

# Happenings at Hope

November-December, 2015 ~ Vol. 2, No. 6

## *In This Issue:*

- 1 - *From the Pastor*
- 2 - *The Liturgy: The Salutation*
- 3 - *What Does it Mean To Be a Lutheran?*
- 4 - *The "End Times" of the Church Year*
- 7 - *Parish News*

## *Worship & Study*

### **Bible Class & Sunday School**

9:30am

### **The Divine Service**

10:30am

### **Skype Bible Study**

Thursdays at 7pm

### **Ladies' & Mens' Bible Studies**

1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month respectively, at 9am

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## ***From the Pastor***

Dear members and friends of Hope Lutheran Church,

There are still 2 months left in the calendar year, but we are coming very near to the end of the church year. The church year, also known as the "liturgical year" or "Christian year," is the schedule according to which our worship of God is focused, Sunday to Sunday, on a certain teaching or blessing which God has given to us. The festival of the Reformation, for example, is focused on the power of God's Word to not only instruct the Church but also to reform the Church at those times when it strays from God's teachings.

The church year is not something that we observe because the Bible demands that we do so. God does tell us in the Bible that we are to faithfully study His Word, and hear It preached, but God does not dictate to us exactly which readings and themes the Church should follow in its regular corporate worship. This is a freedom which God has left to the Church, to organize as seems best for the education and spiritual growth of God's saints.

The particular schedule that we follow at Hope is the "Historic," or one-year series. This is a schedule of readings and themes which repeats itself every year. Other churches in our synod and fellowship follow a three-year schedule, in which the scripture readings are only repeated—you guessed it—every three years.

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These schedules, or lectionaries, are based around the 3 chief festivals of the Church; Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. This is why, if you look at pages 199-203 in the front of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, you'll see that there are more Sundays in the church year than there are in the calendar year. Depending on when Easter falls, there will be more, or fewer, Sundays between then and the beginning of the season of Advent.

As a pastor, these schedules are a wonderful resource. I don't want it to be up solely to me to determine which readings from Scripture will be read and preached on in our services, nor do I want your (a member of our congregation) foundational knowledge of the doctrines of Scripture to depend on my personal whims and preferences. Instead, our study of, and growth in, God's Word can be guided by these schedules of readings which have served the church well for decades and centuries.

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## ***Study of the Liturgy: The Salutation***

St. Paul concludes his second letter to Timothy: “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”<sup>1</sup> When Boaz came to his farm and greeted the workers who were bringing in the harvest, he said, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered, “The Lord bless you.”<sup>2</sup> When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, to call Gideon to lead God's people, the Angel greeted him, “The Lord is with you.”<sup>3</sup> And finally, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, to tell her that she would give birth to the Savior for whom she and the world had been waiting since He had first been promised after the fall into sin, Gabriel said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you.”<sup>4</sup>



All of these verses give us examples of “salutations,” ways in which God's people (or angels) have greeted one another. Now even though this kind of greeting has fallen out of practice in our particular culture, there are other places in the Christian world where people still greet each other in ways like this.

In Ukraine, where I lived for a number of years while my father was serving as an ELS missionary, people will answer the phone during the Christmas season and, instead of saying something like “hello,” will say, “Christ is born,” to which the person

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1 2 Timothy 4:22  
2 Ruth 2:4  
3 Judges 6:12  
4 Luke 1:28

who made the call replies, “Glorify Him!” The same is true for Easter. People greet each other, even strangers on the street, with the statements, “Christ is risen,” and “He is risen indeed.”

In the liturgy, the Salutation is both a greeting and a blessing. The salutation occurs three times; before the prayer for the day, at the beginning of the service of Holy Communion, and then leading up to the Benediction, at the end of the service. This exchange is repeated in the service simply because it is worth repeating. Whether we are praying, receiving the Lord's Supper, or saying goodbye to each other, it is always more than appropriate to affirm each other in God's love and enduring presence.

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## ***What Does it Mean to be Lutheran?***

For many people today, the Lutheran label may not mean what it ought to mean. Much of Lutheranism, as observed on the world scene, is considerably liberal in its theology. A large number of Lutheran scholars do not accept the foundational premise that Dr. Martin Luther himself took for granted: the Bible is verbally inspired and inerrant in its entirety.

In describing genuine Lutheranism, the following brief summary may be of some help: To be truly Lutheran is to acknowledge justification as the central teaching in Scripture. Luther re-discovered this at the time of the Reformation. We acknowledge that we are by nature sinful and enemies of God and would perish forever in hell without God providing his plan of salvation for us. Yet, Jesus Christ, God's own Son, took upon himself our human flesh without sinning and willingly carried out complete satisfaction for the guilt and punishment of our sins before God. He substituted his life of holiness for ours and also substituted his accursed death for the hell we had



deserved. God declared the whole world forgiven through Christ's death and resurrection. A sinner is now justified (declared “holy”) in the sight of God only and entirely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no room for work-righteousness (i.e., earning salvation by one's efforts) in Lutheran doctrine. Only God's grace in Christ saves (Romans 3:20-24, Ephesians 3:8, 9). This grace is received personally by faith as created and sustained through the work of the Holy Spirit.

A true Lutheran also confesses that God brings the forgiveness of sins in Christ to our individual hearts by using certain means: the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Only through these means does the Holy Spirit work faith in the hearts of sinners. The message of the Gospel is not just a statement of historical fact; it is a powerful, living Word that brings life to the sin-darkened soul. Baptism is not just a

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symbolical washing; it is a “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” The Lord’s Supper is not just a meal of bread and wine reminding us of Christ’s death; it is the true body and blood of Christ which is offered the recipient for the remission of sins.

Many other things fall under the heading of true Lutheranism. The teachings are listed in the Book of Concord, which contains the Lutheran Confessions (the three universal Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord). A true Lutheran accepts these Confessions because they are the doctrines found in God’s Word. The Lutheran Confessions especially help a person distinguish between the two important teachings in the Bible: Law and Gospel.

A true Lutheran confesses and teaches only what is clearly taught in Scripture, not going beyond it and not being satisfied with less. Although a teaching from Scripture may not seem completely logical or reasonable, a Lutheran accepts it as truth because it is God’s truth, and all doctrines in the Bible support the main one: justification by grace through faith in Christ. This is why we often use the three *solas*, or “alones” to describe Lutheranism: Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone.

-Rev. John Moldstad, ELS President

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## ***The End of the World In the Lectionary***

The end of the world is viewed by many as both mysterious and fascinating. Even within the sphere of Christianity, there are all sorts of different ideas about what the end of the world will be like and what Christians are supposed to do in order to be ready for the end when it comes. Not surprisingly, the last several Sundays of the Church year have to do with the end of the world.



The end of the world is something for which Christians have been waiting ever since Jesus ascended into a cloud, out of the sight of his disciples and any other people who were present that day on the Mount of Olives. And we aren't waiting for this because we're impatient. We're waiting because Jesus has told us to wait, and to always be expecting the end to come, because as He tells us in Matthew 25, “keep watch, because you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Even though many people wish He had, God has not told us on what exact date the end will come. But this has not stopped some people and organizations from still claiming to know when Jesus will finally return. However, not surprisingly, not one of

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these predictions have proven to be true.<sup>5</sup>

In his *Book of Family Prayer*, the Norwegian Lutheran Pastor, Nils Laache, writes about the conclusion to the Church Year:

Very appropriately, the end of the Church Year is when we focus on the end of the world. The last few Sundays remind us that one day this world will come to an end, and Christ will fulfill His promise to return and “judge the living and the dead.” We are ready for His return, and prepare ourselves by diligent use of the Means of Grace. Nor is the Last Judgment something we need fear. The Church is not a society trying to create heaven on earth. We are the bride waiting for her Bridegroom, who will take use from the troubles and anxieties of this earth to our place prepared in heaven.<sup>6</sup>

There are three “Last Sundays” of the Church year. On the first of these, the 3<sup>rd</sup> to last, the theme is “the signs of the end times.” In the lessons, we are warned that the end of the world will be preceded by many bad things, both outside and even within the outward organization of the Church. We will hear in the Gospel Lesson from Matthew 24, “For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” However, especially as we will hear in the Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah 49, God will sooner forget His people still on earth than would a nursing mother forget about her child. In other words, it isn't going to happen.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> to last Sunday has to do with the last judgment. The imagery of what this will be like is drawn from what Jesus tells us in Matthew 25: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come,

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- 5 For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses have claimed on no fewer than 6 occasions that they knew when the end of the world would come. When the appointed day came and went, the organization had to postpone or “rephrase” their prediction in order to not lose face. Recently, there were many people who believed and claimed that the “blood moon” lunar eclipse in September of this year would signal the end of the world. There were enough members of the Mormon church who believed this that the organization had to issue a statement telling its members to not buy into the idea.
- 6 Laache, Nils Jakob, *Book of Family Prayer*, trans. Mark Degarmeaux (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Co.), 680.

you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

Jesus also tells those whom he judges WHY He has judged them; it has to do with whether or not they ever shown the world that they believed. Only God can look into our hearts to see our faith. But we can't look into each other's hearts. The only way that we can see, or show, faith is by the works that flow from it, as Jesus tells us in Matthew 7, "By their fruit you will recognize them." We are not told this to be frightened about whether we have sufficiently shown the faith in our hearts. We are told this, rather, so that we can remember that faith without works is dead (James 2:14). Do not be afraid of showing others what you believe through what you do and say. That is how we glorify God for His gifts of Christ, faith in Him, and the forgiveness of sins which God gives us through that faith.

The last Sunday of the Church year has some really neat imagery. In the Gospel lesson we will hear Jesus' parable of the 10 virgins. In this parable, 10 young women (kind of like bridesmaids) are waiting for the groom to come and bring them to the wedding feast. But, the groom doesn't come as early as they would have expected, so five of the virgins' lamps run out of oil. They have to go and buy more oil, but while they're gone, the groom comes, and they end up getting shut out of the wedding feast.



This parable shows us the importance of faith. There is nothing that we have to do, or be doing, when Jesus returns in order to be ready for His return. We simply need to be believing. This is what the flames of the lamps symbolize—faith. The oil represents the means of grace. Not even the most pious Christian is able to keep him or herself in the faith. This is something which we all need the Holy Spirit to do for us continually. The Holy Spirit has only promised to do this for us through the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments. So the main theme for this final Sunday is to stay ready by remaining in the faith, and to remain in the faith by remaining in the means of grace. It is through these means that God has already brought us to faith and forgiven our sins. And through these, God will keep us in a blessed, forgiven, state, until we meet our savior.

The end of the world is, in many ways, mysterious. But we have no reason to be afraid of it. God has warned us of the evil that will grow in the world, but He has promised to always remember, and preserve His Children. God has told us about the final judgment, and that it is definitely important that we don't keep our faith bottled up inside of ourselves. But the basis for our salvation isn't our good works, It is, rather

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the good works of Christ, which are counted as ours by faith. God has promised to preserve us in this faith, keeping it burning, by the work of the Holy Spirit through the “oil” of the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments.

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## *Parish News*

### **Upcoming Events**

#### November

- 1 – Youth Group Bonfire at Webber Home
- 7 – Ladies Bible Study
- 14 – Men's Bible Study
- 25 – Thanksgiving Eve Service

#### December

- 5 – Ladies Bible Study
- 12 – Men's Bible Study
- 13 – Congregation movie night, *The Nativity Story*
- 24 – Christmas Eve Service
- 25 – Christmas Day Festival Service

Advent Midweek Services – Theme, “Jesus our Prophet, Priest, and King”

December 2, 9, 16

