



# Shining Mountains *news*

"IT IS OUR MISSION, AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD AND COMMAND TO GROW IN HIS WORD, TO GATHER AROUND HIS WORD, AND TO GO WITH HIS WORD."

*Reflections on the Health and Humans Services Mandate*

## Living in Two Kingdoms

Much of the recent national news has been focused on a controversial announcement by the US Department of Health and Human Services. The announcement required the all health care plans, included those provided by religious organizations, would be required to include coverage for contraceptives, drugs that cause early-pregnancy abortions (such as "Plan B") and other procedures, even when those things are contrary to the beliefs of the religious organization. After widespread objection, an accommodation was announced requiring insurance companies to provide that coverage free of charge.

As you watched the news, you may have noticed that concern about this step was spread through many church bodies, including non-Christian ones. Leaders from the Missouri Synod, the Roman Catholic Church, evangelical Christian churches and Jewish organizations testified before representatives of our government. Many other churches (including the WELS) have released official statements.

It's important to note both the similarities and the differences in the objections from the different church bodies. One item the Roman Catholic Church objects to is providing *any* sort of contraceptive medication. This is a result of their false teaching that *any* form of

birth control is *in and of itself* sinful. The Wisconsin Synod does not share the Catholic Church's false teaching or objection on this matter. Not only has our Lord not forbidden a husband and wife using contraceptive birth control anywhere in Scripture, but we also recognize that some forms of contraceptives are actually prescribed as a medical treatment at times. Our synod's insurance does cover some forms of this contraception such as "the pill"; it does *not* cover abortion-inducing medication. I've personally known, been related to and ministered to many Christian women who are on contraceptive medication for medical reasons. Much more troubling for our church body is a mandate to provide employees with medication that would terminate the life of a conceived child.

The religious bodies who have protested this decision do share a common concern, however – one of government mandating church-related organizations to act in a way that's in direct contradictions with our beliefs. In one unified society that includes people of many religions, we know that there are times when the government does legislate in opposition to a particular religious practice as it seeks to carry out its role of protecting the physical welfare of its citizens. There are even times we're grateful for it: many Chris-



tians are glad that the abusive (and at times incestuous) practice of polygamy among fundamentalist Mormons is outlawed. We do not object to aspects of Islamic sharia being blocked. But the ability of the government to do so is a sword that can cut both ways. We want the government to be able to curb the abusive and sinful practices of false religions

and protect her citizens; that same ability of the government also has the potential (as in a *portion* of this mandate) to seek to compel Christians to sinful actions. When the government works with a faulty definition of what it means to protect its citizens (as it does in a portion of this mandate), problems arise for believers.

Lutherans have experienced this before. Many of the first Lutherans who came to America did so as a result of the Prussian Union. Two hundred years ago the King of Prussia used an official decree to merge the Lutheran and Calvinist (Reformed) churches in Prussia. He did this, in part, in the hopes of creating a unified country more able to defend itself and its citizens. It was supposedly for the protection of its citizens. In doing so, however, the government made it illegal to practice church fellowship or communion according to God's Word (the government actually mandated a change to Christ's words of institution!). As a result, some believers unfortunately gave in to false doctrine and simply "lived with it"; others stayed and suffered punishment; still others fled to America and founded Lutheran churches here. In recent years our own church body has faced legal challenges; the Supreme Court of California heard a case in which one of our Lutheran high schools was sued for expelling students who were living in an openly sinful lifestyle. The school's rights to put its doctrine into practice were upheld in that case. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has faced similar legal battles as well. Some of our mission churches operate in countries where sharing the gospel is outlawed and preaching against some specific sins has been criminalized. These real experiences have led to the concerns that many church bodies share over the recent HHS decision.

In these difficult and complicated circumstances, what should a Christian keep in mind?

First, God grant that we cherish the liberties that we have. We have long enjoyed great freedom of religion in this country. If the mandate would have stood without accommodation and our synodical institutions would have had to pay fines for violating a portion of this law, that expense would have been small compared to what many Christians have suffered (and still daily suffer around the world) to hold to the faith. And remember that God has blessed us with a rare gift: a democracy that allows us to peaceably and respectably petition our representatives and elect our leaders. May speaking up for the protection of life never be seen as a partisan issue, but as one that all Christians of every political stripe pray and work for—as indeed many pro-life Republican and Democrat groups are currently doing. We're able to take a stand against the portions of this law that are sinful and destructive.

Second, pray for those that are easily forgotten in this: the many women who are hurt because of the false Roman Catholic theology regarding birth control that denies them some basic medical treatments. May one blessing that comes out of this be that many people associated with these institutions more clearly see the false and man-made doctrines that fill them. May the desire for *physical* well-being lead many to churches that serve their *spiritual* needs with the truth of God's Word. And may all God's people look for ways to help and care for those in pain and suffering.

Additionally, remember that our Savior doesn't simply command us to respect life; he also commands us to respect and pray for our leaders in the government and take their words and actions in the kindest possible way. This is perhaps especially important to remember in the age of facebook and emails, when with the click of a button Christians can spread around the world comments that disrespect the government God has given to us. Doing so while trying to stand up against the sin of abortion does not make that slander any less of a sin, unworthy of the name of Christ.

Finally and most importantly, keep your eyes on where true change comes from. It's a blessing when Christians are active in standing up for what is right in our cities and our country, but our first responsibility isn't a political one. Even as we mourn over legalized abortion in our country, there's a sobering statistic to keep in mind: not simply that over 50,000,000 abortions have taken place since Roe v. Wade, but that these abortions have taken place in a country in which nearly 90% of the citizens confess to be *Christian*. How much lower would that number be if God's Word was always taught in truth in our homes and churches and if Christ's love and forgiveness was modeled in our actions. It's a good and noble thing to stand up for the truth in the public arena; it's a far more lasting good when we share our Savior and his love with our families and strive earnestly to reach out to those who do not know him.

## Bible Study



### SUNDAY MORNING: BIBLE TRANSLATION

For two or three weeks beginning March 4, we'll examine the issue of Bible translations (with special focus on the revision of the NIV translation. The goal of the class is to emphasize what it means that we believe in an inspired and inerrant Bible, look at the challenges facing all translations, and examine a number of popular translations.

### FRIDAY MORNING: WISDOM LITERATURE

Our new *weekly* morning Bible study at Shining Mountains meets Friday mornings at 9:00am. Over the next few months we'll dig into the Old Testament books classified as *wisdom literature*. These unique books of the Bible (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Song of Songs and Job) force us to wrestle with difficult concepts as we put God's wisdom into practice in our daily lives. Throughout March and part of April, we'll focus on the book of Proverbs.

### MONTHLY: LET THERE BE LIGHT!

Our monthly Bible study next meets on Thursday, March 22nd at 7:00 pm. As we continue our walk through the five books of Moses, we'll focus on the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. To prepare for the class, consider reviewing Genesis 25-50.



# I believe in + the Holy Christian Church +

*In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, we confess our faith in "the Holy Christian Church." Throughout our newsletters in 2012, we'll examine what this means. What is the Church? What is the difference between "the Church" and "churches"? What does it matter what church you belong to? What's going on among "Lutheran" churches? God's Word will guide our discussion as we talk about these questions.*

In a recent confirmation class, I asked our students to use the word "church" in a sentence. The four of them used "church" in four different ways: The building we go to, the congregation that meets there, the worship services we hold and the whole group of believers everywhere. All of these things are "church."

So what comes to your mind?

When the Apostle Peter was talking about God's Church, the Holy Spirit inspired him to write these words: **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light** (1 Peter 2:9).

Did you notice what his emphasis was on? *People*. That's what the church is in its truest sense: not buildings or worship services, not programs or potlucks. It's people.

But note how these people are described: *Chosen. Holy. Called out of darkness*. (Indeed, the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, comes from two words meaning "to call out.") Peter is drawing an important distinction. The true *Church* isn't just those people who meet together on a Sunday morning; it's all those who have true faith in Jesus. That brings something tricky into the picture.

## The Church Is Invisible

If membership in the Church is something that comes only through faith in Jesus, than in the truest sense I can't tell who is or isn't a member of the church. Faith lives in the heart. I can't read the heart. Christ himself warns us that "not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Those words of God are meant to refocus us on something important. I'm not to spend my days on earth looking at my fel-

low church members and trying to determine which ones are really Christian—or just Christian enough for my book. Rather, Jesus' words call us to consider our own hearts: *Am I just coming to church for my own reasons? Am I missing what's most important? Am I just saying "Lord, Lord," or do I repent and trust in my Savior?*

Christ's true church is invisible. It's a matter of faith. But that doesn't mean we don't know where to look for the Church.

## The Church Is Invisible, but not Unnoticeable

While we can't see into people's hearts, the Church has outward signs of where we should find her. We often call these the "marks of the Church." Jesus himself tells us what they are: He told us that whoever holds to his teaching are truly his disciples (John 8:31). He also gave the Church his command to use his Sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:24). Where we find God's Word taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments rightly practiced, there is Christ's Church.

What a happy place that must be!

At times. Because the other truth is still there, isn't it? Within this visible church, there will still be hypocrites. And within this visible church, true and faithful Christians will still fall into sin. What a difficult place to be at times! What's the church on earth to do?

The same thing she's always done. Remember what the church is: people who have been called by the Gospel. Hold to that Gospel. Cherish it. Don't be surprised when heartaches come into the church—Jesus promised us that these, too, would come. But the Gospel is still the Gospel: it still calls us out of this world to be God's dearly loved people, declaring the praises of the God who brought us into his wonderful light!



January	<i>I believe in the <u>Holy</u> Christian Church</i>	July	<i>Do denominations really matter?</i>
February	<i>I believe in the Holy <u>Christian</u> Church</i>	August	<i>"So what if they're not WELS?"</i>
March	<i>I believe in the Holy Christian <u>Church</u></i>	September	<i>What's going on among the Lutherans?</i>
April	<i>The joy of the Church</i>	October	<i>WELS: The confession we share</i>
May	<i>The mission of the Church</i>	November	<i>WELS: The challenges we share</i>
June	<i>Orthodox and Heterodox churches</i>	December	<i>WELS: The mission we share</i>

# Growing in Christ

Shining Mountains provides a Sunday School program to partner with parents in raising our children in the truth of God's Word. Each month, parents can look to this page of the newsletter and see their student's upcoming lessons, memory work, and updates about when the children will next sing in our worship services.

Date	Lower grades (Miss Newton)	Middle grades (Mrs. Giese)	Upper grades (Mrs. Baker)
3/4	<b>The Good Samaritan helps a hurt man</b> Serve one another in love. (Gal 5:13)	<b>Daniel in the Lion's Den</b> <i>Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20)</i>	<b>Daniel in the Lion's Den</b> <i>Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Mt 5:16)</i>
3/11	<b>Jesus heals ten sick men</b> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. (Ps 118:1)	<b>God's people return home</b> <i>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28)</i>	<b>God's people return home</b> <i>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)</i>
3/18	<b>Jesus blesses the children</b> Love comes from God. (1 Jn 4:7)	<b>The upper room</b> <i>Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41)</i>	<b>The upper room</b> <i>Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)</i>
3/25	<b>Jesus changes Zacchaeus' life</b> Jesus came to save sinners. (1 Ti 1:15)	<b>Peter's denial</b> <i>Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the body is weak. (Matthew 26:41)</i>	<b>Peter's denial</b> <i>He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God (John 8:47)</i>

*The Sunday School children next sing in worship on Easter Sunday, April 8th. The song they're working on for that day is I Am the Resurrection and the Life.*

## Serving Us in March *Thank you to those who served in February!*

	<u>Ushers</u>	<u>Refreshments</u>	<u>Flowers</u>	<u>Cleaners</u>
3/4	R Buchholz / P Agenten	R Pruitt	<i>open</i>	Baker, L&V (3/5-3/10)
3/7	J Newton / L Hunziker	<i>(midweek Lenten worship)</i>		
3/11	J Lauersdorf / T Zulauf	Spalding	<i>open</i>	Ballard (3/12-3/17)
3/14	T Linn / P Marozick	<i>(midweek Lenten worship)</i>		
3/18	D Pruitt / M Joecks	<i>open</i>	Spalding	Buchholz (3/19-3/24)
3/21	J Kohler / T Armbrecht	<i>(midweek Lenten worship)</i>		
3/25	J Thiede / D Thiede	P. Pruitt	P. Pruitt	Giese (3/26-3/31)
3/28	J Becker / S McGough	<i>(midweek Lenten worship)</i>		

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.  
**Psalm 84:10**

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# March 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				<b>1</b>	<b>2</b> 9am <i>Wisdom Literature</i> Bible study	<b>3</b>
				6pm Church Council meeting		
<b>4</b> 9:15 Sunday School 9:20 Bible class 10:30 Worship w/ H.C	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>  6:30pm Confirmation class	<b>7</b>  6pm Soup Supper 7pm Midweek Lenten worship	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> 9am <i>Wisdom Literature</i> Bible study	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b> 9:15 Sunday School 9:20 Bible class 10:30 Worship	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>  6:30pm Confirmation class	<b>14</b>  6pm Soup Supper 7pm Midweek Lenten worship	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> 9am <i>Wisdom Literature</i> Bible study	<b>17</b>
<b>18</b> 9:15 Sunday School 9:20 Bible class 10:30 Worship w/ H.C	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>  6:30pm Confirmation class	<b>21</b>  6pm Soup Supper 7pm Midweek Lenten worship	<b>22</b>  7pm Let There Be Light Bible study	<b>23</b> 9am <i>Wisdom Literature</i> Bible study	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b> 9:15 Sunday School 9:20 Bible class 10:30 Worship	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>  6:30pm Confirmation class	<b>28</b>  6pm Soup Supper 7pm Midweek Lenten worship	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b> 9am <i>Wisdom Literature</i> Bible study	<b>31</b>

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# Upcoming Messages

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The month of March takes us through the season of *Lent*. May the following schedule help you as you prepare for worship or look for opportunities to invite a friend!

## ***Sundays in March—Fix Your Eyes on Jesus...***

March 4: ...*to find meaning in your struggles*

March 11: ...*to understand real religion*

March 18: ...*to find real joy*

March 25: ...*even when he doesn't seem glorious*

## ***Wednesdays in March—What Wondrous Love Is This!***

March 7: The Lord's Prayer

March 14: Baptism

March 21: Confession and Absolution

March 28: The Lord's Supper

