Editorial - Christmas: The Great Wait

Brothers and sisters, one of my favorite parts of the Biblical record regarding Jesus’ coming that first Christmas and the meaning and impact of His Incarnation is this old man named Simeon (see Luke 2:23-35). He was faithful to God to the very last day of his life. He waited on the Messiah, knowing that in this world we will have trouble, but with faith in God, He will bring redemption His Way, in His timing, for His purposes. The theme of waiting on the Lord is one of those sub-themes found throughout the Scriptures in Old and New Testaments. As a window on the events and words of Simeon, I want to use this key Scripture for our meditation:

Psalm 27:13-14. “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the Lord In the land of the living. 14 Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!”

Christmas is all about the Great Wait. Of course in our culture and our families, we repeat this cycle of waiting. As soon as Christmas finally comes, we follow up the joy and precious moments with the fact that we have to wait another 365 days for our annual festival to return. Of course, as Christians, we can celebrate the meaning and impact of Christmas any and every day of the year. But in order to do that best, we have to understand what it means that Christmas is all about the Great Wait. First, it is A long wait. Second, it is A wait with longing. Third, it is a Wait with a future.

A Long Wait. We sing of this as the Church, “Come, Thou long-expected Jesus.” The Genealogy of Jesus found in Luke 3 and Matthew 1 drive home this point. From one generation to another, Adam and Eve had to wait. It wasn’t Cain or Abel who brought redemption for the sin that Adam brought into the world, and the slavery to the temptations and deceptions of the devil that Eve fell prey to. Their next son, Seth, even though he was in the line of promise, Seth wasn’t the Messiah either. And on and on the genealogy goes. One son of Adam begets another, and he begets another, and he begets another.

Not only was the wait long, it was grueling. The character of the waiting is seen as you do some Bible study and background research into the people in the list. Even the great Kings like David and Solomon, or the patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Men of faith? Well, they all made the Hall of Faith in the list. Even the great Kings like David and Solomon, or the patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Men of faith? Well, they all made the Hall of Faith chapter in Hebrews 11. But they also are great sinners, as the Scripture is sure to point out. They disappointed since they could not keep covenant with God in the absolute faithfulness that we need to overcome the curse on sin. So, we wait. Another generation. Maybe this time. And of course, everyone else living in that generation had to wait even longer, and hope that maybe their children would see the Redeemer. Their hope of seeing Him in their lifetime was gone once the man in the promised line demonstrated his sin. Think of it. Just one character flaw, one tiny sin in your King, and Israel would have to wait another generation. By those standards, nobody would ever be qualified to be President!

So this long wait for the first Christmas—the arrival of the Christ—was A Wait with Longing. Psalm 27 says be of “good courage.” That means we need courage. We’d lose heart and be in despair otherwise.

The longing is on man’s side. It is hard to wait. It is hard to wait when it feels there is no purpose, there is no reward coming. It is even harder to wait when you do have hopes set, anticipations high, and then the wait is over, and the hopes are dashed. It seems all foolish. That is much worse than waiting at a stoplight. This sort of waiting with expectations unmet once the wait is over, that explains the deep frustration.
Last February, Jeannette and I had the privilege of attending the Ligonier conference in Orlando, Florida. The conference was a great blessing and I would recommend going if you ever get the chance. The speakers were all excellent and the venue was amazing. The speakers were not overly academic and the worship times were very uplifting. We also met a number of interesting people and made new friends. The conference topic was “The Gospel.” This sermon is a compilation of ideas from several different conference speakers as well as other sources. I will try to do justice to both them and the topic. There are 3 points, 1. The Gospel is God’s, 2. The Gospel is Jesus, and 3. The Gospel demands our response. The Scripture reading is Romans 1:1-6 then dropping down to verses 16 and 17.

The Gospel is God’s

The book of Romans, of course, is actually a letter written by Paul sometime around the year 55 A.D. It was written to the Church in Rome which was already established, though not by Paul himself. Like many of his other letters it has an opening, which we just read, a main body of the letter, and a conclusion. Unlike most of Paul’s other letters, Romans is long. Dr. Sproul called it Paul’s “magisterial epistle,” his “magnum opus,” or his greatest work. It is Paul’s fullest, grandest, and most comprehensive statement of the gospel.

In the introduction, Paul identifies himself as the author and the Church in Rome as the recipient (in verse seven). He also identifies himself as a bondservant or slave, someone who is totally at the disposal of his master. The master, in Paul’s case, is Jesus Christ. He also states his calling or mission in life. He is called to be an Apostle, an official messenger of the gospel.

We are familiar with the term Apostle. To be an Apostle you had to be personally appointed by Christ and an eyewitness of the resurrection (or one who received a special revelation of the risen Jesus, which was the case with Paul). Apostles were given authority to teach and to write.

The Apostles were Christ’s ambassadors. An ambassador is someone who has been officially called and sanctioned to represent his master, the one who called him. They may speak in his name and proclaim the master’s message, as if the master was actually speaking himself. An ambassador is not speaking for himself, he is to relay faithfully his master’s message. He is not free to alter it. He has not been given the authority to alter the content. He is to be a faithful representative of his master.

Apostles were also “separated to the gospel of God.” We have all learned, probably as children, that the word gospel means “good news” or “good message.” We will discuss the content of this good message shortly. The last two words in the phrase “separated to the gospel of God,” could mean a message about or concerning God, but in this case the word is most properly interpreted as implying ownership. This gospel, this message, belongs to God. He authored it. He composed it. He originated it. He ordained it to come to pass. It is His. Why make a point of such a small distinction? Well if the good news truly belongs to God, then man, fallen man, has no right to change it. We are not allowed to alter or mess with it in any way. But history tells us we are very prone to mess with the Gospel, even though it does not belong to us but to God.

In 1546, Martin Luther preached his last sermon just a few days before he died. In this sermon Luther said that the most impoverished being in the world must be God Himself because everyone wants to
improve, or edit God’s message. Since the message was first revealed to man in Genesis 3:15, and then progressively revealed throughout the pages of Scripture, through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the wondrous gospel message has been rewritten, changed, or edited in countless ways. It is as if the good news was not quite good enough, could be made better, or more palatable to modern man. In the Sunday night Bible study (of our congregation) which we finished last Spring, we were reminded of the main theme of the Book of Galatians. It was an appeal to the Galatian Christians to not be fooled by an alternative gospel, a gospel of faith plus something else. The real Gospel message is that justification is a free gift of God’s grace; it is not earned or deserved. We must be aware of what the true gospel message is.

This Fall, the adult Sunday school class will start a study on Church History. The Consistory made that decision for several reasons. One reason is that 2017 marks the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. A lot of history led up to the Reformation, a great desire of the Reformers to return to the simple truth of God’s Gospel, and a lot of history has occurred since the Reformation. We can learn from a study of Church History. Most people, including myself, are ignorant of much Church History. I am looking forward to the study. The second reason for choosing to study Church History is that most or all of the current attempts to alter God’s gospel have already been done in the past in various ways. We should be knowledgeable about them so we can recognize error today when we see it or hear it.

I made a very short list of some of these attempts to alter God’s message in preparation for this sermon a week or so ago. It didn’t take long, 5-10 minutes. Any one of you could make a similar or even more complete list. Time however doesn’t allow us to make an exhaustive study, but here are a few: The book of Galatians refers to the historical existence of heresy. We mentioned before that the main theme of Galatians was that Christians are not to be fooled by a false gospel. It was written by Paul somewhere around A.D. 55. Think about that! People were alive then that were eyewitnesses. They saw Christ, perhaps ate with Him or travelled with Him. Maybe they heard Him speak. The ink was hardly dry on the original Gospel copy and already a counterfeit copy was being brought forth.

Later, in A.D. 140, Marcion was an early church heretic. He rejected all of the Old Testament and most of the New, except the Pauline Epistles. He emphasized God’s love over and above all of God’s other attributes. Could that idea possibly be relevant to the Church today?

Then there was Mohammed and his followers in 570, Joseph Smith in 1830, and Charles Russell and Joseph Rutherford, the founders of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1870. Here’s a few token atheists to complete the list: Karl Marx, 1883, whose famous quote was “religion is the opium of the masses” and Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, modern examples of prominent intellectuals who were not content with their own atheism but wanted to convince the world that there is no God, and that belief in a higher power is actually harmful to mankind. That has to be the ultimate rejection of the gospel, to reject the good news and the Giver at the same time. Psalm 14 however, tells us “the fool says there is no God.”

This list of changes, or outright rejection could go on and on, couldn’t it? Man is not content with the faith once delivered to the saints. We are arrogant enough to change it. However, Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, told those believers in Galatia something else. Turn with me to Galatians 1 while I read verses 6 to 10. “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6–10)

Powerful words! Sobering words! If anyone, even an angel from heaven, anyone who would dare to edit God’s word, let them be accursed. Do we really believe that God will hold us guiltless when we pervert, alter, or change His message?

The Gospel is Jesus

On that sobering word, we will move on to point number two, which is: What is the content of the Gospel of good news? In Paul’s opening paragraph, (I am back in Romans 1 again), he summarizes the Gospel. He points out that the Good News of Christ has been promised before, through the prophets of the Old Testament. That it is about God’s Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Our Messiah, Redeemer, King, who was born of the lineage of King David. Everything foretold by prophecy, revealed partially in type, shadows, or symbols has been made reality in Jesus. What God has promised has come to pass and this Jesus is declared to be the Son of God. He,
Jesus, has been given power according to the Spirit of Holiness, says verse 4.

Here is a very clear example of the Trinitarian nature of God, what God has purposed is carried out by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born of the seed of David, to fulfill prophecy and to share in our weaknesses and frailties. He is transformed by the Holy Spirit in the resurrection. This is a reference to the two stages of Christ’s ministry: His humiliation followed by His exaltation and enthronement at the right hand of His Father. This Scripture also reminds us of Christ’s dual nature. He is one person, with two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. He has a human nature, because only a human would be an appropriate sacrifice for human sin. He has a divine nature in order to be able to survive such a sacrifice. The wages of sin is death, the Bible teaches us. Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world and through another man, Jesus, sin is atoned for. This is the good message. This is God’s gospel.

Man, through his fall into sin is separated, alienated from his Creator. He is dead spiritually in his sin. He is in desperate shape, hopeless without divine intervention. And what has God ordained? He has a plan, a plan conceived before the foundations of the world were laid. A plan to reconcile fallen man with Himself. A costly plan. Since the wages of sin is death, someone will have to die. Since man is already dead spiritually, man cannot do it. The death of a sinful man would also not atone for other sinners. We need a sinless man, able to withstand the rigors of our just punishment. Only God’s Son will do. God will have to sacrifice His own Son, His only Son, His Beloved Son, in order to redeem us.

Wouldn’t it be cheaper for God to kill us all and start over? He came close to doing that in Noah’s day. Why not just start over, it would have been way cheaper. Yet, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. It is a wonder, is it not? All of us from time to time wonder, “Why me, Lord?” You could have easily passed me by and bestowed your saving grace on someone else. But do we also ponder why God so loved this sin filled world? And yet He did love the world so much that He was willing to sacrifice the most precious, eternal blessing in all the universe, His own Beloved Son. God didn’t offer redemption for fallen angels, yet He did for us. How astounding, how baffling, how wonderfully wise, and how very humbling!

The gospel message is also summarized well in the words of Romans 5:8, “But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. . . . For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Romans 1:16–17
It is a simple message. It is full of profound truth that we may ponder for a lifetime. Yet it is so simple that even a child can understand it. How could we possibly improve on it? What needs editing? Who would dare to alter such a perfect plan? At bedtime there is a little ritual that always happens at our house, involving who loves who more. The parent says, “I love you to the moon and back,” and the child responds with “I love you to Jupiter and back,” and so on until we get to “infinity plus one.” God’s love is much more profound than even that. Here is another summary of God’s gospel: At the cross, man stood before God and said “I hate you this much,” and God stood before the world and said, “I love you this much.”

The Gospel Demands our Response

That brings us to the final point this morning. God’s gospel demands our response. How do we respond to such love? Well, to be very brief, I could say, “believe it, live it, and proclaim it, Amen! Let’s stand for prayer.” However, I would like you to stay seated for just a minute or two longer. When we believe the gospel truth, we believe all that it implies. I am a sinner, I deserve to perish in my sinfulness, I can’t save myself, I can’t lift myself up to God. I can only receive the gift that God freely gives to me and to you. And that gift is His Son. I will cling to Jesus. When I worry about the strength or weakness of my faith, I will cling to Jesus. When life is difficult, uncertain, or frightening, I will cling to Jesus. My salvation does not depend on my pitiful, wavering faith. My hope and trust is in nothing less than Jesus’ perfect love and righteousness. I will cling to Jesus.

That is the good news and our response. All our hope and trust is in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is all outside of ourselves (extra nos, in Latin). Outside of ourselves, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” One of the things I took away from several of the conference speakers, but especially Dr. Ian Hamilton, was that we Reformed believers are well-versed in doctrine. We like doctrine. I like doctrine. I like to read about it. I like to study it. Doctrine is important. We are to worship God in spirit and in truth, so doctrine matters. But in the end, we are not saved by any specific doctrine on its own. We are saved by a Person, Jesus, and His perfectly obedient, sinless life and atoning, sin-vanquishing death. We cling to Jesus. Here is a sobering thought to ponder. Do you realize the only disfigured body in heaven will be Christ’s? Our glorified bodies will be whole, not ravaged by disease, age, accident or injury. But Christ’s glorified body still bears the marks of His sacrifice for you and me.

“Amazing love! How can it be that Jesus would die for me?” What is our response? Humble gratitude and confident trust in this life. The God Who has already given the most precious gift in the universe to me, that God the Father, my Father, will work out for good everything that happens to me. So to the best of my ability, I will give God my best. I will be obedient in this life as the sometimes painfully slow process of sanctification is worked out in me. Finally, having been given such a precious gift, extra nos, I will share the good news. I will be an evangelist. J. I. Packer’s definition of an evangelist is this: “an evangelist is a Christian living as a Christian.” Amen.

“Heavenly Father, forgive us for doubting Your Word. Forgive us for thinking that we could possibly improve upon it, or not completely put our hope and trust in it. Grant us a full measure of faith, faith in our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. When we are anxious, fearful, or full of doubt, remind us that You love us, loved us so much that You presented to us the most precious gift in the universe. Give us humble gratitude and a confident trust in Your goodness to us. All because and through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.” 

Elder Don Oliver
Grace RCUS, Rapid City, SD
anger behind the people who first met Jesus at His first Advent. He wasn’t kingly enough in His birth. Later, He wasn’t kingly enough in His entrance to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on a little donkey. Jesus didn’t wipe out the Roman occupiers of the Promised Land. He even spoke against the religious conservatives who would have been His biggest allies—the Pharisees. It didn’t make sense according to human wisdom. So people waited with longing.

But even the genealogy that describes the long wait shows the wait had a purpose and direction, a conclusion. “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.” (Matthew 1:17) It was part of a plan designed by Someone much bigger and more grand than any of the individual people along the timeline.

The people of God are waiting and waiting and totally useless to do anything themselves to help bring in the Kingdom, and suddenly we read that God enters History and takes charge.

The cause of this longing—it’s our fault. The prophet Isaiah explained it perfectly. “21 Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1–2)

NOTICE, the Kingdom of God couldn’t advance as long as it was up to the holy saints to keep the Kingdom going. The problems in this world are not ultimately because of the sin of the evil Gentiles, or the Muslims, or those people out there. This was the sin of the covenant people, the faithful ones who cared about showing up to worship the Creator and to wait for His promises. Isaiah continues to describe in verses 3-15 the sinfulness of God’s people. Then we read a striking surprise. The people of God are waiting and waiting and totally useless to do anything themselves to help bring in the Kingdom, and suddenly we read that God enters History and takes charge.

“15 ..... Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him That there was no justice. 16 He saw that there was no man, And wondered that there was no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him. . . 20 “The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” Says the Lord.” (Isaiah 59:15-16, 20)

I think we sometimes forget that the Jews and the shepherds and Joseph and Mary weren’t the only ones participating in “the Great Wait.” So was God. He couldn’t move His redemptive history forward until the fullness of the times.

The longing for Christmas is on God’s side, too. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and faith. So what does God do? He not only makes faith POSSIBLE, the sovereign God makes faith certain, guaranteed, by sending His only Son to live the perfect life and die the perfect death. Then the Father with the Son send us the Holy Spirit, so that we are able to have faith and we place that faith entirely in the Word Who became flesh and dwelt among us, our Lord Jesus.

God longs to rescue His people. He has been longing for it longer than any one man or woman. Ever since Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, God longed to have the kind of fellowship that He created mankind to enjoy with Him. So God guarded that Garden so that Adam or Eve or their descendants would not wander back in before the Holy One had come and thus bring eternal judgment on themselves and us. God made the promise in Genesis 3:15 that the woman (Eve) would one day have a child, a seed Who would crush the head of the serpent. That child was the only hope.

HOW might we APPLY this? Do you long for an end to persecution of Christians? God longs for it too, even more. Do you long for an end to hypocritical and half-hearted worship and churchianity? God longs for it even more. Do you long for strength to overcome your own sin and doubts and weakness? God longs for it even more. And Christmas reminds us that God has done something about all this. God knows that if He doesn’t do something, nobody will. Nobody even can bridge the gap between the Holy God and us wicked creatures.

The Great wait is a long wait, and a wait with longing for God to come to the rescue. But one last thing: the Great Wait that accompanies a Christian view of Christmas and the Incarnation is also A Wait with a Future.
The future that God brings through the Great Wait, well, that future doesn’t always match our expectations that we developed during our long hours and years of waiting. The “long-expected Jesus” exposes our expectations.

As we enter a New Year, it is good to keep that in mind. We might think of it this way: The wait isn’t over, but is transformed from the wait for the 1st Advent to the wait for the 2nd Advent. Also, the great wait for the 2nd Coming of the Christ is a wait that has a future moment when all waiting is concluded, and our faith is sight. We learn this in the first fulfillment of the Great Wait as the old man Simeon said, when holding the Christ child, “For my eyes have seen Your salvation.” (Luke 2:30)

But that’s the rub. The future that God brings through the Great Wait, well, that future doesn’t always match our expectations that we developed during our long hours and years of waiting. The long-expected Jesus exposes our expectations. As the old Christmas carol goes, “Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to ______.” What do you fill in the blank? Jesus is born to stop abortion. Jesus is born to … fix the Supreme Court. Jesus is born to … keep my kids happy and healthy as they grow and establish families of their own. Come thou long expected Jesus, born to … help me have a “peaceful, easy feeling” in my retirement years.

What are some of your expectations? One of the quickest ways to identify your expectations is to ask, what really gets you upset? What frustrates you? The times you get upset, frustrated, that is most likely because of an unmet expectation. Someone not keeping their word. A child who doesn’t behave or act their age. An attitude that seems so deep-rooted that it will never change, so that ministering to some people seems a hopeless exercise in waiting.

We have our expectations, and most of them are noble. But they must be placed within the proper timeline: the larger timeline of waiting on the Lord. And dwelling on what Jesus really came to do, and on the ongoing reality of sin and misery in this life until we reach the end of that 2nd Great Wait.

We wait for people in the congregation to get their act together. We wait for that elder or deacon (or minister!) to improve in his skills. We wait for the youth of the church to grow and mature; yet they grow and disappear instead. Our expectations and dreams are regularly clouded by conflict and doubt and stress. We know what it means to wait, and we will wait long with great expectations of slow spiritual growth. But shouldn’t there be some spiritual growth?

The Great Wait. Christmas teaches us about the fact that we as God’s people have been involved in a great wait for a great number of years, centuries, millennia. As we celebrate the 1st Coming of Jesus in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago now, we have such a beautiful number of songs of worship in the Church. Songs that we sing with joy in our hearts, of joy to the world and peace on earth because the great wait is over. But, perhaps, we also sing these songs much like the music that is played at the doctor’s office. We call it a waiting room, so we have music playing to help calm our nerves and pass the time. For Christians, the Great Wait for the first coming is over, but we sing of what Christ came to do and actually did do, accomplishing our salvation. Yet we also sing these songs for the next Great Wait, the period of time we are in now, waiting for the End – not the end of the Old Covenant, or the End of the 1st Age, but the End of the Ages. That day when all history reaches its climax, when Genesis has led to Revelation—fulfilled, the marriage supper of the Lamb of God is spread on the table, and we see our Redeemer face to face. Now we see through a glass dimly, but then, the wait is over. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus! And while You tarry, we wait on the Lord, we are of good courage, for YOU shall strengthen our heart. We would lose heart, unless we believed we would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. That very first Christmas, Psalm 27 was fulfilled. God’s only begotten Son entered the land of the living, and revealed the goodness. Simeon saw it in the Christ-child’s face. My eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord, now I can depart in peace.

It is a long wait. It is a wait with longing. But it is a wait with a future: a wait that is guaranteed to come to a glorious end, not because we can bring the 2nd Coming, but because God is once again going to take history into His own hands, and bring His redemption to pass.

Rev. Kyle Sorensen
Manitowoc, Wisconsin
Times change, the message remains

About forty years ago, when Rev. Aaron Kayayan was preparing from Paris audio recordings that would be aired in France and in French-speaking Africa, I helped him do so by operating the big REVOX 77 reel-to-reel machine that, at the time, was considered top-of-the-line, and made for excellent quality recordings in analogue technology. Back then, cut-and-paste literally meant using a pair of scissors and some special adhesive tape... When I took over the ministry of Reformed Faith and Life in the late nineties, recordings were done at a Pretoria studio by a sound engineer of Transworld Radio: each master tape was duplicated at TWR's offices in as many cassettes as were needed. They were subsequently sent to various FM radio stations in France or African countries. Finding enough plastic boxes for them was at times a real challenge. In the early years of the previous decade, cassettes became obsolete and were replaced by CDs. In time, it became necessary to copy the master recording at Reformed Faith and Life’s office with a duplicating machine we purchased. Today, while CDs are still in use, it is possible to send audio files directly from computer to computer via a specialized application, avoiding the business of duplicating, packing, and dispatching via snail mail while hoping in fear and trembling that African postal services would deliver each parcel to its respective addressees.

New technologies are never an end in themselves

Similar changes have affected other aspects of the radio component of our ministry: this year, in agreement with our various supporting committees, we put an end to our short waves (SW) broadcasts for Central Africa, which had been running since the very inception of Rev’ Aaron’s radio ministry in the mid seventies. It became evident to us that less and less people in Africa were tuning to SW, preferring by and large to listen to local FM radios, even receiving them via their cell phone. Having jumped on the internet broadcasting service of TWR (www.twr360.org) has proved to be an efficient means to reach out not only to Africans, but throughout the world, as some of the comments we regularly receive from internet users testify.

While technology can be (and is) used by many to foster the apostate motive of the serpent: “… ye shall be like gods…” we, at Reformed Faith and Life, do not believe that retreating into a kind of “neo-Amish” worldview would be acting in a faithful way, especially when it concerns the proclamation of the glorious Gospel of salvation to all nations.
We should carry out this mandate as faithful stewards

U.S. and Canada October visit

It was a pleasure to meet with Rev. Schnabel again, along with other faithful members of both our U.S. and Canadian committees during my recent trip to North America. In addition to reporting and reflecting upon past and present activities as well as planning future ones, I was invited to preach the Word in six different churches from the U.R.C.N.A.

I also visited with other fellow Christians eager to hear about what the Lord is doing on the field of His mission and was asked to address young people in three Christian schools in Ontario, speaking to 11th and 12th graders about the challenge of keeping faith alive in our globalized world.

As the end of another year approaches, fraught with many uncertainties about the course of affairs in a world bent on rushing towards more conflict and self-destruction, let us bear in mind these extraordinary words found in Hebrews 1:3:

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No Other Gospel

If someone asked you to explain the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them how would you respond? Would you tell the person that God wants to save people by His glorious grace through God-wrought faith in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ, but we must also do good works in order to be saved? Would you say that we need to be good people who obey God’s commands and once we do God will grant us eternal life? Or would you tell them that we must be baptized and become a member of a church in order to be saved? Sadly, many people today, who attend Bible believing churches every Sunday and who confess to be Christians, really can’t give a clear explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead, they would explain the Gospel in the ways just mentioned. This is one major reason why we hear some who profess to be Christians saying there will be many good Muslims, Mormons, and people of other religions in heaven—even though these people clearly deny the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This should cause us to take notice. If people who were taught directly under the tutelage of the Apostle Paul were suddenly turning away from the truth, what does that say about our propensity to embrace lies? This is why we must pay careful attention to the reading, teaching, and preaching of God’s Word. There are always those who will attempt to lead the people of God astray from the true Gospel into something that is contrary (Acts 20:29-30; Galatians 1:7). Every Christian must be a diligent student of the Word of Christ lest we also turn away from the One Who has called us in the grace of Christ to another Gospel, which is not another. There is only one true Gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners and it’s by way of grace through faith and not of works, and anyone who teaches contrary is under God’s curse.

Only One True Gospel

In Paul’s letters it was common for him to give a greeting of thanks to the church for their common faith or their love for the truth. And this he does in almost every one of his epistles except for his letter to the Galatians. His first words after the opening greeting are not “I give thanks,” but rather (vs. 6) “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel…” Paul was not one to mince words when it came down to the truth of a matter. He was not about to praise the Galatians in fact there was no reason for him to do so. The Galatians were not remaining steadfast in the faith to which they were called, but were turning from it. And Paul was not about to thank them for their perverse behavior. Rather, the Apostle Paul gives the Galatians a solemn warning about their “turning away from Him that called them into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel, which is not another.” Notice what Paul says here --- to turn away from the true Gospel is to turn away from God Himself. This is very important for us to understand.

(KJV) Galatians 1:6-10

*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. “
To turn away from the message of the Gospel is to turn away from God because what the message says, God says; what Scripture says, God says!  “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed” (Galatians 3:8).

God the Father had called the Galatians to Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel --- the Gospel that’s altogether good news for sinners. The Gospel that declares that Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed all the righteous requirements of the law and then went to the cross to die for the sins of many who had transgressed God’s law and who were under the curse of God because of their transgression. Christ suffered the curse of God in their place on the cross and then imputed to them righteousness which He alone had merited in exchange for their sins being imputed to Him on the cross. He was then raised from the dead as a witness that God had accepted His atoning work. And all of this is received by the sinner by grace through faith – not works! This is good news for sinners!

Yet this was the good news that the Galatians were so easily and quickly being turned away from, and the Apostle Paul is bewildered by this. Not that they were being turned away but rather that it happened so suddenly. Paul knew that there would be those who profess faith in Christ who would later turn their backs on Christ. You’ll remember the words he spoke to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31; “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” Paul anticipated this, but what was troubling was that it happened so soon after he had departed from Galatia. The message they were turning to was not even good news. Oh, how could they be so fooled into embracing a teaching that was just the opposite of what Paul had preached to them? And so clearly was the Gospel preached to the Galatians that Paul says in chapter 3:1: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?” It’s always amazing when people turn aside from the Gospel. You present the truth to them and they seem to be so zealous for the truth and to rejoice in Christ’s atoning work. Yet not long after you explain the Gospel to them they become members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons. They turn from the true Gospel of freedom in Christ unto a teaching that only brings them into bondage and places them under the curse and wrath of God. As Paul said to the Galatians: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another…”

When Paul condemns those following a different Gospel we need to understand that there are two Greek words for the English word “another.” When Paul says he marvels that they are so soon removed to another Gospel he uses the word “heteros” --- a teaching that stands over against the true Gospel. It’s a teaching that’s not homogenous with the true Gospel --- it’s not the same; it’s altogether different. In verse 7 Paul says, “which is not another Gospel.” Here he uses the other Greek word “allos” --- meaning it’s NOT the same as the true Gospel. So Paul says I am amazed that you are following a different Gospel which teaches contrary to the true Gospel, which is not in its true character a Gospel at all; it’s not good news. And so Paul says to the Galatians: There’s only one true Gospel and it was already preached to you by me. This other teaching that claims to be a Gospel is no Gospel at all. It’s NOT good news. It’s not another Gospel, but only a perversion of the one true Gospel.

This revelation condemns all other religions. Any other message that men may bring, Paul says, is not good news, is not the Gospel of God. In one verse the Apostle Paul eliminates every other religion on the face of the earth since they carry a message contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not popular to say in our world today. Our world wants universalism --- it
wants a message that says you can have your religion and I can have mine, but since we are both sincere in our religion we will both be accepted into heaven. The world wants a message that says we all worship the same God just in different ways. But Paul says the Gospel is fixed in heaven and any teaching contrary to this Gospel is false and is under the curse of God. Christianity doesn’t teach universalism, but exclusivism! Jesus said there was only one way to heaven and He was it. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” And Peter said in Acts 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Paul also makes the Galatians aware of the fact that there are those who always want to trouble the church by perverting the Gospel of Christ. They want to shake the church to its foundation rather than strive to edify and build it up. And the churches of Galatia were being shaken by the false teaching of the Judiazers, who were attempting to pervert the Gospel of grace by adding to it the works of the law. But this is an impossibility. As Paul wrote in Romans 11:6: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” The two are diametrically opposed; either Christ is a complete Savior or He is not a Savior at all.

Beloved in Christ: The greatest enemies of the church are not those who openly contradict the teaching of Scripture and deny Jesus Christ, but those who quote Scripture and profess to trust in Christ all the while subtly undermining and distorting the true Gospel with a system of works-righteousness. This is exactly what the Judiazers were doing. And men do the same thing in the church today. They come into the church and profess Jesus Christ and the teaching of Scripture but soon they begin to introduce false teaching, which is not good news, and try to draw away disciples after themselves, which always causes the church to be unsettled. Be aware of such men, beloved. Be diligent readers of Scripture in order to recognize their false teaching. Be so familiar with the true Gospel that you can instantly recognize the counterfeit. And be a faithful reader of the confessions of the church as they will keep you on track regarding the truth of the main and plain things of Scripture. This will make the church strong and will edify true believers.

And notice also that this one true Gospel belongs to Christ. It’s His message; He owns it. Therefore, no man has the authority to change it. But this is exactly what the Judiazers were doing. They were seeking to change something that was not theirs to change. Paul was angry because Christ’s Gospel was at stake. Men may dislike and reject the Gospel message but the fact is they cannot change it and still call it God’s good news. The Gospel is not ours to change as we will. It belongs to Christ, and the true preacher is a slave of Christ and is called to faithfully proclaim Christ’s message. And His message is fixed and man has no power over it. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35). The Scripture is eternal truth that never needs amending.

False Messengers are Accursed of God

For any man to tamper with Christ’s Gospel will result in his being devoted to destruction, as Paul says in verses 8-9: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” Notice that Paul puts himself and every preacher of God’s Word under the same condemnation. Even if an angel from heaven were to deliver a message contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul says let him be anathema. When something is called “anathema” it means that it has been taken from ordinary use and handed over to God. If it’s a good thing it has been handed over to Him for His use, but if it’s a bad thing it has been handed over to Him for destruction. But either way it has been taken out of ordinary relationships and is devoted to God. So what Paul is saying is that the punishment of the man who attempts to change the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be in God’s hands. The man should be regarded as beyond men’s power to help and as having fallen into the state about which the writer to the Hebrews says: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

The error of the Judiazers, which the Apostle Paul pronounces to be anathema, is something that the church today would probably see as minor because the modern church is so zealous for unity at all costs. After all, the Judiazers agreed with Paul about many things. They agreed that Jesus was the Messiah, the divine Son of God. They agreed that He was raised from the dead and was the object of saving faith if men would be saved, and that the requirements of the Law needed to be kept, yet Paul says let them be accursed for tampering with the Gospel. The main difference was the way in which those elements which Paul and the Judiazers agreed were grouped together and set before the people. Paul preached, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and at the moment you believe you are
saved.” He then taught that believers proceed to keep the Law by the saving power of the Holy Spirit out of a heart of gratitude to God for such a wonderful salvation. The Judiazers, on the other hand, said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and keep the law as best you can, and then you will be saved.” Many say how slight the difference. Yes, but how great the consequence. It’s like two trains at the station that start out only thirty feet apart. They seem to be very close, yet because they’re on different tracks they end up hundreds of miles apart. Many today say this was just theological hair-splitting and Paul should have joined hands with these men and embraced them as brothers, and these are the same men who say that Protestants and Roman Catholics should also join hands. Yet Paul did nothing of the sort. Rather he said, “Let these men be anathema” — set apart to God for destruction. Paul didn’t tolerate false doctrine, and if we want to be faithful to apostolic doctrine neither should we. This is how important the truth of the Gospel really is. Just a little poison added to the well of grace is enough to kill all who drink from it. This is not theological hair-splitting — this is a matter of salvation and damnation. If we have to bring even an ounce of works to bridge the slightest gap for our salvation then we are still lost in sin. We must trust Christ for nothing or for everything. To trust him partly is no trust in Him at all. As the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 30 teaches: “Do those also believe in the only Savior Jesus, who seek their salvation and welfare from “saints,” themselves, or anywhere else? No; although they make their boast of Him, yet in their deeds they deny the only Savior Jesus; for either Jesus is not a complete Savior, or they who by true faith receive this Savior, must have in Him all that is necessary to their salvation.”

Will we have a religion of merit or grace? Will it be divine accomplishment or human achievement? It can’t be both since they are diametrically opposed as Paul says in Romans 11:6: “If of grace not of works, if of works not of grace.” The Judiazers taught that a man must earn part of his salvation, while Paul taught that salvation was earned by Christ and they who trust Him have all that’s necessary for salvation. Yet Paul did show remarkable tolerance elsewhere in his ministry. In Philippians 1:15-18: “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” Men were preaching the true Gospel out of a wrong motive. They only wanted to cause trouble for Paul. But Paul says I don’t really care because the Gospel is being proclaimed. Paul recognized that it wasn’t about him. Whether people liked or disliked him wasn’t of great concern. What mattered was whether the truth was being preached.

The main question for Paul was always the truth of the message, not the personality of the messenger. But in the church today, this is just the opposite. Paul was intolerant about the content of the message but he exercised much tolerance towards the personality of the messenger. The church today is tolerant about the message but intolerant about the personality of the messenger. Paul’s principle was plain; he didn’t defend himself or utter anathemas out of an interest in his own personal pride or because of the personality of the messenger. Paul did so only when the glory of Christ and the truth of Christ’s Gospel were at stake.

This issue was so important that the apostle repeats his warning in verse 9: “As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” In other words he says, I gave you the warning on my last visit and now again I am giving you exactly the same warning. “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

True Messengers Seek God’s Approval

And then he says in verse 10: “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”
**Book Review by Rev. David Fagrey**

This book is based on a very simple truth: our world would go a long way in solving the problem of racism if everyone would simply realize that all human beings are descendants of Adam and Eve. All human beings are related. Some are more closely related than others are, but all are related. God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26, KJV). How then does one explain the fact that there are different ethnic groups? How does one explain differences in skin color and eye shape? This book answers such questions in a biblical and scientific manner.

The authors begin by admitting the obvious truth that if all human beings are descendants of Adam and Eve then “back at the beginning when there was only the first generation, brothers would have had to marry sisters or there wouldn't have been any more generations!” (p.24). This was not a problem at the beginning, for then the effects of sin and the curse would have been minimal to start with. When there came to be an increased potential to produce deformed offspring, then the Lord introduced laws forbidding brother-sister (and close relative) marriage (Leviticus 18-20).

In chapter 2, the authors refute the claim commonly made by evolutionists that the observable changes in living animals are evidence that evolution is true. However, this is NOT what evolution is all about. Creationists agree that dogs, for example, change. But they change into different varieties or breeds of dogs. Creationists deny that one kind of animal changed into another kind of animal over millions of years, which is what evolution is really all about. In the rest of chapter two the authors use the basic principles of genetics (which are very simply explained) to explain how changes have occurred in dogs.

In chapters 3-4, the authors apply the same basic principles of genetics to human beings. They show how variations in skin color, for example, can develop in only a few generations. First of all, we all have the same coloring pigment in our skin: melanin – a dark brownish pigment that is found in special cells in our skin. If we produce a little melanin, it means that we will be European white. If our skin produces a great deal of melanin, we will be a very deep black. And in between are all shades of brown. Secondly, the authors demonstrate (very simply) that two middle brown parents (called “mulatto”) can produce an entire range of “colors,” from very white to very black – in only one generation! Noah and his family were probably mid-brown, with genes for both dark and light skin. In fact, most of the world’s population today is still mid-brown. Chapter 4 is the best chapter in the book and contains a lot of useful information regarding how the different ethnic groups arose from Noah’s three sons.

Chapter 5 deals straightforwardly with the matter of interracial marriage and concludes that there is no biblical justification for claiming that people from different ethnic groups should not marry.

In chapters 6-7, the authors refute all the pseudo-biblical arguments that, sadly, even Christians have used to promote racism. For example, the curse that Noah pronounced upon Canaan was NOT the origin of black people!

In the rest of the book the authors give several horrible examples of how Darwinian Evolution has impacted society. Darwinian evolution is inherently a racist philosophy, teaching that different groups (“races”) of people have evolved at different times and rates, so some groups are not as advanced as others. Some are more like their ape-like ancestors than...
others are. For example, Darwin taught that blacks were less evolved than whites, and that they would eventually become extinct. This sort of evolutionary thinking inspired Hitler (an ardent evolutionist) in his quest to eliminate Jews (and other groups) and establish his “master race.” This sort of thinking also led people to view Australian Aborigines as “missing links” between an ape-like ancestor and rest of mankind. This resulted in terrible prejudices and injustices towards the Aborigines. Thousands were deliberately murdered to provide specimens of “living missing links” for museums. The authors also tell the horrible story of Ota Benga, an African Pygmy, who was put on display, along with an orangutan, in the Bronx Zoo in early 1900s as an example of an inferior race.

The publishers hope that Christians will distribute this book and by God’s grace start a reformation in “race” relations. Highly recommended. To order, call Answers in Genesis at 1-800-778-3390.

Rev. David Fagrey,
Rapid City, SD

[Editor: from the website www.answersingenesis.org, under the book One Race One Blood: A Biblical Answer to Racism, by Ken Ham and Dr. Charles Ware (Master Books: 2010), “Special note: Previously published under the title Darwin’s Plantation, this book utilizes historical research, with special emphasis on the history and growth of race-related culture issues faced in the U.S.A. and throughout the world. Readers will benefit from the emotion-touching personal experiences communicated by the book’s cross-racial writing team, and the updates to much of the teaching included in One Blood, the book co-written by Ken Ham on races and racism that was previously distributed by Answers in Genesis. This is unquestionably the most race-unifying book ever distributed by AiG (other than the Bible), due in large part to the clear biblical perspective given for every major issue discussed.”]
Anna - A Senior That Grew Old Gracefully

Luke 2:36-38

... 36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." (Luke 2:36–38, NKJV)

My observation over the years is that the role of seniors is one of the most neglected themes in the Christmas Story, and perhaps in the Christian preaching in this youth-orientated age.

About fifty-six years ago we bought a Kirby vacuum cleaner. It was made very well with plenty of metal and rubber with just a bit of plastic on it. We used Kirby for many years until it started to wheeze a bit and did not pick up too well. It was relegated to the basement for lighter work. Later there were a few more deteriorations and Kirby was then used in the garage, where it still operates today. The point is that though the Kirby does not work that well anymore, it is still a useful vacuum cleaner. This can be said of us old folks. We may not be able to get about as we did but we are still useful on a limited basis.

When we read about Simeon and Anna we are reminded of Psalm 92:12-14, “12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those who are planted in the house of the Lord Shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing.” (NKJV) The Psalmist is saying that we are still productive in our final years. Anna and Simeon showed that fact. As we read in Psalm 103:5, “The Lord “who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” It should be noted that the eagle replenishes its wing feathers each year. The eagle flies anew.

David in Psalm 71 expects that he will have a positive answer to this prayer. “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.” (Psalm 71:9). Isaiah says, “Even in your old age, I shall be the same. And even to your graying years I shall bear you.” (Isaiah 46:4) The great old Prophet proclaims that God does not leave us in the wilderness to die. That was what the pagan nations did with their senior citizens through the practice of patricide. (or consider the modern day practice of assisted suicide for old folks who have outgrown their usefulness to society?? – Ed.)

These Bible verses differ from 1) The attitude of the “Science of Biosis”. That is where people are frozen in order to await a cure for what killed them. The believer on the other hand looks for the resurrection of the dead. (see Job 19:25-27; Heidelberg Catechism # 57)

2) Ponce De Leon, who was seeking till his death the “Fountain of Youth”. He died and failed in his quest.

3) Our modern youth-driven culture where young folks think only of the present moment and not in decades. (I still ask young folks, “What and where do you think you will be in 10 years?”)

Now, our text does reflect the statement of Florence Nightingale, who at the age of sixty-five said, “Today, Oh Lord, let me dedicate this crumbling old woman to Thee.” Our text may also be reflected in the words of General Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964), who, is quoted as saying, “You are as young as your faith, as old as your doubt; as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fear; as young as your hope, as old as your despair.” Anna was not an old geezer, an old fogy, an old fossil, a foolish old woman, but, a senior saint.

For what it is worth back in 2011 A.D., this old guy was looked on by a few high school youths as, “The oldest teenager in the high school” and “An 18 year old in a 78 year old body.”

We are to reflect 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “...we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” Yes, muscles may ache and old joints hurt. Life may slow down a
bit, but inwardly we are “renewed every day.” Near my retirement from teaching at Mitchell Christian High School in 2011, a fine young Senior student stated that I “had lived a very full life.” I replied that I did not appreciate being put in the “past tense.” I told our young saint that Psalm 92 reminds old folks that no matter how old we are, we can continue to have a fresh and fruitful life (verses 12,14). Old folks have been “planted” in the rich soil of God’s vineyard and will continue to “bear much fruit” (John 15:5). There are times when old people realize that society often looks at them at 65 and older as being useless ends. The conversation ended with my young ward with the reminder that even youth are to remember that we are to be taught “to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:2)

The theme of Luke 2:36-38 is this: Anna was a Senior who was dedicated to God.

I. Anna was a prophetess (vs. 36) Anna was a fore-teller and a forth-teller. She did so with spiritual insight into the Word and Who Jesus was. (She was like the evangelist Philip’s four unmarried daughters in Luke 21:9) A true prophet is one who, having received revelations of the mind and will of God, declares to others what has been received (Deuteronomy 18:18). The Apostle Paul regarded the gift of prophecy as being highly important (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Her name means “Grace.” Our Senior saint was a member of Asher, which has been called a “lost tribe of Israel.” Asher means “Happy.” The covenant with the listings of generations were very important to the Jews. Anna seems to be not only a dedicated covenant keeper, but endowed with a gracious, happy demeanor and message.

II. Anna never lost hope over many, many years (vs. 36) She was very old. Anna is at least 84, if you take that figure as the sum given by Luke. (In fact there are some commentaries that say she could have been 106, but I prefer 84 years seeing I turn that age this year.) Psalm 90:10 would present the age of 84 as being very old. This saint was able to cope with a length of anguish and grief. Anna was also alone. Anna did not seem to “think old.” “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.” (Galatians 6:9)

III. Anna never grew bitter in the face of sorrow (vs. 36) There is no unhappiness here. An interesting state of our day is that 66% of those 65 and older are happy with their lives, while those 18-39 are only 50% happy with their circumstances. We live in an age of dissatisfaction.

IV. Anna never ceased to worship her God (vs. 37) She never missed a worship service. Anna was taken care of by the temple officials. That was called “a widow that was a widow indeed.” (1 Timothy 5:5,16; Acts 6:1ff.) “Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God and continues in treaties and prayers night and day.” Remember that the office of Deacon was to take care of the daily administration of the Christian Church’s widows. There was a reliance upon the church for her needs. It is somewhat like the Ministerial Aid of the RCUS to our ministerial widows and the local church’s oversight of widows who are in need. The church is to “honor the aged.” (Leviticus 19:32)

We learn something about Anna by her “fasting and prayer” in the temple confines. Anna did not have a high view of herself. There was consciousness of her sin and the need of God's forgiveness. It appears that in her prayers she was also concerned for others in God’s Kingdom and for Israel’s great hope.

V. Anna knew Jesus and gave thanks (vs. 38) Anna understood that Jesus was the “Redemption of Jerusalem.” Being in the “court of the women” she saw Joseph and Mary with the Infant Jesus. She carefully observed Simeon taking Jesus in his arms. She listened to his “Nunc Dimittis” (the expression of faith in the Lord of which Simeon sang in Luke 2:29-32). She distinctly hears Simeon’s words and she “came up” and joined the little family. She is convinced that this child is indeed the Messiah. Filled with gratitude she immediately returns thanks to God. Her prayer finished, Anna begins to speak.

VI. Anna shared the message of Simeon (vs. 38) The Messiah has come and He is Jesus. The Greek here

Anna was not an old geezer, an old fogy, an old fossil, a foolish old woman. She was a senior saint! 

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22
For those who have been associated with the Reformed faith all of their lives, they may not appreciate how eye-awakening these past two years have been to me. Although I grew up in a gospel-teaching church and then attended an independent, non-denominational Bible church for thirty-five years, did door-to-door evangelism, and faithfully served in my church in many capacities with my six homeschooled children, God had a plan to open up my knowledge of Himself to a whole new dimension.

Three years ago, through a Christian radio station, I began to listen to some Reformed Bible teachers. I ordered a monthly Reformed publication and a biography of a Reformed preacher. I began to read everything I could find on the internet about “monergism” and the reformed faith. I checked out Martin Luther’s commentary on Galatians from the library. I got a Reformation Study Bible. [NOTE: “monergism” is a theological term that expresses that the work of saving sinners is done by One (‘mono’). “Synergism” is the popular (and unbiblical) view that we are saved by the work of God plus another person—such as our works or our free will exercise of faith. The Biblical gospel is monergism: we are saved by Christ ALONE - Editor]

Due to the compromised integrity of the leadership in the church I was attending, I knew I needed to seek another church family to worship with. At this time, my unbelieving husband told me he no longer wanted to be with me, and I would have to leave. It was time for a fresh start. A friend from out of town informed me that my city had a reformed church and suggested I try attending there. That was two years ago. I loved it. I went through membership counseling and borrowed more books from that church to read.

In six months, I, with tears, was accepted to be a member and took my membership vows in front of the church. I was asked to help organize their shelves of books into a library — which has been such a blessing because I have been able to read and absorb even more... sometimes reading more than organizing!

I play the piano at church when needed, or play for the service in our new church plant 50 miles away. I teach Kids’ Quest on Wednesday evenings, and taught children’s Sunday School through the summer. I counsel girls at the Crisis Pregnancy Center in my city, and love being able to invite my clients to church with me where they will be welcomed. I helped go door-to-door in the church neighborhood.

But how my life has been touched is my understanding of the truth of Scripture. The dispensational teaching I had been under for years had such a chopped-up view of Scripture. Now I see that the entirety of the Bible is a beautiful narrative of the person of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for His own. The law, the creeds of the church, the catechisms and confessions have been such helpful instructions in the doctrines of the Scriptures.

I also need to say that in the very first reformed church service I attended, I was overwhelmed with the impression that this was truly a service of the worship of God in every way. The focus was completely on our Lord through corporate prayer, corporate praise, confession of our faith, reading of Scripture, and teaching of God’s Word. An elder explained to me how the structure of the service is taken directly from Scripture and the pattern of worship we find there.

It was so refreshing! I now see the Old Testament in an entirely new light, appreciating the types and shadows it gives us of Christ. I love my church family and am very thankful for our pastor.

In the Reformed church, I’ve come home. I praise God for bringing me ~at the age of 60~ to Reformed theology and under the care of the church elders.

Ms. Peggy Huggenberger
St. John’s RCUS
Lincoln, Nebraska
The 42nd annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) was held November 8th-10th, at the Free Reformed Church in Pompton Plains, NJ. The meeting was hosted by the Free Reformed Churches of North America. NAPARC is comprised of thirteen member churches from the United States and Canada. All thirteen churches had delegates present for this meeting. In addition two Presbyterian/Reformed churches sent observers to this meeting.

Member churches of NAPARC are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC); the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC); the Église réformée du Québec (ERQ); the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA); the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC); the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC); the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (KPCA-Kosin); the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC); the Presbyterian Reformed Church in America (PCA); the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC); the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS); the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA); and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). These churches were represented by a total of thirty-eight delegates.

Delegates from the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America (PRCNA) attended as invited observers. A total of six observer delegates were present from these two churches.

The Council was called to order by Rev. Bart Elshout (HRC) the vice chairman acting in the stead of Dr. L.W. Bilkes (FRCNA) the chairman, who was unable to attend because of health issues. Following the election of officers Rev. Elshout assumed the chair. Rev. Maynard Koerner and Rev. Ron Potter, both from the RCUS, were re-elected as treasurer and secretary respectively. The Rev. James Kim of the KAPC was elected vice-chairman. Each session of the Council was opened with the singing of a Psalm, devotions, and prayer.

The Basis of the Council is set forth in its Constitution (Art. II) as follows: “Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.”

The Purpose of the Council is (Article III): “We regard this basis of fellowship as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the Member Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another, and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.”

The Function of the Council is to (Article IV):
1. Facilitate discussion, consultation, and the sharing of insights among Member Churches on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common.
2. Encourage the Member Churches to pursue closer ecclesiastical relations, as appropriate, among the regional and major assemblies.
3. Promote the appointment of committees to study matters of common interest and concern and, when appropriate, make recommendations to the Council with respect to them.
4. Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.
5. Promote local, regional, and general assembly/synodical-wide cooperation wherever possible and feasible in such areas as missions, relief efforts, training of men for the ministry, Christian schools, activities for young people, and church education and publications.
6. Operate a website to facilitate the exchange of information and to foster increased cooperation and fellowship among the Member Churches.

In fulfillment of the Basis, the Purpose and the Function of NAPARC each of the member churches brought reports to the Council table. The presentation of each of these reports was followed by a period of questioning by delegates and by prayer for the reporting church...
by a designated member church. Each of the reports revealed the upholding of the three marks of the true Church (Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 29). The reports also demonstrated the labours of the churches in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ to a lost and perishing world in a variety of regional and ethnic venues.

Discussion on several topics took place. These were proposed by two member churches (ERQ, PCA) and germane to the work of the Church. These topics were previously approved by the Interim Committee which is charged with preparing the Council Docket. After a time of discussion the Council determined that more time was needed to do justice to these topics and placed them on the 2017 Docket of NAPARC to enable thoughtful preparation for further discussion.

NAPARC also approved the following statement to be forwarded to the Churches for their action:

“That NAPARC urge its member denominations and federations to urge their respective congregations to make a regular part of the information they publish in weekly bulletins, church newsletters, church websites and other informational publications, their affiliation with NAPARC, providing also a web address to encourage their members to learn about NAPARC and to help foster an awareness of the biblical ecumenical mandate to seek ever greater unity with those of like faith and practice. Just as the local church makes known its affiliation with its denomination or federation, so it should make known its broader fraternal bonds.”

Reports were also brought on the World Missions Consultation which met earlier in the year, and also from the Web Site Committee and from the Treasurer. A Budget was also approved.

On the evening of November 8th, a devotional service under the oversight of the host Church was held. Rev. Carl Schouls (Ret. FRCNA) preached a sermon from Habakkuk 3:17-19 entitled “A Thanksgiving Hymn of Faith.”

On the evening of November 9th, following a banquet hosted by the Pompton Plains Free Reformed Church, the Rev. Jerrold Lewis (FRCNA) Pastor of the host Church, presented a lecture entitled “English Latent Antinomianism.”

The annual NAPARC Council meeting provides a venue for bi-lateral meetings between Interchurch Relations Committees of the member churches to take place. Time is provided on the NAPARC Docket to enable this and all delegations took advantage of this.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 14th-16th at Puritan and Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. It will be hosted by the Heritage Reformed Congregations.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Ron Potter,
Secretary, NAPARC
says she “‘omologew”, meaning “to say the same thing” as Simeon. This is her prophetic message. Jesus is salvation. In Luke 1:68 “redemption” is mentioned in the Benediction of Zacharias. Jehovah, Israel’s covenant God, would save His people from their sin. (Matthew 1:21) Hebrews 9:12 states Jesus “entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption - through His own blood.” Salvation is in Jesus. He is the Recoverer and the Ransom that paid the price of our sin’s obligation. We are free from the consequences of our personal wicked and evil sin. His life and death are the payment - He fulfilled the law for us as a perfect and blemish-less sacrifice and substitute. We now have “at-one-ment” with our Father.

Conclusion: Anna speaks to those who are “waiting” for the salvation of the Messiah. In view of the fact that the Gospels, on so many occasions, describe the unbelief, wickedness, and hardness of heart of the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees and their many followers, it is refreshing to know that there is a “remnant according to God’s gracious election.” (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:5) That remnant is found in these old saints of God - Anna and Simeon. We can still proclaim this message to others even when we are old. Many can remember the great institutions of the past that proclaimed that “Jesus saves!” but they have now just become museum pieces of the old-time religion. That old-time religion is true religion. Now we are faced with contemporary worship, a new “liberating” gospel and relevant nonsense that are not true. The Pharisees and Sadducees of our day (both Works salvation and Liberalism) do not have the answer to the dilemma of sin. Our old gospel does. “You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sin.” (Matthew 1:21)

Rev. Howard Hart
Mitchell, SD
Praise God for confirming His covenant promises to Kayloni Bentz as she was confirmed in the Christian faith at First Reformed Church in Herreid. She is pictured here with her teacher, Rev. Cody Schwichtenberg.