

# Praise Today

Contemporary Worship Forms in the Context of the Historical Service

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## The Five Miracles of Christmas

Rev. Paul C. Stratman, WELS, St. Louis, MI

*"This is really a series of "meditations" for our Christmas Eve service. The rest of the service is based on Prof. Tiefel's "Prayer at Close of Day on Christmas Eve" on the Commission on Worship page. I substituted "The Story of God's Love at Christmas" with the "Five Miracles" while using all the other prayers, responses and most of his hymn suggestions." Copyright (c) 1999 Pastor Paul C. Stratman, St. Louis, Michigan. Used with permission.*

Martin Luther once remarked, "There are five miracles we see in Matthew's account of our Lord's birth. He was born of a virgin, God became man, his birth was foretold by Isaiah seven hundred years before it happened, Joseph believed it, and we believe it" [I haven't seen a reference to *Luther's Works* for this quote, however, many elements of it are in his sermons for Christmas and Epiphany. See "Roland Bainton, *The Martin Luther Christmas Book*," (c) 1948, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia.] This evening we will hear Scriptures and meditate on each of these miracles.

### 1. Born of a Virgin: Matthew 1:18

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

Our God is the Lord of all creation and all nature. He created nature. The whole natural order is his law. What we call "laws of nature" are all of his invention. We know that all things began with his command, "Let there be light." We know that humanity began when he sculpted a man out of clay and gave him the breath of life. God is able to create life from the dust. He is able to make a virgin conceive. This wasn't the first time. Six months earlier, an elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, learned that they would be parents, too. Two thousand years earlier, Abraham and Sarah, aged 100 and 90, became parents. With God all things are possible. He set aside his own "natural laws" for the benefit of humanity.

**HYMN**—#67 "What Child Is This"

### 2. God became man: Matthew 1:19-21

Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

We recite the words of the creed so many times, we don't stop to think what the words mean, "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." ... "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven and was incarnate .... and became fully human." I didn't fully understand the miracle of God taking on human flesh until I had children of my own. I thought, "Here, in my arms, I am holding an 8 pound gift from God." Then thinking about Christmas, "God became like this." All the Scriptures testify that the child Jesus is God, the creator and Lord of all. St. John says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. The Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1). St. Paul says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). "To us a child is born, to us a Son is given ... the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). "His name shall be called Immanuel, [which means, 'God with us']" (Isaiah 7:14). The infinite God now lies in the manger. He whom heaven and earth cannot contain, now weighs seven pounds, ten ounces. The great mystery here is not how did God become fully human. By his great power, he can do anything he pleases. The great mystery is why would God the creator take on the nature of man the creature? The answer is his great love. "He was born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

**HYMN—#34 “Now Sing We, Now Rejoice”**



**3. Prophesied by Isaiah 700 years before it happened: Matthew 1:22-23**

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel*” — which means, “*God with us.*”

Our God had a plan. He had a plan from the very beginning. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and fell into sin, God promised them that the seed of the woman would crush Satan’s head. Adam and Eve must have wondered what God meant by “the seed of the woman.” God waited thousands of years to give the details. Over 700 years before Christ was born, an unfaithful king was speaking with his prophet. First he prophet told the king that Judah would not be destroyed and God’s people would endure. Isaiah also invited the king to ask God for a sign. When the king refused to ask for a sign, Isaiah said, “The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” Now we understand what God meant by the ‘seed of the woman.’ Now we see why God preserved the children of Abraham and led them out of captivity twice. God was keeping his first promise, to send the Savior to the whole human race.

**HYMN—#47 “Behold, a Branch Is Growing”**

**4. Joseph believed this: Matthew 1:24-25**

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Sunday we read the account of the angel’s announcement to

Mary. Here we read about the announcement to Joseph. The angel announced that Mary’s child was that Savior, and Joseph decided not to do what he had planned. He didn’t divorce Mary. He took her as his wife. He took her with him to Bethlehem. When King Herod was about to kill the babies in Bethlehem, Joseph guarded and protected Mary and the child Jesus and took them to Egypt. He made a home for Mary and Jesus in Nazareth. Joseph believed the word of the Lord. This is another Christmas miracle. In the face of what was impossible and improbable, Joseph believed what the Lord said. Even though he had his own idea about what Mary had done, he threw that idea aside when he heard the Lord’s plan. The human heart is the most peculiar of all God’s creations. When the darkness hears the word of the Lord, it turns to light. When the waters hear his word, they open up so God’s people can pass through. When God tells water to become wine, it does so. The human heart does not always hear the Word of the Lord and respond. Many people harden their hearts when they hear God’s promise or when they hear his plan. If God’s promise sounds impossible, the heart hardens like cement. If the God’s plan is contrary to what a person wants to do, the heart hardens— sometimes in the face of very strong evidence that God’s Word is true. But God had already begun his miracle of faith in Joseph’s heart. St. Matthew describes him as a “just man.” Instead of having Mary stoned to death for adultery, he planned to be merciful and simply end the engagement, until God revealed the rest of the plan to him. Joseph believed the word of the Lord, and took the task the Lord set before him.

**HYMN—#56 “Gentle Mary Laid Her Child”**

*Praise Today* is an independent publication serving pastors and worship leaders of confessional Lutheranism. It is published monthly and relies heavily on the submissions of subscribers to share their ideas of worship framed in the historical orders of service with application to the needs of Christians today.

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## *Praise Today*

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5. We believe this: Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

It is also a miracle that God’s Word has come to us. The Word of the Lord has spread into all the earth. By God’s grace, we know that God became fully human to save all humanity. We know our Savior who came to be our substitute. He took our guilt. We have his holiness credited to us. He “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” We believe that the babe in the manger is the Son of God, our Savior. Like Joseph, we also have heard God’s plan and promise. God has worked his miracle of faith in our hearts, too. We couldn’t, we wouldn’t believe in this babe of Bethlehem because it goes against human reason and pride. Why should a babe, born in a barn, be God? ... or even Savior of the world. But our God has told us this is his plan. He has announced the holy birth with angels, saying, “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” His Holy Spirit has changed our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh— hearts with ears that are eager to hear more of what the

Lord will say. — hearts full of joy and peace that come from the forgiveness that babe brought by his death on the cross, some thirty years later. Joy made complete by his resurrection from the dead. When we sing his praises, he hears it, because he lives. He is still “God with us.” God’s Christmas gift of his Son is still ours.

Amen.

**HYMN—#41 “Let All Together Praise Our God”**



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## Confession and Absolution

*by John L. Hoh, Jr.*

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*This psalm neatly divides into our confession of our sin and the pastor’s proclamation, in Jesus’ place, of the absolution of our sins.*

### Confession (Psalm 130:1-6)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

### Absolution (Psalm 130:7-8)

O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. O Come Let Us Adore Him!



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# Long Time Ago in Bethlehem

by Rev. James Sonnemann, Salem-Eastside, WELS, Milwaukee, MI

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Rev. Sonnemann used the tune from Let All the People Praise You as the basis of this Children's Christmas Service.

CW= Christian Worship; LAPPY= Let All the People Praise You

**PRESERVICE ORGAN MUSIC**—Variations on traditional Christmas melodies.

**PASTOR**—Greeting.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**PEOPLE**—Amen

**PASTOR**—Prayer for Christmas Eve.

**PROCESSIONAL HYMN**—“On This Day, Earth Shall Ring” (insert)

## LONG TIME AGO IN BETHLEHEM

### A Royal Line Was Anointed

Our Lord Jesus completed his saving work for us at Jerusalem, on the cross on which he died and at the tomb from which he rose. But God's plan of salvation was set in motion in Bethlehem, where, as St. John the Evangelist wrote, “**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.**”

That motion began with the anointing of David, son of Jesse of Bethlehem, as king of Israel. David was the founder of the royal dynasty from which the promised Savior would spring.

**SCRIPTURE**—1 Samuel 16:1-13: Samuel anoints David king.

Wicked kings succeeded David, but the line was preserved for the sake of the Messiah, who would come from it.

**SCRIPTURE**—Isaiah 11:1-3; 5-10: The Savior is the Living Branch from the dead stump of Jesse's line.

**HYMN**—“Behold, A Branch is Growing” (CW #47)

David's great disappointment was that he would not be allowed to build the Temple as the house for his God. But God promised a far greater honor for David, by which his name would be forever connected with the Messiah and with God's plan of salvation:

**SCRIPTURE**—2 Samuel 7:11a-14a: From David's own body would spring the One whom God would call his Son, who would build a house of ransomed souls for his Father and occupy David's throne forever.

**REFRAIN**—“Hark! Now hear the angels sing... (LAPPY #204)

**HYMN**—“Rejoice and Be Merry” (insert)

**SERMON**—Matthew 22:41-45

“If David Calls Him Lord, How Can He Be His Son?”

**HYMN**—“Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising” (CW #42)

## LONG TIME AGO IN BETHLEHEM

### The Eternal King Was Born

True to his promise to David about the heir to his throne who would reign forever, God moved the prophet Micah to announce that the Savior would be born in David's hometown, Bethlehem.

**SCRIPTURE**—Micah 5:2: Details of the Savior's birth are given.

**HYMN**—“O Little Town of Bethlehem” (CW #66)

Suddenly, the time had come. The birth of the Son of God was announced to Joseph first:

**SCRIPTURE**—Matthew 1:18-25: The angel assures Joseph of Mary's purity and of the virgin birth foretold in Isaiah's prophecy.

**REFRAIN**—“Hark! Now hear the angels sing... (LAPPY #204)

**HYMN**—“Some Children See Him” (insert)

The angel Gabriel then came to prepare Mary for the news that she would be the virgin mother of the Lord.

**SCRIPTURE**—Luke 1:26-45: Mary thankfully receives the angel's message.

**HYMN**—“My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord” (CW #274)

As the prophets foretold, the Savior is born in David's city, Bethlehem.

**HYMN**—“Away In A Manger” (CW #68)

**SCRIPTURE**—Luke 2:1-7: God controls events so that Joseph's family journeys from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born.

**HYMN**—“Infant Holy, Infant Lowly” (insert)

**SCRIPTURE**—Luke 2:8-14: The angel host announces the Savior’s birth to the shepherds.

**HYMN**—“Angels We Have Heard on High” (CW #63)

**SCRIPTURE**—Luke 2:15-20: The shepherds are the first to visit Israel’s newborn King, and are eager to spread the news of salvation.

**HYMN**—“Mary’s Little Boy Child” (Theme for the service—LAPPY #204)

## LONG TIME AGO IN BETHLEHEM

### God’s Promise Was Fulfilled

God worked all things out in human history to accomplish our salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He took all our punishment and set us free to live new changed lives in God’s will. He made it possible for us to reign with him eternally.

Some think that Christians are conceited thinking of humankind at the center of the universe, at the center of history, and at the center of God’s attention. God himself tells us that it is true. In his love, he created the world as the home for his human masterpiece. He has directed all of history for our eternal welfare.

**SCRIPTURE**—Galatians 4:4-5: Jesus Christ came to save us, when God’s time had fully come.

**HYMN**—“He is Born, The Child Divine” (insert)

Jesus’ coming to save us gives us purpose and direction in this life and certainty for the life to come.

**SCRIPTURE**—John 14:1-4: Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and will return to take us there.

**CHOIR**—“Christ the Lord to Us is Born”

Our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome all our deadly enemies—Satan, death, eternal punishment in hell. He rules for our welfare and is worthy of our praise.

**SCRIPTURE**—Revelation 22:16; 5:11-14: The Branch of David is shown in his glory; the glory he has prepared for us.

**REFRAIN**—“Hark! Now hear the angels sing... (LAPPY #204)

**HYMN**—“Silent Night, Holy Night” (CW #60)

**OFFERING**—“Organ Meditation”

**PRAYER OF THE CHURCH**—

**LORD’S PRAYER**—

**THE BLESSING**—“C: Amen, Amen, Amen (sung)

**RECESSIONAL HYMN**—“Once in Royal David’s City” (CW #50)

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## Old-Fashioned Worship Service

*by Naomi Sehloff*

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My congregation had an interesting way to celebrate the 150 year anniversary of the synod today. We had an old fashion service. The bible readings were from the King James. The hymns were from the old hymnal. The order of service was the one used in 1911. The woman and children had to sit separately from the men. The women were asked to wear hats and the men were asked to wear dark suits. For communion the men went first the women followed. The older woman enjoyed being able to wear their hats again in church.

We had some complaints, especially from mothers with young children, but everyone enjoyed seeing how the past Christians worshiped in the past. I think it is important to look at the how our parents and grandparents worship God in the past. I thank God that my parents and Grandparents made sure I was taught God’s word so I could worship him to today.



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# Songs Of Ascent

Rev. John R. Hildebrant, WELS, Manitowoc, WI

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Rev. Hildebrant writes:

Since I don't *\*think\** I'm going to get around to writing the even numbered verses very soon, I thought I'd at least share the odd numbered ones (the first trilogy of verses) that I have for my Thaxted hymn. The tune and original words can be found at: <http://tch.simplenet.com/htm/i/vow2the.htm>.

My idea in this hymn was to make a "club sandwich" of sorts using the festivals of Transfiguration, Palm Sunday, and Ascension to bracket the Lenten and Easter seasons. These verses focus on Christ and his *\*ascent\** (mountain experiences) in each case. The even numbered verses (when I get around to writing them) will focus on our response, our *\*assent\**, in each case. [Like the George Lukas trilogies, I know exactly what each unwritten verse will say, I just haven't *\*done\** them yet!] Eventually, this "mega-hymn" should contain three two-verse hymns for each festival (perhaps with an interchangeable seventh, concluding verse - if I write a doxology.) But as it is, these odd verses can work together.

In the trilogy of verses below, the third syllable in each verse is identical - as is the third *\*last\** syllable in each verse. There are also the more obvious "glory" parallels in the second half of each first line.

I like [verse 3] the best because it really follows the music ["in the highest"] and reflects a more somber Palm Sunday celebration as part of the Passion rather than a sort of Easter-lite or Easter-preview that many hymns tend to reflect.

The tune is really majestic and yet somewhat melancholy. These three festivals seem to fit the tune quite well. In each, there is much to be joyful about as Christ shows his majesty. But each is also tinged with a bit of sadness.

If there are any grammar problems, doctrinal problems, or anything you just don't like - please let me know! I can always try to fix it!

1. Rise, pray, ascend the mountain; reveal your glory there.  
Transfigured, we behold you, a sight beyond compare.  
With Moses and Elijah, great prophets from of old,  
Now speak of your departure, your passion to unfold.  
Then hear the voice of heaven, your Father from above,  
Commanding all to listen to you, his Son, his Love.

2. *(Yet to be written)*

3. Ride on, ascend to Zion; receive your glory due.  
Your foal so gently follows the cloaks and palms they strew.  
The city you once wept o'er now greets you with a cry.  
But songs of adoration, soon turn to 'Crucify!'  
Yet as a conqu'ring hero, you come to face the grave.  
Hosanna in the highest, O David's Son, now save!

4. *(Yet to be written)*

5. Arise, ascend the heavens; retain your glory now.  
Let ev'ry tongue confess you, for ev'ry knee shall bow.  
Tho seemingly receding, your ministry expand  
To exercise the power you hold at God's right hand.  
Bestow the benediction, 'til clouded vision wanes.  
Be with us ever-present, Eternal Son, who reigns.

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With you, dear readers, I await the coming verses from Rev. Hildebrant!



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# Tunes for “These Are the Words of Him

Rev. John R. Hildebrant, WELS, Manitowoc, WI

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*I have received some requests as to the tune to be used for Rev. Hildebrant’s “These Are the Words of Him,” a hymn based on Revelation. Here is an e-mail Rev. Hildebrant wrote explaining \*his\* preferred choice of tunes, as well as others that \*may\* work with the hymn.*

*Rev. Hildebrant writes:*

For those of you who were interested in the Hymn “These Are the Words of Him,” [Volume 5, Number 3, May/June 1999] I have a couple of notes.

First, a major part of my original disappointment was with the tune. I didn’t specifically write it for DIADEMATA [CW #341 “Crown Him with Many Crowns”] I started writing it as a double short meter (SMD.) But after the first verse, I realized that there was only one SMD tune in our hymnal. So it was by \*default\* rather than \*choice\* that I suggested the tune DIADEMATA. (BTW, this is also the only SMD tune in *Lutheran Worship*, the Missouri Synod hymnal.)

But now I have come across \*five\* other SMD tunes! The last two of these were in the ELCA hymnal [*Lutheran Book of Worship*], but I don’t care for them too much. The first one that I came across is the best one in my opinion. I was helping my mother pack up some books. Among them was an old Norwegian American hymnal published in Decorah, Iowa, 101 years ago. As I flipped through the pages (which included music, not just lyrics - which is unusual for old hymnals) the words “THESSALONICA - SMD” jumped off the page at me. One of the other SMD tunes in this hymnal was pretty good as well. But THESSALONICA is by far the best one for my hymn. The melody even goes up and then down (you could even say over!) on the line “To him who overcomes!”

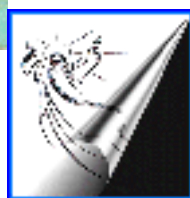
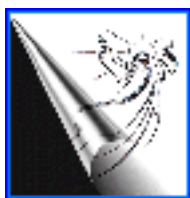
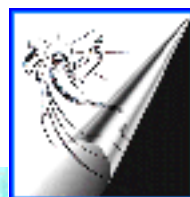
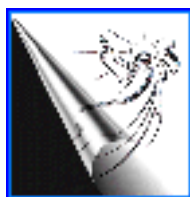
Using DIADEMATA is still OK. But I like the idea of using tunes that are not included in *Christian Worship (CW)*. And included or not, I feel THESSALONICA would be the best tune for “These Are the Words of Him.”

Thanks to Pastor Paul Stratman, I was made aware of a shareware program on the internet called “NoteWorthy.” (It is found at "<http://www.ntworthy.com/>") I’m currently using the unregistered evaluation copy. For \$40 I would like to register the program. But if I can’t afford to register it, I would be willing to send out the hymn with the music to anyone via snail-mail. If I can afford to register the program, then I would be willing to send the hymn out as an e-mail attachment playable on NoteWorthy software. . . . The same goes for my first two hymns since I’m not aware of my version of ADORO TE (with the my favorite extra note and thus extra syllable) in print anywhere and PRAISE, MY SOUL is also not in our hymnals.

One typo was also found in the version of “These Are the Words.” that I sent out. The word “yeah” in the first verse should be “yea.”

*Rev. Hildebrant*

*Manitowoc, WI*

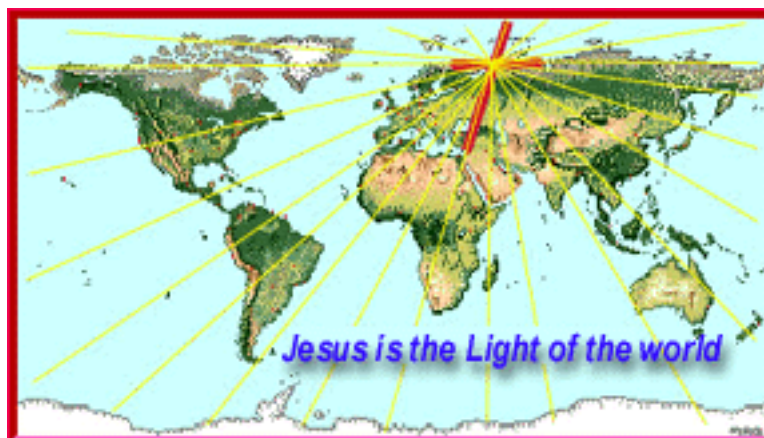


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## *Praise Today*

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**The Mission of the Church:  
To Build up the Believers to do Works of Service,  
To Proclaim the Good News of Forgiveness,  
To Proclaim Peace and Freedom to the Captives!**



**NEXT MONTH**—What is Salem on Milwaukee’s East side doing for Epiphany? Learn how Salem focuses on “Christ Manifesting Himself in the Lives of His Believers.”

More hymns!

Lenten themes.