

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! This month we enter a new year, a new Church year, that is. Happy New Year! We just celebrated Thanksgiving, giving God praise for all that He has done in not only making us, but in continuing to take care of us, through providing for our bodily and spiritual needs, from food and medicine and grocery clerks and doctors to Word and Sacrament and pastors and missionaries. Now we look forward by looking back: remembering our dear Savior's birth at His first coming, while eagerly anticipating His return to take us home. Let's kick this celebration off with continuing our study from Luther's Large Catechism.



*Happy New Year!!!*

As we progress through our study of the Second Commandment, Luther writes that the abuse of God's Name, as well as all the other sins we as humanity commit, have led to all the natural punishments which occur: "plague, war, famine, fire, flood, wayward spouses and children and servants, and troubles of every kind (Book of Concord (BoC), p.394)." These are God's way of showing His displeasure at sin, just as parents might "confront (their children) with the commandment, and continually impress it upon them, so that they may be brought up not merely with punishment but with reverence and fear of God (BoC, p.394)."

Each of these sound bad—if “plague” were to appear in the paper, it would most likely be in the headlines, as would “war,” “famine,” “flood,” or “fire”—yet none of these is truly as bad as we should have it. In Genesis, God commanded that Adam and Eve not partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil under the penalty of death. When our ancestors ate that which they were not to, though, they didn’t fall over dead—but they were indeed *headed* for death, physical and eternal.

Out of His grace and mercy, God already had His plan in mind. Immediately after their fall, God promised the serpent who misled them that Eve’s seed would save them and all people from the serpent by stomping its head. Around two thousand years ago, this promise was fulfilled: Jesus was born as the babe in the manger, on His way to the cross where He would lay the defeating blow against that serpent Satan.

So why do these punishments still exist? They still exist because sin is still dying. Like Adam and Eve, we trust in the promise of God for deliverance. They trusted in a Savior to come; we trust in the Savior who has come, as we celebrate this very month. Merry Christmas! Happy Birthday Jesus Christ, Immanuel—God with Us, the One who was, and is, and is coming for us soon! Come Lord Jesus, come! Amen!

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh