**The Monthly Newsletter of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**Lindy, Nebraska**

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**The Rod and Staff**



**December 2017**

**A Series on the Lutheran Reformation: The Reformation Legacy**

The year 2017 will soon draw to a close. Because the year 1517 is often taken as the symbolic beginning of this time of Reformation, Lutheran churches in our time recognize the year 2017 as the five-hundredth anniversary of this pivotal time in history. Throughout this year, we have explored some key aspects of the life of Martin Luther and the beginning of the Lutheran/Protestant Reformation. But things must come to an end, and as we prepare to turn the calendar to 2018 AD, we now conclude this series.

Of course, being a Lutheran is not simply about Martin Luther. He was an important figure, no doubt, and his contributions to our understanding of faith and human civilization more generally cannot be ignored. Yet as we have seen, Luther was an imperfect person like all of us, every bit as much in need of God’s forgiveness and redemption as we are. And so it is important for us to look a bit beyond Martin Luther in this final reflection of 2017.

After Luther “got the ball rolling” with his work of reformation, things were far from “happily ever after.” The various kingdoms and principalities of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) began taking sides, some loyal to the Church of Rome and some to the evangelical (Lutheran) movement. This was a time when the Emperor Charles V needed unity to face outside challenges, such as the threat of Turkish Muslim invasion of Europe. The Emperor called for an imperial diet (assembly) where the Lutherans could explain their teachings. As Martin Luther had been excommunicated by the Roman Church and condemned by the secular authorities nine years earlier, it fell to Luther’s colleagues to take leadership in this situation.

Luther’s younger colleague Philipp Melanchthon wrote a document that came to be known as the *Augsburg Confession*, for it was in the city of Augsburg, Germany that the imperial diet was held in the year 1530. The presentation of the *Augsburg Confession* on June 25, 1530 is considered by some to be the birthday of the Lutheran Church. This *Augsburg Confession* goes to great pains to demonstrate that the faith of these evangelicals (Lutherans) is in line with the faith of the historic Christian Church and that these Lutherans only changed things in the church that they felt were not faithful to the teachings of the Bible. Hence, Melanchthon did highlight differences between the Lutherans and the Church of Rome, but he also emphasized the things they held in common. The hope was that the Church of Rome would grant recognition to the Lutherans. However, it was not well-received.

Curiously, Philipp Melanchthon was a layperson, meaning that he was not ordained as a pastor. He was a lay theologian, and the people who signed the *Augsburg Confession*, princes and rulers of various kinds throughout Germany, were also laypeople. What this demonstrates is that from a Lutheran point of view, pastors do not own the church. Pastors are a part of the whole body of Christ who are called to serve in a particular and important way. But all Christians together must contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

After the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession*, this document came to take on new significance for the Lutherans. No longer was it a document focused on building bridges with the Church of Rome. It became the primary Lutheran statement of faith. In 1580, it was added to a collection of several other writings in a book called *The Book of Concord*. Just a side note, but the Latin form of the German word “Augsburg” is “Augustana,” and the Latin form of “Concord” is “Concordia.” This is why many Lutheran schools and organizations are named Augustana and Concordia. To this day, when Lutheran pastors are ordained, they pledge to teach and preach in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, the *Augsburg Confession*, and the other documents of the *Book of Concord*.

We see, then, that the Lutheran Reformation did not end with Martin Luther. Many say that Lutherans “broke away” from the Church of Rome, but Lutherans have always understood themselves as a part of the “one holy catholic and apostolic Church” going back to the first apostles. In time, Lutherans did receive some official recognition. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg declared the following rule: He who rules, his the religion. If your ruler happened to be a Lutheran, you were a Lutheran. If your ruler was a Roman Catholic, you were a Roman Catholic.

At the same time, other Protestant movements were beginning to take shape. Many people were inspired by Martin Luther and his work, but they often felt that Luther did not go quite far enough in his work of reform. During the sixteenth century, we see the development of a complex “tree” of various Christian traditions.

It wasn’t until Christians of these various types began coexisting that the modern concept of “denominations” developed. Often, people refer to various “religions” when they actually mean different types of Christian traditions. Because of the time of the Reformation, Christians today find themselves divided into various denominational “families,” such as the Roman Catholic Church, Lutherans, Reformed Christians, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and various others.

As we think about being a Lutheran in the twenty-first century, we also need to reflect on how we relate to other parts of this Christian “family tree.” The late Elson Ruff, who was editor of the *Lutheran Magazine* (at the time a publication of the old United Lutheran Church in America, which Good Shepherd was originally a member of), was asked a question many years ago: “Do Lutherans believe that theirs is the only true religion?” His response was “Yes.” But he went on to say, “But they do not believe they are the only ones who have it. There are true Christian believers in the vast majority of the churches, perhaps in all.”

I have come to believe that Elson Ruff’s comment from some years ago remains valid for us today. As a Lutheran, I value our tradition and believe it to be the best expression of the Christian faith. At the same time, we recognize genuine Christian faith among members of other denominational families, and while not completely agreeing with them on every point of doctrine, we can be grateful that Christ lives among them and in them. And we also recognize in humility that there are some things we can learn from our Christian brethren in other parts of the “family tree.”

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Special Announcements**

* On Sunday December 10, the Second Sunday of Advent, the Sunday School will have their Christmas program as a part of worship at 10:30 AM.
* Also on December 10, the youth group and anyone who would like to come along will meet at the church at 1:00 PM to go Christmas caroling in Bloomfield.
* On Wednesday December 13, the youth group will meet at 7:00 PM.
* Confirmation class will meet for the last time of the year 2017 on Wednesday December 20. We will resume after the turn of the year on January 3.
* This year, December 24 falls on a Sunday. Accordingly, we will have worship in the morning at the usual time as well as the Christmas Eve worship service at 5:00 PM.

**Commemoration of the Saints**

Lutherans do not venerate (pray to) special people called “saints.” Our Lutheran confessional documents speak against that practice. However, those same documents that prohibit the veneration of saints encourage Christian people to look to the lives of significant Christians of the past as a source of encouragement for our lives in the present.

This month, we revisit the life of **Philipp Melanchthon**, Martin Luther’s younger colleague in Wittenberg, Germany. We have already featured him in a previous month, but being as he was mentioned in the introductory article, his life is worth a second look.

Philipp Melanchthon was especially gifted in the area of language, and he is responsible for teaching Luther much of the Greek language, which enabled Luther to translate the New Testament into German. At the same time, Melanchthon was more systematic and less brash that Martin Luther, and he sought out ways to build bridges with Christians of other perspectives. In Wittenberg today, the town square has statues of both Luther and Melanchthon. Whereas Luther’s statue has a quote from Jesus in Mark chapter 1 where he says “Believe in the gospel,” Melanchthon’s statue has a quote from the New Testament letter of Ephesians about “maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” Melanchthon was the author of the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530, which remains today as the primary Lutheran statement of faith. He also wrote what became known as the first Lutheran theological textbook called *Loci Communes*, and for that reason became known as “The Teacher of Germany.”

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

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**Worship Schedule**

**December 3:** First Sunday of Advent with Holy Communion at altar rail (Blue)

**December 10:** Second Sunday of Advent with Sunday School Christmas program (Blue)

**December 17:** Third Sunday of Advent with Holy Communion continuous line (Blue)

**December 24 (Morning):** Fourth Sunday of Advent (Blue)

**December 24 (Evening):** Christmas Eve Worship, 5:00 PM (White)

**December 31:** First Sunday after Christmas (White)

**Christmas Day**

Technically speaking, the Christmas season does not begin until Christmas Eve, when the sun goes down on December 24. Nevertheless, our culture generally considers the whole month of December to be “Christmas.” There is nothing wrong with holiday cheer this time of year, but Christmas Day still stands as a reminder of the most important message of the season: the incarnation of the Son of God as he was born to live among us and be our Savior. Merry Christmas to one and all!

**Featured Hymn for December 2017**

***All My Heart This Night Rejoices***

*Lutheran Hymnal for Church and Home, 118*

1. All my heart this night rejoices, as I hear, far and near, sweetest angel voices; “Christ is born,” their choirs are singing, till the air everywhere now with joy is ringing.
2. Hark, a voice, from yonder manger, soft and sweet, doth entreat, “Flee from woe and danger; brethren, come from all that grieves you, you are freed; all you need, I will surely give you.”
3. Come then, let us hasten yonder, here let all, great and small, kneel in awe and wonder; love him who with love is yearning; hail the star that from far bright with hope is burning.
4. Ye who pine in weary sadness, weep no more, for the door now is found of gladness; cling to Him, for He will guide you where no cross, pain or loss can again betide you.
* Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1675, trans. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-1878

*Note: In this hymn, Paul Gerhardt tells the reason for the joy of Christmas: God has chosen to come among us and abide with us.*

**Monthly Watchword for December 2017**

“Because of the tender mercy of our God…the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

* Luke 1:78-79 ESV

**Ushers for December:**

* Head Ushers:
	+ Carsten and Darci Barger
* Ushers:
	+ Lyle and Myva Scott
	+ Gene Eckmann
	+ Tony and Brenda Petersen
	+ Kris True
	+ Kathy Koops

**For Further Information on LCMC and the NALC:** You can download and read the newsletters of both organizations at the following addresses:

* **http://www.lcmc.net/newsletters**
* **http://thenalc.org/newsletter/**

**Website:** The web address is as follows:

* **www.gselclindy.weebly.com**

**Some Quotes from Martin Luther:**

“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”

“One Christian who has been tried is worth a hundred who have not been tried, for the blessing of God grows in trials. He who has experienced them can teach, comfort, and advise many in bodily and spiritual matters.”

“Just as there is no fire without heat and smoke, so there is no faith without love.”

**From Martin Luther’s Small Catechism:**

**The Ten Commandments: The Sixth Commandment**

*You shall not commit adultery.*

*What does this mean?*

*We should fear and love God so that in matters of sex we are chaste and disciplined in our words and actions, and that a husband and wife love and honor each other.*

**December 2017**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  |  |  |    |  | 1 | 2 |
| 3Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion (altar rail)First Sunday of AdventBlue | 4 | 5 | 6Confirmation class, 5:00 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10Worship, 10:30Sunday School Christmas programBlue | 11 | 12 | 13Confirmation class, 5:00Council meeting, 7:00 PMYouth meeting, 7:00 PM | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion (continuous line)Blue | 18 | 19 | 20Pr. Tom in LindyWomen’s meeting, 10:00 AMConfirmation class, 5:00 PM | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 24Worship, 10:30BlueChristmas Eve worship, 5:00 PMWhite | 25 | 26 | 27 28 29 30 No confirmation,Christmas break |
| 31Worship, 10:30White |  |  |  |

Good Shepherd Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Lindy

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