

# **ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

## **Topical Bulletin, December 2017**

This month we Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16 KJV) What a wonderful mystery! The eternal only begotten Son of God was made man in order to redeem us sinful human beings! It is as Holy Writ reports in Galatians 4:4-5: “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Take it to heart that Jesus kept God’s Law perfectly in our place and then He paid for our lack of keeping it by redeeming us with His holy and precious blood, for “almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22 KJV) Hence, “the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son cleanseth us from all sin. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.” (1 John 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-21 KJV) Jesus was born into this world in order that He might save us from our sins.

Think about it. If God did not send His only begotten Son to redeem us we would all be stuck in our sins and headed for hell since God’s Word plainly states: “*there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Ezekiel 18:4 KJV) Yes, “the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (Romans 6:23; John 3:16-18 KJV) Therefore, CHRISTMAS IS A TIME TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR ONE TRUE SAVIOR, GOD’S GREAT AND WONDERFUL GIFT TO US! CHRISTMAS is about celebrating CHRIST.

Unfortunately, Christmas – along with all other Christian holidays – has become overshadowed by materialism and commercialism, which begs the following questions as subject matter in this month’s topical bulletin: ***What has happened in America regarding Christian holidays? How are we Christians to rightly observe Christian holidays?***

It is quite noticeable that Jewish holidays, Islamic holidays, and all other non-Christian holidays celebrated in America have not been subjected to the same materialism and commercialism as Christian holidays; and yet, the Jews, Islamists, and all other non-Christians hold to a false god or gods while Christians have the one true God, the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in

the beginning with God. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." (1 Corinthians 8:5-6; John 1:1-2; 1 John 5:7 KJV) Accordingly, we Bible-believing Lutheran Christians should certainly honor the one true God when celebrating Christian seasons and holidays, such as: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity, Reformation Day, and Thanksgiving.

Lest this bulletin become too lengthy, we will consider only three of the aforementioned abused holidays and seasons: Christmas, Easter, and Reformation Day.

**Reformation Day** should be celebrated on October 31<sup>st</sup> every year by Lutheran Christians since it is a day to recognize and remember that the Lord God restored His WORD – the Holy Bible – back into the hands of the common people through the work of His servant Martin Luther and his coworkers who followed. The Word of God is of great importance to us and should be recognized as a tremendous blessing since Jesus says: "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 8:31-32; 14:23-24 KJV)

Reformation Day is therefore a day to give thanks for the Gospel of Christ being once again placed in the forefront of preaching and its importance duly noted, for the Apostle Paul writes: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17 KJV)

This past October 31, 2017 was the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, and yet I observed no mention of it in the worldly news-media, and little or no mention of it among many churches and individuals professing the name "Lutheran." Instead, the vast majority of people celebrated Halloween— which ironically means "holy-evening" even though there was nothing "holy" about how that "evening" was celebrated by folks with their parties. The television news broadcasts showed children and adults wearing costumes of witches and devils and other things, all supposedly in "fun" when the fact is that the Lord God does NOT consider devils, witches, and the like "fun" since such things are evil. It is disappointing, to say the least, to observe professed Christians celebrating Halloween in lieu of or in addition to Reformation Day, for it behooves all of us Christians to remember that the Lord Jesus Christ commands: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16 KJV)

Ponder what God's Word says regarding witches and the like: "There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, *or* an enchanter, *or* a witch, *Or* a charmer, *or* a consulter with familiar spirits, *or* a wizard, *or* a necromancer. For all that do these things *are* an abomination unto the LORD." (Deuteronomy 18:10-12 KJV) "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:19-25 KJV) "The devil... was a murderer from the

beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44 KJV) Thus, the devil, witches and wizards are NOT “fun” things that Christians are to imitate and celebrate. Now, a costume ball in itself is certainly not sinful; however, evil characters are NOT to be imitated as if such are acceptable or fun, for God’s Word commands: “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:22 KJV) Hence, Lutheran Christians would do well to celebrate Reformation Day on each October 31<sup>st</sup> rather than celebrating that which is misnamed “Halloween” and merely glorifies materialism, commercialism, paganism, and evil.

**Easter Day** for us Bible-believing Lutheran Christians is the FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, which is certainly worth celebrating because Holy Scripture declares: “if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:16-22 KJV) Jesus our Lord is He, “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” (Romans 4:25 KJV) JESUS CHRIST IS OUR LIVING LORD AND SAVIOR, and that is certainly something worth celebrating each year.

However, what has the world made of Easter? Easter is held to be a day of fun and games centering on a big-eared character called the “Easter-bunny” who would have children spend their time playing and eating hard-boiled eggs, chocolate bunnies, and all sorts of other candy treats while ignoring the celebration of Christ’s bodily resurrection. Now, there is nothing sinful in itself about playing games, or eating eggs or candy; but, when the true reason for Easter is forgotten or overshadowed it is a harmful problem. JESUS CHRIST IS TO BE VALUED ABOVE ALL ELSE, for “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 KJV) We must beware of permitting materialism and commercialism to rob us of the true joy and meaning of Easter: the joy of celebrating and knowing Jesus as our living Lord and Savior who will on the Last Day “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” (Philippians 3:21 KJV) Thus, when it comes to celebrating the Easter holiday let us keep Christ first and foremost in our thoughts and activities, for Holy Scripture bids: “Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.” (Psalm 97:12 KJV)

**Christmas Day** is, as I mentioned earlier in this bulletin, A TIME TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR ONE TRUE SAVIOR, GOD’S GREAT AND WONDERFUL GIFT TO US! Why is Jesus of vital importance to us? Holy Writ answers: “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [And] the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 3:23; 6:23 KJV) Think about it. We would all be eternally lost and damned without Jesus Christ and His atoning work. We were all conceived and born in sin, and we daily sin in thoughts, words, and deeds. Jesus Christ our substitute was conceived and born without sin, for He was the Virgin Mary’s HOLY CHILD, for “the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done,

that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (Matthew 1:18-23 KJV) JESUS CHRIST IS GOD WITH US! Jesus Christ is true man and true God, the one true Savior of the world!

Yes, "it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (*And* this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:1-14 KJV)

So, I repeat: CHRISTMAS IS A TIME TO CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR ONE TRUE SAVIOR, GOD'S GREAT AND WONDERFUL GIFT TO US! CHRISTMAS is about celebrating CHRIST. Christmas is NOT about Santa, reindeer, toys, trinkets, or football games and parties. Christmas is NOT a time to contribute to bell-ringers with red kettles whose funds go to the church-organization known as the "Salvation Army" which holds to many false doctrines such as: the denial of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture; the denial that Jesus Christ has actually paid ALL the sinner's debt by His own perfect life and the shedding of His holy and precious blood; the "Salvation Army" holds to the doctrine of works-righteousness. So, to contribute to the "Salvation Army" at any time is to help them promulgate their false teachings. Fellow Christians, let us not permit any distractions take our attention off the real reason for the season; let us have joy in Jesus Christ, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:6-11)

Let us value all Christian seasons and holidays as holy-days, taking time to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has opened heaven to us poor sinful human beings. Let us remember that God's Holy Word plainly states: "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15 KJV) God grant that we be fruitful in the faith, living as witnesses for Jesus in word and deed, showing that "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19 KJV)

Have a truly blessed Christmas and New Year.

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