



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

January 6, 2020—The Epiphany of Our Lord

Dear Brothers in Christ,

On this Twelfth Day of Christmas, while many struggle to pick up the pieces of their broken lives and others keep a wary watch on ominous developments in the Middle East, you and I get back to the task at hand—the mission our Lord Jesus has given His church to tend His sheep and lambs and gather in the lost so there will be one flock and one Shepherd (John 10:16).

You know that Shepherd well. He's the One who has commissioned you to proclaim Him crucified and risen, to baptize sinners into His death and resurrection, to nourish broken bodies and souls with His living flesh and blood, the very Bread of Heaven.

True, you and I don't know many details about the year ahead. However, I can tell you from both study of Scripture and my own bitter experience that you will doubtless have a rough go of it. The Evil One just doesn't give up without a fight, and as a servant of Christ, you are one of his favorite targets. Jesus warned us ahead of time, after all: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

You have His Word on it, so be sure to take up Him on that promise. When you get discouraged—and we all do—find your refuge in Him by meditation and prayer. There is life in His Word, and comfort in talking to Him. You will emerge refreshed for service, newly confident of His abiding presence.

I needn't remind you we live in a very dark world spiritually speaking. Statistically, the church is in decline, which has Christians running scared as we face the third decade of the third millennium. Desperate times call for desperate measures, many think. And so some propose radical adjustments to our message to make it more acceptable to a neo-pagan context.

The Lord's prophet has a different idea:

"Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising." (Isaiah 60:1-3)

Epiphany empowers vigorous mission to both the lost and the found. Souls locked in spiritual darkness and living in the shadow of death need the glory of the LORD that first shone at the manger and now radiates through the Gospel preached and sacraments administered by your mouth and hands.

Be of good cheer, my friend. No matter what darkness you might be facing right now, there's hope. Christ Jesus is the Light no darkness can overcome.

And He remains Light for you and yours.

Your pastor and your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford