

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY,

31 October 2021

Reformation Day

HYMNS: 138 324 368 294 328 195

INTROIT:

God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in troubles.
Therefore we shall not be afraid, though the earth quakes, and the mountains totter into the midst of the seas; though its waters roar and foam, and the mountains shake with their raging.

There is a river, the water-channels of which make the city of God rejoice, the holy place, the sanctuary of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her, she will not totter; God will help her when the morning appears.

Nations rage, kingdoms totter; He utters His voice, the earth melts.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Come, see some of the works of the LORD, the awesome things that He has brought on the earth!

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in pieces; He burns the chariots with fire.

"Stop, and know that I am God; I shall be exalted among the nations, I shall be exalted in the earth."

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46

COLLECT: Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS Revelation 14:6-7 The messages of the three angels.

Romans 3:19-28 Declared righteous through faith.

Matthew 11:12-19 Messengers from John the Baptist.

SERMON: Matthew 11:12-19 WISDOM IS PROVED RIGHT BY HER ACTIONS

Jesus Christ gives Eternal Life

Today we celebrate what we call the Reformation. Historians say that this Reformation was begun by Martin Luther, when he posted 95 statements to debate on a cathedral door (common practice then, like putting garage sale signs on power poles now). Since the printing press had been invented not too long before this, these were printed and distributed throughout northern Europe with many people agreeing with Luther. This finally led to division in the Roman Catholic Church with especially German-speaking people becoming Lutherans and other Europeans becoming Protestants (this is oversimplifying what happened, but this is to be a Christian “Message”, not an article about history).

However, history has to be recognised, as it shows that Luther didn’t really begin this “re-formation” of the church. There had been other “reformers” in previous centuries, who had preached against various abuses and false theologies. Among them were St. Francis of Assisi, Savonarollo, Jan Hus, and John Wycliffe – their efforts started already back in the 1200s. Luther recognised the efforts of at least some of them, and also recognised them as fellow citizens in God’s kingdom and so part of “the communion of saints,” which we confess each time we speak the Apostles’ Creed.

“The communion of saints” is the whole family of God through faith in Jesus as Saviour: those now alive in this life and those who are alive beyond death in eternal life. “The communion of saints” is sometimes called “the Church on earth and the Church in heaven,” because the Bible teaching is that if you trust in Jesus for forgiveness, you are already a “saint,” one of God’s children. “Saints” are not only in heaven; they (including us) are also here on earth – our challenge is to live as a saint, as much as possible, since this Christian life is praise to God.

The “communion of saints” is what Hebrews 12:22-24 is all about. There, the writer proclaims, *“Rather, you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to tens of thousands of angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the first-born, whose names have been written in heaven. You have come to the Judge, the God of all, to the spirits of righteous people who have been made perfect, to Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”*

This is what we already are a part of, even though still sinners here on earth. This was the God-given truth which the Reformation made clear again, just as the writer of Hebrews was inspired to make clear to the Christians of Jewish background then.

No one knows for sure who wrote Hebrews, but we do know why. Many Jews had become Christians, in fact, in those first months only former Jews converted to faith in Jesus as the Promised One who had come – only gradually did even the apostles reach out to non-Jews (Gentiles) with the Gospel. As the number of believers grew, they began to be persecuted – by the Jews and then by the Romans. However, in some of

these persecutions only Gentile Christians were attacked – Jewish Christians were not.

And so many Jewish Christians were being tempted to give up their faith in Jesus and just be satisfied with the Jewish religion. Hebrews was written to try to keep them from falling back into that unbelief, that rejection of Jesus as God's Promised Saviour.

In order to explain this in ways these former Jews could most easily understand, the writer of Hebrews took rituals and incidents, which they knew from Scripture (our Old Testament, their "sacred Scriptures") to explain to them the "new covenant" (in Jesus – in contrast to the "old covenant", which God had established at Mt. Sinai.

In the Exodus the Israelites had experienced God's Presence with great fear. Mt. Sinai apparently became an active volcano: "*burning with fire, darkness, gloom and storms ... a trumpet blast,*" a mountain not even to be touched by human or animal under threat of death (12:18-20). In explaining the meaning of the commandments Luther wrote: "We should fear and love God" – the Old Testament believers sure had the "fear" part of it! By the way, should we obey God because we "fear" Him? I remember being taught that this "fear" actually was "respect." But in reality, it is "fear" in that if we just want to insist on our own instead of God's way, then we had better "fear His wrath and not act contrary to" His commandments. Of course, in these days who even cares about what God says – or threatens? Unbelievers don't care at all! We care, but we act out of "love" for God, thanking Him for His love in Jesus, not because of "fear" (although at times we may need the "slap" of God's threat to turn us away from an evil we may really want to do – such as hating, or refusing to forgive some one). Anyway, the Old Testament people of God mostly had that reaction of fear, carried over from Mt. Sinai.

In contrast, Hebrews says, "*(we) have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*", meaning that we have an eternal blessing, which we enjoy looking forward to already, since – through faith – we are a part of that eternal experience already in that it is assured to us.

But how can that be? I sin! I still sin! Even though I don't want to, yet I do! I sure don't always live like a saint! So how can I be part of that holy assembly of God's people, that "communion of saints"?

I can't! Right! You can't! Not on your own! Instead, we are accepted, since we have come "*to Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament and to the sprinkled blood*" of Jesus! This reference is to the Old Testament practice of sprinkling blood from the sacrifices especially on the altar, but also somewhat on the people. Realistically, not many of the people were touched by that blood, so the assurance of forgiveness might be doubted (am I forgiven?). Now with Jesus there is no doubt! His blood is sprinkled over all my sins and touches me so that "*the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Now there is no doubt: Jesus did pay for me, my debt, my imperfections, my rebellions; so God does forgive me, and God has already counted

me in that number of “*the spirits of righteous people who have been made perfect,*” perfect in God’s Judgment, because He counts the blood of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, as sufficient to take away my sins. Therefore, He sees instead, the perfection given to me from Jesus.

Eternal life belongs to us, not by any of our own efforts, but only through the sacrifice of our Saviour, Jesus Christ!

Welcome to all worshipping with us today! Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922. Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaalc@gmail.com.
Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

COMING SERVICES

7 November All Saints	14 November 25 Pentecost	21 November Last Sunday of the Church Year
10.00am Praise & Thanksgiving service at Bethlehem Lutheran Church (re-dedication of new church) 41 Buckland Street, Toowoomba	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR	8.30am OAK HC Harvest 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.30am GRN HC Harvest 9.00am LOWOOD LR
	9.00am LOWOOD HC Confirmation Service (Thomas Steinhardt) & Harvest Thanksgiving	
Sunday, 7 November		
READINGS: 1 Kings 8:22-30; Revelation 21:1-5; Luke 19:1-10		
HYMNS: 468 440 437 257		
Sunday, 14 November		
READINGS: Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-13 LOWOOD: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 12:13-21		
HYMNS: 735 485 384 510 LOWOOD: 296 563 297 560 293 301		