



THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

October-December 2022

ON THE FULLNESS OF TIME

The Christian Church begins its New Year not with a pagan observance of worldly festivities centring around a mythical god Januarius, seeking to drown the past in wine and lust and peering into a future filled with wishful thinking. No, the Christian begins his New Year with the Advent Season that tells him of the many preparations God has made for his salvation and that of all mankind. He gladly reminds himself of the many prophecies of old foretelling the coming of the Saviour, beginning with the Seed of the woman and leading up to the virgin born Child from the seed of Jesse and David. In the Christmas Season, he is reminded of the climax of God's preparation in the fullness of time by His proclamation on the plains of Bethlehem, "*I am bringing you Good News of great joy, which will be for all the people, because a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord, has been born for you today, in the city of David*" (Luke 2:10-11), and the presentation of the greatest gift in the Christchild in the humble manger of Bethlehem.

All human history leads up to this climax in the fullness of time, offering humankind the most beautiful gift of all, yet least appreciated and grossly overlooked in most Christmas presents throughout the world. It is the task of the Christian Church and its messengers among the clergy and laity to broadcast this message of joy and hope to a sin-ridden world to the very ends of the earth. Our prayer must always be that God's gracious Word will be preached and received in many hearts and homes.

In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul gave wonderful expression to the most marvellous gift of God when he penned those immortal and all comprehensive words, "*When the time had fully come, God sent out His Son, born of a woman*" (4:4). We can imagine our heavenly Father having an hour-glass before Him and watching the trickling of the grains of sand down to the lower half of the glass, and then being obliged to turn the hour-glass around for a new recording of time. He had written these words for the Christians in the Province of Galatia in Asia Minor, but also for us. It is a timeless message intended for all humankind.

Paul had sought to warn the churches in Galatia not to heed the injunctions of the Judaizing Christians who insisted on the keeping of the Law of Moses *in addition to* faith in Christ. He had been weaned away from the law-drenched teachings of the Pharisees. Wholeheartedly had he accepted the Gospel of Christ and was not ashamed of it. He preached and defended it before friend and foe and would not have it adulterated by anyone in any way. If anyone would come and preach any other gospel to them, he would let it be known that he was accursed before God.

Salvation is a pure gift of God to sinful man through the vicarious suffering and death of Christ. It becomes our gift and inheritance through faith in Christ, created in us solely through the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts so that we fully recognise our sinful nature and put our whole trust in Christ and His meritorious suffering and death. Only a heart enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel can fully appreciate the greatest gift of God to all mankind. Only a true Christian will be truly grateful for this most precious gift of the Christchild lying in the manger at Bethlehem, born in the fulness of time as foretold by the prophets of old to the Virgin Mary.

In the first three chapters of his Letter to the Romans, Paul points out how both the Jew and the Gentile, who have the Law of God written into their hearts, and in addition to that the Jew who also had the Law given to Moses written on tablets of stone, have failed to keep the Law of God and are therefore bankrupt before God and all of their righteousness is nothing but filthy rags before God. This Law accuses and condemns both the Jew and the Gentile; yes, it includes all humankind and makes it accountable to God and to stand condemned before Him. Only a living faith in Christ and His vicarious atonement can save man from eternal damnation. Paul summarises this precious truth in another momentous word of his in Romans 3:28, "*For we conclude that a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the Law.*"

Luther grasped this truth as the heart of the Gospel and proclaimed it as the doctrine with which the Church of Christ either stands or falls. That he understood this truth, he proved by his marvellous interpretation of Galatians and also by his unwillingness to alter his translation of Romans 3:28 by not dropping the added word: through faith alone. In the teachings of the Papacy, he saw the continuation of the teachings of the Judaizing Galatian Christians. He also saw in the Papacy the Antichrist because the Church of Rome curses all those who say we are saved through faith in Christ alone and not through added good works. So many Lutherans of our day in the pulpit as well as in the pew fail to follow Luther in this teaching on the Antichrist and thereby reveal that they, too, have forsaken the true Lutheran fold and teaching. Just as little as Paul and Luther would suffer any changing and adulteration of the Gospel, we also must be ready and willing to abide by the pure Word and doctrine if we would be faithful Lutherans, come what may.

Because of their failure to keep the Law of God and Moses, the Jews were declared bankrupt by God. The history of the Old Testament brings out this bankruptcy very clearly. Yet not only are the Jews bankrupt before God in their own righteousness but also the Gentiles stand condemned before God through its teachings and way of

life. Thus, the fullness of time revealed both the bankruptcy of the Jew and the Gentile before God. The measure of man's sins and failures and also the measure of God's wrath over sin were filled to the brim. In order to satisfy God's holiness and hatred of sin, *atonement had to be made*. Since man was bankrupt and could save himself as little as a man could pull himself out of the mire by his own bootstraps, God had to send His Son. He did it in the fullness of time and thereby also revealed His great love for man who would have been lost and without hope apart from Christ. This is the significance of the words of Paul on the fullness of time. They are all-comprehensive. Rarely have mightier words ever been written. It is one of the rare gems of the Holy Scripture.

Only a true Christian will be able to grasp the deep significance of these words of Paul. Only he will also understand the ways of God in history. Everything in this world centres around the salvation of man through Christ and His Gospel. For the spreading of this Gospel God sends out His messengers and heralds into all the world and protects His Church and children everywhere. He sees to it that His true invisible Church is preserved through all times and strife, even though visible kingdoms and churches rise and fall. The manger of Bethlehem and the Cross of Calvary is for us Christians, the key to a correct understanding of all things and the ways of God with man for his salvation.

In the fullness of time God sent His Son into this world. The final fullness will come when all time is ended, and a blessed eternity awaits the faithful believers. The blessed in heaven will enjoy the fullness of those blessings, which God had prepared for all mankind in the fullness of time by the sending of His Son. This Gospel will be preached to all nations as a testimony. A small flock will believe it and cling to it. It fills our hearts with sadness indeed to think and to know that the great majority of mankind rejects this greatest gift of God and His way of salvation.

May we nevertheless keep on preaching this Gospel to the salvation of souls and thus help in bringing in the harvest as long as there is breath in us and as long as the sands of time keep trickling down the hourglass of God's time!

WAS LUTHER THE ANGEL IN REVELATION 14?

The historical Second Reading for the Reformation of the Church is Revelation 14:6-7. There, John writes, "*Then I saw another angel flying in the zenith of the sky. He had the eternal Good News to tell those who are living on the earth and every nation, tribe, language and people*" (v. 6).

Most every Lutheran before the last century believed that the angel or the messenger referred to here in Revelation 14 is the reformer Martin Luther - not that it can be applied to him but that it is, in fact, a singular and direct reference to the man named Martin Luther. Here is what Johann

Bugenhagen preached at Luther's funeral in 1546: "This angel who says, 'Fear God and give him the honour,' was Dr Martin Luther. And what is written here, 'Fear God and give him the honour,' are the two parts of Dr Martin Luther's doctrine, the Law and the Gospel."

C. F. W. Walther preached in a sermon just 177 years ago: "These words from the Revelation of St. John are, as you have already learned on other occasions, a prophecy of the Reformation of the church established by God through Luther three hundred years ago. The angel, the one sent by God, who flew through the midst of heaven is Luther, and the eternal Gospel that he preached is Luther's doctrine."¹

Here's something interesting. I read sermons and commentaries from the last one hundred years, and it is hard to find a single Lutheran in this time who actually still believes that Revelation 14 refers to Martin Luther. That may be the reason that many Lutheran churches no longer use Revelation 14 on the Festival of the Reformation. It's not as persuasive to them, and, after all, Romans 3:19-28 does, in fact, capture the theology of the Reformation in a beautiful way.

However, this change is not, I don't suppose, so much that we finally have a better understanding of the verse. There is no new data or insight. Rather, it is that Bugenhagen and Walther and Lutherans in those days didn't consider it silly or strange or parochial to say that an event as momentous as the Reformation could have been prophesied in the Scriptures. Especially Lutherans at the time of Luther actually believed that Luther, by the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, had set them free from utter bondage.

And that is no small thing.

Walther characterises it this way: "Before [Luther's day], nearly a thousand years of spiritual darkness had settled over all of Christianity... The light of the pure Gospel was lost nearly everywhere... The Book of Books... the Holy Scriptures, lay in the dust, right in the midst of Christianity... All of Christianity was under the yoke of slavery... The anti-Christ, foretold in Scripture, the Pope in Rome, ruled on his throne of Satan... Christianity languished in fearful despair and anxiety. Thousands had, in their previous predicament of sin, cried out in vain, 'What must we do to be saved?' But there was no answer" (Walther, 110–11).

It was really bad. Worse even than war. Worse than food shortage. Worse than nakedness. Our fathers in the faith recognised that it does not get worse, more desperate in this life, than when a man does not know, cannot find, the gracious God revealed at last in the Gospel that Luther discovered in the Scriptures and proclaimed so clearly.

¹ "Reformation Sermon on Revelation 14.6–12 (1845)," Treasury of C. F. W. Walther, tr. Joel R. Baseley, vol. 4 [Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008], 112.

For Luther, the whole anti-Christian system of infused grace, conditional penance, mitigated forgiveness, mystical and philosophical gunk could not satisfy his yearning to know that God was his friend and not his enemy. The Roman Catholic system at the time was well arranged to raise money but not to deliver to a man under the burden of the flesh a clean conscience and confidence in God.

Therefore, God blessed Luther with a wildly penetrating desire to understand the Bible and the heavenly message, and there, not without diligence but surely by God's grace, Luther was relieved at last. Christ is his Saviour from sin. God the Father declares him righteous in love. And Christ is our Saviour too. His death on the cross has taken away our sins, and given us eternal life, despite our sins, entirely apart from any works of ours. No credit belongs to us poor sinners, but all glory for our salvation, our standing, and our confidence belong to God alone. That was Luther's preaching.

Thus, it's not a stretch to conclude, as many Christians have, that Luther was the angel, the messenger, who preached to the entire earth - to *"every nation, tribe, language, and people."* So, we give thanks to God specifically for Martin Luther and his teaching, which reformed the Lord's Church, of which we are members.

We thank God for Martin Luther and the doctrine he proclaimed with such clarity in his day and ours.

Whether he is the angel in these verses may be up for debate, but we don't need to mitigate the importance of the Reformation; after our Lord's life and death and resurrection, after the courageous work of the apostles, the most important event in Church history is the Reformation. We do well to remember it with thanksgiving to God.

R.I.P LCA

In February 2023, the LCA will be holding their General Synod in Melbourne. Once again, the question everyone in that church is asking is, *"What will happen regarding the ordination of women?"* (How long must this go on for!) Perhaps not for much longer. The Bishop of the LCA, Pastor Paul Smith, is pro-women's ordination and is surrounded by many like-minded officials. It appears that the liberal branch of this church now has the numbers and people in the right place to carry out the will of the devil.

Recently, the recent General Pastors Meeting was held in Geelong. It is from here that proposals etc., go on to synod. One of the many things that were discussed was the ever-present motion to delete clause 6.11 of the Thesis of Agreement (Male only pastorate). Of course, this then allows women into the ministry of the LCA. When will these people learn to read their Bibles? Especially 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:12, 3:2.

A proposal also came from the Queensland District that there be one LCA but two practices - a liberal branch and a confessional branch. I believe that this will be the first item of the agenda to be discussed at the synod. If the QLD proposal is debated first and is agreed to, then the proposal to delete 6.11 may not even be discussed. The proposal to delete TA 6.11 would be doctrinal in nature and require a 2/3 majority (really, how can you vote on a doctrinal issue and pass it with a 2/3 majority? When God commands something, surely you don't vote on whether you want to agree or disagree with Him, as though He hasn't made something clear!) whereas the QLD proposal would be of a practical/procedural nature and would possibly require only a simple majority. If that is the case, then the Queensland proposal is likely to be voted in by the laity. One would have to seriously question how long you could have one church with two practices before it becomes two entirely separate synods. Obviously, fellowship does not have high regard in the LCA.

Also, recently, it was reported that the calls of the lecturers to the ALC (Australian Lutheran College) in Adelaide had been cancelled and replaced with a new call to halftime service (they will have their salaries cut by half next year, meaning they must find other sources of income). These lecturers' new calls will also be conditional on the acceptance of *"Towards 2028. Our Strategic Direction,"* a booklet released outlining the future direction of the ALC. While there are many things listed in this booklet that sends alarm bells ringing, one of the listed priorities of the seminary, and one that the lecturers are expected to accept, is listed as **"Work(ing) with the University of Divinity in promoting and developing an ALC contribution to their strategic university-wide goals, namely indigenous theologies, gender and theology, changing culture, climate change and sustainability"** (my emphasis). Already, one lecturer has resigned, and I would not be surprised if others (there are five lecturers at the seminary) will also resign. This is part of the wokeism that is beginning to grow not only throughout Lutheran institutions of learning but throughout many seminaries around the world.

The LCA will not recover from this devilish onslaught. We all have family or close friends who still worship in this church, and truly, some of them are not even aware of what is happening. All we can do is warn them, pray for them, and keep them informed while at the same time, thanking the Lord that we are not part of it! Our eyes were opened many years ago, and things have only gotten worse for the LCA. We must also be on our guard that the AELC does not begin down the path of ecumenism, wokeism, or anything else that diminishes the pure and unadulterated Word of God. We are far from perfect, but we pray that when we er, the Lord will forgive and gently correct us,

continue to lead us, and point others to His Gospel promises. May He do so through the humble service of the AELC!

FROM THE PASTOR

Our Advent/Christmas period has begun! The New Church Year begins on the 1st Sunday in Advent, and it won't be long before we celebrate Christmas. It is a busy time of year but also a joyful one.

Much has happened over the past couple of months. The latest confirmation class are well into their learning and is looking forward to a short break over Christmas. Men's Fellowship, Women's Guild, and Bible Studies are all taking a break until the New Year. Thank you to all who attended these events. We are always looking for more to come along, so make it a priority in the New Year to join us if you can.

The hall renovations at Bethlehem Toowoomba are now complete, and it was fun to hold a concert there early in November. You can see from the couple of pictures on this page that the hall looks pretty good! The concert was recorded, so if anyone would like a DVD, please tell pastor, and he'll organise a copy for you. The concert has also been uploaded in the member's section of the website, www.aelc.org.au. Remember to check out the member's section, where new content is uploaded regularly. If you need the password to log in, ask pastor.

The church at St Paul's Greenwood has also received a new roof after hail damaged the old one a while ago.

Patrick Hensel has now begun his studies for the ministry. He has started online classes in Greek and sit-down lessons with me, reading through a book entitled, "*A Summary of Christian Doctrine.*" These classes will take him well into next year. Please pray for Patrick (and his wife, Jessica).

I continue to meet monthly via Zoom with the pastors of ULMA. Last month I was informed that another independent congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church, Texas, was seeking membership in the ULMA. Their Pastor is Paul Harris. He will be joining us for our December meeting online. If anyone would like to check them out, their website is www.trinityaustin.com.

May you all have a holy and Christ-filled Christmas and a wonderful New Year!

Hoping to see you all in Church!

Pastor



St Paul's Greenwood with it's new roof



The renovated church hall at Bethlehem Toowoomba

