

Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 4 – Christology: The Focus of Our Outreach Message

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I. Our call and our message

One of the missionaries sent to Japan by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod emphasized in his sermon on January 27, 2008: “Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth what his mission was: to preach the gospel, but not with human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. The church does not need eloquence; it needs the message of the cross. The church does not need church leaders who can attract people to themselves; the church needs church leaders who can draw the attention of people to the cross.” I am sure that all of us here agree with this Bible-based message.

We, the CELC, are a group of Lutheran Church bodies. Each of these church bodies is a group of Christians. The firm and only foundation on which a Christian church stands is Jesus Christ. Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth: “You...are God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).

The Lutheran Hymnal 465:1 reflects the above truth very well: “Christ is our cornerstone, On Him alone we build.” The original text of this hymn was written in Latin in the eighth century (TLH 465, headnote). Like Paul and the other apostles in the first century, the author built God’s building upon Jesus Christ in his day. Like the apostles, he was faithful to Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18. Jesus said to Peter there: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” The Greek word for “rock” in this passage is feminine, *petra*. It does not refer to the masculine Greek word for “Peter,” *petros*, but to the confession Peter made: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

We are also building God's building in our communities and around the world. But we should not build them with stirring speeches about politics, philanthropy, humanism, the economy or the environment. It is true that speeches about those matters are useful to a certain degree for our earthly lives, but such speeches will never save people from eternal death in hell as the result of their sins. Such topics should not be the center of our message.

It is the gospel of Jesus that should be the center of our message, because it alone can save people from eternal death. Through it the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people and willing obedience to their Lord. It is for the gospel that Paul was set apart (Romans 1:1). That is why Paul could boldly confess: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). That is why he said, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23). That is why he said, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Paul and the eleven disciples were called to be apostles directly by God (Jesus). We were called to be pastors, missionaries, professors not directly by God, but through our local church or church body. Yet Jesus has given to us the same commission he gave to the apostles: "Go into all the world and preach the good news (gospel) to all creation" (Mark 16:15). It is our God-given role to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations (Luke 24:47). In order to carry out that role, we should know who Jesus is, and what he has done to save all people from eternal death. For that reason, let us study together about Jesus.

II. Jesus' divinity and humanity assure our listeners of salvation: nothing is left undone

1. Jesus' divinity and humanity

Not only the Bible, which is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God, but also the three universal creeds – the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed – and many other faithful statements derived from the Bible clearly teach us about Jesus' divinity and humanity.

For instance, the Athanasian Creed says:

For this is the right faith, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and man: he is God, begotten before the ages of the substance of the Father, and he is man, born in the world of the substance of his mother, perfect God and perfect man, with reasonable soul and human flesh, equal to the Father with respect to his Godhead and inferior to the Father with respect to his manhood (Tappert, *The Book of Concord*: 19-20, Article 28-31).

The above article teaches us about Jesus' two natures—divinity and humanity—and about his two states—humiliation and exaltation. This is not a man-made story but is God's truth that we should confess over against heresies. For that reason, we first study Jesus' divinity.

a. The Bible clearly teaches us that Jesus is true God.

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called *the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35). We know God the Father's declaration of Jesus at his Baptism and at his transfiguration: "This is *my Son*, whom I love" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

When a paralytic man was brought to Jesus, he said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Having heard this, some teachers of the law thought to themselves: “He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Because he is the all-knowing God, Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus healed the sick man in order to show them *his divine authority* to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12).

Jesus did many other miracles during his three-year public ministry. He changed water to wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). He calmed the storm with one command: “Quiet! Be still!” (Mark 4:39). He fed the five thousand (John 6:1-14). He healed a man born blind at Siloam (John 9:7). Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43,44). He did all these miracles to reveal his glory as *the Son of God* (John 3:11; 10:25).

On the night Jesus was betrayed, Philip, one of the apostles, asked him: “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (John 14:8). Jesus replied: “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (John 14:11). Of course, the most wonderful miracle to reveal his divine glory was his own resurrection from the dead. Many disciples saw it. Therefore, Paul writes: “Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with the power to be *the Son of God* by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

One day Jesus said to the Jews who did not believe in his divinity: “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). This “I am” phrase is not merely a personal pronoun and a linking verb. Jesus is applying the “I AM” phrase of Exodus 3:14 to himself. At Mt. Horeb God introduced himself to Moses, saying: “I AM WHO I AM.” Professor Ernst H. Wendland has a good comment on this:

Those who are familiar with the Hebrew language will see something else of great significance in God’s “I AM.” The letters of the Hebrew that stem for the word “I am” are the same letters used in the Hebrew word which we translate as “LORD” (Wendland, *The People’s Bible on Exodus: 25*).

With that “I am” phrase Jesus solemnly claimed *his divinity*, his oneness with God the Father. Let us also keep in mind Jesus’ words in John 10:30: “I and my Father are one.” Here let me quote from the Concordia Self-Study Bible regarding the word “one”:

The Greek is neuter – “one thing,” not “one person.” The two are one in essence or nature, but they are not identical persons. This great truth is what warrants Jesus’ “I am” declarations (*CSSB*, footnote: 1627).

John, the last remaining apostle, correctly understood Jesus’ divinity and wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1,2). The phrase “in the beginning” means before the universe and everything in it were created. There were no planets, no water, no air, no time, no fish, no birds, no animals, and no human beings. Before anything existed, the Word existed with God.

The Word is not the language that we daily use to communicate with one another but one of Jesus’ titles. He is called the Word because he has made God known to us, human beings (John 1:18). God the Father communicates with us through Jesus. And the Word, Jesus, was God. He is God forever. Next we go on to Jesus’ humanity.

b. The Bible clearly teaches us that Jesus is true man.

It was immediately after the fall of our first parents that God made the first promise about the Savior who would save human beings from eternal death. In this promise the Savior is called “her (Eve’s) offspring” (Genesis 3:15). These two words implied that the Savior would take a human body and would be born of a woman.

In order to fulfill his saving plan, God chose Abraham’s descendants, the Israelites, as his own people from whom the Savior would be born (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17,18a). Out of the twelve tribes of Israel, God chose the tribe of Judah as the tribe from which the Savior would be born (Genesis 49:8-10). And out of the tribe of Judah, God chose David’s line as the line from which the Savior would be born (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5,6). As Matthew records in the first chapter of his Gospel, Jesus was born as a descendant of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1-16). Paul also writes the same truth this way: “Who (Jesus) as to his human nature was a descendant of David” (Romans 1:3).

Jesus took on *a human body* in the womb of Mary. He was born in Bethlehem. He *was wrapped* in cloths and *placed* in a manger (Luke 2:7). Jesus made his dwelling among the Israelites (John 1:14). He *was circumcised* on the eighth day after his birth (Luke 2:21). When he was twelve years old, he *traveled* with his parents from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover (Luke 2:42). As a boy he *was obedient* to his parents (Luke 2:51). He *grew* in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). Before he started his public ministry, he *had worked* as a carpenter in Nazareth (Mark 6:1-5).

The Bible gives us other testimony of Jesus’ human nature. He *ate* and *drank* (Luke 7:36,34). He *slept* (Mark 4:38). He had *a will* (Luke 22:42). He had *emotions* (John 11:33). He *wept* (John 11:35). On the night before his crucifixion, when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus *was overwhelmed* with sorrow to the point of death (Matthew 26:38). After he *suffered* many things, Jesus *died* on the cross (John 19:30). He was not falling into a state of suspended animation. The Roman soldiers found that Jesus was dead (John 19:33).

On the same day two of Jesus’ disciples – Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – took Jesus’ body. According to Jewish burial customs, they wrapped *his body* with spices in strips of linen. At the beginning of his life on this earth Jesus was wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger. At the end of his life he was wrapped in strips of linen and laid in a new tomb near Golgotha, the place of crucifixion. Jesus *was buried* (John 19:38-42).

Jesus had the same kind of body that we have – consisting of *flesh* and *blood* and *bones* (Luke 24:39). One big difference between Jesus and all human beings is that he had *no sin*, since he had been conceived by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. Some people teach:

- That Jesus is only seemingly a human being but not so in reality.
- That Jesus had only a human body.
- That Jesus had only a human soul.
- That Jesus did not have a human will and human emotions, etc.

Are these statements true or false? Based on the passages that we have just quoted, the answer is clear: Jesus is indeed true man. Next we will see that Jesus’ two natures assure us of salvation.

2. Jesus’ two natures assure us of salvation: nothing is left undone.

As we have just learned, Jesus is both true God and true man. He is completely God and completely man, yet he is only one person. Professor Lyle Lange writes:

The two natures of Christ retained their essence and properties, even after their union in the person of Christ. The two natures were not mixed so that they became a new substance. They also were not separated so that they had no communication with each other. The Bible tells us that within the person of the God-man, Jesus, there was sharing of the attributes. By attributes, we mean not only what the divine and the human nature are, such as eternal and temporal, but also everything that the two natures do or suffer.

Concerning this sharing of attributes, the Formula of Concord states: Since both natures are personally united (that is united in one person), we believe, teach, and confess that this union is not a connection or association of the sort that neither nature shares things with the other personally (that is, because of the personal union), as if two boards were glued together, with neither giving the other anything or receiving anything from the other. Instead, here is the most complete Communion, which God truly has with this human being; out of this personal union and out of the most complete and most indescribable communication that results from it flows everything human that can be ascribed to and believed about God and everything divine that can be ascribed to and believed about the human Christ. The ancient teachers of the church have explained this union and communication of the natures using similes of a glowing iron and of the union of body and soul in the human being.

Therefore, we also believe, teach, and confess that no mere human being suffered, died, was buried, descended into hell, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and was exalted to the majesty and almighty power of God for us, but rather it was a human being whose human nature has such a profound, indescribable union and communion with the Son of God, that this human nature is one person with the Son of God (FC Ep VIII: 9,13). (Lange, *God So Loved The World*: 254,255)

The union of Jesus' two natures, as well as his two states, is treated in detail in *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession For The Twenty-First Century*, Article IV. For that reason, in this essay I would like to emphasize the fact that this union assures us of salvation.

The union of Jesus' two natures is a deep and great mystery. Paul calls Christ "the mystery of God" (Colossians 2:2). The two natures were united at the moment the Son of God was conceived in the womb of Mary. "Not by changing the Godhead into flesh but by taking on the humanity into God" (Tappert, *Op. Cit.* 20, Article 33). Since that time, even after his ascension, Jesus has had two natures. Since his conception, Jesus has not been only man or only God, but the God-man. Jesus is the image of the invisible God and all God's fullness dwells in him (Colossians 1:15,19).

The Bible does not tell us that Jesus divided his work as the Savior: one part as the work of his divine nature, the other part as the work of his human nature. Because of the union of the two natures and because of the sharing of attributes, the baby Jesus laid in a manger was not only a descendant of David but he was also "the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). When the baby Jesus shed his blood at his circumcision to obey God's law, "the Son of the Most High" also shed his blood. When he was twelve years old Jesus called the temple in Jerusalem "my Father's house (God the Father's house)" (Luke 2:49).

At the beginning of his public ministry, the God-man, Jesus, was baptized by John the Baptist. Because he had no sin and because he was the one who instituted Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus did not need to be baptized. That is why John tried to deter him from being baptized. But Jesus told John to baptize him in order "to fulfill all righteousness" – it was God the Father's will that Jesus become the Substitute for sinners (Matthew 3:15). At that time John saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove

and lighting on Jesus. This descending of the Spirit was a sign that Jesus, baptized by John, was the Son of God (John 1:33-34).

Right after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12). He did not eat anything for forty days and forty nights. He was very hungry. Satan did not overlook this ideal opportunity to tempt Jesus. He came to Jesus and said: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Satan did not have saving faith in Jesus, but he knew that Jesus who was starving was the Son of God.

On the mountain of Transfiguration Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' face shine like the sun, and his clothes become as white as the light (Matthew 17:1,2). This shows that Jesus' human nature was also shining with the glory and majesty which originally belong to Jesus' divine nature.

When the enemies arrested Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, he did not resist them at all. This was not because Jesus was powerless, but because he wanted to fulfill God's will. If he had wanted to destroy them, he could have called down out of heaven more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:25). They took Jesus to Caiaphas, the high priest. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say" (Matthew 26:63, 64).

On the cross Jesus suffered the agony of hell and died. To suffer or to die is characteristic of man. Because of the union of the two natures, however, Jesus' divine nature also suffered and died. The centurion who was guarding Jesus said: "Surely he was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). Jesus who was crucified is not merely man; He is also the One who will come with clouds to judge all people. He is the Alpha and the Omega (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 1:7, 8).

Reverend Wayne Mueller writes:

The one who will do the final judging on the Last Day identifies himself as "the Alpha and the Omega" (verse 8). Even though John says "the Lord God" said these words, we know that it is the Son, not the Father speaking. Jesus will identify himself with this same name two more times (21:6; 22:13). In 22:13 he explains the name: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." A little later in this chapter Jesus calls himself "the First and the Last" (1:17).

Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus uses these letters for his name to symbolize God's steadfastness from beginning to end. He brought us to faith and will stay with us to the end. We can be confident "that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Words used to describe the Father – who is and who was and who is to come (1:4) – also fit the Son: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). (Mueller, *The People's Bible on Revelation*: 16,17).

Jesus' two natures and their union were absolutely necessary to live a perfect life and to die as the substitute for all people, to pay for all the sins of all people, and to destroy the power of Satan, sin, and death. The God-man completely carried out his work as the Savior. Nothing is left undone. Before he breathed his last, he said: "It is finished" (John 19:30). And his resurrection and his empty tomb testify to that fact. Those who believe in him will live, even though they die (John 11:25). Therefore, together with Paul we can say: "I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because, I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Next we take a look at Jesus' threefold office.

III. Jesus' Threefold Office

Among God's people in Old Testament times, prophets, priests, and kings were important people. They were God's servants to lead the spiritual and daily lives of the people. They were anointed with oil before they began serving in their office. For example, God commanded Moses, "After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests" (Exodus 28:41). God commanded Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16:1). God commanded Elijah: "Anoint Elisha...to succeed you as prophet" (1 Kings 19:16). Anointing was a visible means that signified that God would separate that person for a particular task and would pour the Holy Spirit on him to carry it out (1 Samuel 16:13).

Prophets, priests, and kings prefigured the threefold office of Jesus Christ; He is our Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus was not anointed with oil before he started his public ministry, but the Greek name *Christ* (*Messiah* in Hebrew) means "the anointed one" (Lange, *Op. Cit.* 289). This name showed that the Father set apart Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. And the Father poured the Holy Spirit upon him without measure so that he could carry out his threefold office (Matthew 3:16). Unlike the prophets, priests, and kings in the Old Testament, Jesus perfectly carried out his office.

1. Jesus our Prophet stands behind our witness

Professor Lange writes:

The prophet essentially was a preacher. He was told by God to write his Word (Ex 17:14) or to proclaim his Word (Ex 19:7, 8). On occasion, the prophet also proclaimed God's Word concerning what was to happen in the future, as Moses did when he foretold that one day God would send *the Prophet* whom he, Moses, prefigured (Dt. 18:15). The main role of the prophet, however, was to be that of a "forth teller" (preacher), not always a "foreteller" (someone who foretells the future). (Lange, *Op. Cit.* 291)

In Acts 3:22 Peter quotes from Deuteronomy 18:15, and the context tells us that *the Prophet* prophesied in that passage is Jesus. And the Father's declaration at Jesus' transfiguration testifies that Peter's quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15 is correct. The Father declared, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him*" (Matthew 17:5).

We should listen to *the Prophet* because he tells us about the Father (John 1:18). He speaks just what the Father has taught him (John 8:28). What he tells us is truth (John 8:45). His Word sets us free (John 8:32). His Word gives us encouragement, comfort, and peace (Matthew 9:2; 11:28,29). His Word is a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105). He can give us eternal life as a free gift through faith in him (John 11:25,26). On the Last Day he will judge all people *according to his Word* (Luke 9:26).

Jesus not only taught God's Word correctly, he also correctly divided and properly used the two main teachings of God's Word—the law and the gospel. Quoting from the ELS Catechism, Professor Wilhelm W. Petersen writes in his essay about the definition and usage of the law and gospel.

The Law teaches us what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches us what God has done, and still does, for our salvation. The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God. The Law must be preached

to all men, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be preached to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins” (*The 1993 CELC Proceedings*: 103).

Jesus’ message or teaching was generally made up of the law and gospel. A good example is Mark 16:16: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Yet against stubborn sinners, Jesus strongly preached the law alone, as we see in Matthew 23: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence” (v. 25). He preached the law even to his dear disciples. When Peter tried to block Jesus’ way to the cross, Jesus said to him, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:13). On the other hand, Jesus never hesitated to preach the gospel to penitent sinners. One of the two criminals crucified with Jesus repented of his sins and asked Jesus for forgiveness: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). And Jesus proclaimed to him the pure gospel – the gracious, encouraging, and peace-giving message: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise (heaven)” (Luke 23:43).

On Sabbath days, as was his custom, Jesus went into synagogues in the towns of Galilee and publicly taught God’s Word (Luke 4:14,16,31ff). He often taught a large crowd of people (Matthew 13:34; Luke 5:1). On occasion He gave private lessons to his mother (John 2:4), to his disciples (Mark 9:33-37; John 13:13), and to his friends (Luke 10:38-42). He mainly taught the Jews, but he also taught some gentiles (Mark 8:24-29; John 4:5-42). He taught his enemies (Matthew 26:62-64). He taught Pilate, the Roman governor (John 18:33-37). He used every opportunity to teach the way of salvation. How about you? Where, when, how, and to whom do you teach God’s Word? Are there unique ways that you can do mission work in your country?

Jesus’ prophetic work did not end with his death. While he was publicly proclaiming God’s Word, Jesus *called and trained* his disciples so that they could continue to proclaim God’s Word (Luke 5:10b). Then, before his ascension he committed his prophetic work *to them and all the Christians of all times*, saying: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19,20a). And he made the sure promise: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b). Whenever we give witness on behalf of Jesus, he stands behind our witness.

For instance, as an apostle to the Gentiles and their kings and to the Israelites, our Lord called Paul, who had passionately persecuted many Christians. Through Ananias the Lord told him what he might do (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-15; 26:16,17). Paul understood his God-given role and faithfully carried it out. He proclaimed and taught God’s Word in many places and to many people, especially throughout the Eastern half of the Roman Empire. He could affirm, “But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain” (Roman 15:23,24). Can we say with confidence, “O Lord, there is no more place for me to work in my mission field?”

Paul was a great apostle, however, it was God who *called* him and *gave* him his role as an apostle. Therefore Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “But *by the grace of God* I am what I am, and *his grace* to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them (the apostles) – yet not I, but *the grace of God* that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). He wrote to the Ephesians, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, *which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10). He also wrote, “It is *he* (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ

may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:11-13a).

2. Jesus our Priest answers our prayers for harvest workers

Professor Lange writes:

The role of the priest in the Old Testament was to represent the people before God. Before the giving of the covenant on Sinai (Ex 20-31; Lev), believers of the Old Testament offered sacrifices to God themselves (Abel – Ge 4:4; Noah – Ge 8:20; Abraham – Ge 12:7; 22:13; Jacob – Ge 35:7). The sacrifices reminded believers that they were sinners and needed a substitute to atone for their sins. They were also an expression of thanksgiving to God for his blessings. However, in the Law of Moses, God directed the Israelites to bring their offerings through a priest. The priest was to represent them before God. This reminded the Israelites of their sin and their need for a Savior to represent them before God. (Lange, *Op. Cit.* 292)

Moses tells us about sacred garments for his brother Aaron: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban, and a sash (Exodus 28:4). The turban is interesting. It had to have a plate of pure gold on it. The plate was engraved with the words: “HOLY TO THE LORD.” It had to be attached to the turban with a blue cord and had to be on the front of the turban (Exodus 28:36,37). Whenever Aaron entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar to minister in the Holy Place, he had to wear the sacred garments with the plate on his forehead so that he would not incur guilt and die (Exodus 28:35,38). These garments covered his sins and made him holy to be able to stand before God. In other words, he could not stand before God because of his own merits.

As we just heard, the role of a priest was to reconcile the people with God by means of sacrifices and intercessions. The tenth day of the seventh month was one of the special days for the Israelites. It was the Day of Atonement. Only on that day was the high priest allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, wearing the proper garments and with the blood of the sacrifice, to atone for all the sins of the Israelites. Before doing that, however, he had to offer a bull to atone for his own sin. The details of this priestly service on the Day of Atonement are recorded in Leviticus 16.

According to the law, the people offered countless sacrifices through the priest. They offered two lambs a year old *without defect*, as a regular burnt offering each day, one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight (Numbers 28:3-8). Once a week, on the Sabbath day, they offered as a burnt offering two lambs, each a year old and *without defect* (Numbers 28:9). Every month, on the first day, they offered as a burnt offering two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old—all *without defect* (Numbers 28:11). On the fourteenth day of the first month, as the LORD’S Passover, they offered a male lamb, one year old and *without defect* (Numbers 28:16; Exodus 12:1-14). For seven days after the Passover, they offered as a burnt offering two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old—all *without defect* (Numbers 28:17-19). On the day of firstfruits, fifty days after the Passover, They offered as a burnt offering two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, and one male goat—all *without defect* (Numbers 28:26-31). Leviticus 17 tells about these sacrifices in detail.

In the sentences above, one common phrase stands out: *without defect*. The sacrifices offered to God had to be *without defect*. However, the blood of these animal sacrifices and the atoning work of the high priest could not take away the sins of the people. They were only shadows of Jesus’ atoning death and priestly office. That is why the author of Hebrews writes:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you (God) did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.’ ... And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Hebrews 10:1-7, 10).

By one sacrifice Jesus atoned for all the sins of all people (Hebrew 10:14). The sacrifice he offered was not animals but his holy and precious life. Jesus was worthy to be the sacrifice to make atonement for all people, because he had no sin. Unlike the high priest of the Old Testament, he did not need to offer a sacrifice for his own sin before making atonement of all people. He was “the perfect sacrifice” and “the perfect high priest.” Therefore, he could atone for all the sins of all times, once for all, when he died on the cross. That is why Peter wrote, “...You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb chosen before the creation of the world” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

Because of the priestly work of Jesus, we can draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22). He is still doing his priestly work. He is interceding for us before the Father (1 John 2:1). Therefore, Paul writes, “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). Because of Jesus’ intercession, the Father hears and answers our prayers. He promises that the Father will hear and answer our prayers, saying: “The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 15:19). He encouraged his disciples to pray for harvest workers, saying: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37,38). We are encouraged to pray in the same way. Jesus will surely provide harvest workers for us.

Reverend G. Jerome Albrecht writes:

Jesus asked his disciples, and he also asks us, to share in his compassion (on people like shepherdless sheep) and he tells us the first thing he wants us to do to such compassion. “Ask the Lord of the harvest...to send out workers into his harvest field.” It is the Lord’s harvest field, and he will see to it that the necessary workers bring the harvest in. He assures us that none of his elect will perish. All his sheep will be gathered into his fold. He will accomplish that either with us or without us. He doesn’t need us, but he wants to use us. He graciously wants to give us the privilege of being involved in this all-important work, work with the blessed results that will last into eternity. And the first thing he asks us to do is exceedingly simple and will cost us nothing but a little of our time. He tells us to pray for workers for his harvest field. In response to our prayers, he will provide them. (G. Jerome Albrecht, *The People’s Bible on Matthew*: 141)

3. Jesus our King promises us final victory and royal blessings, even as we witness in the face of opposition

The role of a king was to rule over Israel and to defend the nation against their enemies. God said to Samuel who would anoint Saul as the first king of Israel, “Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he

will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 9:16). A king was also called to serve like a shepherd. God said to David: “You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler” (2 Samuel 5:2). As a shepherd made his sheep lie down in green pastures and led them beside quiet water, the king of Israel was asked to lead the people in God-pleasing paths that offer blessings, safety, and peace. When Solomon was made king in place of his father David, he wanted to be a good judge of his people and asked God for a discerning heart to govern the nation and to distinguish right and wrong. God was pleased with Solomon’s request (1 Kings 3:7-10).

In his People’s Bible commentary on the psalms, Dr. John Brug has this to say about the role of Israel’s king when he summarizes the meaning of Psalm 101:

In this psalm we have a portrait of the ideal King. He is devoted to serving God. He carries out the duty of a ruler to support the good and oppose the evil. In this opening section David declares his devotion to serving the Lord. One way he will serve him is *by singing his praise*. This David did especially through the psalms he wrote. David will also serve the Lord *with a godly life*. David expresses his eagerness for fellowship with God by the question, “When will you come to me?”

In the second section of the psalm David promises that he will not tolerate evil men in his kingdom. The most basic duties God has given to rulers are *to oppose and punish evil* and *to protect and encourage good*. David was an exceptional ruler, but nevertheless he fell far short of the ideal expressed in this psalm.... In spite of good intentions David fell short of the ideal portrait of a king outlined in this psalm (Brug, *The People’s Bible on Psalms*: 111-113).

It is true that David himself fell short of this ideal portrait of a king. He committed gross sins. He coveted someone else’s wife, slept with her, and killed her husband. What he had done displeased the Lord. Through the prophet Nathan, God pointed out David’s sins. David repented of these sins and asked God for forgiveness (2 Samuel 11:1-12:14; Psalm 51). But what David wrote about in Psalm 101 was not some empty political promise. David knew that the ideal King would come and rule in the future. We have evidence of that. In Psalm 23 David confesses that the Lord – the Messiah or the Christ – is his Shepherd-King! And we have Jesus’ own declaration as the Shepherd-King: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:11, 15).

The prophet Zechariah also tells us about Jesus’ office as our King. According to the prophet, Jesus is much different from secular rulers. He is the righteous and gentle King. In the time of Zechariah, the Jews who had returned from the captivity did not have very much money. And there was opposition to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord that had been destroyed. The Jews lost hope and gave up.

At that difficult time God sent Zechariah. The prophet encouraged the people to get to work and to rejoice. He reminded them of God’s wonderful promise of the coming Savior-King, saying: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, *righteous* and having salvation, *gentle* and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). This king’s rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth, but he is not an earthly king. He will not come to make the earthly nation of Israel great. He will not come with chariot and war-horses and battle bow. He will come to do battle with Satan and to sacrifice his holy precious blood as payment for all the sins of all people. To the nations he will proclaim peace based on God’s promise of forgiveness and salvation.

Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy during Holy Week. Though he is the all-powerful King, Jesus set his power aside. On Palm Sunday, he entered Jerusalem as the gentle King, riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11). He was gentle even with his enemies. On the night he was betrayed he allowed the crowd to arrest him. He did not call in his angelic army to destroy them (Matthew 26:47-55). At the Jewish court he had to listen to one false accusation after another, for hours throughout the night; in the end he was charged with blasphemy. His enemies took turns mocking him. They spit on him, slapped him, and struck him with their fists (Mark 14:65). Even when his enemies shouted to Pilate, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" (John 19:6-15), the gentle King did not beg for his life. As Isaiah prophesied, he was "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus kept on walking faithfully to the cross, his final battlefield against the power of Satan, sin, and death. There he completely carried out the will of his Father who sent him to this world; there he proclaimed with confidence, "It is finished" (John 19:30). This was the solemn report that the God-man made to his Father. He reported that he had reached the final goal of his divine mission. The goal was nothing less than the redemption of all sinners. "It is finished" was also a proclamation that everyone present at Calvary that first Good Friday could hear.

"It is finished" was Jesus' shout of triumph. He destroyed Satan, who held the power of death; he freed all those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14, 15). All people of all times should hear Jesus' shout: "It is finished." That is why the Holy Spirit moved John to record Jesus' triumphant shout in the Bible. As a result, our Savior's cry of victory has reached our ears and hearts.

"It is finished." Jesus directed all sinners to himself as their sure and only refuge. The atonement Jesus made is all-sufficient; it is valid for all the people of all time, even for the people who lived in Old Testament times. Jesus' sacrifice does not need to be repeated (Hebrews 10:18).

From eternity God determined to redeem sinners from eternal death through his Son Jesus. Jesus faithfully and perfectly completed his Father's will and plan by his substitutionary suffering and death on the cross. Jesus, the Son of God, finished his work as the Savior and gave up his spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46). When we die, our spirits, too, will separate from our bodies. But there is a difference between Jesus and us. We cannot stop the power of death, but Jesus did stop it for our salvation. Jesus won the victory against the power of Satan, sin, and death. To show this victory, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. As our eternal King, Jesus continues to protect us from every danger; he will finally take us to heaven.

Therefore, with the Apostle Paul we can boldly say:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). . . . We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:7). Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

What a wonderful Prophet, Priest, and King we have! May the Lord Jesus continue to strengthen the CELC's unity of spirit and oneness in faith and confession! May he continue to provide a forum among us for mutual encouragement, spiritual growth, and strengthening in faith and confession! May he promote and strengthen the existing unity in scriptural doctrine and practice among the member churches! May he encourage the members of this Conference to be zealous in sharing the Lutheran heritage of the pure and unadulterated gospel of Jesus with those who do not yet know and believe in Jesus as their Savior! (*The CELC Constitution*, Article III: 1-4).

With the countless saints triumphant and angels in heaven, let us sing in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and praise!" (Revelation 5:12). Amen.

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Abbreviations

Ge Genesis
Ex Exodus
Lev Leviticus
FC Ep Formula of Concord, Epitome
Op. Cit. Opere Citato