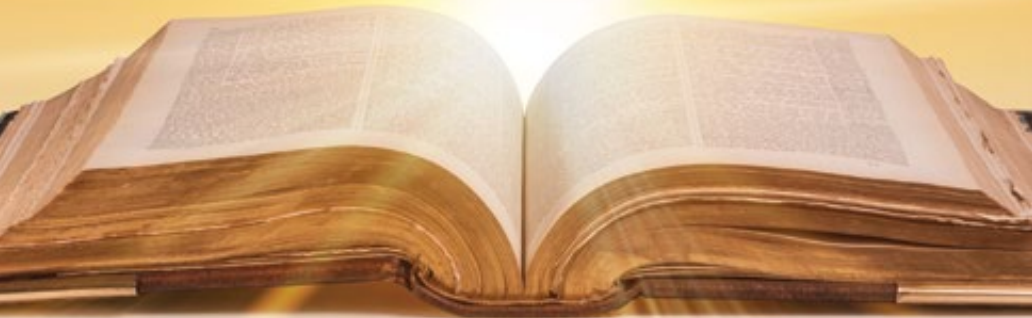

HEAVENLY FIRE



Reflections on Sermons
by Martin Luther



Creative
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Sample



by CAROL GEISLER

October 1

FOR US

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.

Isaiah 9:6



That is, when you hear, A child has been born to us, make the two letters US as large as heaven and earth and say, The child is born, it is true: but for whom is he born? Unto US, for us he is born, says the prophet. (*Festival of Christ's Nativity, first sermon, 1532, vol. 3, p. 215*)

Children like to scramble for the gifts under the Christmas tree, shaking boxes and searching for the bright packages and gift tags with their names. With adults, the search proceeds in a much more orderly manner, but if we are honest, we enjoy finding gift tags with our names too. Surprised (or not) at what we receive, we may say, "For me? You shouldn't have!"

The Child in the manger wears no gift tag, but if he did, the tag would say in letters as large as heaven and earth: "To Us." Your name is on that tag, and the name of every person in the world, past, present and yet to come. The Son is given to all of us, to undeserving sinners. "For me? You shouldn't have!" No, he shouldn't have. But out of his grace he did. The Father sent his Son. The Child is born for us.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the precious gift of your Son. Amen.

October 2

HONORED

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

John 1:14



If our hearts really perceived the greatness of this honor and we could say with firm faith, God is become man, would it be a wonder if we no longer were enemies with any man and surrendered our lives for each other? (*Christmas Day, second sermon, 1534, vol. 1, p. 113*)

A great honor has been done to us, an honor we never deserved, an honor we never could have imagined. God himself, the Creator of all things, stepped into time and history. He took on human flesh in the Person of Christ Jesus. He was born among us as one of us.

Look at the people you see each day, at home, at work, at school, in shopping malls and on city streets. God walked the dusty roads of this earth as a flesh-and-blood man, a human being like the people you see every day. He taught his disciples and ate with them. He grew tired and slept. He wept and prayed. He was like us in every way, “yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Innocent of sin, Jesus the God-man carried the sins of the world in his body to the cross. In that body of flesh and blood, God reconciled the world to himself. Now we share that astonishing love and mercy, serving others in Jesus’ name and seeking reconciliation and peace with those for whom the Savior died.

Lord and God, lead us to love others as you love us. Amen.

October 3

RECOGNITION

Among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.

John 1:26-27



We are to do good works and work hard at doing them ... But when it comes to this man who is called Christ, you should humble yourself like John, and throw all the good works you have ever done at his feet and frankly admit that you are not fit to wipe off Christ's shoes. (*Fourth Sunday in Advent, second sermon, 1533, vol. 1, p. 88*)

Often those who are involved in charity work receive recognition and honor for the loving work that they do. Tirelessly they raise funds for hospitals, build homes for those in need or donate food and clothing to shelters and missions. It is right that they should be recognized for their efforts, and such recognition may encourage others to donate to the causes represented.

When it comes to achieving status before God, to setting right our relationship with him, our works of charity receive—and deserve—no recognition at all. The works we do serve others, but those works cannot earn salvation for us: “All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6). We are justified, placed into a right relationship with God, only through faith in Jesus who, wrapped in the polluted garment of our sin, suffered and died on the cross. Redeemed and forgiven, dressed in Christ's righteousness, we throw even the very best things we do at his feet and honor him as Lord.

Worthy are you, Lord Jesus, to receive honor and glory and blessing.
Amen.

October 4

ALWAYS NEW

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:2



We are not preaching anything new, but always, without ceasing, about that man who is called Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who died for our sins and rose for our justification. (*Holy Easter, 1533, vol. 2, p. 8*)

I love to tell the story,” the song goes, “the old, old story of Jesus and his love.” The story of our salvation *is* old, so old that it stretches back “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20). We never tire of hearing and telling the story of Jesus and his love, but others reject that good news. They listen instead to the world’s many voices—new forms of spirituality, the uncertain promise of a path through life charted by the stars or perhaps the claim that there is no God at all.

We should not be surprised when others listen to those deceitful voices. We have been warned that “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears ... will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). In response, we unceasingly proclaim the truth of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, looking forward to the day when God will make all things new. It is the story of our salvation, and it really never gets old.

God and Savior, keep us faithful to the old, old story of your love for us. Amen.

October 5

SUBSTITUTE

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21



On account of our sins we deserve to suffer death, terror, and hell. But Christ takes our place and innocently endures death, terror, and hell, so that through him and in him we escape all this. (*Holy Week, second sermon, 1534, vol. 1, p. 402*)

When Jesus was on trial, Pilate tried to release the prisoner he knew to be innocent by offering the crowd a choice: “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” (Matthew 27:17). The crowd shouted for Barabbas, and the criminal convicted of murder and rebellion was released. Jesus, innocent of all wrong, died in his place.

What did Barabbas think of the exchange? What did he do with the gift of life and freedom? We don’t know what Barabbas was thinking, but the same unfair exchange has taken place in our lives. We too lived under a sentence of death, guilty of rebellion against God. The innocent Son of God was condemned for our sins and suffered the terrors of death and hell in our place. He endured death and in exchange set us free from sin and guilt and gave us eternal life. What will you do with the gift of life and freedom that is yours in Christ?

Crucified and risen Lord, lead me to use my freedom in ways that glorify you and serve others. Amen.

October 6

WITH ME

He said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43



In his greatest suffering, torment, and disgrace, he appears not to see or feel anything; his only concern, all that he sees and cares for, is your and my misery, our anguish, and great distress. (*Holy Week, fourth sermon, 1534, vol. 1, p. 427*)

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus reached out with compassion. He healed the sick, the blind, the lame and the demon-possessed. He fed hungry crowds with bread and fish and with his nourishing Word. Even as his enemies overpowered him in Gethsemane, he responded with mercy, healing the servant injured in the violence. He could have called an army of angels to his side, but instead willingly submitted to the mob. Jesus asked his heavenly Father to forgive those who crucified him. From the cross he provided for the care of his mother Mary. When the dying thief beside him repented and sought an audience with his crucified King, Jesus promised him paradise.

In his torment, Jesus' only thought was for others. His only thought was for us. He endured the desolation of being abandoned by his Father so that we will never suffer that horrifying anguish. Jesus overcame the darkness of the tomb so that we too will be raised to life on the Last Day. With eternal compassion he promised, “I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3).

Jesus, teach us to live with compassion, putting the needs of others ahead of our own. Amen.

Martin Luther regularly preached in the town church in Wittenberg. But at times, he proclaimed God’s Word in sermons, the house postils, to family members, students and friends gathered in his home. Listeners took careful notes, later writing out the complete sermons. Brief excerpts from these sermons serve as the basis for these devotions for the Reformation month of October (or any time of the year).

Luther spoke of the Word of God as “a heavenly fire.” Kindled in the hearts and mouths of the faithful, studied and proclaimed in our churches and homes, the Word brings to us the good news of forgiveness and life—and sings the devil and sends him packing.

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