

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

WINTER 2008-2009

“Christ Revealed”

Lenae Rasmussen

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January 6, 2009  
El Paso, TX

Wise men followed the star over Bethlehem to find the world’s new King—God’s Son, the Prince of Peace—lying in a manger. They adored Him and gave gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Today we celebrate Epiphany as the day God broke the boundaries of race and nationality to reveal his Son to pagan princes—God’s gift of salvation to a world lost in darkness. The star, together with Micah, the prophet of old, pointed them to Bethlehem, and thus to the Father’s love and grace incarnated in Mary’s infant child. Jesus came to set us free from sin, death, and the power of the devil; He came to give the nations Light and Life, and the star lights the way of His revealing.

It would have done no one any good if Christ had been born anonymously, a nameless birth in a world addicted to power and fame. To know that Christ is truly the one who “has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up

the lowly” someone must point to Him and say, “This is the One. Look no further. All your desperate searching stops here.”

On Christmas night the angel’s message to the shepherds did just that. “I bring you good tidings of great joy... To you is born this day a Savior... You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” On Epiphany, the Star is God’s wondrous beacon leading the Magi to their true Lord and King.

As the season of Epiphany progresses, we hear of the wondrous events of Jesus’ early ministry, each in its own way showing forth and pointing out who Jesus really is: His baptism with the dove and the voice from heaven, His turning water into wine, His healing and casting out demons, his preaching good news to the poor, His transfiguration and appearance with Moses and Elijah. But my favorite is still the Star, the beacon and spotlight showing pagan astrologers the way to the Bethlehem Babe—lighting their way—bringing grace and truth to Gentile princes trapped in darkness.



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **Christ Revealed**  
— Lenae Rasmussen
- **The Third Article**  
— John Rasmussen
- **Martin’s Corner**  
— Paul Tillich
- **The Ninth Augsburg Gathering in El Paso, TX**
- **Credo...**  
The 2009 ALC Youth Leadership Retreat

The mission of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches is to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. We resist any corruption of this Gospel. Looking to the cross of Christ, we proclaim God’s Word as Law and Gospel for the redemption of his people today. May God help us to the glory of his holy name. Amen.

## “Christ Revealed”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE.

“Why?” you might ask. “Why is that so important to you—to us?” On Epiphany we hear the great news that the Christmas babe is not just for the children of Israel (although He surely is that also), not just for the descendants of Judah, but for Gentile Kings, Persian star gazers, from the east. That means the Christmas babe is for you, for like them you belong to the nations not ancient Palestine. Like them your connection to the baby Jesus is by faith alone not a blood line. The good news is that this fact doesn’t matter at all, because on Epiphany the Star of the Wise Men reveals Him to you and fulfills the ancient prophesy that God sent his Son as a light to the Gentiles as well as the glory of his people Israel. And that means you! God gave his Bethlehem star for you.

### Christ’s Star for you

You say you don’t have a star like the wise men did? You say the star is long gone. Well you’re wrong. You do have a star. Listen to the famous Epiphany hymn by Grundtvig:

*Guided by the star they found  
Him whose praise the ages sound.  
We too have a star to guide us  
Which forever will provide us  
With the light to find our Lord,  
With the light to find our Lord.*

*As a star God’s holy Word  
Leads us to our King and Lord;  
Brightly from its sacred pages  
Shall this light throughout the ages  
Shine upon our path of life,  
Shine upon our path of life.*



### Christus Lux Mundi

In Epiphany we especially celebrate the fact that Christ is the Light of the World [*Christus lux mundi*] for indeed, Jesus is the Light of the Nations, i.e., the Light for all peoples (John 8.12). Just who, you ask, is included in the promises of God? Everyone! “Arise, shine, for your light has come” (Is. 60.1) even “foreign nations shall stream to the light of Israel and rulers of the whole world will be drawn to it” (v. 3). The great promises that God gave to Abraham would ultimately be shared with all the nations.

The second Epiphany reading announces that fulfillment. Paul proclaimed that Gentiles—foreigners to God’s promises with Abraham—are also received into the body of Christ. Paul and other apostles of the early church preached their message of good news to many of those considered outside of God’s covenant people Israel.

Finally, Matthew’s story about the wise men also speaks of God’s ubiquitous outreach to people the world over. As God led the magi in safety by a star and a dream, so God leads us to Christ in the midst of a troubled world. Like the magi, countless people are seeking the light of God’s truth today, and God’s door is always open to all the Nations. Those of us who have known God’s leading, loving guidance, and welcome, now welcome the stranger and sojourner as Mary and Joseph welcomed the magi and accepted their gifts.

Epiphany has long been a time in the church year to celebrate the global mission of the church. As the light of the sun strengthens and lengthens each day of this season, so we are reminded that the Light of Christ reaches ever further into our hearts and the hearts of the world.

### Go and Tell

The shepherds and magi left Bethlehem and returned home, telling all what they had seen. We, too, are called to rise from our worship at the manger and move out into the parts of the world we inhabit and share what God has done for us in Christ. As we do, we bear the Light of Christ to the places where we work, study, and play...to those whom God calls today by a star—*His Word*—to see the wonderful gift He has given to us: Light and Life in Christ. We fulfill His calling in our life together as we carry out the daily duties of our vocation and share the Light of Christ with each person God puts in our path.

Blessings and joy this Epiphany season,

*Pastor Lenae Rasmussen*

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church  
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# AUGSBURG LUTHERAN CHURCHES

## THE THIRD ARTICLE OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

### No Hypotheticals!

***I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith.***

*Luther's Small Catechism*

One of the most popular passages in the Bible for American Evangelical Christianity is Revelation 3:20-21, in which Jesus, appearing to John as the eschatological Son of Man, says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me." I remember a well meaning Bible Camp counselor showing us a well known painting depicting this passage and pointing out that there was no knob on the door. The omission was intentional she said. "You see," she explained earnestly, "Jesus can't open the door to your heart. You have to open it to Him—from the inside."



The problem with the Bible passage, of course, is not that it is untrue, but that it is hypothetical. And hypotheticals, especially hypothetical promises, never help real live ("un-hypothetical") sinners. "If anyone opens the door, I will come in..." True enough. But what if I can't—or won't? How does that help? "If a soldier stops a bullet with his chest, he has no need for body armor." True enough. But how does that help a private on patrol in Afghanistan? The Apostle John says, "If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 John 3:21). True enough. But my heart condemns me all the time. Where am I to turn?

Martin Luther spent his whole life cutting through such hypotheticals and driving toward something infinitely better. He knew from bitter personal experience that real sinners need a real savior, and a sure and

certain word of life and salvation to cut through the barriers of sin, death, and unbelief. He knew that our situation is not that of the ivory tower intellectual musing about hypothetical alternatives, but rather that of the disciples on Easter evening, who had the door to the room in which they were hiding so heavily barred from the inside that nothing could get through it. He knew that we, like they, are "bound to sin and cannot free ourselves," and if Jesus were to wait on the outside for us to let Him in, He'd still be waiting.

"So what did Jesus do?" Luther might ask. "He went right through the door!" You can read it all in John 20:19-31. It is John's story of the coming of the Holy Spirit, his Pentecost account. Jesus blasts right through the locked doors of that room, and His disciples' locked and unbelieving hearts and says, "Peace be with you." He shows them His hands and His side. He breaths on them... "Receive the Holy Spirit." And then He sends them out to forgive sins by the power of His breath—His Spirit. He sends them with a sure and certain word. No hypotheticals.

That's what the Third Article of the Creed is all about. Real sinners who lock the door to God every day of their lives. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him." And a real Savior who utterly demolishes that door in His passion to become one with us, breaths the breath of His Spirit upon us and through that Spirit replaces all our "ifs, ands, buts, and maybes" with a word that creates life and light, as it did at the beginning of creation—a word that creates faith. "But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith."

No hypotheticals there. No, none at all. Thanks be to God!

John Rasmussen

## MARTIN'S CORNER

### “FAITH AND UNCERTAINTY” by PAUL TILlich

IN HIS BOOK, *ON THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL*, Martin Luther writes, "What is more miserable than uncertainty!" He challenges the half-sceptical attitude of his great opponent, Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had declared that he would rather go over at once to the camp of the sceptics, if the authority of Scripture and the Church would permit him to do so. Luther demands *certainty* in the matter of our ultimate concern. He demands *assertions* and not sceptical possibilities or academic probabilities. "Take away assertions," he says, "and you take away Christianity." It is not the character of the Christian mind to avoid assertions, he declares. Every word of the prophets and the writers of the New Testament confirms his attitude and disproves that of Erasmus. Neither Jesus nor Paul nor John speaks in terms of probability or of accumulation of experiences. They make assertions with a certainty and an unshaken confidence about the truth of their message, which is often hard to stand and harder to understand for the modern mind. Paul writes to the Galatians, "... Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." We feel a kind of resistance and even resentment against this unbroken certainty, the immediate consequence of which is the "Anathema" against heretics. Have we all become Erasmians, consciously or unconsciously? Do we approach Christianity as just another possibility among so many others? As, perhaps, a probability, but by no means a certainty? Was it not embarrassing for all of us when Karl Barth, following the attitude of the Reformers, said his uncompromising "No!" to all attempts to approach God in terms of progressive assurance? Did *We* not hear in his words

the voices of ancient and modern dictators? Is the fight between Paul and the Jewish pedionists, between Augustine and the Pelagian rationalists, between Luther and the Erasmian humanists decided by a compromise in which, in reality, Paul, Augustine and Luther are defeated? I do not speak here of a theological defeat. I speak of a defeat in our hearts, in our lives, in the depths of our souls. Or can we still realize what Luther means when he exclaims, "What is more miserable than uncertainty!"

But let us look more exactly at the nature of that certainty which Paul and Luther defend. The words of Paul show clearly that it is not *self-certainty*: "... Even if *we* ... should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you...." The truth of the gospel Paul has preached is not dependent on Paul. The certainty he has is not dependent on the changes in his personal experience. He can imagine that some day he might preach a distorted gospel; he can even imagine that an angel from heaven might bring another message than that which the Church has already received. He is not sure of himself and he is not even sure of angelic visions. But he is sure of the gospel, so sure that he places himself and the highest spiritual powers under the threat of a divine curse if he or they should distort the gospel. For, he continues, the gospel I preach is not a human affair; no man put it into my head. I, yet not I; my gospel and yet not my gospel; my certainty and yet not my certainty. This is a description of our situation before God which runs through the whole Bible and the confessions of all the great Christian witnesses. It *is* our certainty, but it is lost the moment we begin to regard it as our certainty. We are certain only as long as we look

**“We may not comprehend,  
but we *are* comprehended.  
We may not grasp anything in  
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which we may strive in vain to  
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certain.”**

*Paul Tillich, The New Being*



## MARTIN'S CORNER

### "FAITH AND UNCERTAINTY" *continued*

at the content of our certainty and not at the rational or irrational experiences in which we have received it. Looking at ourselves and our certainty as *ours*, we discover its weakness, its vulnerability to every critical thought; we discover the small amount of probability which our reasoning can give to the idea of God and to the reality of the Christ. We discover the contradictions in the emotional side of our religious life, its oscillation between ecstatic confidence and despairing doubt. But looking at God, we realize that all the shortcomings of our experience are of no importance. Looking at God, we see that we do not have Him as an object of our knowledge, but that He has us as the subject of our existence. Looking at God we feel that we cannot escape Him even by making Him an object of sceptical arguments or of irresistible emotions. We realize that in our uncertainty there is one fixed point of certainty, however we may name it and describe it and explain it. *We* may not comprehend, but we *are* comprehended. We may not grasp anything in the depth of our uncertainty, but that we are grasped by something ultimate, which keeps us in its grasp and from which we may strive in vain to escape, remains absolutely certain.

**"And in the power of this certainty, though never secure and never without temptation, we may walk from certainty to certainty."**

*Paul Tillich, The New Being*

In this sense Luther speaks of Christian certainty. "By assertion," he writes, "I mean a constant adhering, affirming, defending and invincibly persevering." This certainty was not something he possessed as his own. Nobody has experienced the profundity of doubt more than he. The refuge in authority finally taken by both Augustine and Erasmus was made impossible by Luther. So were all possible arguments for religious

truth and all confidence in his vocation as a reformer, in his religious strength and his accumulated experience. All these do not count in the ultimate uncertainty. But sometimes, \_when, in this worst of all Hells, the First Commandment, "I am the Lord, *thy* God," came to his mind, he knew that one certainty had not left him, and this was the only one which is ultimately needed.

Can we maintain this certainty in spite of the fundamental uncertainties which are the character of our period in religion as well as in all other realms of life? Can we maintain it in spite of our personal doubts and despairs and of our sceptical heritage? The answer to these questions does not depend on us. We can attain the certainty of the Reformers and Apostles whenever it is given to us to touch the Ground of our existence and to look beyond ourselves. When we have left behind all objective probabilities about God and the Christ, and all subjective approximations to God and the Christ, when all preliminary certainties have disappeared, the ultimate certainty may appear to us. And in the power of this certainty, though never secure and never without temptation, we may walk from certainty to certainty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, *The New Being*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 75-78.

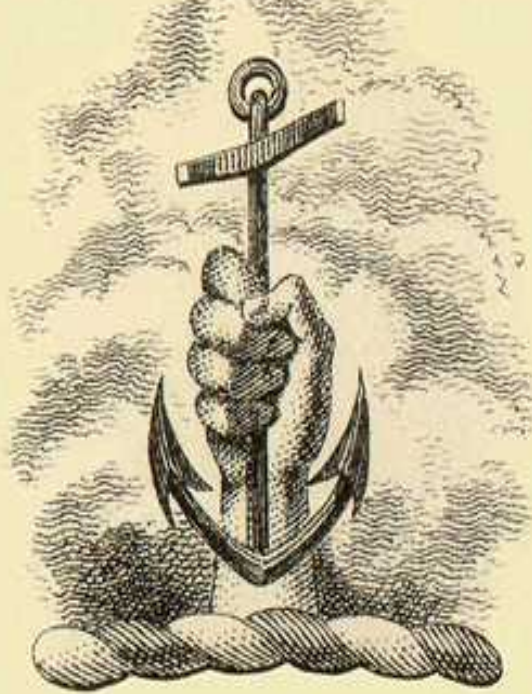




## ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

### Credo

ALC Youth Leadership Retreat  
June 10-13, 2009



Heart Ranch – West Texas

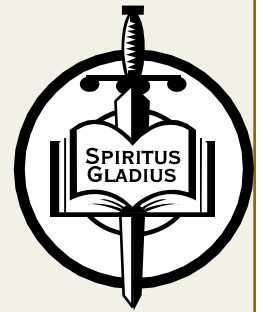
### Article 3

*"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."*

Lutherans are often called "3rd Article Christians" but, "What does this mean?"

**Join us at the Heart Ranch  
this summer and find out!**

Experience the wonders of God's creation, and His gifts of Christ and His Holy Spirit. Come and discover a whole New Life as the Holy Spirit calls you through the Gospel and sets you free in Christ for all eternity.



THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

### UPCOMING EVENTS

February 20, 2009 – Augsburg Council Meeting at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church—El Paso, Texas.

February 21-22, 2009 – Dr. James A. Nestingen will speak on *The Hammer of God* and preach on Transfiguration Sunday as part of the Theologian in Residence Weekend at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church—El Paso, Texas.

June 10 - 13, 2009 – **CREDO: I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT** – the 6th ALC Youth Leadership Retreat at the Heart Ranch in the Davis Mountains of West Texas.

9th Annual Augsburg Gathering—hosted by Saint Paul's Lutheran Church - 1000 Montana Avenue, El Paso, TX.

July 26, 2009 – ALCW Meeting – the 3rd National ALCW meeting.

July 26 - 28, 2009 – **ROCK OF AGES!** Our 9th Annual Convention. *Keynote Speaker: Dr. Roy A. Harrisville, Jr.*

July 29, 2009 – Annual ALC Chaplains Theological Conference

*We're always happy to print news and photos from our member churches and chapters in "The Crux of the Matter." Please send news articles and photos to Pastor Lenae Rasmussen by email <pastorlenae@gmail.com>.*

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

WINTER 2008-2009

VOL. 8, NO. 2

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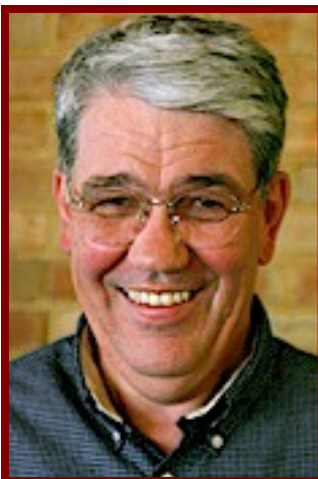
THE CROSS ALONE  
IS OUR THEOLOGY

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

VIEWPOINT

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## Theologian in Residence Weekend



**Dr. James A. Nestingen**  
Professor Emeritus,  
Luther Seminary  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**Feb. 20-22, 2009**

Saint Paul's Lutheran Church in El Paso, is holding its first Theologian in Residence Weekend on February 20-22, 2009. Our special guest theologian will be Dr. James A. Nestingen, Professor Emeritus at Luther Seminary.

Dr. Nestingen is well known for his writing on Luther's Small Catechism and teaching the Lutheran Confessions at Luther Seminary for thirty years. On Saturday, Feb. 21, Nestingen will speak on *The Hammer of God* and Lutheran "care of souls" in light of the Gospel. On Transfiguration Sunday, Jim will lead our Adult Forum and preach at the 10:30 AM worship service.

Following the service, the congregation is hosting a brisket dinner, and at 2:30 PM, Saint Paul's will host another *MusikFest* concert. Our featured artists that afternoon will be Russian-born concert pianist Elvira Spector, and classical guitarist Abraham Spector-Calderón. Abraham's new CD will be on sale.

