

Beacon Lights

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*“And great earthquakes shall
be in divers places, and
famines, and pestilences; and
fearful sights and great signs
shall there be from heaven.”*

Luke 21:11

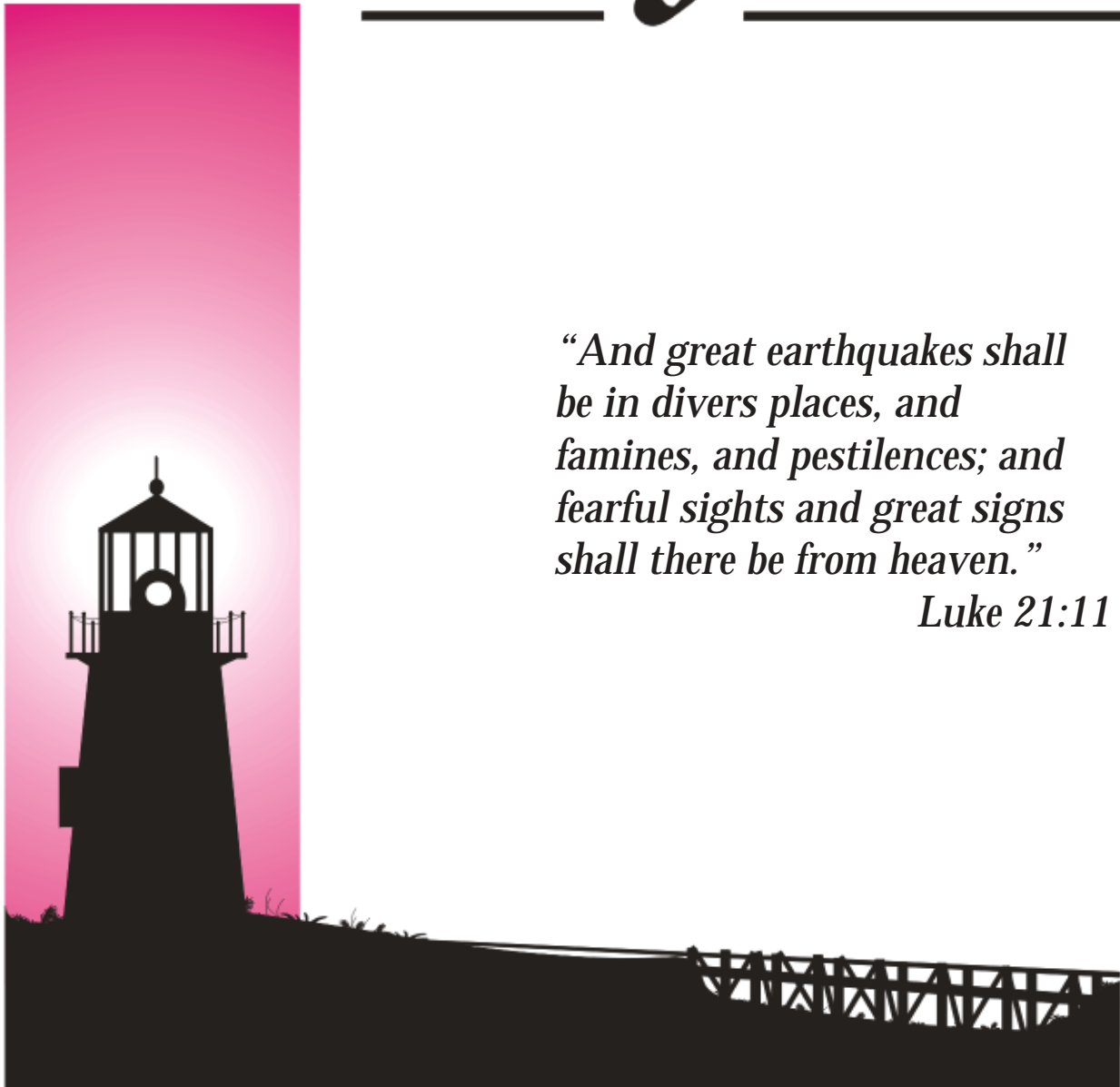


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Editor's Comments



As I write, news of the massive earthquake under the Indian Ocean and resulting Tsunami continues to pour in. The great devastation and loss of life is astounding and the thoughts of all believers quickly turn to the word of our God concerning earthquakes in diverse places. In this issue, I have included a reprint of a convention speech given by Professor Decker on the topic of signs of the times.

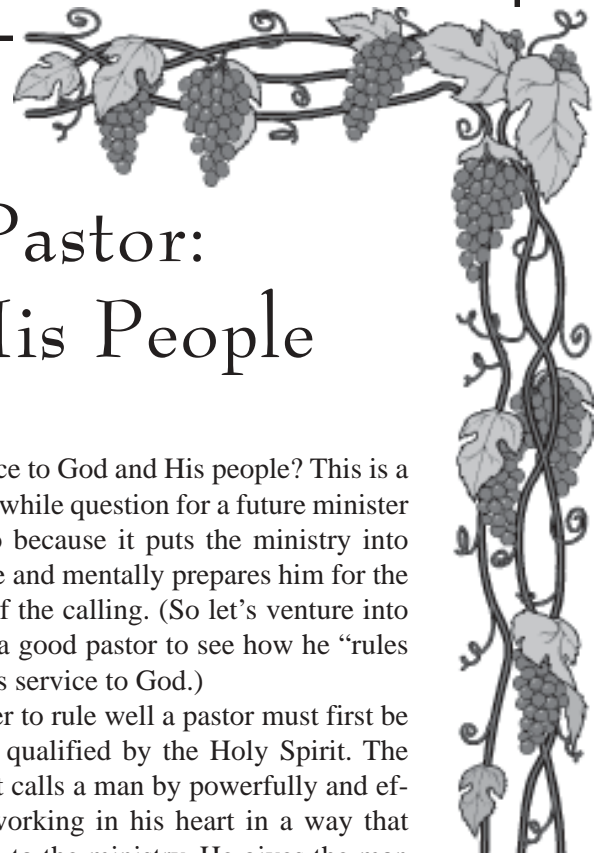
The topic of the signs of the times is something that the *Beacon Lights* survey a few years ago indicated was of interest to the young people. In the last issue, I hinted at the need that *Beacon Lights* has for some writers and articles. I hope you have been giving this some thought, and I would like to encourage you again to submit a piece of writing for publication. What follows is a list of some of the topics that the young people were most interested in. Take a look at them, and consider whether God has not led you through various circumstances that have given you a good insight you might share with our readers.

Defending the Faith
 Confession of Faith
 Christian Liberty
 Death
 Doctrinal Issues

Dating
 Persecution
 Other Churches
 Sex and Abstinence
 Witnessing and Missions

Marriage
 End of the World
 Bible Studies
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 Role of Men and Women ❖

Fruitful Branches



The Work of the Pastor: Service to God and His People

by Daniel Holstege

What is the work of the pastor? When we ask ourselves this question we immediately think of the preaching, teaching, visiting, leading, and ministering work of the preacher. These represent the most important activities in human life. The ministry is considered by God to be the most vitally important and highly honorable of all callings. This can be seen in I Tim. 5:17 where Paul says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." But what does Paul mean by 'ruling well' with regard to the minister? Or in other words, how does the pastor's work reflect an obe-

dient service to God and His people? This is a very worthwhile question for a future minister to pry into because it puts the ministry into perspective and mentally prepares him for the demands of the calling. (So let's venture into the life of a good pastor to see how he "rules well" in his service to God.)

In order to rule well a pastor must first be called and qualified by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit calls a man by powerfully and effectually working in his heart in a way that guides him to the ministry. He gives the man

no rest, and instead He gives him a continual struggle with the purpose of his life. In this way the man of God is brought to the realization of his calling and is made to act on it. The Spirit also qualifies the man for the work he will be taking on himself. This means he is given the talents, characteristics, and abilities needed for the work of the pastor. Not just anyone can become a minister. There needs to be certain attributes, to a lesser or greater degree, present in the man. This is why the training of preachers must be rigorous, so that they are tested as to their abilities and shown to be acceptable or wanting.

Once a man is called and qualified, he will become a minister and thus take on the tasks of the ministry. The pastor's work consists of many demanding activities. The Netherlands Confession says that, "there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities" (Art. 30). The most important task of the pastor as we all know is to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the person of the pastor is the actual mouthpiece of our Savior in heaven, so when he speaks with authority from Scripture we hear Jesus speaking to us. The minister serves Jesus in his preaching, and he does it well when he is faithful to the Word of God.

Preaching is one of the keys to the kingdom by which God's people are gathered and the wicked are hardened in their unbelief. The Heidelberg Catechism says in Lord's Day 31, Question and Answer 83, "What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? The preaching of the holy gospel, ... [by this] the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers." By means of the preaching, Christ gathers His Church; so the work of the pastor in preaching is a very important service and calling. The pastor further shows his service to God by preaching with great humility, giving all glory and praise to his Father in heaven. Peter himself exhorted preachers when he said, "be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5).

The pastor also serves the people of God in his preaching. As the mouthpiece of Christ, he is the minister of grace unto them. It is by his preaching that the people of God receive faith and by it the grace of our Lord and Savior. The preaching of the gospel is the means God has chosen to administer grace to His people even though it is done by a sinful man for "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21b). If we who are the people of God were no longer given the preaching of the gospel, it would be

like denying a fish its watery environment. As a fish cannot live out of the water, so we cannot live spiritually day to day without being nourished by the Word of our God. We must remember this when we become weary of church attendance and would rather not go. We are very really fed in our souls by the preaching which we hear. Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life by which His people would no longer hunger, and we hear that Bread of Life proclaimed when we hear the preaching.

There are many ways in which believers are served in the preaching. In the preaching is God's Word to His people in the form of doctrine, exhortation, judgment and comfort among other similar categories. We hear of our complete depravity and of the salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus, and we are commanded to turn from our wicked ways and serve the Lord. We are turned by the power of the Holy Ghost from our old man into a new man by that preaching. We are renewed in heart and mind as the Canons of Dordt confesses in the Fifth Head, Art. 7 where it says, "...by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them (people of God) to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins..." and later in Art. 14, "...as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it in us..." So as we can see, we are given all of our great and many spiritual needs in the preaching, and thus it is an incredibly important service to all believers.

The preacher serves the people of God in other ways as well. The whole life of the preacher is a service to believers, so it involves many other activities in addition to the preaching on Sundays. One of the main tasks it involves is visitation of the sick, elderly, distressed, and all others with special needs. As the earlier quote from the Confession said, "...also that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities." A good preacher will be active in going in and out among the people of his congregation. He will find out the needs of the people and then come to each individual in his or her unique situation and bring a word of comfort. He will not only bring his own sympathy however, but he will also and more importantly bring the Word of God as comfort. In this way he will be a servant of the psychological and spiritual needs of the people of God.

Now we can ask ourselves again what it means to 'rule well' with regard to the preachers of God's Word. How does the preacher 'rule well' and thus obtain the double honor that he is entitled to by the Lord? First, he must take his education seriously because by it he will

see whether he has been called and during it he will develop in being qualified. Secondly, as an ordained pastor he must preach the true Word of God as it is found in Scripture and do it with all meekness and humility, giving all glory to God. Lastly, he must serve the people of God in his preaching, visiting, consoling, and all other activities, giving freely of himself for the benefit of the flock. As I discover these necessary tasks with regard to the pastor, I can't help but be awed and humbled by the great calling and responsibility placed on the servant of God. I look at the daunting task of the seminary training and then the ever-continuing work done by the pastor and I know that without the grace of God I could never 'rule well' as the good pastor does. But I also know that one who is called will be qualified and made able to

perform the tasks required of him. So with this in mind and the Lord as my guide, I begin the great and wondrous journey of the pastor. ❖

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The Glorious Body of Christ. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Daniel is a member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He wrote this essay for the 2003 Protestant Reformed Scholarship.

Book Review

Deceived on Purpose: the New Age Implications of the Purpose-Driven Church

reviewed by Sarah Hoksbergen

Deceived on Purpose: the New Age Implications of the Purpose-Driven Church, by Warren Smith. Ravenna, OH: Conscience Press, 2004. 170 pages. \$12.00 (paper) + \$3.00 shipping. Available through Discernment Ministries, P.O. Box 254, High Bridge, NJ 08829-0254, (903) 567-6423, www.discernment-ministries.com.

Have you ever seen yard signs in people's front lawns asking if you were looking for purpose in your life? Have you had a friend or relative talk about going through the "40 days of purpose"? Did you wonder what it was all about?

I hadn't thought much of it until I heard an interview on a conservative Christian radio station out of Milwaukee (VCY, America Radio Network) with a man by the name of Warren Smith. Mr. Smith was, up until about 20 years ago, heavily involved in the New Age Movement. He advocated such beliefs as "we are all one" because God is "in" everyone (including unbelievers) and everything (all aspects of creation) (p. 79).

By the grace of God, Mr. Smith was led out of the New Age Movement, and from what I can gather, is now a man of strong faith. He read Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church* and was taken aback by some of the teachings and phrases used. Mr. Smith questions the use of a very liberal paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. He felt uncomfortable with Rick Warren's use of the term "purpose", his 5-point P.E.A.C.E. plan, and much more.

What Mr. Smith attempted to do in his book is bring to light the hidden implications behind the Purpose-Driven movement. He did extensive research into the teachings of Rick Warren, Robert Schuller, Maitreya (a false New Age "Christ") and many more, showing that Rick Warren's teachings are leading away from true biblical teachings and toward world peace and religious ecumenism. Mr. Smith relies heavily on scripture to prove his points, but he also uses his background and basic

logic to draw conclusions not obvious to many of us life-long Christians.

I believe this book could be very beneficial for us as parents as we raise up the covenant seed and strive to teach them to be discerning Christians. Satan is not “entirely predictable” (see p. 133), as Rick Warren claims, but scripture says of him in II Corinthians 11:14-15 “...for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness...” Mr. Smith also reminds us that the Bible describes how “peace” will be the way Antichrist “wonderfully” deceives the world (Dan. 8:23-25) (p. 131).

Let us be ready to give an answer! ❖

Sarah is a member of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

From the Pastor's Study

God-breathed Scripture (1)

by Rev. Angus Stewart



In II Timothy 3:16 we read these famous words, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally, God-breathed].” God-breathed Scripture includes the Old Testament, which Timothy was taught from his childhood (15). And if the Old Testament Scripture is God-breathed, surely the New Testament Scripture is God-breathed as well.

Note that our text does not say, “All scripture breathes God,” that is, all Scripture breathes out God and thus inspires or moves us. True, the Bible does excite us. But the text speaks not of the effect that Scripture has on us, but of the formation and nature of Scripture itself, namely, that it is God-breathed. Thus it is not that the penmen (Habakkuk, Jude etc.) were God-breathed—this would not even make sense. Nor is it the thoughts of the writers which are said to be God-breathed. Instead it is the Scriptures themselves—the writings of the Old and New Testaments—that are God-breathed.

It is not the case that the prophets and apostles wrote the words of the Bible and God breathed into the words. Rather holy men of God (eternally ordained and providentially prepared for the task) borne by the Holy Ghost (II Peter 1:21) wrote the words of Scripture and the words they wrote were the words which God breathed out. Thus the Scriptures are the product of God's breath.

This pithy adjective, “God-breathed,” occurring only here in all the Bible, merely condenses the teaching of the rest of the Word of God on its own nature. The whole Bible proclaims loudly and often that it comes from God—thus it is *God-breathed*. But the Bible also pro-

claims loudly and often that it was produced by the Holy Spirit (e.g., II Samuel 23:2; Acts 28:25; Heb. 3:7). Since God produced the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit; and since the Holy Spirit is, literally, the Holy *Breath*; Scripture is *God-breathed*.

It is not that some or most or the best parts of Scripture are God-breathed and that the rest are something less than God-breathed. “*All Scripture is God-breathed.*” Every one of the 66 biblical books (Esther as well as Romans); and every part of every book; and every chapter and every verse; and every word, syllable and letter is God-breathed. Even the most difficult parts (e.g., the building of Solomon's temple in I Kings 6-7) and the least inspiring parts (e.g., the genealogies of I Chron. 1-9) and the seemingly irrelevant parts (e.g., Paul's leaving his cloak at Troas in II Tim. 4:13) are all God-breathed.

If all Scripture is God-breathed, let us not mock or trifle with even its least comely parts, as they might seem to us. Instead, let us esteem all of it as a precious treasure from heaven, the product of the very Breath of God.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16), but what about Bible versions? Are any of them “God-breathed”?

The CPRF uses the *Authorized Version (AV)* for two main reasons. First, we believe that the AV is translated from the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts—manuscripts which have been preserved in and used by the church over the centuries. These manuscripts are faithful to the autographs or original manuscripts penned by

the prophets and apostles. In no age has God's church ever been without His pure Word, for the Scriptures have "by [God's] singular care and providence [been] kept pure in all ages, [and they] are therefore authentic" (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 1.8). Second, we believe that the AV is based on the best principles of translation. The translators sought to convey not merely the general thought of each text of Scripture but the very expressions in which it is conveyed. Where exact literalness was impossible, the translators of the AV gave full expression of its meaning in English. The AV italicizes words not in the original—words which were necessary to give the sense of the text in English. Thus it shows its commitment to *verbal* inspiration, the truth that *every word* is God-breathed.

This brings us back to our original question: Is every word of the AV (or any other Bible version) God-breathed? If the words of the AV were God-breathed, then its translators must have been borne by the Spirit as the holy prophets who wrote not "by the will of man" but "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). If the words of the AV were God-breathed, then what of the earlier translations of Tyndale and others? If their translations were God-breathed, then there would be two or more God-breathed English Bible translations. If only the AV was God-breathed, then there was no God-breathed English Bible until 1611. And were the revisions of the AV in 1629, 1638, 1762 and 1769 also God-breathed? Did one God-breathed revision replace another God-breathed revision? Do other languages have one God-breathed translation? Then there would be God-breathed Polish and Arabic translations and thousands more.

The Hebrew and Greek autographs were "immediately inspired by God [God-breathed]," and "by God's singular care and providence" through the faithful copying of the divine original over the centuries, His Word has been "kept pure in all ages" (WCF 1.8). The English words of the AV, though not themselves directly breathed by God, constitute a faithful and trustworthy translation of the God-breathed original, so that we have in our hands the more sure Word, God's hammer. ❖

Rev. Stewart is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland. This series is being reprinted with permission from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship website, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/> Volume IX, Issues 7 & 8.

Peace

*The first ray of sunlight
Is just peeking through—
No breeze is yet stirring,
The day is so new;
The birds are beginning
Their daily refrain;
The dew cloaks the grasses;
I stroll down the lane.*

*I muse on the wonder
Of all God has made;
The sounds, scents and movement
This moment displayed.
Each creature, each action
Is part of a whole;
A balanced creation—
It's in God's control.*

*The cares of my life
Seem to vanish away.
If God clothes the grass
May I worry today?
God promised that all things
Shall work for my good.
I have comfort and peace;
He has told me I would.*

*Of myself I'm defiled;
I cover my face;
Yet I'm His own dear child
By the work of His grace.
So I pause now to thank
My Creator and Friend,
My Father, my Savior,
The Beginning and End.*

Thelma Westra

When I In Awesome Wonder...
Michigan's Golden Coast
The Battle Front: Man

by Deane Wassink

What do you think the lakeshore looked like before “the white man came”? With a little thought it will be evident to you that man is responsible for the loss of much of the original form of the lakeshore. The vast marshes have been filled in and drained. The lush and life giving forests were cleared away so the land was laid waste. Fertilizer and municipal waste water pollute the water. Foreign plants and animals attack and displace the natives on the shore and in the water. Dredging of harbors and the building of piers have changed the patterns of erosion and accretion so that the very shape and structure of the shoreline has changed.

Do my comments all seem negative? I guess so. There was a time that I was so sickened by the changes wrought by man that I could not get past it. It bothered me to find any evidence of man in “pristine” places I had found. I have a few more years under my belt now to give me some perspective. Upon reflection, many of the changes are to be expected as the spread of the population and work of settling a new land occurred. The Bible calls it “subduing the earth”. Sadly, often man rapes the earth in the process, even though it may be done in ignorance. The foolishness of man is revealed in that, for all his “science” and human wisdom he has often made the environment worse instead of better.

I daily live face to face with the struggles my own forefathers went through to settle the land I live on just three generations ago. My great grandfather homesteaded the land I farm. He dug the ditch by hand and with horses that drained the swamp below the hill were my house is. He cut down the forest and planted his crops on virgin ground. He did so on his knees in prayer that God would use the sweat of his brow to enable him to raise a covenant family, care for others, worship as he pleased and serve the Lord with his talents. God honored that and blessed him in his generations. I am thankful for it and honor it too.

Am I thankful for what native shoreline has been preserved in its original form? Certainly, if for no other reason than that God's revelation of Himself in the ecosystem of the lakeshore might be preserved for us to study—to His glory.

Do I think that we as responsible citizens of the kingdom of heaven—and of our earthly government—should educate ourselves to do what is right in the environment? Absolutely!

May God give us grace to do what is right with respect to the environment. What are you doing to serve the Lord in this way? We are called to serve Him in that responsibility as well as the many aspects of our spiritual walk.

Faith's Reality

*The spectacles of faith reality show,
While human eyes confusion know.*

*When trials come 'tis not His wrath,
But, love brings the trouble on our path.*

*Death is not the end of life,
But, life begins in the end of strife.*

*When often trouble pulls us down,
His grace removes the self-centered frown.*

*When all around seems out of control,
He guides all things for the good of my soul.*

*Give me glasses to see Your wondrous grace,
Till the day I shall see You face to face. ❖*

*Deane is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church
in Holland, Michigan.*

Signs in the World

by Prof. Robert D. Decker

As a boy I recall that from time to time my pastors: H. Hoeksema and C. Hanko would preach on the last things. They would preach about the signs of Christ's coming and about the Antichrist and the persecution during the great tribulation. And I was frightened by it all. Rev. Hoeksema used to say from the pulpit that he hoped he would still be living in those days but I fervently hoped I would not! I dare say you share some of those same fears. That's why I'm glad for the opportunity to speak on this subject. Jesus knows our fears. That's why He said: "See that ye be not troubled." We have nothing to fear and every reason to rejoice.

The occasion for these words of Jesus is found in verses 1-3 of Matthew 24. Jesus and the disciples are near the temple when Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Then they went to the Mount of Olives. The disciples ask: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?" The rest of the passage is Jesus' answer to their question. Jesus explains that the destruction of the temple is a picture of the end of the world. What we have then in this chapter are the signs of Christ's coming and of the end of the world. We shall consider the beginning of those signs, those which occur in the world. They are wars and rumor of war, earthquakes, famine, pestilence and abounding lawlessness. The Lord speaks of these in verses 6-8 and 12.

Let us consider first what these signs are. Jesus tells us they are wars and rumors of war. It was a time of peace when Jesus spoke these words. It was a peace enforced by Rome's military might, but peace nonetheless. Jesus said that's going to change. The disciples were on the verge of hearing of wars and rumors of wars. In the very near future they would hear of these. How true these words of Jesus are. There have been thousands of wars since that time. In Europe there have been three hundred wars in the past three hundred years. The world of the twentieth century witnessed two terrible world wars in which millions were slaughtered. Six million Jews died in the second world war alone. Then there were the Ko-

rean and Vietnam wars. And we hear of wars and rumors of war today. Ireland is wracked by conflict, Russia invaded Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq are at war. There is revolution in Poland. The Arab-Israeli world is a virtual time bomb which could explode at any moment and at the slightest provocation. The world is simply an armed camp. The world is armed to the teeth with all kinds of sophisticated weaponry, to say nothing of the utterly fearful nuclear weapon. The world has the capability of destroying itself with the push of a button in a matter of moments.

But there's more. Wars will continue and increase. Nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. War has characterized the entire history of the world. That will continue and increase. Jesus said so. And our Lord told us these are a sign of His coming and of the end of the world.

But there are more signs in the world. There shall be famines. Thousands die from starvation. Children with bloated bellies go to sleep hungry every night. A recent newspaper reported that ten thousand people, most of them children die of hunger per day. There shall be pestilences. Think of the destruction of crops by insects. There are diseases of every sort. Heart disease and cancer kill thousands every day. There are earthquakes in diverse places. How true! They cause untold damage to property and loss of life and injuries. Scientists predict many more and worry about the severity of them. Jesus spoke too of abounding iniquity. Iniquity is literally lawlessness. The word refers to contempt for the law, willful violation of the law. That abounds and increases. This too is perfectly obvious in today's world. Prisons are filled to overflowing and they can't build new ones fast enough. In Michigan the problem is so severe that the state wants to release prisoners early. Crime in spite of men's best efforts increases. When we lived in South Holland the Chicago police called the Cabrini-Green housing project, "the war zone."

Many streets in our cities are unsafe at any hour of the day or night. But there's still more! How many thou-

sands of babies are murdered in cold blood before they see the light of day! Think of the pornography, prostitution, gambling, and homosexuality in our world. It's enough to make the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah blush. Drug addiction and drunkenness are problems of huge proportions.

How are all these to be explained? Not as natural occurrences. They don't just happen. They are not to be explained in terms of Political Science or the principles of Sociology. There is no natural explanation which accounts for them.

That's what sinful man thinks. He thinks that man is in control. He measures the force of earthquakes with his seismograph. He forecasts volcanoes like Mt. St. Helens. He spins his theories of world economics to prevent famine and has all kinds of measures to prevent

...[sinful man] thinks that man is in control. He measures the force of earthquakes with his seismograph. He forecasts volcanoes...With his diplomacy, man attempts to end the wars and tensions among the nations. None of this is the answer.

pestilence. With his diplomacy, man attempts to end the wars and tensions among the nations. None of this is the answer. At bottom it's utterly futile. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and lawlessness continue and abound.

But Jesus has the answer! "All these things must come to pass." Literally Jesus says: it is necessary that these things become. That's a divine necessity. No matter what man thinks or does these things must happen. Nothing will stop them or even cause them to slow down. It is necessary that these things become. God said it is necessary. This is divine necessity. God brings these things. God has determined that His kingdom will come in the way of all these things. That's His eternal counsel in Christ Jesus.

What must be our attitude towards all these things? Jesus tells us, and He uses very strong language. "See!" He says. Take note of this! Know this! Our Lord means

to emphasize this very, very strongly. One commentator put it nicely when he wrote: "Look out for wars but do not be scared out of your wits by them." This is what Jesus is saying to us. "See, that ye be not troubled." To be troubled is to be alarmed, to be paralyzed with fear and to cry out in terror. The Lord says: "See that ye be not terrified by these things."

Make no mistake these things are terrifying! Think of the terrors of war. Who knows the terror of many millions of war victims and soldiers since these words were spoken? Who can measure the screams as troops and tanks and guns roar through village and countryside or as the bombers devastate cities and towns. Think of the screams of a mother who has just seen her child burned to a crisp or blown to bits! That's war. Go to the hospital and hear the moans and cries of the sick. Witness the fears of the dying. The examples could be multiplied. There is no way one can calculate the terror caused by earthquake and storm. The suffering caused by all these things is simply beyond comprehension. In the face of all these things Jesus says: "See that ye be not troubled."

Why not? The answer is all these things must come to pass but the end is not yet. These are signs of the end of the world. But there's more that has to happen before the end comes. God has determined these things as signs of the final revelation of His glory in Jesus Christ. We must know that. We must be sober and watch and pray. When we see these things we must realize our God is at work bringing the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

All these are the beginning of sorrows. Literally Jesus says these are the beginning of birth pangs. The end is not yet but these signs tell us that the beginning of the end is at hand. Other signs must follow until finally Antichrist comes. And when the gospel shall have been preached to the ends of the world then shall the end come. But these signs: war, earthquake, famine and the rest are the beginning of birth pangs. Just as birth pangs tell us that the birth of the child is very near so these signs tell us that the end of the world and the birth of the new world are very near.

Therefore do not be terrified! Rejoice and be very glad! Christ is coming in great power and glory. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. ❖

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Watching Daily At My Gates

I have received many indications that the devotionals are being used by the readers of Beacon Lights. We hope you are enjoying them. It requires a lot of work on the part of the writers and their work is deeply appreciated by the Beacon Lights staff. I hope we are able to continue getting fresh devotional material, but this may depend upon whether or not a few others are willing to join with the men who have devoted much time and effort in the past years. If you are willing, or know someone who may be able to help out, please contact the editor. The spiritual rewards of digging into God's word and writing are without price. What follows is a reprint of devotionals published seven years ago in the February 1999 issue.

Devotionals for February 1-3 by Susan Adams

February 1 Read Psalm 84: 8, 9; Psalm 4

What does it mean that God is our Shield? He is our defender, and we can ask of Him like a little child of its father. We lean on Him without any fear or doubt. When David asks God to look at His Anointed, this is speaking typically of Christ as our Mediator. God can hear us sinners because Christ's perfect work covers us! That is why we often say at the end our prayers, "For Jesus' sake." We can be sure we are accepted with God. Read and sing Psalter 226:1, 228:1 and 229:4

February 2 Read Psalm 84:10, Psalm 122

Like David, our true satisfaction comes from living constantly in God's presence. Yet we so easily lose the sense of God's favor as we get drawn into empty pleasure-seeking and satisfying our carnal desires. Remember these words of David, that he would rather have the humblest work in God's temple than have everything the world can offer. Do you find yourself longing throughout the week for the active spiritual rest you experience on the Sabbath? When we die we will finally live in God's courts forever. Read and sing Psalter 226:2, 228:2 and 229:5

February 3 Read Psalm 84:11, 12; Romans 8:28-39

What a comfort that the Bible tells us the LORD will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. Whether God does or doesn't give you a spouse, children, financial security, or whatever else you may think you need, He is not denying you anything!! You don't have the right to withhold any thankfulness from Him! The happiness we receive comes as we trust Him. Read and sing Psalter 226:3, 228:3 and 229:6

Devotionals for February 4-10 by Mike Feenstra

February 4 Read Psalm 85, Ezra 3, Psalm 85:1-2

In Psalm 85 we find the psalmist rejoicing in the restoration of Jacob and exulting in God for His promised salvation in Christ. From out of the depths of trouble, the psalmist beseeches God to remember that He had brought back His people from captivity. Therefore, he pleads that God might remember His covenant and turn His people to see His salvation. Then, with great confidence, the psalmist ends with a beautiful confession of the promised Messiah. Although there is some disagreement as to when this Psalm was written, most commentators agree that the psalmist is speaking of the return from Babylon. Recall what a wonderful salvation that was for God's people (Ezra 3). While the old people cried when they saw the foundations of the new temple, the people shouted for joy because God had brought back their captive band. When we are in trouble, let us with the psalmist remember those former mercies of God in our prayers for deliverance. Sing Psalter 230:1 and 231:1.

February 5 Read Ezekiel 39:23-29, Psalm 85:3-4

We sing in Psalter 230:2 the following words: "in grace Thy people, Lord, return." What do these words mean? The idea is this: the psalmist asked God to turn His people to Himself. That is, the psalmist confessed that God *alone* works repentance. This truth is abundantly clear in Ezekiel 39:23-29, the passage which records the promise of the restoration of Judah. There, God powerfully declared, "Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel." In our Psalm, we find that God had fulfilled that promise. God had covered the sins of His people. He had brought them back from captivity and into covenant fellowship with Him in the promised land of Canaan. Yet, after this restoration we learn that Israel had sinned. As a result, they were under the heavy hand of God. Therefore, the psalmist asked God to "let His wrath no longer burn" by turning His people to Himself. My fellow young people, when we feel the heat of God's anger over our sin, let us also pray to God that He might turn us from our sins and cause His face to shine on us. Sing Psalter 230:2.

February 6 Read Psalm 30, Psalm 85:5-6

"Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?" Such words reveal that Israel did not have God's smiling face beaming down on them. Because of their sin, they did not feel the warmth of fellowship with the living God. Therefore, on behalf of Israel, the psalmist came boldly before God's presence, beseeching Him to re-

vive His people. Although it sounds as if these godly Jews (who were represented by the psalmist) were finding fault with God, Calvin says they were seeking to find “hope of relief from the contemplation of the nature of God; as if they laid it down as a fixed principle, that it is impossible for Him to be angry for ever” (Cf. Psalm 30:5). Therefore, the psalmist’s questions and petitions in Psalm 85:5-6 were statements of hope based solidly on God’s promise that He would make His people rejoice in His covenant presence. The only foundation for this promise is Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, Israel (and we) would forever be under God’s wrath even as the wicked! (Cf. Psalm 5:5, 7:11). Praise God for His covenant mercies! Sing Psalter 230:3 and 231:2.

February 7 Read Psalm 85:8-13, Psalm 85:7-8

After we lay our petitions before the living God, we ought to be ready to hear what the Lord will speak. That speech of God will not come to us by some “inner voice” that tells us exactly what God’s will is. Neither will it come through reading all kinds of works by the “experts” of this world. Rather, God’s voice is heard, powerfully, where He has prescribed: in the Scriptures and in the faithful preaching of the Word. Here is where God speaks the blessed words of the gospel to His people. Here is where God will “answer us in peace.” In thankfulness for His Word of salvation, let us therefore go up to God’s house in this day and show forth His praise by walking according to His commandments and not turning again unto folly. Sing Psalter 230:4 and 231:3.

February 8 Read I Kings 6-7, Psalm 85:9

Have you ever contemplated the beauty of the city of Jerusalem during Solomon’s reign? While you were reading the passage from I Kings, were you awed by the splendor of the beautifully carved flowers and the golden presence of the temple? Truly, glory dwelled in the land of Israel during the reign of King Solomon! However, that former glory had faded away when the Psalmist wrote our verse. After their long captivity, God’s people had returned to a land which was desolate when compared to the glory of Solomon’s reign. In that state, the psalmist confidently proclaimed, “Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in all our land.” The glory of which the psalmist spoke is ultimately the glory of the New Jerusalem described for us in Revelation 21 and 22. Take a few moments to compare the infinite majesty of this New Jerusalem with its type—the glory of the Old Jerusalem. Such a study can only make us yearn for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we might exult in the glory of our God for ever and ever. Sing Psalter 230:5.

February 9 Read Heidelberg Catechism LD, 4-6; Psalm 85:10-11

The glorious kingdom spoken of in verses nine and eleven is realized only because of what we read in verse ten: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” In this vivid example of friendship, God illustrates to us the work of Christ. It is Christ who has made truth to agree with mercy. It is Christ who has reconciled law and peace. He is that Mediator spoken of in Question and Answer 18. Away

with the false doctrine that God is *only* a God of love! Our God is a God not only of love, mercy, and peace but also of righteousness and truth! Our Christ is the One who makes these attributes to embrace each other! Therefore, let us give thanks not only by living a godly life but also by defending the truth about God and Christ explained in Lord’s Day 4-6. Sing Psalter 230:6 and 232:3.

February 10 Read Psalm 85, Psalm 85:11-13

We have seen that this Psalm is a plea to God to remember His covenant and to remember how He had brought back His people from the captivity of Babylon. The cries of the psalmist to God on behalf of Israel showed that Israel was experiencing God’s anger. Yet, we saw that the psalmist was confident that salvation would appear to God’s people because God had promised it in Christ. Surely, exclaimed the psalmist in verses 11-13, this Messiah would cause the land to yield her increase. Truth would spring forth out of that land. Righteousness would shine brightly from the heavens. Yet, the land spoken of is not a future kingdom on this earth. Therefore, we should not look for this good land in a golden age of a literal one thousand year reign. Rather, we must believe that the good land of Psalm 85, the land which is permeated with truth and righteousness, is a spiritual kingdom with Christ as the King. Sing Psalter 230:7 and 232:3.

Devotionals for February 11-28 by John Huizenga

February 11 Read Deuteronomy 7:1-10, Psalm 86:1-2

The titles of the Psalter numbers for Psalm 86 emphasize the confidence that the believer has in coming to God. The sinner, burdened with the knowledge of his or her weakness, frailty, and guilt before God comes to God and says, “Help me because I am needy and also holy and therefore worthy of help.” How can the sinner come with such confidence? The passage we read from Deuteronomy gives the answer which is fulfilled in Christ. God has chosen his people. He determined from eternity to love them. He makes them holy in Christ. He reveals his great love and mercy in the way of delivering us from our sins and troubles. Let us sing with thankful praise Psalter 233 and 235:1.

February 12 Read Luke 11:5-13; Psalm 86:3, 4

As we noticed yesterday, the basis of our confidence in coming to God in prayer is the gracious and sovereign love of God which has the power to make us His people. In the verses we read today, emphasis is placed upon the covenant relationship of God with His people. God is our Lord and we are servants. The covenant relationship we have with God is the fruit of sovereign election from eternity. Our consciousness of being a servant and covenant friend of God also gives us confidence in our approach to God in prayer. We know God will not send us evil when we ask for those things which the child of God needs. Let us rejoice in the comfort God has given to us. Sing Psalter 233:2 and 235:1.

February 13 Read 1 John 4; Psalm 86:5

The love of God is at the heart of the covenant that He has established with His chosen people. God loved them from eternity, and because of His love for them, He reveals Himself to

them and makes them holy and fit to live with Him forever. Even the way in which he makes us holy, by the sacrifice of His Son, reveals that love. Knowing this truth, we come to Him with our every need confident that He will care for us. But how can we know that we are children of God? The love of God within us is manifest in our love for one another and our testimony of the truth. Do you love your brother and sister in the Lord? Do you study the word of God so that you are able and willing to testify of the truth? Then you also will have the confidence to come to God in prayer. Sing Psalter 233:3 and 235:2.

February 14 Read Jonah 2; Psalm 86:6, 7

Sometimes we wonder whether or not God will hear us in our times of need especially when our sinful walk has brought the trouble we have. Jonah disobeyed the direct command of God to go preach in Ninevah and soon he found himself in the belly of a great fish. Yet he turned to the Lord. He repented and prayed to God for deliverance. This does not mean we willfully sin for our enjoyment thinking we can pray to God any time we get in trouble. This is not how the believer thinks. Sin is the enemy. We must fight against it. When we slip into sin, it makes us feel sick. The believer does not want to sin, but when he does, he goes straight to God in prayer. Each time this happens, we experience a little more of God's love and we grow in our faith. Sing Psalter 233:4 and 235:3.

February 15 Read Daniel 3; Psalm 86:8, 9

Man tries so hard to avoid the one and only God. It is quite amazing to think that man being a creature made by God Himself, living within a world created by God, does not confess God. Instead, he worships all sorts of things that clearly have no power in themselves to create the world or uphold life. This fact demonstrates how wicked man really is. It is not until God sends something that shakes the hard hearts of men that they acknowledge the one and only God. Even so, God has created all men and all the different nations with a view to gathering from among them a people who have been changed by the power of His grace. God gathers a people who do not merely confess Him out of fear, but out of love for Him. Let us show today by our walk of life that we confess God as the one and only God. Sing Psalter 233:5 and 236:1.

February 16 Read John 6:30-45; Psalm 86:10, 11

"Teach me thy way, O Lord; ...unite my heart to fear thy name." These are the words of a child of God that knows his own inability to love and obey God. Some would argue that this shows the ability of sinful man to accept God by his own will and thereby receive salvation. But it is clear that these words are from a mature Christian, not one who decides to go seek the truth. Jesus uses the same language: "taught of God," and then explains that one does not even seek to be taught until God draws him. Popular Christianity loves to glorify man with his fervent seeking of God and coming forth to accept him. The true doctrines of grace call us to a fervent seeking of God after God has first drawn us into His light. May we pray every day that God teach us and unite us as we grow spiritually in our knowledge and for His glory. Sing Psalter 233:6 and 236:2

February 17 Read 1 Thessalonians 1; Psalm 86:12, 13

Eternal praise to God with our whole heart is the only thing we can rightfully do. Anything else is sin. We owe everything we have and are to God. Why do we owe such total and complete devotion to God? The Word of God in the Psalm says that it is because God is merciful and has delivered us from the lowest hell. That lowest hell is the experiencing of the wrath of God for sin. This wrath, we read in 1 Thessalonians, was suffered by Christ for our sake. In this life, we have only a small beginning of living perfectly before God. So much of our living is for our glory; but we do grow, and in this way of fighting sin, we see more clearly the mercy and love of God. In heaven our abilities, talents, and personalities will be used in perfect service to God. Sing Psalter 234:1 and 236:3.

February 18 Read Acts 4:23-31, Psalm 86:14

It is bad enough when one person rises up against you to bring some accusation or misery into your life. The fear and suffering is multiplied when assemblies and even leaders of nations rise up against us. What hope do we have when even the laws of the land and authorities are against you? Even murderers have "rights" in our country, but the antichristian powers have no tolerance for the believer. We need never despair, however, because the God who governs even the rising up of wicked assemblies does it for the service of His people. Never was this more clear than when they delivered up Christ to be crucified. The devil's attempt to destroy Christ was in itself the salvation of all the elect. May we also with the early Church described in the book of Acts go forth with boldness and sing praise to our God. Sing Psalter 234:2 and 236:3.

February 19 Read Ephesians 2:1-10, Psalm 86:15

"Full" and "plentiful" are words that express an abundance of something. Nothing more can be added without overflowing. The full capacity has been reached. God has no bounds and therefore these words express perfection in God. God's mercy is perfect. Nothing could make it better or fuller. The measure of God's mercy and compassion can only be measured in terms of the effect they have on finite creatures like us. Our sins are heinous and putrid and we stand in ourselves without a shred of goodness before God. God's mercy is His desire and purpose to make us His friend servants and take away our sins. The more we see how sinful we are, the more we come to know the greatness of God's love and mercy. We see the greatness of our sin and misery when we see the righteousness and justice of God as he poured out his wrath against sin in Christ. Sing Psalter 234:3 and 236:4.

February 20 Read Ephesians 3:1-19, Psalm 86:16

A wonderful gift it is to have the very power of God within us that we might know the love of God. We ask for strength from God to help us through trials in life, but strength from God is also necessary for new spiritual growth as we see from the text in Ephesians. Natural man, man fallen in sin and unredeemed, is not able to know and love God. He can only hate and despise God. God so works in our mind and soul that our eyes and ears are opened to see and hear the word of God and comprehend something of the love of God. This is something

for which we must pray. We do not receive this power of God apart from the word of God, however. God gives us the power to know, and he also gives us his word upon which to exercise the power we have. Sing Psalter 234:4 and 236:5.

February 21 Read Micah 7:1-13, Psalm 86:17

In this verse the Psalmist asks for some token or sign that proves to the wicked that God is with him. From the outside, the Christian does not appear to be any better off than the wicked. You can not do a scientific study to find any distinction between the believer and unbeliever that would show clearly that God loves the believer and hates the unbeliever. This distinction will not be made clear to the wicked until the final day of judgment when God shows to them how He has redeemed them from sin and brings them into covenant fellowship. Until then, the wicked will try to explain away and dispute any claims we have of the particular love of God. Yet for this token we pray. The Lord has taught us to pray for this in the Lord's Prayer when we say "Thy kingdom come." Sing Psalter 234:5 and 236:5.

February 22 Read 1 Peter 2:1-10, Psalm 87:1-3

Though the individual believer and the church from an earthy perspective may seem weak, battered, and torn with strife, the true church which is the people of God gathered from the beginning of the world, is strong and glorious. In the Old Testament, Zion was the earthly place where God chose to dwell with His people. Zion was placed upon an immovable mountain. These things were pictures of the Church. Christ is the foundation. His work of salvation cannot be moved. The elect will certainly be gathered to live with God forever in heaven. Though we cannot see the glory of the whole picture, we know that the foundation is sure and that the sovereign God is the builder. Let us rejoice in this knowledge. Sing Psalter 237-239:1.

February 23 Read Acts 13:44-52; Psalm 87:4, 5

The cities and countries named in Psalm 4 and 5 were enemy nations to Israel. By the revelation of God to the Psalmist, he was given a glimpse of the plan of God to turn the hearts of the enemy to repentance and salvation. This was known to the Israelites, but many Jews at the time of the apostles would have none of it. They thought God chose the Jews because of something special within them. They refused to acknowledge the wisdom and power of God's grace to save from every nation. We must rejoice with the Psalmist when the gospel goes out to other nations. We must support and encourage those men who leave their familiar life and church in obedience to the call of God to bring the gospel to other nations. Give praise to God as you sing Psalter 237:2, 238:2 and 239:1.

February 24 Read Revelation 14:1-13; Psalm 87:6, 7.

The great truths summed up in this Psalm can be listed as follows: 1) As the great Shepherd counting His sheep, so God will count every one of His chosen. Not one will be forgotten. The number will be complete and perfect. 2) The church will be gathered by the preaching of the word from every tribe, tongue, and nation. 3) The church raised to eternal glory will sing praises to God that no other person can sing. We will sing

a song that will testify of the great work of salvation within us. We will sing forever of the truth that all our salvation came from God alone. Salvation by grace alone is a truth we must hold dear in our churches because it is the song we will sing forever in glory. Sing Psalter 237:3, 238:3 and 239:2.

February 25 Read 2 Corinthians 13, Psalm 88:1-5

Psalm 87 was filled with joy and gladness for the work of God as He gathers His church. Psalm 88 is an outpouring of sorrow. Often the individual saints in the church are filled with sorrow, but God has placed us within the body of Christ that we might receive strength from fellow saints and the preaching of the word. The psalmist says in verse 4, "I am as a man that hath no strength." The apostle in his letter to the Corinthians reveals that Christ was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. Our weakness always turns our attention to the almighty God. He is never weak. The power of God is our only strength. Let us come to Him with our every need. Sing Psalter 240:1.

February 26 Read Romans 2:1-9, 1 Peter 2:19-25, Psalm 88:6-8

The psalmist confesses before God that the sorrow he has was given him by God. In fact, the sorrow is a result of the wrath of God against him. God laid him in the deepest pit. God took away all his friends. God pours out His wrath because of sin. Sorrow does not come from the devil or anyone else. Romans 2 instructs us that God pours out wrath upon those who are impenitent and disobedient. When the wrath of God is poured out upon us, we are truly dead in sin. Apart from Christ we will find no hope of life. In Christ is the only hope because he bore the wrath of God due unto those sins. God brings us sorrow. God brings us joy in Christ. He is sovereign in our salvation. Sing Psalter 240:2.

February 27 Read Romans 9:1-18, Psalm 88:9-13

Yesterday we meditated upon the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation. In the Psalm read today, we read of the psalmist taking action to ask God for salvation. Does this teach us that we have a part our salvation? We must not forget that the very fact that the psalmist is crying out to God is evidence of a godly heart that is sorrowing under chastisement. Romans 9:18 teaches that God hardens the heart of the wicked. Being hard, they do not cry out to God for salvation. Sorrow like that of the psalmist is a terrible thing, but the beauty of Christ is revealed in a repentant sinner. Sing Psalter 240:3.

February 28 Read Matthew 27:39-49, Psalm 13-18

In our weakness and frailty as a creature of God, we ask God "why?" Even Christ, having taken upon himself our human nature and all our sins cried out in His darkest moment, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God is a God of infinite wisdom. We will never know the depths of the riches of His knowledge. When things seem so contrary to our human understanding of what is right, we say "why?" Yet we have hope in the victory of Christ. After He said "why," He commended his Spirit to God and God gave Him the victory. In glory the questions we have will be answered. Let us be content to wait upon Him in hope. Sing Psalter 240:4, 5.

The Discussion

by J. P. de Klerk

Leo van Veen had been involved with the young people's clubs of his church for several years.

He was faithfully assisted by his wife, Astrid. They suggested organizing a kind of winter camp this year, involving five boys and five girls, who would like to take a break in the coldest part of the year.

Leo had a job with a merchant who was quite willing to let them use a small castle in the southern part of Belgium for a few days. Of course, they had to provide their own food and leave the place as clean as possible.

The young people were delighted. They looked forward to having discussions and singing. There was sufficient money in the club treasury for the trip. Leo was a great organizer and had planned the camp very well.

On the day of departure the journey got a romantic flavor when it started to snow. When they arrived at the front door of the castle there was more than a meter of the white stuff around on the fir trees and the shrubs. They cleared the lawn to the main road and made a big snowman.

But that first evening in front of the fire in the living room they spoke with each other about being a young Christian these days. They decided that would be the subject of discussion.

Leo said, "Are we all aware of the consequences. Do we know when to say yes and when to say no? Two of you are already first-year students at the university. You will hear jibes, abusive language and challenges as soon as they know that you are Christians. All sorts of things can happen."

A girl named Anna said it was her opinion that it was just as difficult as marriage.

Astrid asked her what she meant by that. She knew that Anna was shy but honest.

"Well, if you have narrow-minded pretensions...."

But they all started talking at the same time until Leo stopped them and said, "Hang on, this is an interesting subject. Let us try to answer the question: What makes a marriage a good and lasting relationship?"

Simon Dekker: "I think it is a social exercise promoting such basics as Christian faith, trust, honesty and respect for each other. We see everywhere that the world has increasingly abandoned these ideals."

Nelly van Hove: "You may be right, but aren't you generalizing? Many people are just trying to get on with their lives, cheer each other up and are happy to survive."

Hank Rademaker: "Our Christian freedom is conditional. By nature we all are rebellious. Is it not a fascinating reality that in a marriage we find expression...that we are different?"

Leo: "Let us take three practical things to start with. Now, how does it begin?"

Ada Bouwman: "You fall in love. I mean, not that you are just dizzy or you have a strange feeling in your stomach or your heart thumps."

Astrid: "Right. That is the beginning and the art is to keep it that way. I have cozy notions like nostalgia and innocence and old-fashioned values."

Leo: "In fact, we get real love from God and reflect that in our marriage. Together we try and we pray, imitating His love. Don't forget, we believe that He brought us together. That is important."

Astrid said with a smile: "Leo and I defend each other as lions against the rest of the people with whom we live."

Leo: "Right. The next thing is communication."

Yvonne de Zeeuw: "I guess, that has to do everything with your emotions. The warmth you feel for each other. How do you always



find the right words to prevent misunderstanding?"

Wim van Dalfsen: "I presume sometimes you have to nurse a wounded soul. I mean, heartstrings are delicate instruments."

Anna Feenstra: "The gentler the touch the more resonant the echo. I saw these words the other day in a book. I don't think you should sacrifice the team spirit to a small difference of opinion. You can always ask the Lord to guide you. True?"

Leo: "Sure. God says in His Word that we should always pray, when things go well and whenever there are problems. Sometimes you do something with a bravado that belies your uncertainty, and afterwards you realize you do not do it in your own power, but Jesus Christ gave it to you. With Him you live in the light, also when you understand each other suddenly better than ever before. Honestly."

Anna: "Like the healing power of love?"

Hank Rademaker grinned and said: "Anyhow, I will treat my future wife as something better than a vegetable."

Leo: "Now, in a marriage and otherwise, we have to honor and praise God, as the Catechism says. What do you think about that?"

Astrid: "Like in Zephaniah 3, where love and joy go together with thankfulness."

Nelly van Hove: "At home I have a text on the wall in my room, from 1 Peter 1 about rejoicing, having love for each other, and great joy. I believe, it stimulates us to singing psalms and other spiritual songs. I do when I am at work."

Leo: "Nothing against that. Why should the world have songs all day, polluting many work places? We have reason to be happy. We are God's children; we have a glorious eternal future."

Short Story Writing Contest

Eight Prizes Beginning with 6th Grade

Attention teachers, students, and anyone else who is willing to yield their pen to some prose. *Beacon Lights* is offering a writing contest that has been designed to work with your school writing instruction. Many of the teachers were introduced to some good strategies for writing stories at the last teacher's convention, and here is some incentive for prize-winning stories. A total of eight \$10 prizes will be awarded: one prize for each grade level (6th through 12th) and one for post high school entries. The prize winning entries may also be published in *Beacon Lights* as well as the second and third place winners. Please contact the business office of *Beacon Lights* for information regarding material for writing stories that was presented at the teacher's convention.

For this contest, we are looking for short stories having a distinctly Reformed perspective. Entries will not be considered for the contest unless they are between 800 and 1600 words, typed, double-spaced and postmarked by June 1, 2005. All entries must have the author's name on the first page along with the word count. The entries will be judged according to the following guidelines: originality, believable plot, character development, appropriate setting, and resolution of the problem.

We look forward to receiving your entry. Please mail it to the business office of *Beacon Lights* no later than June 1, 2005. Please follow the guidelines carefully! Start early and plan on doing lots of revisions to polish it and hone it down to the required length. Keep in mind that a typical double spaced page contains about 200 words and your word processor probably has a word count feature.

Simon Dekker: “I find it more and more difficult nowadays. There are bands who call themselves Christians, they misuse well-known melodies, or they wreck the whole thing with drums and a beat. The heathen suppose you will agree with it, that you are one of them and their blasphemy. The texts of their songs are shocking; about demons, hell, ghosts, monsters from space, anti-discipline, and anti-law and order.”

Ada: “I work in a bookstore. The taste of the customers always amazes me. They ask for titles my boss would not dare to put in his shop window but they will order them.”

Leo: “Psalm 27:14 says, ‘Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart,’ so I

believe we should joyfully do our duty, though others will not endure sound doctrine anymore. Let us ask God every day to guide and protect us.”

They all agreed.

* * * * *

After five days they traveled home.

It took them all day because of all the snow and ice on the roads, but they had enjoyed their little vacation.

Some married and went to live in the city, others moved abroad, but they all kept in contact with each other. ❖

J. P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.

Church Family

The Reformed Family

by Andy Lanning

Western culture more and more shows itself to be an enemy of marriage and the family. Astronomical divorce rates, remarriage after divorce, homosexual unions and now marriages, and the increasing disregard for the ordinance of marriage by couples who live together and raise children together outside of marriage all contribute to Western culture’s attack on marriage. Mothers who leave their children with grandma or at day-care to pursue a career outside of the home, parents limiting the number of children they have so that there is as little interference as possible with the parents’ interests and activities, and a refusal to discipline children all contribute to Western culture’s attack on the family. Rather than sound the alarm, much of the church world today approves of Western culture’s attack on marriage and the family, even lending its theological arsenal to the culture to defend and advance the attack. In light of these trends, which are not new, the true Church of Jesus Christ has the calling to preach the truth about marriage and the family, to catechize her children and young people in the honorable state of marriage and the blessedness of the man and woman who

are given children, and to admonish and discipline those members who live in sin with regard to marriage and the family.

Examples of Western culture’s attack on marriage abound. The most recent attack concerns homosexual marriage. On May 17, 2004, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts legalized homosexual marriage for citizens of the state. As far as Massachusetts is concerned, men may now marry men, and even women may now marry women. What has begun in Massachusetts will soon follow in other states as well; for courts in other states have already been doing everything they can to sanction this abomination.

Western culture is not only busy attacking marriage by sanctioning homosexual unions. Western culture has been busy for years overthrowing the institution of marriage by its promotion of divorce and remarriage. Divorce is allowed for every conceivable reason. And although the process of a divorce still costs a significant amount of money and consumes much time, the divorce rate continues to be high. Some estimates put the divorce rate in the country as high as 50%. Because of the

high divorce rate and the significant financial and emotional cost of securing a divorce, some young couples decide to forego marriage altogether. They decide to live together and raise children together as if they were married, but they refuse to enter into the bond of marriage in the first place.

Having undermined marriage, Western culture goes to work on the family. The attack on the family focuses on children and the parents' attitude toward their children. Children are not viewed by the society as a blessing, but as a nuisance. That society views children as a nuisance comes out in the actions of the parents toward their children and in the advice that the popular culture gives to parents regarding their relation to their children. Parents are encouraged to limit the size of their family by using contraceptives to prevent the conception of too many children. At all costs, time must be left for the parents to pursue their own pleasure and their own leisure without the interference of a houseful of kids.

Western culture also attacks families by taking the mother out of the home. The parenting magazines are full of articles that promote the absence of mother from the home. At worst, these magazines and articles encourage mothers to abandon their children in day-care or at grandmother's house so that the mothers are free to pursue their careers outside of the home without the nuisance of raising their own children. At best, these magazines and articles present the mother's abandonment of the home as an acceptable alternative to the mother being a keeper at home.

...magazines and articles present the mother's abandonment of the home as an acceptable alternative to the mother being a keeper at home.

When Western culture attacks marriage and the family, we are not surprised. The ungodly culture of the world has never been a friend of biblical marriage and the covenant family. Ancient Greece and Rome, with all of their high culture, were full of homosexuality. In some cases, the male children were taken out of the home and away from their parents at an early age for the purpose of training them in the art of war. Scripture tells us of the hor-

rendous destruction of the family by the godless cultures surrounding Israel, which at times was practiced also by Israel. For example, part of the service of the god Molech involved burning one's own children as they made them "pass through the fire" (cf. II Kings 17:17).

What is more surprising is that the nominal church stands right behind the ungodly culture, encouraging and defending the culture's destruction of marriage and the family. On every issue, from homosexual marriage to the various ways of viewing children as a nuisance, the apostate and apostatizing churches of the day stand ready to defend the culture.

The biblical and Reformed view of marriage and the family is based on the life of God Himself. God is a covenant God in Himself, living in perfect fellowship as the Triune God. God is the original family, the Father eternally generating the Son in love and the Son eternally being generated by the Father in love. The Father, in His love for the Son, breathes after His Son the Holy Spirit, and the Son does the same to the Father. In His love for Himself, God has determined to reveal Himself in Christ as the covenant God to creatures outside of Himself. The church was eternally chosen by God as the bride of His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the whole Reformed view of marriage and the family is founded upon God as the covenant God. That the Reformed view of marriage and the family flows out of the truth of God's own covenant life in Himself is not strange. The structure of the Belgic Confession indicates that all Reformed doctrine is founded upon the knowledge of God. After a few introductory articles on Scripture, the Belgic Confession begins its treatment of the doctrines of Scripture with the doctrine of the Trinity. So important is the knowledge of God for all of doctrine, that even before its introductory articles on the Word of God, the Belgic Confession begins in Article One with a confession that "there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God." The knowledge of God is foundational to the knowledge of all the other doctrines of Scripture.

As far as marriage is concerned, marriage is one of the outstanding covenant symbols that points to the relationship between Christ and His church. That marriage is an outstanding covenant symbol of Christ's marriage to His church is taught by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5. After explaining how a man and a woman ought to live together as husband and wife, the apostle concludes, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Therefore, when a

Christian man and a Christian woman enter into marriage, they are not primarily entering into an arrangement that suits themselves and their own happiness. Rather, they are entering into a bond that reflects the love and union of Christ and His church.

...when a Christian man and a Christian woman enter into marriage, they are not primarily entering into an arrangement that suits themselves and their own happiness.

The rest of the rules regarding marriage flow out of this covenantal truth. Marriage may not be broken by man (with one exception) because Christ does not break His marriage with the church. Only those whom God has designated are candidates for marriage, because marriage was God's institution as a symbol of His Son's marriage. Not two men or two women, but one man and one woman are eligible to marry.

With regard to the family and children's place in the family, God declares that children are a blessing to the godly husband and wife. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the *man* that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3-5). It is folly

for the covenant husband and wife to attempt to limit the number of children they have for their own selfish interests. Also, in His wisdom, God has fitted and equipped the mother for the high calling of nurturing those covenant blessings in the home.

It is folly for the covenant husband and wife to attempt to limit the number of children they have for their own selfish interests.

The proper view of marriage and the family is being attacked by modern culture and the modern church. But let the true church of Christ protect the proper view of marriage and the family among her own members. The church must preach the truth of marriage in connection with the great symbolism of marriage as the marriage of Christ and the church. The church must catechize her children and young people in how to marry and how to raise a family. The church must also admonish and discipline those members who walk in sin with regard to marriage and the family. By these means, God preserves His covenant people not only in the proper view of marriage and the family, but in a proper walk in marriage and in the family. ❖

Andy is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. He wrote this essay for the 2004 Protestant Reformed Scholarship.

Church History

George M. Ophoff (19) Years in the Seminary

by Prof. Herman Hanko

In the last article we talked briefly about Rev. Ophoff's labors in the congregation of Byron Center. If you recall, I emphasized that Rev. Ophoff's gifts from

God suited him to be a professor in the Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, rather than work in the pastoral ministry. He was at his best in the classroom. It

is to this aspect of Rev. Ophoff's work that I wish to call the attention of our readers in this and subsequent articles.

I had the distinct privilege of attending seminary while Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff were teaching. At about the time I started my college studies Rev. Hoeksema suffered a severe stroke. After the Lord brought to Rev. Hoeksema recovery from this stroke and after he resumed his labors in the Seminary, I and a few other students at college were fearful that by the time we arrived at the Seminary, Rev. Hoeksema would no longer be able to teach. The result was that we requested permission of the Theological School Committee to audit Rev. Hoeksema's Dogmatics classes so that we could have our Dogmatics with him even though we were not ready as yet for seminary work. This permission was granted, and we spent three years with Rev. Hoeksema in Dogmatics classes before we entered the Seminary. It was during these years that we also, quite naturally, got to know Rev. Ophoff as a teacher—although we never took any formal classes with him until we actually entered Seminary. But the Lord preserved both Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff, and we spent another three years under their instruction.

The memories of these years are still very strong. Especially when we started Seminary, a year or two before the split of 1953, the Seminary was rather large and in fact, had students from the German Reformed Churches and from the Netherlands. There were also several students from our own churches, many of whom are with us no longer. Some were studying for the ministry; some were attending various classes although they had no intention of entering the ministry.

Before I speak of the labors of Rev. Ophoff, there are several general remarks which are worth making. These remarks are mainly impressions which linger over the years.

The first impression which I had already in those years and which still continues is the impression of the immense dedication of these men. More than once the thought came to us that both these men could undoubtedly have been great men of the Christian Reformed Church had they stayed in that denomination and been willing to bend their consciences to swallow the poison of common grace. They could have been two of the outstanding preachers in those churches. They could have, without doubt, been two of the greatest theologians which that denomination produced. They could have occupied positions of leadership in denominational affairs. It is not impossible to imagine that sooner or later they could have



Professor Ophoff

taught in the Seminary. But they had refused to subscribe to doctrines which they knew to be contrary to the Word of God. The result was that they were sitting in the cold, dark, and often dank basement of First Church spending a great share of their time with a few students to teach them the Reformed faith and how to be ministers of the gospel. Even though we were few in numbers (later our numbers in Seminary were reduced to three or four, and there were times when there was only one student) these two men labored unceasingly to give us the very best they had. The question often arose: Why were two men, who could have been so great, content to spend their time with a couple of students in such poorly equipped quarters? I think the question never occurred to them. They were completely content. And the fact that their place was, from every human viewpoint, so small, did not keep them from giving us the very best of Seminary educations. This was dedication of a very high degree, and the depth of their dedications left its mark upon us.

The second impression which I have of those years was the impression of the patience of these men. They were patient with us—patient beyond the call of duty. We were fresh out of college. We had, as so many college students, an exaggerated idea of our grasp of every conceivable intellectual problem. We were, in short, rather cocky. These men, on the other hand, had forgotten more than we ever knew. We would argue with them, debate their theology, question what they were teaching and not hesitate to express some disagreement. It would have

been somewhat natural if they had become extremely impatient and had laughed at our foolishness and ignorance. But they did not do this—not once, in my recollection. They enjoyed the arguments, entered vigorously into the debates, and encouraged us to ask all the questions we wanted to ask. They treated our problems seriously and tolerated our ignorance with amazing fortitude—although I suspect they must often have smiled behind their hands at our foolishness.

The third impression which I have is the impression that our education was of the highest caliber possible. I cannot stress this strongly enough. It is true that, especially during the years of the struggle which resulted in the split of 1953, these men were often preoccupied with many weighty matters. It is also true that school did not always operate on a regular basis because of the work these men had to do in Classis meetings and Synodical gatherings. It is also true that we were sent, in the years after the split, all over the country to preach—even during the school year. But the fact remains that our education was an excellent one. We had good courses. We had to study and study hard, often times on our own.

But when I speak of how good an education we received, I mean especially that the education was based completely on Scripture and the Confessions. Both are true. I recall vividly that when we debated with our professors, they had all the patience in the world, but they insisted that all our arguments had to be based on Scripture and the Confessions. If we were called down in our debating it was only for what Rev. Hoeksema would laughingly call “our philosophizing.”

They taught us that every argument had to be grounded in Scripture or it was not worth considering. They taught us a respect for the Confessions which remains to the present. They taught us in this way how to be ministers of the gospel.

My fourth impression of school was that it was a time of great fun. We worked hard. We had to work hard. We could not do much else but squirm inwardly and outwardly when the paralyzing eyes of our professors would nail us to our seats for a lesson unprepared or poorly done. But we had great times. It was in my school days that I learned that neither Rev. Hoeksema nor Rev. Ophoff were the cold austere men they were pictured to be. They were hearty, fond of a good joke, could see the humorous side of things, were prepared to “let down their hair” with the students and could often laugh uproariously along with the rest of us. There was genuine

camaraderie in school. They were pleasant years and times which can never be repeated.

Rev. Ophoff’s classes were also a lot of fun. Often times however, they were a lot of fun for different reasons. Rev. Ophoff had absolutely no conception of time. If we did not ourselves take over the matter of beginning and ending classes, one class could have run through the whole morning without Rev. Ophoff being aware of it. One of the students once brought an alarm clock to school set to go off on the hour when the class was supposed to end. When Rev. Ophoff, startled by the loudly ringing buzzer, asked as the source of the noise, a glib-tongued student talked him into the use of an alarm. This lasted for just two days, for Rev. Ophoff could not be time-bound.

We had fun in his classes too because we thought we were always getting away with all sorts of things in his assignments. I say, we thought we were getting away with things, because to this day I am not sure. I sometimes suspect that he was more aware of what was going on than we gave him credit for. To cite but one illustration. Some of you may be aware of the fact that the Hebrew Bible uses dots and various other signs for vowels. When in our Hebrew quizzes we had a dot in the wrong place, we would often tell Rev. Ophoff that it was a fly speck, and he would give us credit for a right answer. But I suspect sometimes that he knew, but went along with our little joke, enjoying his fooling of us more than we enjoyed our fooling of him.

But his classes were also fun because we never knew what was going to happen at any given time. I recall the time that the opening of the day was delayed because Rev. Ophoff had come to school sucking on an immense jawbreaker. The sucking grew in fury as the minutes sailed by and the jaw breaker failed to decrease in size. The look on Rev. Ophoff’s face grew increasingly puzzled, until, pulling the jawbreaker from his mouth, he said in disgust: “No wonder it wouldn’t melt. The paper is still on it.”

But we learned. A former student once said that Rev. Ophoff stayed longer at Mt. Sinai in Old Testament History class than the children of Israel. But we learned. And we grew. And we were, sometimes in spite of ourselves, being prepared for the ministry of the Word.

*The last article in this series was in the August/September issue. ❖

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. The last article in this series was in the August/September issue.

The Synodal Reformed Church of Goes

by J. P. de Klerk

Goes is a well-known city in the Dutch province of Zeeland, on the former island of South Beveland. This Synodal Reformed Church (now part of the “Samen-Op-Weg” which is a union of Protestant but modernist churches) was built by the famous architect A. Rothuizen. The manse, in the foreground, blocks a full view of the church. The tower is situated next to the main entrance, and has a very high steeple. The roof is also high and steep. The inside of this church is very sober. It was built in 1929 and is known as the Westerkerk (the name of the street is the Westwal, meaning a dyke).

Goes came into existence in the Middle Ages, as farmers settled there to provide food to the “Oostende” castle. It soon became a small town which was officially recognized in 1417 by Countess Jacoba van Beieren. Goes became an important harbor in those days

for trade with England. In 1651 the harbor was enlarged and improved.



State Reformed Church of 's-Heer Arendskerke

In the governmental archives of The Netherlands, the State Reformed Church of 's-Heer Arendskerke is mentioned as a monument of historical value, but without many particulars. The little town is situated not far from the city of Goes, in the western part of the former island of Zuid-Beveland that is part of the Dutch province of Zeeland. The church was probably built in 1350 with natural hewn sandstone bricks from East Flanders. The tower has a pinnacle and a small spire. This ancient area was even occupied by the Roman army in 75 A.D. The people had a constant battle against the sea, building many dykes, trying to reclaim land and sometimes losing whole cities in the springtide and the fierce storm. Several foundations of old buildings have been found in the soil by archaeologists. The church has remained undamaged throughout the centuries. ❖

J. P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

What Am I?

I travel only one pace,
But not by feet or fin.
If all God's creatures would race,
There'd be no doubt I'd win.

And I'm not only swiftest—
No less and never worst,
In time of all creation
I was the very first.

This order has a reason
In all life's sustenance,
I'm proof from the beginning
Of God's good providence.

You cannot grab my fingers
Or hold me to your face,
But I can so surround you,
You feel my warm embrace.

Although your hands can't catch me,
Your eyes can hold withal,
In fact, they only grasp me
And nothing else at all!

You can't destroy my being,
But bending me will yield
A covenant sign and pattern—
My colors are revealed.

I never left God's people
In Goshen, but on some
I was completely absent—
A plague on them had come.

And once upon a journey
To persecute and hound,
My strength shown so intensely
The purpose turned around.

So now you get the picture,
A bright and clear decree—
To fellowship with others
You walk inside of me.

Not all men comprehend me,
As parables imply,
But one was sent as witness.
Now tell me, what am I? ❖

**Look up and read I John 1:7 and John 1:5-9.
What five-letter word occurs seven times in
these verses?**

Connie is the mother of 5 children and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



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Church News

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

- Triplets Alexandra Hope, Amanda Grace, and Joshua Bradley daughters and son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad Vis—Cornerstone, IN
Taylor Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Russell Tolsma—Edmonton, Canada
Molly Katherine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad Baker—First, MI
Elisabeth Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David Linker—Lacombe, Canada
Owen Elliot son of Mr. & Mrs. Luke Griess—Loveland, CO
Eli Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Langerak—Hope, MI
Jeremy Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Langerak—Hope, MI
Aiden Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Derek Cnossen—Hudsonville, MI
Keahna Vanae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Veryl Heynen—Hull, IA
Drew Caleb, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Poppema—Hull, IA
Joshua Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kimmy Kooiker—Hull, IA
Elizabeth Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Dykstra—Southeast, MI
Daniel Ray, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Holleman—South Holland, IL
Hannah Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Phillip Lenting—South Holland, IL
Carson James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dean Poppema—Southwest, MI
Seth Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Engelsma—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

- Jared Hekstra—Byron Center, MI
Heather Oosterbaan—Byron Center, MI
Jason and Jennifer Taylor—Byron Center, MI
Eileen Dykstra—Grace, MI
Brooke Wassink—Holland, MI
Nathan Buys—Hull, IA
Amy Grevengoed—Hull, IA
Brent VanMaanen—Hull, IA

MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

- Mr. Randy Scott and Miss Jenny Taylor—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Joseph VanOverloop and Miss Audra Koole—Faith, MI
Mr. Ben Boverhof and Miss Jammie Kamminga—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Nathan DeKok and Miss Valerie Westra—Hull, IA