, as well as from discarded human umbilical cords and placentas do not result in the deaths of human embryos.

Let me put my conviction that I would refuse treatment that used stem cells from human embryos. The scientific work on this is in any case nowhere near developed. That form of research has not provided any cures. Human life begins at conception. It is protected by God's command, "You shall not murder!" God's intention for every human being is that it should be redeemed from sin and receive eternal life through faith



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

in Jesus Christ (Jn 3:16). Approval of experimentation and reception of cures that would result from the destruction of tiny human lives is tantamount to approval of the murder involved. It is not right to consent to the murder of one human being on the basis that it might help another.

We can be sure, in any case, that, if experimentation on stem cells harvested from destroyed human embryos did prove to be successful in treating disease, the demand for experimentation for more cures would soon deplete the banks of stored embryos; and the next step would be the deliberate creation of embryos that would be destroyed for more research. The desire of private medical firms for big dollars would certainly drive lobbying for more experimentation.

Procedures that include the destruction of human embryos contradict the biblical view of children as God's gift (Ps 127:3-5). People who oppose embryonic stem cell research should announce their convictions even at disadvantage to their own possible well-being (1 Thess 5:22). God's love for us in Christ must motivate us to help and support our neighbours (1 Jn 4:10, 19). We have the duty to speak up for the weak and helpless (Prv 31:8-9). We must maintain God's love and care for every human being (Ps 139:13-16). If we have a debilitating condition or disease, and the question of treatment with stem cells comes up, we should therefore refuse stem cells that come from human embryos.

CP

## IS THE TRUTH DETERMINED BY FELLOWSHIP?

Towards the close of the debates about lay consecration, one correspondent said that we should not be quoting what a certain person had written on the subject, because he was not in our fellowship. So the question should be asked, "Do fellowship-relationships decide who has a right to be heard, or does fellowship rest on what is true?" Just putting the question in that way makes the answer obvious. Fellowship rests on the truth of God's Word, and is created by it. People who reply dismissively with, "Who is Dr so and so?" are less likely to arrive at the truth, and more likely to become increasingly obscurantist. We ought to scrutinise under the light of Scripture and the Confessions whatever people in our own fellowship and in other fellowships are saying. God's truth has the power to correct false views. Our primary duty is to proclaim God's truth.

What is the best way to defend a lion? Let it out! It will defend itself.

CP

## A REPORT FROM MARBURG AND MINDEN

Life goes on in our parish. We have anywhere from 45 to 76 members at worship on a Sunday and financially we are holding our own. Lenten services are offered every Wednesday in Marburg, Minden, or Lowood. The youth group continues to meet every month and Bible Study is a regular feature of our meetings, as well as having a lot of fun. I am also holding a number of small catechesis classes at present, and we look forward to four weddings around the parish before the end of the year.

We are moving on into the future God has for us, albeit with smaller numbers, but continuing to "hold sacred ground" with the help of God. We have been hurt by all that has happened, but God is teaching us what it means to suffer for the faith, and there are spiritual truths learned by going through such valleys that are precious indeed.

MH

## ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ACCOUNTS OF JESUS' PASSION AND RESURRECTION

(For the actual questions, refer to the February Newsletter 2009)

1. It must have been close to midnight when the arresting party arrived at Gethsemane. The fire for warmth and crowing of the rooster give other indications of the lateness of the hour during Jesus' first trial.
2. Jesus had not said that He would destroy His body. "Destroy" in Jn 2 is imperative. He had also said nothing about a temple made with hands and another not made with hands. "Three days" were included in the mockery at the cross, and were the reason for the request for a guard at the tomb.
3. The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus was a miracle-worker, and were afraid of Him. Judas probably told them that Jesus was repeatedly talking about His death, and so was not likely to defend Himself.
4. Jesus and His disciples had been staying at nights at Bethany. Some of the disciples were probably at the home of Martha, and the rest, perhaps, nearby.
5. The women named were Mary (the mother of Jesus), Mary Magdalene, Mary (the wife of Clopas and mother of James the younger and Joses), Salome (the mother of James and John), and Joanna (the wife of Chusa).



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

6. Judas would have heard Jesus' three explicit predictions of His death and resurrection, Jesus' prediction in Mt 26:2, and Jesus' linking of Mary's anointing Him to His burial.
7. Jesus told His disciples that He would meet them in Galilee after He had risen while they were on the way out to Gethsemane (Mk 14:28).
8. An unnamed young man had also been following Jesus and the Eleven on their way to Gethsemane (Mk. 14:51). Some think that Mark was referring to himself.
9. The nine disciples most likely fled eastwards, towards Bethany. They were unlikely to go further, because some of their womenfolk were still in Jerusalem.
10. It seems likely that one of the leaders of the Jewish Council, perhaps Caiaphas, had visited Pilate late on Thursday night to get an assurance that Pilate would endorse a death-sentence and come outside the Praetorium early on the Friday morning to ratify the sentence.
11. Pilate appears as an obstinate man in his refusal to change the title over Jesus' cross and to grant the request for a Roman guard at the tomb.
12. Although it was early when Jesus was taken into the palace, Pilate came outside to the Jews with a formal demand for their accusation. The dream of Pilate's wife must have been prompted by a discussion between her and Pilate before she had gone to bed.
13. Pilate's wife and the centurion at the crucifixion both called Jesus a righteous man.
14. The message of Pilate's wife to Pilate shows that she feared that Pilate he might mishandle Jesus' case because he feared trouble with the Roman emperor. Pilate's protector or patron Sejanus had fallen from power in AD 31 because he had been plotting against the emperor. The connections of Pilate's wife to high society at Rome made Pilate's position dangerous.
15. The charge that Jesus was claiming to be a king was more serious than that Jesus was perverting the nation or that He opposed payment of taxes. When the Jews reminded Pilate, "Everyone who makes himself a king is speaking against Caesar," his indecision ceased.
16. Joanna's husband Chusa was the manager of Herod's household (Lk 8:3). Since Herod was in Jerusalem, Chusa would have been on official duties, which would probably have involved Joanna as well.
17. It is most likely that Salome was Mary's sister, so that James and John, in the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, were Jesus' first cousins. That would explain Salome's request for high positions for her sons in Jesus' kingdom and the disputes among the disciples about greatness. By the time John wrote his Gospel, he had learnt Jesus' lesson about humility. In it he nowhere referred by name to his aunt Mary, his own mother Salome, James, or himself (only obliquely as the one whom Jesus loved), and he mentioned Zebedee only once, when he could hardly have avoided it (Jn 21:2).
18. Jesus entrusted His mother Mary to John, who apparently was Mary's nephew and Jesus' first cousin.
19. Martha and Mary of Bethany were probably not present because news may not have spread to Bethany yet, and because, characteristically, Martha would have been serving the nine disciples, who had, probably, fled to Bethany.
20. Salome (Mary's sister and John's mother) would very likely have gone away from the place of crucifixion with Mary and John.
21. The disposal of Jesus' body before Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate was under Roman control. Technically, after Pilate gave permission to Joseph, it was no longer a Roman responsibility.
22. Pilate's statement, "You have a guard" meant that the guard posted at the tomb came from the Jewish temple guard.
23. The guard did not report to Pilate, but to the Jewish authorities. The Jews promised to put in a word for the guard if Pilate heard about their alleged sleeping on duty.
24. Mary (the wife of Clopas) was the mother of James and Joses, and Salome was the mother of James and John. So probably both were approaching fifty. Middle-aged women do not often run fast or far. Mary Magdalene was probably younger.
25. Hymn 768 is mistaken. Although there were three Marys at the cross, on Easter morning Mary (Jesus' mother) was not at the tomb with the others. Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas were.
26. The women were the most likely of Jesus' followers to visit His tomb for a last tribute because they were women.
27. Mary Magdalene said, "We do not know where they have laid Him" (Jn 20:2).
28. Acts and the Epistles make no reference to the women at the empty tomb because no one contested the fact that the tomb was empty. Besides, a report that admitted the presence of some of Jesus' followers at



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

the tomb early on Sunday morning might have given credence to the Jews' lie that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body.

29. The day after the Preparation was the Saturday, the Sabbath (Mt 26:62). The Jewish authorities were not likely to have sealed Jesus' tomb until after the Sabbath had passed, on Saturday evening.
30. Jesus' tomb was right there in Jerusalem. In his sermon at Jerusalem in Acts 2, Peter mentioned David's grave at Jerusalem, and contrasted the decay of David's body with the fact that Jesus' body did not decay.
31. The young man in Mark 14:51 had quite possibly heard Jesus' words in 14:28. However, since he had fled in fear from the temple guard, he is not likely to have risked confronting them again. The words in Mk 14:7 are similar to those in Mt 28:7, which were spoken by an angel. An angel can appear in the form of a young man.
32. On Easter day, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, the other women, Peter, the two disciples going to Emmaus, and to the Eleven (without Thomas) and those who were with them.

CP

Newsletter's Address:

The Editor, AELC Newsletter  
1 Fiona St, Kingsthorpe Qld 4400  
cpriebbe@bigpond.net.au

The Newsletter is for and on behalf of the Australian  
Evangelical Lutheran Church

Newsletter Management Committee:

Pastor Clarence Priebbenow (Editor)

Pastor Peter Ziebell

Pastor Mark Hampel

Paul Hoopert

[www.aelc.org.au](http://www.aelc.org.au)