



## DP Vantage Point

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*For Christ and for His world SWD Magnifies partnerships,  
Multiplies ministries, and Maximizes resources.*

4 December 2014

Thoughts on the Old Testament Lesson  
for the Fourth Sunday in Advent: Isaiah 61:1ff

Dear Brothers in the Ministry:

*"Dear Santa: All I want for Christmas is to skip church. I am too old for fairy tales."* If you haven't heard, those words are on a very large billboard in Milwaukee with a little girl in a red hat next to the words; put there by an atheist group. Santa is given credibility, while the real Christmas gift, the Father's Virgin-born Son, is belittled as a myth, a falsehood; sad but, not really surprising.

It is a sad commentary on the spiritual malaise of our time. Even though we Christians put up signs in our yards that urge people to "keep Christ in Christmas", there are forces at work to keep sinners away from the real meaning of Christmas. The evil foe wants nothing else than to keep sinners from their Savior, and he will do anything to make that happen. Our work is cut out for us. But the message we proclaim is powerful and creative. It is no myth, no fairy tale. It is God's own message. In the midst of a hopeless world God gives us a message of hope. In a world torn apart by strife God proclaims to us a message of healing.

That message is about the greatest gift that the holy God has given to sinful mankind. Unlike the gifts that we give each other, the gift of the Virgin-born Son of God is a gift that keeps on giving long after the trees are discarded; long after the billboard is replaced. Rightly understood Christmas is a celebration of what God himself gives us. Look at God's love was able to accomplish for us in His Virgin-born Son. We have a Father who restores the broken.

This is how. First, our Lord tells us that our Lord Jesus has come "to preach good news to the poor". That's why Jesus regularly visited the synagogues on the Sabbath. That's what His Sermon on the Mount is all about. That's what our Lord Jesus does when he tells the paralyzed man, "Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven." It is what Jesus for Peter after the denials, when Jesus tells Peter, "Feed my lambs."

That good news is of vital importance for sinners. A beautiful example of that can be seen in how those of questionable background came to Jesus. Publicans and sinners like Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene, broken by the weight of their sin, worn out by a conscience that constantly reminded them of their failures. They are welcomed by our Lord Jesus. Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Today I must stay at your house." Jesus tells us why he went out to the way to call Zacchaeus down from that tree. He says, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Broken by the weight of a guilty conscience, sinners came to Jesus for forgiveness. And Jesus provided that, as the Psalm says, "He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds."

Along with that the Prophet Isaiah tells us that Jesus came "to proclaim freedom for the captives." Think of the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Instead of commending her to the scribes for stoning, Jesus forgives her, telling her to "Go and sin no more".

Jesus came not only to proclaim freedom, but to be that freedom for us. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he

might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." He died on the cross cursed with your sin. He rose from the grave to give life.

Added to that, Isaiah tells us that Jesus came to "release from darkness the prisoners." Because of our sins it was as if we were held in a dark dungeon. We know what that darkness is about. Deep darkness, utter darkness where there is no light. Deep darkness, utter darkness is one of the ways that our Lord describes what hell is like. He tells us that it is a place where there is "darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." At one point Isaiah look around and says, "darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples."

With the birth of our Lord Jesus we not only see the bright glory of our Lord shining around the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem. Light shines from the manger. Light shines from our Lord Jesus. St. John points to our Lord Jesus saying, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Jesus himself says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

With all of those many spiritual presents that come with our Lord Jesus, we have are able to join the angel choirs in singing, "Glory to God in the highest!" We are able to rejoice because the Prophet reminds us that our Lord Jesus was born "to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

Let the atheist believe their myth. As Joshua says to the Children of Israel; "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Our God tells no tales. Our God is no liar. His love for sinners is proven by the gift of His Son. He left the glory of heaven behind to bless us. He wrapped Himself in human flesh to redeem us.

The message of the angels to the shepherds is still the greatest news ever shared, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord".

May our Lord bless your Advent and your Christmas!

## **Words from Dr. Luther, Volume 54, page 197**

*Dependence on External Word of God  
May or June, 1533*

"We'll stick to the oral Word. The devil can't stay where this means [of grace] is. So, for example, there are people who can't stand a bodily God, as God became flesh for us.<sup>80</sup> They want to have a spiritual God and boast of their use [of the Word], though the use without the fact is a figment of the imagination. God's sending [of his Son into the flesh] is a fact. The sacrament of baptism is a fact. Those people don't distinguish between the fact and the use of the sacrament. Water, they say, is water, and they don't see that it's God's water. On the other hand, many people have the fact but not the use, that is, the fruit. So the pope has the forgiveness of sins, the Word, and the sacraments but he doesn't have the use [or fruit]. Accordingly one must distinguish between the use and the fact.

"I'd like to ask a fanatic how he becomes certain from his thoughts and the arguments of his own heart apart from the Word. We have the Scriptures, miracles, sacraments, testimonies. God sent his Son into the flesh, and of him it was said that men saw him, touched him, etc.<sup>81</sup> We intend to stick to this. If they don't hear us in God's name, they may hear others who speak in their own names.<sup>82</sup> Let him who doesn't want the truth believe a lie. This is what will happen to the world."

<sup>80</sup> Cf. John 1:14.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. I John 1:1.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. John 5:43.

## Other SWD News:

**I want to begin with a word of thanksgiving for each of you** who serve in this sacred office at this special time of the year. What an opportunity this season presents to us! Many churches will be full; guests and visitors, family members and those who only show up at Christmas will be in attendance. Proclaim the Christ! Let them see Jesus as their Savior. Plant the Word. God will grant the increase.

- Also, in the midst of this busy season, please take time for your family. If you have children, be their father. If you have grandchildren, be their grandfather.
- Also, take the time to reflect on the precious gift of a Savior who was born for you. In a quiet moment read Luke 2 for yourself. Spend some time in John 1. The Baby born in the stable is your Savior as well. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

**Statistical Reports:** You have all now received notice through my office from Secretary Hartwig in St. Louis regarding the importance of making sure that your latest statistical report is on file. This is about our representation at the next Synod convention. Circuits that fall short of the requirements will need to join with another circuit to form an electoral circuit.

- Just this week Karen sent a reminder letter out to those whose statistical reports have not been filed with St. Louis. Please take a moment to get this information submitted. It is important.
- What is needed is simple: the number of baptized and the number of communicant members in your congregation. Should you need help locating the proper form, please give Karen a call; she can help you.

## SWD Mission Intentions:

Each congregation should have received the 2015-2016 Mission Intention Forms and Information. This year’s mailing looks a little different than in the past. We have included a pie chart so that God’s people know how their precious gifts are distributed as we work together, caring for God’s people and reaching out to the lost. My encouragement is that as you fill in the form, you do so with God’s people prayerfully. We have much to accomplish here in SWD especially as we set our sights on “Confessing Christ for the next generation”.

- **Please consider increasing your mission intention, if only by a little bit. Set an example for God’s people, for congregation you serve on our Lord’s behalf. Let them see that our work together, that mission, is important.**
- **The example of the Macedonians always comes to mind,** “For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”  
2 Corinthians 8:3ff

**SWD Convention Planning:** Among the presenters that we have been working on for our June 2015 convention is a representative from the Alliance for Defending Freedom. The ADF regularly reports to the Council of Presidents about First Amendment issues that affect us as we move deeper into this anti-Christian society. We have received word that one of their representatives will be with us in June. During part of the presentation there will be a “question and answer” opportunity so that delegates might ask questions.

**Current SWD Financials:** As normal, the latest SWD financials are attached to this Vantage Point. One of the eye-opening items this month are the number of congregations who either are behind in their intentions or who have not been able to share God's blessings for our common work. At present we are \$193,000.00 short "year to date". My prayer is that our gracious Lord will bless generously so that we can end the year on a positive note financially. I thank you for your diligence and your generosity!

### **Calling Congregations, Divine Calls, and Clergy Roster:**

- Beloit – St. John
- Brookfield – Immanuel (Associate)
- Hartland – Divine Redeemer (Associate)
- Lebanon – St. Peter
- Milwaukee – Hope
- Necedah – St. James/New Miner – St. Paul
- Oregon – Community of Life (Associate)
- Pleasant Prairie – Good Shepherd
- Portage – St. John
- Racine – Prince of Peace
- Sun Prairie – Bethlehem
- Union Grove – St. Paul (sole)
- Wales - Bethlehem

### **Pastors considering a call:**

- George Borghardt – Zion, McHenry, IL to Prince of Peace, Racine
- Karl Gibbs – Our Savior, Milford, IL to St. Peter, Lebanon
- James McCoid – Community of Faith, Spring Grove, IL to Community of Life, Oregon
- David Ramirez – Zion, Lincoln, IL to St. Paul, Union Grove
- James Thelen – Ascension, Tucson, AZ to Bethlehem, Wales
- Thomas Vanderbilt – Ascension, Madison, TN to St. John, Portage

### **Pastors accepting a call:**

- Matthew Gehrke – Concorida, Cottage Hills, IL to Trinity, Wisconsin Dells
- Patrick Niles – St. Paul, Concordia, MO to Trinity, Rantoul/Hilbert/Potter

### **Prayer considerations:**

- George Mumm and his family at the death of his wife Pauline
- Roger Laesch as he recovers from hip replacement surgery
- Roger Erdman as he also recovers from hip replacement surgery

May our Lord bless!!

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***Passionate Believers...Changing Life...Confessing Christ***  
*empowering life changing ministries of bold, passionate witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*