**Vespers III,**

**22 March 2020,**

**The Third Sunday in Lent,**

***Concordia Lutheran Mission,***

**Terrebonne, Oregon**.

**“Salvation in Christ is God’s Work Alone.”**

The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner.

This is the LORD’s doing; it *is* marvelous in our eyes.

**Psalm 118:22-23**.

Salvation in Christ clearly excludes the works of men because the **psalmist**writes that the Work of Salvation is *the Lord’s doing* not men’s.

The Lord’s Work of Salvation comes through the Cornerstone, Jesus of Nazareth, rejected by the leaders of Judah. The nation of Judah, appointed for the Ministry of Salvation[[1]](#footnote-1)1, did not assist in the Work of Salvation but rather opposed it. The Lord, however, even though the ministers of the Church sought to sabotage His Work prevailed. While God appoints men priests and ministers out of His Mercy, in the last analysis, He does not need them because Salvation is His Work.

The Cornerstone was Fashioned without human hands. In other words, it was solely the Work of God. We see this Divine Exclusivity in the Work of Salvation in the Virgin Birth of Christ. No man assisted in the Incarnation. God alone became Incarnate by His Conception in the womb of the Virgin St. Mary. He alone lived a Holy Life, waking, sleeping, living, dying, and rising again, in order to Redeem men from their sins.

Likewise, the Preaching of the Gospel belongs to Christ the Cornerstone. Christ possesses the Sevenfold Gifts of the Spirit.[[2]](#footnote-2)2 God the Holy Spirit was active in Christ to effect the Atonement for sin and He is also active in applying that Atonement through the Preaching of the Word. Once again we find that it is God alone effecting the Salvation of men apart from their works.

Salvation in Christ is God’s Work alone.

**I. Christ is the Cornerstone uncut by Human Hands and Fashioned by God for the Salvation of Men through the Cross.**

**A. The Ministers of the Gospel’s rejection of Christ and the Birth of the Savior shows, again, Salvation is God’s Work alone not that of men.**

The **psalmist** makes clear that the Work of Salvation is God’s alone not the work of men through their own works. He writes:

The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner.

This is the LORD’s doing; it *is* marvelous in our eyes.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

It is “the Lord’s doing”, not “the Lord’s and man’s doing.” Christ became the Cornerstone in spite of the opposition of men.

Moreover, it was the Ministers of the Gospel opposed the Work of Salvation. The builders, namely, the leaders of Judah, who were the Ministers of the Gospel, actually sought to sabotage the Saving Work of the Gospel in a fifth column action through their unbelief. They rejected Christ’s teaching and, at last, Crucified Him.

Finally, we see this Work of Salvation is the Lord’s Work alone because the origins of this Saving Cornerstone originated outside of human hands. The prophet Daniel writes:

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone cut out of the mountain without hands[[4]](#footnote-4)4, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold;[[5]](#footnote-5)5 the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream *is* certain therefore sure.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

The prophet Daniel here refers to the Birth of Christ by the Virgin St. Mary. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

Christ was born of His mother, the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:[34-]35); He is the “stone cut by no man’s hand” (Dan. 4:25).

The rejection of Christ by the Ministers of the Gospel and the Birth of Christ by the Virgin St. Mary show once again that Salvation is solely God’s Work alone and not the works of men.

**B. Christ the Cornerstone was born of the Virgin St. Mary in order to sanctify men by His Passion and Save.**

Christ is the Cornerstone cut “without human hands” means Christ was Fashioned solely by God Himself without the assistance of men. Christ was Fashioned “without human hands” in order that He be conceived and born purely to live a Holy Life for us and for all men, culminating in His Passion. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, ... Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

Christ’s Giving of His Life for a Ransom began with His Pure Conception in the womb of the Virgin St. Mary. David writes of Christ’s sinless conception:

I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother’s belly.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Likewise, the Apostle St. Matthew writes of Christ’s Pure and Holy Conception:

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

No man, save Christ, can say God is our God from the womb because all men are conceived in sin. David writes that men are conceived in sin:

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

Christ, however, was conceived purely for us and for all men in order to give us a pure conception and birth. Luther writes:

This is the great joy, of which the angel speaks, this is the consolation and the superabundant goodness of God, that man (if he has this faith) may boast of such treasure as that Mary is his real mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. For these things are, all of them, true and they come to pass, provided we believe them; this is the chief part and chief good in all the gospels, before one derives from them teaching concerning good works. Christ, above all things, must become ours and we his, before we undertake good works. That happens in no other way than through such faith; it teaches the right understanding of the gospels and it seizes hold on them in the right place. That makes for the right knowledge of Christ; from it the conscience becomes happy, free, and contented; from it grow love and praise of God, because it is he who has given us freely such superabundant goods in Christ. Then there follows a mind right willing to do, to refrain from doing, and to suffer everything that is pleasing to God, be it a matter of living or dying, as I have said many times. This is the meaning of Isaiah 9[:6]: “To us a child is born, and to us a son is given.” To us, to us, born to us and given to us. Therefore see to it that you derive from the Gospel not only enjoyment of the story as such, for that does not last long. Nor should you derive from it only an example, for that does not hold up without faith. But see to it that you make his birth your own, and that you make an exchange with him, so that you rid yourself of your birth and receive, instead, his. This happens, if you have this faith. By this token you sit assuredly in the Virgin Mary’s lap and are her dear child. This faith you have to practice and to pray for as long as you live; you can never strengthen it enough. That is our foundation and our inheritance; on it the good works are to be built.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

Christ’s Entire Holy Life was spent sanctifying our human nature for us to make us holy and forever pleasing to God. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of God the Holy Spirit’s Work in Christ to effect our sanctification and salvation:

The Spirit of the Lord settles down upon the Son of David and so rests upon him. ... The expression calls to mind the similar statement of John the Baptist, that he saw the Spirit descending and resting upon Jesus. John 1, 32. Christ is Emmanuel, God in human flesh, the mighty God. But the Spirit of God permeates and has complete control also of his human nature, of his human life and activity from the very first. The humble, despised Branch is anointed beyond measure with the Spirit of God.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

Christ was obedient unto God throughout His Life, even unto the death of the Cross. David records Christ’s Confession in the midst of His Passion:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou* *so* far from helping me, *and from* the words of my roaring?1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of Christ’s obedience in the midst of His Passion:

Yet, while Christ knows Himself totally forsaken of God in the abyss of hell, He cries, “My God, My God!” Even in such an abject condition, as He was in, He still clings to God as His personal God. This was a God-pleasing prayer that as it were issued from the pit of hell. This is something extraordinary, something unheard of. In the midst of the torments of hell Christ asserts that as His Son He will cling to God and claim Him as His own! Never before and never after has such a confident prayer issued from the abyss of hell on the part of those who are damned in that place. Ordinarily from those who suffer the torments of the damned come only cries and sighs of despair, never prayers of faith. It was by this prayer that Christ conquered and overcame the power of hell.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

This obedience to God even from the pit of hell overthrew the gates of hell. Christ’s Entire Holy Life was lived for all men, because they are unholy, in order to redeem them from their unholiness and give them life everlasting. Luther writes of Christ’s Obedience for us and for all men:

Therefore everything which Christ has is ours, graciously bestowed on us unworthy men out of God’s sheer mercy, although we have rather deserved wrath and condemnation, and hell also. Even Christ himself, therefore, who says he came to do the most sacred will of his Father [John 6:38], became obedient to him; and whatever he did, he did it for us and desired it to be ours, saying, “I am among you as one who serves” [Luke 22:27]. He also states, “This is my body, which is given for you” [Luke 22:19]. Isaiah 43[:24] says, “You have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities.”1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

Christ is God’s Cornerstone because upon Him rests the Salvation of all men through Christ’s Holy Life lived for all men.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

**II. Christ the Cornerstone Blesses Men with the Fruits of His Passion by Holy Spirit through the Gospel by Faith.**

**A. God the Holy Spirit Preaches the Gospel to apply Christ’s Holy Life to men.**

Christ, however, continues beyond His Passion to preach the Gospel in order to save men from their sins after vanquishing those who opposed Him and even Crucified Him to try to prevent Him from bringing about the Salvation of men through the Cross. The prophet Zechariah writes:

For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone *shall be* seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7

The Seven Eyes of the Cornerstone are the Sevenfold Gifts of the Spirit. The prophet Isaiah writes:

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears ... .1[[18]](#footnote-18)8

The Spirit of the Lord rests upon Christ to effect the Sanctification of men, as we’ve already seen, and also to distribute that Sanctification to men through the Gospel.1[[19]](#footnote-19)9 The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

And there was delivered unto him [Jesus] the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ... . 2[[20]](#footnote-20)0

**B. Men rest on Christ through the Gospel and gain life everlasting.**

Through the Preaching of the Gospel, men come to rest upon Christ and His Holy Life lived for them forever pleasing to God and gain life everlasting. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

And Jesus answered and said unto him, ... And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.2[[21]](#footnote-21)1

The Lutheran Church confesses that the Rock on which Christ builds His Church is God’s Word and Sacraments for men:

In all these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles [and does not speak for himself alone, but for all the apostles], as appears from the text itself. For Christ ask not Peter alone, but says: *Whom do ye say that I am?* And what is here said [to Peter alone] in the singular number: *I will give unto thee the keys; and whatsoever thou shalt bind*, etc., is elsewhere expressed [to their entire number], in the plural Matt. 18, 18: *Whatsoever ye shall bind* etc. And in John 20, 23: *Whosesoever sins ye remit*, etc. These words testify that the keys are given alike to all the apostles, and that all the apostles are alike sent forth [to preach]. ... Therefore it is necessary that in these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of the apostles, and for this reason they do not accord to Peter any prerogative, aor superiority, or lordship [which he had, or was to have had, in preference to the other apostles]. ... However, as to the declaration: *Upon this rock I will build My Church*, certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: *Upon this rock*, i.e. upon this ministry [Therefore he addresses him as a minister of this office in which this concession and doctrine is to be in operation, and says: *Upon this rock, i.e.,* this preaching ministry.]2[[22]](#footnote-22)2

**Conclusion**.

In spite of the fifth column betrayal of the Ministers of the Gospel in Judah, Christ effected the Salvation of men through His Passion. This folly of the Ministers of the Gospel came about because they didn’t understand Salvation rests alone upon God not upon men. Their treachery born of works righteousness, therefore, was nothing but folly and futility. Christ effected our Salvation because God not men had determined man’s Salvation from eternity.

Moreover, the defeat of the enemies of the Gospel by the Passion of Christ is further illuminated by Christ moving beyond this conflict to Preaching the Gospel of His Passion. Through the Preaching of the Gospel to apply to men the Sanctification of Christ’s Holy Life for men, Christ Sanctifies sinners and saves. This is Christ the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes because it overcomes the whole world, the flesh, and the devil, arrayed against Him, and it is marvelous because we gain life everlasting and the riches of Christ’s everlasting Kingdom.

***Amen.***

1. 1“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is* *there* in circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” **Romans 3:1-2**. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2Hence, the Stone has Seven Eyes. “For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone *shall be* seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” **Zechariah 3:9**. “*There are seven facets.* This is what Isaiah says: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me” (Is. 61:1). The seven facets, then, are the seven spirits or gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ has distributed in the church. These gifts cause that Branch to blossom forth, even though the world, Satan, and all creatures always stand against it.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 20, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3**Psalm 118:22-23**. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4“The prophetic vision pictures the same thing, where ‘a stone was cut out of a mountain without hands’ (Dan. 2:34), that is, Christ from the Virgin without the work of a man. And Ps. 22:9: ... ‘Thou art He who took me from the womb,’ not like Job, who said (10:10): ‘Hast Thou not milked me as milk?’” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 29, pp. 190, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5Daniel here refers to the Fourth Kingdom to arise, namely, the Roman Empire. “In the seventh chapter begin the visions and prophecies of the future kingdoms, especially of the kingdom of Christ, for whose sake all these visions came to pass. To begin with, the four kingdoms, which he pointed out above in chapter 2[:31–43] in the great image, he now sees again in another form, namely in the four beasts. Most of his attention centers on the fourth beast, the Roman empire, about which he wants to say something more. For under that very Roman empire the greatest event on earth was supposed to take place, namely, that Christ should come and redeem men, and the world should come to its end.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35, p. 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**Daniel 2:45**. Other passages also teach the Virgin Birth of Christ. “... the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.” **Jeremiah 31:22**. “The angel says not among [unmarried] maidens but ‘among women’ because of that first promise of Gen. 3:15 that the woman’s seed would bruise the serpent’s head, and Jer. 31:{22}: ‘The woman will encompass a man.’ For that very reason Paul says, Gal. 4:4: ‘He was born of a woman.’ From this comparison of passages of Scripture, the explanation of the angel’s greeting will become clear.” *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, Vol. One, Book One, tr. Richard J. Dinda, Malone, TX: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2009, p. 113, correction in braces added; the original had verse 22, underscore added. Also, Luther: 3. Only a new man can sing *a new song*. But the new man is a man of grace, a spiritual and inner man before God. The old man, however, is the man of sin, the carnal and outer man before the world. The newness is grace, the oldness, sin. Therefore the devil is called the “old serpent” (Rev. 12:9), and Christ “a new thing which the Lord created on the earth” (Jer. 31:22), through whom God the Father made all things new, according to Rev. 21:5. It is clear, then, that this “new song” is so called not because of time, but because of the new holy thing, for Scripture is holy, and it speaks of the holy. Thus also the harp is holy and the psaltery is holy.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 10, p. Also, **Isaiah 7:14**. “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**St. Matthew 20:25**, **28**. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Psalm 22:10**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9**St. Matthew 1:23**. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**Psalm 51:5**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11*Luther’s Works,* Vol. 52, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12*Isaiah: The First Twelve Chapters*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date, p. 119. But we believe, teach, and confess that God the Father has so given His Spirit to Christ, His beloved Son, according to the assumed humanity (on account of which He is called also *Messias*, *i.e.*, the Anointed), that He has not received His gifts by measure as other saints. For *upon Christ* the Lord, according to His assumed human nature (because, according to His divinity, He is of one essence with the Holy Ghost), rests *The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge* [*and of the fear of the Lord*, Col. 2, 3; Is. 11, 2; 61, 1] ..., therefore (as the Fathers say) the entire fulness of the spirit has been communicated by the personal union to Christ according to the flesh, which is personally united with the Son of God.” *The Formula of Concord*, **Thorough Declaration, VIII. Of the Person of Christ**.72, 73, 74, *Triglotta*, p. 1041. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13**Psalm 22:1**. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14*Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 67, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 31, pp.298, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16“He is called ‘the Cornerstone’ (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7): (a) *Because He supports the spiritual edifice*. (b) *Because He joins the Jews and Gentiles* into one Church (Eph. 2:20-21). ... For almost the same reasons He is called ‘the Stone,’ ‘the Rock,’ ‘the Foundation’ (Isa. 8:14; Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11; etc.).” The Rev. Dr. George Gerhardt, *Theological Commonplaces ... On the Person and Office of Christ*, tr. Richard J. Dinda, edited with annotations by Benjamin T. G. Mayes, no date, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17**Zechariah 3:9**. “*There are seven facets.* This is what Isaiah says: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me” (Is. 61:1). The seven facets, then, are the seven spirits or gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ has distributed in the church. These gifts cause that Branch to blossom forth, even though the world, Satan, and all creatures always stand against it.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 20, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18**Isaiah 11:2-3**. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19“For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.” *The Large Catechism*, **Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III**.38-39, *Triglotta*, 689. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 20**St. Luke 4:17**, **18**, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 21**St. Matthew 16:17**, **18**. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 22*The Smalcald Articles:* **Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope**.23, 24, 25, *Triglotta*, p. 511, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)