



News

of the Iowa Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church

www.iowamissiondistrict.com

January 2021

A Word from the Dean

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him."

(Matthew 2:1-3)

It was, after all, just a baby. And how important can just a baby be? This is the sort of question I might have asked before my wife and I had children of our own. But as we waited and wondered during each of the pregnancies, and then as we experienced the wonder of birth, I grew in my understanding that babies are an amazing gift from God. And I began to appreciate the power and gift of life, and the profound grief a parent would experience at the death of a child.

Jesus was just a baby. Of course, He would have been just as precious to Mary and Joseph as any child is to his or her parents. And were it not for a multitude of angels appearing to some shepherds, the first evangelists, proclaiming the good news of the birth of this one, and if not for a few magi who understood what that peculiar light in the sky meant, no one else would have noticed this baby. But as soon as word got out about who had been born, the world changed forever. *"When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him."* Even as he was still but an infant, already the evil in the world was beginning to understand who this was. This child was, in fact, the Son of God. And all the forces of evil in this world would unleash its fury, would do all it could to eliminate this threat to its dominance.

As we recover from the holiday that was Christmas, we dare not forget how amazing it is that more than 2,000 years ago, God saw fit to send His only Son into this world. And this gift of the Son was not only something we read about. This gift is one that we receive anew each day: in the hearing of the word, in sharing of the meal, in our daily dying to sin, in the confession of our sin and receiving forgiveness.

There is one more gift to unwrap. It is a gift that is given to us each time we dare to open our hearts to God. So, in some ways, Christmas is more than just a day in December to which retailers look forward. It is more than just a baby. It is very God of very God coming to us, to be with us, and to restore us to our Heavenly Father.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean, Iowa Mission District, NALC



Solus Christus—Christ Alone

Pr. Ken Kimball

*Old West Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waukon, Iowa
Old East Paint Creek Lutheran Church, Waterville, Iowa*

This is the heart of the Lutheran solas (Faith Alone, Grace Alone, Scripture Alone, The Word Alone, Christ Alone). It is important to note what false claim the truth of each particular sola is directed at. Faith Alone and Grace Alone are directed at the error of works' righteousness, the lie that we can somehow attain or gain or accomplish our salvation by our effort and understanding; the truth is that salvation is pure gift, that comes by grace and is received by faith (that faith also being a gift). Scripture Alone and the Word Alone are directed at the error and falsehood that ascribes to other authorities (human reason, tradition, etc.) an authority equal with or greater than the written Word of God, the Bible.

The solas are short-hand for basic Christian truths answering questions about salvation and authority in the Church's preaching and teaching. The danger is that when they are disconnected from the central truth, i.e. Christ Jesus, they can become empty and meaningless slogans, or worse, be used to lead people astray. The grace pointed to in Grace Alone is precisely and only God's grace in Christ Jesus—Who He is (including His relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit) and what He has done and promises. The faith pointed to in Faith Alone is faith that trusts and adheres to Christ Jesus and His deeds and promises, not to that of any other figure, religious or secular. Similarly, Scripture Alone and the Word Alone point to the authority of the Bible, the written Word of God, an authority

which the written Word receives from the Living Word, the eternal Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-18).

In our Gospel reading for the 1st Sunday after Christmas this year, we read and hear Simeon's joyful exclamation to God "My eyes have seen Your salvation" as he beholds the baby Whom Joseph and Mary have brought to the Temple. This baby, this Jesus, "God with us" is salvation for us.

The meaning of the solas centers in a Person. The saving grace of God is not a general principle but a Person. Faith is not a feeling or faith in faith or some mere intellectual assent to the possibility of God's existence but a trust in and relationship with a specific Person, Christ Jesus, true God, Son of the Father from eternity and true Man born of the virgin Mary, Who at great cost has saved and redeemed us, lost and condemned people. The Scriptures, the written Word of God, the Bible, possesses supreme authority for the Church, not as some book of general knowledge, but because it bears witness to the only One Who saves, Christ Jesus. Without Jesus, the solas fly apart into meaninglessness. Christ Alone gives meaning and makes the other solas intelligible—reminding us that the solas are all about Him.

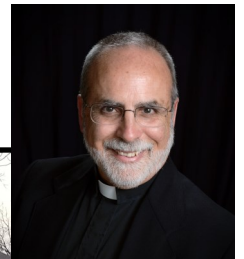
"God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:4-5)

This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District

Dean Staley has been continuing his rounds of visits and has shared more pictures of pastors and church buildings. Since most of us don't have the opportunity to get around much these last few months, it's good to see some familiar faces—or meet some new ones!



Right: *Lay Minister Marlene Nimke serves St. John's Lutheran Church, Palmer, IA.*
Below: *St. John's Plainfield (IA), Western Douglas is served by Pastor Kim Thacker.*



Above: *Pastor Gary Burkhalter (Mission District Treasurer) serves Mission in Christ Lutheran Church in Strawberry Point, IA.*
Left middle: *St. Paul's Lutheran, Sheldon, IA, is served by Pastor Dan Baker.*
Left: *Pastor Mark Jamison is pastor at St. John's Lutheran, Boyden, IA.*

This and That.... continued

Right: *Lay Minister Dan Buhs serves Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Ackley, Iowa.*



Operation Christmas Child Trinity, Avoca

For the past ten years, Trinity Lutheran in Avoca has been participating in Operation Christmas Child, an annual drive to pack shoeboxes to be sent to needy children throughout the world. For nearly 30 years, Samaritans Purse, an international relief organization, has sponsored the effort. Given a 4-star review by the independent reviewer, Charity Navigator, Samaritan's Purse helps even the smallest congregations reach out to help children throughout the world in a fun and simple way.



The idea caught the imagination of the people at Trinity, and soon dozens and dozens of boxes were being filled each year. The project involves church members of all ages, from young children to more seasoned members. Those who aren't able easily to go shopping for gifts are encouraged to make financial donations so that others can do the shopping. It's especially fun to see children buying presents that will be sent to children their same age across the world. While standard shoeboxes can be used, preprinted boxes are also available to purchase from Samaritan's Purse. The cost of delivering each box is \$9, which is also paid through donations.

Families and individuals take as many boxes as they want to fill and bring them back to the church before the deadline. Trinity's youth group has a special event each year to shop for the contents of the shoe boxes and then stuff the boxes at the church. This year they filled 102 boxes in that one-day event.

This year's final total of boxes was 655 boxes, which were dedicated during the children's time in the worship service on November 22nd. Pastor Eric Meisner reports that since the project began at Trinity, more than 5,000 boxes have been sent.

Any congregations who would like to participate in this event in 2021 can find more information at <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/>

Announcing the 2021 Iowa Mission District Pastors' Retreat

I am very excited to announce that this year's IMD Pastors' Retreat will be held on June 7 & 8 at the Best Western Holiday Lodge in Clear Lake, featuring a keynote address by Professor Gracia Grindal from Lutheran Seminary. The event is open to all those serving churches in the IMD, lay or ordained, and also pastors who are rostered in the NALC but serving LCMC congregations. While there are still some details to be worked out, we will begin at 12:30pm with an opening Communion worship, followed by free time in the afternoon in which Professor Grindal and I will be available to meet informally with pastors. We will have supper at 5:30 with a keynote address at around 7:00. The evening will close with Compline, and then a fellowship reception. The next morning will feature an open forum with myself and a closing worship with hymn sing. We will wrap up at noon.

This will be the first time we will try meeting in such a venue. Previously we have met in church camp settings, but these locations all have major drawbacks. This year's site has the benefit of plenty of rooms for overnight accommodations, meeting space, on-site dining, and opportunity for fellowship. It also has the benefit of being fairly central to all the congregations of the IMD, so that more than half our pastors are within 100 miles. I am hopeful that all these factors will lead to a better turnout than we've had in years past.

I encourage all church leaders to help in whatever way you can to allow your pastor to come. The cost of the event is covered by the IMD through the contributions congregations send in. If a pastor wants to have a private room, however, we ask for a \$60 donation for the additional cost.

Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean, Iowa Mission District

Announcements

Upcoming Events

April 24, 2021—9:00 a.m.—Mission District Council meeting

June 7-8, 2021—Iowa Mission District Pastors' Retreat—Best Western Holiday Lodge, Clear Lake, Iowa. Cost is covered by the mission district, but those wanting a private room will be asked for a \$60 donation to offset the added expense.

September 11, 2021—Iowa Mission District Convocation—Emmons Lutheran Church, Emmons, MN.

August 2-6, 2021—NALC Luther Week, Corpus Christi, TX

Please Pray for:

Pastor Mel Harris who is undergoing cancer treatments

Amy Cooper (wife of Pastor Jason Cooper)

Pastor David Steffenson who is undergoing chemo for pancreatic cancer.

All who have suffered from natural disasters, fires and other hardships.

All who are at risk for getting COVID-19, those who suffer from it, all who are caring for the sick, researching treatments and preventive measures and trying to make wise decisions for the public good.

Our Votes Count

Although you may want to hear nothing more about voting, there is an important vote that each of our congregations must consider in the coming weeks.

The NALC has as one of its four values that we are “Congregationally Focused”. One of the most important ways this is manifested is that each congregation is given the chance to consider all constitutional changes that are approved at the national convocation. These changes cannot go into effect unless two-thirds of the congregations give our assent. In other church bodies, what happens at the national conventions are handed down to congregations with no opportunity to have a say in the matter.

At the most recent NALC Convocation, two amendments were passed. It is these amendments that must be considered by each congregation, brought to a vote, and then the report of the vote must be sent to the NALC. Instruction for all this can be found at: <https://thenalc.org/projects/ratification-process-materials/>

The deadline for congregations to submit their action on these amendments is Monday, February 8th. If two-thirds or more of the congregations who submit votes by that date vote in favor of the amendments, they will be ratified. If fewer than two-thirds of the congregations who submit votes by that date vote in favor of the amendments, they will be defeated.

Most congregations have their annual meeting in January. It is during these meetings that these amendments can be considered and a vote taken. Each congregation needs to follow its own constitution to ensure that its members are aware of the amendments in plenty of time, and that the votes pass by the margin indicated in its own constitution.

Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean IMD

Donations and Correspondence

Checks sent to the Mission District for support should be made out to the **Iowa Mission District, NALC**, and mailed to Pastor Gary Burkhalter at **312 E Mission St, Strawberry Point, IA 52076**.

Correspondence for Mr. Craig Lease, Mission District Secretary, should be sent to **405 7th St. N., Northwood, IA 50459**

Items for the Mission District newsletter (pictures, news, etc.) are best sent via e-mail to Pastor Barbara Wills at barbaramwills@gmail.com.



A Few of My Favorite Psalms

Praying the Psalms

The Psalter—the Book of Psalms—has been called the prayer book of the Bible. My interest in the Psalms began in high school when I decided to read through the whole Psalter for the first time. Through the years I had my favorites—it seems like every young Christian “grew up on” the 23rd Psalm, and I was required to memorize Psalm 100 by one of my Sunday School teachers sometime during my youth. Over the years I developed other favorites that spoke strongly to me—Psalm 91 was a source of comfort the year my husband was in Viet Nam, Psalm 139 helped me through the grief process when my older brother died at age 48, and I memorized Psalm 121 after a parishioner who had been severely injured in World War II shared with me that this was the Psalm that kept him going in the difficult year of recovery from his wounds.

Through the years I discovered other sources of encouragement in my encounter with the Psalms. *Praying the Psalms* by Thomas Merton invited me into a deeper relationship with these prayers that have sustained the people of God through thousands of years. Sometime after reading his little book I decided to begin a process of reading a Psalm (or a portion of the longer ones) each day, on a continuing basis. Although the recommendations for the daily lectionary and prayers (frequently used with the daily prayer services found on pages 131-167 in the Lutheran Book of Worship) suggest specific Psalms for different seasons and times of day, I have found my continuous readings frequently fit very nicely with the other Scripture texts for the day, and have chosen to continue my practice—no Psalms are left out, and I must read the unpleasant ones as well as my favorites.

My current practice is to read a variety of translations. The Revised Standard Version has been my favorite, although the first time I read through the Psalms it was from my little white, zippered, King James Version Bible my parents gave me for my tenth birthday in 1956. Even though it's not always comfortable to read these favorite prayers with the different wording each translation offers, it is helpful to get a fuller idea of the meanings of many of the phrases, and it puts us in touch with what is more familiar to our brothers and sisters in Christ from other traditions. Consequently, I may follow the reading of the

RSV with the Psalm texts in the LBW (adding in Psalm 14 and one or two others that were omitted when the LBW was assembled) and then the New English Version. Other versions I've used include *The Psalms, A New Translation*, which I found in the bookstore at New Melleray Abbey (rural Dubuque) few years ago when I was on retreat. This is the version the monks use in their daily prayers—or did at that time. Most recently I purchased *Reading the Psalms with Luther* from Concordia. It's in the ESV with notes from Luther for each Psalm.

Some people have expressed reluctance to pray the Psalms because it's poetic and they have difficulty with poetry. I've shared with my Bible study classes that it might be helpful to focus on a short verse or phrase and make that your prayer—put it in your own words or ask what the Lord might be saying to you in that phrase. Another objection is the violence of some of the prayers. Luther pointed out that all of Scripture points to Christ. To read the Psalms from a Christian viewpoint is helpful. We remember that our Lord destroyed all wickedness and evil in His death and resurrection, and that He prayed Psalm 22 from the cross: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Using this frame of reference when we pray the more violent Psalms helps us to rephrase them to address the sins without condemning the sinners (ourselves included). We can pray that the Lord will destroy any wickedness within us. We can remember that Christ took the place of sinners and was killed for the evil we've done. And when we encounter the psalmists' justification of themselves and “boasting” of their own righteousness, we must always return to the cross of Christ—our righteousness is a gift bestowed on us by the grace of God given through faith in Christ. Yes, we can claim this righteousness, but only as a gift and standing with other sinners under the grace and mercy of the Lord:

*Preserve me, O God, for in thee I take refuge.
I say to the LORD, “Thou art my Lord;
I have no good apart from thee.” (Psalm 16:1-2)*

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: **Our Saviour's**, Dan Buhs, Lay Minister
Avoca: **Trinity**, Pr. Eric Meissner
Badger: **Badger Lutheran**, Pr. Scott Meier
Boyden: **St. John**, Pr. Mark Jamison
Des Moines: **Unity Evangelical Lutheran**,
Pr. Donna Joseph; Pr. Diane Joseph
Dorchester: **Waterloo Ridge**,
Prs. Bill and Diane Odermann
Eagle Grove: **Evangelical Lutheran**, Pr. Jason Cooper
Eagle Grove: **Samuel Lutheran**, Call Process
Ellsworth: **Trinity**, Pastor Jon Rollefson
Emmons, MN: **Emmons**, Pastor Ryan Henkel
Gilmore City: **First**, Tracy Nerem, Lay Minister
Grafton: **Emmanuel**, Pr. Solveig Zamzow
Greene: **St. John (Vilmar)**, Call Process
Gunder: **Marion**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Harlan: **Bethlehem**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
+Huxley: **Shepherd of the Prairie**,
Scott Licht, Lay Minister
Irwin: **St. Paul**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
Laurens: **Bethany**, Pr. David Klappenbach
Manchester: **First**, Pr. Tony D. Ede
+Monona, **Faith**: Pr. Mel Harris
Northwood: **Peace**, Pr. Barbara Wills
Palmer: **St. John's Lizard Township**,
Marlene Nimke, Lay Minister
Plainfield: **St. John**, Pr. Kim Thacker
Readlyn: **St. Matthew**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Readlyn: **Zion**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Robins: **Servants of Christ**, Pr. Ron Voss
+Rochester, MN: **Emmanuel**, Pr. David Steffenson
Ruthven: **Zion**
St. Ansgar: **First**, Pr. Christopher Staley
+St. Charles, MN—**Trinity**, Pr. David Schafer
St. Olaf: **Norway**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Sheldon: **St. Paul**, Pr. Dan Baker
+Sibley: **Faith**, Pr. Tim Nappe
Spencer: **Trinity**, Call Process
Strawberry Pt.: **Mission in Christ**, Pr. Gary Burkhalter
Thor: **Ullensvang**, Pr. Darryl Landsverk
Waterville: **Old East Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball
Waukon: **Old West Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball

+ indicates mission congregation

The Iowa Mission District website may be found at: www.iowamissiondistrict.com. If your congregation has a web site, and you would like to have the web address linked to your church name on the Mission District web site, please send the web address to me, Pastor Barbara Wills, at barbaramwills@gmail.com.

Iowa Mission District Leadership

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Craig Lease, Secretary—
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Pastor Burkhalter, Treasurer—
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Mission District Council Members:

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Pastor Barbara Wills—
barbaramwills@gmail.com

*The Iowa Mission District
has 38 congregations.*



Pastors available for pulpit supply:

Pastor Paul Breddin—515--528-2284
Pastor James Glesne—563-380-8110
Pastor Jack Miller—(507) 798-2408
Pastor Paul Weeg- -641-381-0675



Pastor Tim Nappe is also available for pulpit supply. His primary focus is his ministry with "Reaching the Unreached", and he will share information about this mission work whenever he does pulpit supply for a congregation. Contact information: 712-331-4245. Or email at pastortim.milford@gmail.com