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In This Issue
In this issue, we again feature articles that were submitted as part of the scholarship essay contest. The two essay prompts for the articles were:

1. The fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” Galatians 5:22, 23. Why is it important to manifest this fruit in your personal walk as minister or Christian school teacher? How will you aim in your labors at the bringing forth of this fruit in students and parishioners? A good answer to this essay should view the fruit of the Spirit broadly rather than giving detailed explanations of each fruit.

2. In every classroom there is a child dealing with pain or difficulties. In every congregation there is a family living in turmoil and unrest. In John 21:15 Jesus gives the command to “feed my lambs”. In Matthew 10:6 Jesus calls his disciples to go to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.

How will you feed the lambs of God, especially those in unique and difficult circumstances? How will you show mercy and kindness to those who carry such burdens?

May this issue serve not only to give us good, edifying material to read but also to remind us to lift up our prayers to God, that he will raise up and give us more teachers and pastors, for the need is urgent.

Erratum
There was an error in the October 2020 editorial, Watchmen, that I wish to correct, and for which I want to apologize. In that article, I wrote, “It is in our nature to hate such a man, as Jehoshaphat hated Micaiah because he “never prophesied” good, but always evil” (2 Chron. 18:7).” A careful reader pointed out to me that it was not Jehoshaphat that hated Micaiah, but Ahab. He is correct. I apologize for the mistake. I thank the reader for bringing this to my attention and remind all readers that I welcome their feedback.

THE BIRTH OF A SWORD

The Christmas season is in full swing, and there is no escaping it. Stores are playing Christmas music, the Christmas tree is up, presents are safely tucked underneath, there is a buzz in the air, we get a few days off work; why, this is the most wonderful time of the year!

There is no question, the Christmas season has been commercialized, and the Jesus Christ of the Bible has been turned into a caricature of the reality. Jesus Christ has been transformed into a smiling, benevolent, Santa Claus-like figure who stands ready to answer every wish and check off every item on the Christmas list. He is like your old white-haired uncle who sits in the corner, smiles a lot, cracks some hilarious jokes, and agrees with everything anyone says. Nothing can wipe that smile off his face, much less offend him. Everybody loves Uncle So-and-so! Always agreeable, never judgmental—who doesn’t like having him around?

This is the Jesus the world has constructed, a Jesus who condemns no one and condones everything. Attraction to this Jesus quickly finds entrance into our hearts and our affections. We can see this in our celebration of the season.

We are tempted to make Christmas a time when we can put our guard down for a time, ignore our differences with others, exchange gifts, and tell our cousin who left the church a few years ago and for
all we know hasn’t darkened the door of one since, “Merry Christmas! How nice to see you again!” Where we might not see and fellowship with someone the rest of the year, this is the time we are tempted to make room to catch up with our sister who left her husband and took up with another man, abandoning both her husband and her children, leaving wreckage in her wake. Or maybe it was a harmless split. It was amicable! The children were older, and it had become clear that they had drifted apart. They each had now found their soulmate, were faithfully attending conservative Reformed churches, and their lives were now in order. We construct such a narrative to cover over the destruction and wickedness of their evil deed.

For many Christians, Christmas is a time to ignore differences and sing about peace, love, and harmony. It is a time when parties are held when the whole family can once again gather around a table, when we won’t focus on differences but focus on the fact that we have the same last name. We craft excuses why this is permitted; in fact, we are told it is crucial to come together at Christmas. If we didn’t gather, that would cause a rift in the family, and no one wants to be the cause of that. Grandpa and Grandma would be angry if everyone didn’t come. Not to make this sacrifice for Grandpa and Grandma would be unloving, harsh, and judgmental.

This is the Christ of the modern-day Christmas. Peace-loving, non-judgmental, willing and eager to overlook sins, and someone who smiles a lot.

This Christ bears no likeness to the Christ of the Bible.

Let’s make some space to allow Jesus to have a say in the matter: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household” (Matt. 10:34–36).

It is this time of the year that the temptation to fellowship with those walking unrepentantly in sin is the greatest. It is okay, we are told, at this time of the year to fellowship with someone who is trampling God’s law underfoot and showing himself unbelieving by his actions.

We may never judge a man or woman’s eternal destiny, nor do we want to, but we are called to judge the fruits that someone bears. Jesus speaks to this in Matthew 7:16–17: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.”

We see the corrupt fruit, we know it is contrary to God’s good law, and yet we are tempted to console ourselves that is okay that we maintain fellowship with them. After all, it is Christmas time, and if we didn’t go, the family would be so upset! This is compelling to our natural ear. But let us again hear Jesus Christ, this time speaking through his apostle in 2 Thessalonians 3:6: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.” And again a few verses later, in verse 14: “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

This stance will draw charges. You will be accused of being proud and thinking you are better than others. This charge is false. Obedience to this command of Christ has to do with our identity and the identity of our loved ones. Our earthly relationships are important and ought to be nurtured. But not at all costs. Jesus taught us who his true brothers and sisters were, and we can apply that same instruction to ourselves. “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:50). The truth and reality of the antithesis will drive its sword right through many families. Which family is not touched by these things?

Neither is faithfulness to this command driven by a desire to cause unrest or trouble in a family. This false charge, too, is made against those who strive to live holy before their God. Truth and obedient living are never the cause of trouble. The one who sinned, and continues unrepentantly in sin, is he who troubles the family.

This Christmas season let us battle hard against the desires and motivations of our earthly nature that tell us it is okay, just for a season, to put down the sword and simply to fit in. Young person, it may be your calling to remind your parents of the clear instruction of Jesus that the time is now to take up our crosses and bear reproach for the name of our Lord and Savior by not being partakers with the workers of iniquity (Eph. 5:7).

While the world remembers the birth of a Jesus of its own creation, let us celebrate his birth according to knowledge and remember that we celebrate not the birth of a harmless and inoffensive babe, but the birth of a sword, indeed, the birth of our sword-wielding King, Christ Jesus.
Like many of our people, I often watch online videos of the Covenant Christian High School choirs. I am always struck by the beauty of the songs, but as Mr. Kleyn’s camera steadily pans across the singing faces, something else often jumps out at me as well. As I look, I am startled by the number of faces representing homes that I know are affected by pain and unrest. The number includes only cases that I know about; the flock of Christ contains many homes touched by God in especially painful ways. Watch the videos. Read the bulletins. Glance around the sanctuary pews. You will see many injured sheep in special need of their Shepherd’s tender care.

Christ, our good Shepherd, gives that care through various means. One of those means is the pastor of a congregation. When injured members of the flock need to be strengthened, the command of John 21:16–17 comes to the pastor: “Feed my sheep.” When some in the flock are faint-hearted, infirm, or stumbling, 1 Thessalonians 5:14 commands the pastor: “comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.” A pastor must be able to do this; it is essential. By God’s grace it is also possible.

As we examine how a pastor mercifully feeds and tends to injured sheep, we will first consider the content of the care he must bring. Second, we will examine the manner in which he must bring it. We will see that a faithful pastor, using the word, extracts the sheep from harmful places, carries them toward the safety and comfort of the good pastures, and does so repeatedly and patiently.

For an undershepherd to nourish God’s sheep effectively, he must give them the proper food. What is this food? Put simply, it is the word of Christ. He is “the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die” (John 6:50). His word is the “sincere milk” whereby we grow (1 Pet. 2:2). “Hearken[ing] diligently” to him, our soul “eat[s]...that which is good, and...delight[s] itself in fattness” (Isa. 55:2). The Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism set forth Christ as our spiritual meat and drink in their treatments of the Lord’s Supper.1 Heads 3–4.17 of the Canons of Dordt explicitly identifies the preaching of the word as the “means...ordained to be the...food of the soul,” just as physical food and drink are the means ordained to “prolong and support this our natural life.”2 Through time, Reformed fathers have concurred: to feed the sheep, the undershepherd must bring the word.3

A pastor must not feed the sheep with anything other than that word. As he sits in his office creating “meal plans,” a pastor must bear in mind the truth that “office bearers are nothing more, yet also nothing less than undershepherds under Christ. They are His servants, who are mandated by Him to feed the flock and to be overseers over God’s heritage in His Name.”4 The pastor does not own the flock. Christ owns the flock, and Christ will choose what to feed the flock.

This is especially important for a pastor to remember when he is visiting injured sheep. Seeing the spiritual cuts and bruises, the pastor may be tempted to abandon the solid food of the word and instead experiment with all kinds of strange remedies. The theological snake-oils advertised to pastors are endless in our day: “Try a little bit of uplifting philosophy on your ailing sheep,” one expert says. “For best results, mix in a compelling story,” adds a salesman. “Maybe what’s needed is some all-natural community service,” speculates another. Substituting such “food” for God’s word

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1 Belgic Confession 35 and Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 28, in The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).
4 Hoeksema, Herman, Reformed Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1985), 631–635.
is folly. At best, the sheep will starve. At worst, the already suffering sheep will be poisoned.

Christ is the only one who can feed his sheep. Therefore, his word alone will nourish.

When a pastor visits a sheep and faithfully expounds the word, Christ is speaking. If we may speak this way, when a pastor cracks open his Bible, he might as well have opened up the clouds of heaven themselves. The word sounds; the voice of Christ rings out. There is a visitation from on high. The sheep beholds Christ by faith, feeding upon him. This is a sobering thought to the undershepherd, who fervently pleads with God, “Don’t let my word get in the way of thine!”

Just as important as the content a shepherd brings is the manner in which he brings it. Injured sheep are sensitive. If an undershepherd is incompetent in his handling of the word or in his handling of the sheep, the sheep will quickly pick up on this. They will not trust him or the word he brings. If an undershepherd works haphazardly or roughly with the sheep, the sheep may be left with the impression that the Shepherd the undershepherd represents is similarly careless or harsh. Conversely, when an undershepherd handles the word effectively and in kindness and mercy, the sheep are given a clearer view of the Good Shepherd, who “healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds,” pitying them “as a father pitieth his children” (Ps. 147:3; 103:13).

A pastor should have the humility to seek wise guidance when applying God’s word to specific hurting homes. When he does this, he will be shown a general manner of shepherding injured sheep that consists, first, of using the word to carefully expose and address whatever danger is threatening the sheep in their particular circumstances; second, of using the word to lead the sheep back to a place of spiritual safety; and third, of using the word to patiently repeat these two steps as often as needed, knowing that sheep are prone to regress and wander.

This is the pastoral approach of the Heidelberg Catechism, which comes to us as sheep in need of comfort. First, the Catechism addresses the danger that we are in. Knowing that we are prone to minimize our sins, the Catechism addresses the source of our misery: life apart from Christ. Second, the Catechism shows us the remedy to that misery: deliverance from sin and the resulting thankful life with God that follows. Third, the Catechism (by design) repeats itself annually, knowing that the congregation needs constant reminding. A faithful pastor does well to follow the lead of the Catechism, showing firmness, warmth, and consistency.

Gisbertus Voetius, a Reformed church father who served as a delegate to the Synod of Dordt, also exhibits this three-part pattern of shepherding in a pastoral work entitled Spiritual Desertion. He presents steps in restoring spiritually depressed saints that are “part purgative [meaning they address the dangers and underlying problems that may stalk the saint] and part restorative [meaning they re-establish the saint, leading him back to spiritual health].” Voetius urges perseverance when tending to a spiritually depressed saint, prescribing prayer and patience for those who relapse. Voetius’ meticulous care and extensive scriptural applications when bringing pastoral care are instructive to pastors seeking to diligently diagnose and treat their own sheep who have lost the sense of God’s favor.

This pastoral approach is also seen in some of Martin Luther’s writings. In a sermon on preparing to die, Luther begins each of his points by addressing a specific inner turmoil that a saint on his deathbed may struggle with. After exposing the devil’s hand behind the turmoil, Luther presents the spiritual remedy, along with pertinent scriptural quotations. Within his sermon, Luther often repeats and reminds his congregation of the fountainhead of their comfort: the knowledge of one’s justification in Christ.

Likewise, in a text addressing women whose pregnancies have not gone well, Luther begins by first addressing the fears of bereaved mothers: “It is not their fault...God is not angry with them or with others who are involved.” He follows this by directing their attention to the hope they have in loss: “Whatever Christians sincerely pray, especially in the unexpressed yearnings of their hearts, becomes a great, unbearable cry in God’s ears. God must listen.” Luther ends by enumerating saints in the Old and New Testaments who suffered similar


8 Consolation for Women, 424.
sorrows and were heard by God. He repeatedly shows that God hears the sobs of mothers. A pastor seeking to bind up the wounds of his own dying sheep and crying ewes would do well to imitate Luther’s empathy, kindness, and conviction.

When a pastor looks over his congregation and sees families that are touched by grief or turmoil, God gives him a heart of empathy for his hurting sheep. God works it in the pastor to feed his sheep from the word and the word alone. God gives the pastor a spirit of kindness toward the sheep that seeks to warn and extract them from danger and point them to the path of life. An attitude of mercy is worked in the pastor, which persists in ministering to injured sheep through difficulty and setback. The pastor works as an instrument in the Shepherd’s hand, the hand that holds bruised and battered sheep within its tender care.

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Aaron attends Calvin University and aspires to the gospel ministry. He attends Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

HAVING A SHEPHERD’S HEART FOR STUDENTS

A Christian school is not an elite institution where only the best, most successful students are accepted, nor is it a place populated by saints whose lives are untouched by the effects of sin. A Christian school is a place full of sinners, who are perfectly designed by God and covered by the blood of Christ, but who still daily struggle with living in a sinful world with a sinful nature. As a teacher, it will be part of my job to recognize the struggles that each individual student faces and help them. Jesus instructed Peter to “feed my lambs” and “feed my sheep” (John 21:15–16); Jesus knows that his children are like sheep, prone to wander and in need of constant guidance and comfort. Though I too have the heart of a sheep, taking up the calling of teacher means that I also must help shepherd. As a teacher, I must reflect the mercy and kindness of Christ through awareness of and empathy for students’ struggles, patient counseling based on scripture, considerate teaching methods, and above all, prayer.

When I walk into a classroom and survey the room, I must see more than a group of high schoolers whom I need to instruct. The difficulties that each student faces will not necessarily be obvious, but each one of them is a unique human, created by God and placed in a specific situation with particular gifts and struggles, wrestling with the effects of sin in their lives. These effects can be wide-ranging, but they can all be devastating. Looking across a classroom full of students, there might be one grieving the death of a grandparent, parent, sibling, or close friend. Another might face bullying in the hallways or online; some might struggle with learning difficulties or self-image issues. Many of them may be wrestling with depression and anxiety. According to the National Institutes of Health, 13% of young
people aged 12–17 experienced a major depressive episode in the last year (NIH 2017); if I have 25 students, that means three of them have likely been touched by depression. Another student might have an unstable family life: perhaps he or she has a single parent or is being torn between two homes in a divorce. Or maybe he or she has parents who are constantly fighting or a mother or father who simply does not make an effort to show them love. Another student could be dealing with an abuser in her home. And it is quite possible that any one of them could be dealing with many of these issues compounded together or be scarred from any one of these events happening years earlier in his life.

All these difficulties are not detached from the learning that happens in school. Students cannot simply drop these burdens at the door; they will carry them into the classroom, where these burdens can quickly lead to academic struggles. For one, these issues will likely lead to an inability to focus. Imagine trying to pay attention to a discussion on The Canterbury Tales when you know you will face a torrent of bullying in the hallways or the next time you open your phone. Imagine trying to remember the structure of DNA when your parents are not speaking to each other. Further, depression and anxiety can lead to dropping grades, a lack of motivation and interest in activities, anger, difficulty with relationships (which only compounds these problems), fatigue, and even physical pain such as headaches and stomachaches (McCarthy 2018). A home in turmoil interrupts the environment needed to do homework and further contributes to depression and anxiety. Research has shown that family structure is correlated with academic performance and attendance; in one study of high school seniors, students with divorced parents had on average a lower GPA and missed almost 60% more classes than those from an intact household (Ham 2003). Students will inevitably come to class bearing anger, grief, sadness, disappointment, or loneliness, on some or many days, and the effects of students’ struggles will manifest themselves in their classroom performance. As a prospective teacher, I need to be prepared to help address these issues.

When dealing with struggling students, the guiding principle must be to model the love of Christ. In his earthly ministry, Christ consistently reached out to the downcast and the outcasts, thereby giving instruction on how I can minister to students today. One important step to being an effective shepherd in the classroom is to cultivate awareness and empathy. Christ knew the heart of each person he encountered, but often he took time to ask them questions and lead them to see their own needs before providing a solution (consider, for example, the blind beggar in Luke 18:35–43 or the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1–26). I, of course, do not know the hearts of my students, but it is essential for me to cultivate awareness of my students’ lives and ask meaningful questions to draw out their specific needs. Precisely because I do not know their hearts, I must not be quick to assume or to judge but be careful to listen, working to build trust so that students feel comfortable speaking with me. Maybe this means inviting students to come chat during lunchtime, or maybe just being present in the hallways at breaks and in between classes, not lost in preparing lessons or deep in conversation with other teachers about my hobbies. I must actively take interest in students’ activities outside the classroom and build relationships. Like Christ, this all must be done with humility, and I must show love, not just to the students whom I personally feel bad for but for those that are least deserving of mercy. Students that are struggling will most likely not be the most kind or fun to hang out with; they may be distanced and aloof; they may lash out in anger. But I must strive to reflect Christ, although I will do so imperfectly, to reach those who seem unreachable.

Cultivating awareness of and empathy for students may give me the opportunity to speak directly to students about their needs; in this case, the best counsel I can bring is the word of God. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The word of God is applicable to any situation, and it is efficacious: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7). There will be times when students need help beyond what I can provide, but one of the most powerful things that I can do for one of my students is to bring the promises of scripture to them. God’s word is more powerful than any logical suggestions or words of comfort that I can give from my own head. Just as I need Christ daily, I can point my students to their Savior, the Lord who “will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble” (Ps. 9:9).

In addition to bringing the word of God to struggling students, there are other practical things I can do in my classroom to help students that are struggling. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, we read, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be
patient toward all men.” I can support students who are “weak” due to physical or spiritual struggles through concrete changes to the way I teach and by being flexible. If I know a student is going through difficult circumstances, I can be accommodating in expectations for homework. “Be[jing] patient toward all men” in the classroom means that when a student is lagging in schoolwork, I take the time to consider his situation and extend him grace and forgiveness.

This text also speaks to those students who may simply be less academically gifted. God has given each of his children specific talents and specific roles in the body of the church (1 Cor. 12:12–27). This means that not everyone will excel in the classroom, but that does not mean I may ignore them. As a teacher I will be called to do what it takes to come alongside the weaker students to help them to understand as much as they are able. This is an essential component of my teaching education: learning strategies to ensure that students with learning disabilities are not left behind and various methodologies to address different types of learners. By cultivating patience and making adjustments to how I teach, I will aim to support the “weak” and ensure that each student knows his worth as a covenant child of God.

Finally, the most powerful thing that I can do to help struggling students is to pray. Just after the admonishment in 1 Thessalonians 5 to help the weak, we are further exhorted in verse 17 to “pray without ceasing.” Prayer is the means that God has ordained for us to communicate and fellowship with him, and thus through prayer I can bring my burdens and the burdens of my students before our sovereign Father. Through prayer I will be reminded that God is faithful and will keep his promises to his people: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14). By praying for the specific needs of specific students, I won’t be granted instant answers or solutions, but I will be reminded of God’s sovereignty over their lives, and I can ask God for the patience and love that I need to shepherd them. Moreover, I can pray with students; rather than simply telling them I will pray for them, we can come before God together and dwell on his promises to preserve his people and work all things for their good. We can pray confidently, knowing that my students and I, in all our struggles, are in God’s hands.

Having not yet begun my calling as a teacher, I confess that I do not know exactly what awaits me in the classroom. Right now, I can only imagine the struggles my students and I will face. But today I can foster awareness and empathy for those around me; I can continue to grow in my knowledge of God’s word so that I can more effectively bring words of comfort. I can study teaching techniques for students with special needs, and I can grow in my personal prayer life. I know that none of these things will make me a perfect teacher, for I too am touched by sin and struggles, but I pray and trust that God will guide me as one of his sheep to help teach his flock.

Works Cited


Elizabeth is a post-grad at Western Governor’s University and is pursing a career in teaching. She attends Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudonville, Michigan.
FEED MY LAMBS

Nathan comes to school one morning, hangs up his backpack, hands in his homework, and runs out to play on the playground like every other morning. However, when the teacher looks at his homework, none of the questions have been answered. After the teacher discusses the situation with him, Nathan just stares at the ground and mumbles. The teacher’s first reaction is to punish the student for not doing his homework, but what if there is more to the story than what is readily apparent?

Many children deal with difficult circumstances at some point before they become adults. Sometimes, difficult circumstances are clearly evident, for example, when a child is diagnosed with severe ADHD or when the father loses his job. However, in just as many cases, these difficult circumstances are not easily discernible. Therefore, to minister to and encourage children of any age we must always be learning about them as well as constantly praying to God for his help and guidance.

While comforting those in difficult circumstances is necessary toward any person of any age, as a future teacher I plan to focus on the difficult circumstances of the school-aged children and how they can be fed and comforted spiritually. Many teachers have a prominent role as advisors and role models to students. Because they often spend many hours of the day with these children, they can have a huge impact on their lives. The more mindful that a teacher is of this fact, the more likely this influence can be used to help the student learn, grow, and thrive in light of God’s word. However, getting to know students and interacting with them is not a chore, but a joyful experience and something that I look forward to when I become a teacher.

However, even when just dealing with children, there is still a wide range of experiences and unique barriers they may face during these years. For example, a junior high teacher will likely meet different challenges than a kindergarten teacher. A kindergartner has a much simpler view of life, and a hug and an encouraging word may be all that is necessary to cheer his day. However, a junior high student has a much greater grasp on the complexities and stresses of life and may need a much different approach, such as a deeper discussion of the circumstances. Overall, there is a general guideline of principles that can be applied to various situations, even though every person and child is different and thus a slightly different approach will likely be needed in various specific circumstances.

Furthermore, there is a wide range of circumstances that could be considered difficult. This ranges from learning disabilities to physical disabilities to hard circumstances in the home, such as low or no income, a split family, or even a family member who has left the church. Having a friend leave the church is hard, but having a father or a brother leave can be devastating, leading to doubts and weariness of the soul. Some deal with parents who are sick, going through cancer treatments, or permanently injured. Even with a life that others would consider to be normal and problem-free, studies show that about 25% of students deal with depression at some time before they become adults, and this depression generally lasts at least eight months (quoted in Slopsema). Unfortunately, many deal with much more than that even before they become adults.

How should we treat these children? What should guide our decisions? The first thing that we ought to do is pray. We know that we lack the necessary wisdom, but our loving Father does not. As James reminds us in his epistle on faith, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). We need to pray for those children or teenagers who are dealing with hard things in their lives: pray that they come through with a stronger faith and deeper love for God, and even pray that this burden would soon be lifted from their shoulders. We need to pray for ourselves, that we deal with the situation in a beneficial rather than detrimental manner, in a manner pleasing to God. We need to pray for the words to be given us from God and pray that our walk and example will help those children. As James 5:16 states, “Pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” To pray is not a hard thing, yet so often we dive into a situation, trying to save the day without asking the all-knowing and wise Father for help. Indeed, we are so small compared with God, and we should
not assume we know what is right when our creator and sovereign director can be asked. He is the one who will work all things for the good of his people. Therefore, to him we must go for direction and instruction.

In many situations, patience is necessary. Our current society is in the midst of a movement of immediate gratification. If we want fun, we want it now. If we want money, we want it now, and we do not want to spend the time to obtain it. However, in many cases, solving problems and dealing with their aftermath does not come quickly or easily. This is especially true when this is an ongoing situation. Having a family member dealing with cancer is always going to be hard, and that pain is never going to completely go away. Yes, a person may learn to deal with this pain and not let it overtake his entire life, but it is always there. The same can be said about having a family member leave the church. We will never stop praying for a lost sheep to be returned to the fold, and we will never stop hurting that a loved one has walked away, but after time, and by God’s grace, we are not overcome by this situation. As James 1:3–4 puts it so perfectly, “The trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” Often times, burdens are placed on us for a while, and sometimes they are never lifted while we live on this earth. While we may not wish for this to happen to anyone, we can be an example of patience for those in need, remembering that in Christ we have an easy burden and our yoke is made light, for he gives us rest (Matt. 11:28–30).

In many circumstances, there is no way for us to end the difficulties of others, and therefore we must not stress ourselves out about trying to make it all go away. Rather, we are called to work with the child and help him or her to deal with the fallout of the situation. Practically speaking, this may mean addressing similar situations through the curriculum or devotions in school and making general applications. This could also mean adjusting the homework load for a time to a lighter and more feasible weight, to something that will not be another stress point in their lives. While education is a primary goal of a teacher, the welfare of the student is the primary goal of a teacher. Easing homework for a time could be beneficial in the long run, especially for the child’s mental health and spiritual growth. As Christian teachers, we ought not to stress academic learning over spiritual growth, and we must be mindful that homework does not take up so much time and energy that there is nothing left for spiritual growth.

We, as teachers, are here to comfort and support the students that we teach. We sometimes see these students as much as their parents do. Because of this, we have the opportunity to have a meaningful effect on the students’ lives, and thus we also have a huge responsibility. No platitudes of this world can truly bring peace, which is why we must always lead them to the Bible, to God, and to our dear Savior Jesus Christ. As Lord’s Day 1 so sweetly promises, we belong to Christ, who assures us of eternal life because he has fully paid for all of our sins. That is our only comfort in life and in death. These words hang in the hallway of my house, and I am comforted by them every single day. I can share this comfort with another who is also hurting because God has made these promises to him as well. This is something for which I am eternally thankful. Throughout the past years, I have worked for various organizations, one of which was a local before and after school program called STARS. This program included all of the public elementary and middle schools in the area. As this was also the cheapest childcare option in the area, there were many students who were poor or had been barred from various other organizations. Many students were dealing with broken homes, learning disorders, and indifferent parents. So many times I wanted to comfort these students, but I could not think of any meaningful words to bring them because they had no hope in God and no foundation for comfort. It was at these times when I was grateful to have been raised as a believer and thankful to know that I will likely be teaching in a Christian school when I finish my education.

However, we cannot comfort well, cannot pray with understanding, and cannot know how to help a student unless we know and understand these students. It is not enough to have an intellectual knowledge of the difficulties in their lives, even if we may have undergone these same difficulties ourselves; we must also know the individual, for every person sees the world a little bit differently, and the same experience can shape two people in vastly different ways. This shows a deeper calling in a teacher’s work. We must not stop at teaching a child the information that he needs to graduate. No, in my opinion, much more important is getting to know the child, understanding how he learns and how he is doing. This will not only improve how well we are able to teach him; we will also be able to help him through life’s difficult and dangerous ways.

As children of God, we know that the path of this life will be difficult, tiring, and dangerous.
However, as brethren in Christ, we can help others navigate that path, and together we can journey toward eternal life. For together, we can have hope of a day when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev. 21:4).

Works Cited


Heidelberg Catechism, in The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005).

Suzanna is enrolled at California State University and is pursuing a teaching career. She attends Redlands Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

CHRISTIAN LIVING

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IN EDUCATION

Normally when we think of fruit, we think of apples, oranges, bananas, or grapes. These are things that we eat in our daily lives. They are sweet and usually a very refreshing treat. Fruit doesn’t always mean the refreshing foods that we eat though. Another definition of fruit is the result or reward of work or activity. The latter definition is one that applies to the fruit of the Spirit. According to Galatians 5:22–23, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” The Spirit works in our hearts, and this is the fruit that is a result of the Spirit’s work. The Spirit is working in our hearts, and as a result, we are blessed with love, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. The fruit of the Spirit is important to us as covenant children of God. As teachers, it is our calling not only to glorify God using this fruit, but also to guide our students to do the same.

Rev. Carl Haak wrote an article about how this fruit is the description of a beautiful person. We want our students to be able to see the beauty that all of the children of God have through the Spirit working in our hearts. Haak says, “The Spirit makes us look like Jesus...to be given the Fruit of the Spirit is to be given the beauty of Jesus.” All of these fruits directly reflect attributes of God. The Spirit is in our hearts, and we are able to see those attributes of God reflected in us. That in itself is a beautiful thing, but it makes us beautiful as well (Haak 1984). Before teachers begin to help students understand why the fruit of the Spirit is important, they need to get a good grasp of the fruit themselves. Proverbs 18:15 says, “The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.” We should be seeking to grow in knowledge so that we are able to train up covenant children. “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). There is much about the fruit of the Spirit that can be taught to students, but there is even more that can be learned about it.

The fruit of the Spirit is one united result of the work of the Spirit in our hearts. It is not multiple different entities. This is an idea that we all should know and that we should make sure our students know. Each part of that fruit is unique, but all parts are united as one fruit of the Spirit. Rev. Haak compared it to a bouquet of flowers. All of the individual flowers work together to create one beautiful bouquet. You do not pull separate flowers out when you want them. You keep them together, and they blend together beautifully as one (Haak 1984). They cannot be separated. We are not given only some or just one of these virtues. They are all one fruit of the Spirit, the fruit that we are so thankful for. This can be commonly overlooked, but through awareness of the topic we can appreciate it and glorify God. This united fruit is in the hearts of all of God’s children.
He blesses us with the ability to use this fruit for his honor and glory. Our work of thankfulness is evidence of that fruit.

Teachers all have a desire to help their students grow academically, but they have a stronger desire to help their students grow spiritually. Having that desire translates into putting it into action. There are two ways that teachers can help students spiritually understand many topics, including the fruit of the Spirit. The first way is being an example to our students, and the second way is confessing it with our mouths in everything we do (Bol 2001). When we confess the fruit of the Spirit and work to fight the sinful nature that we all have, we are glorifying God in all that we do. God created man that we might glorify him, and sending his Spirit to work that fruit in our hearts leaves us without excuse. This is a difficult lesson to teach and even harder to learn.

As teachers, our every move is being watched by the students in our classrooms, as well as all of the students in the school. They copy, memorize, and often repeat many of the actions that we do and the words and phrases that we say. We must be an example for these students. We need to put on our “spiritual wardrobe.” Rev. Martyn McGeown wrote in his article, “The Christian’s Spiritual Wardrobe,” “To put on this ‘spiritual wardrobe’ is to put on Christ himself...It is to be adorned with his beauty, which is the beauty of holiness, so that we glorify him in our attitude and behavior” (McGeown 2020).

As we model the fruit of the Spirit, it shouldn’t be done with the mindset that we are being watched, but rather we should be filled with a desire to glorify God. We want our students to see that we aren’t doing these things of our own accord or for the sole purpose of praising ourselves. It is all of the Spirit in our hearts and for the glory of our perfect heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” This verse is talking about letting our lights shine so that unbelievers are able to see what God has done for us, but this can be applicable for our classrooms as well. We want to let our lights shine and help our students shine their lights to the best of their ability.

While we are being examples and confessing it with our hearts, we also need to confess it with our mouths. This should be done in everything that we do. As teachers, we should proclaim it in every subject that we teach and during every period of the day. It doesn’t matter if we are teaching students in kindergarten or in high school; this is important for all ages. Our students should hear it in the way we teach and the things we say. Whether it be in Bible, science, or even math class, the name of our great God can and should be praised. Through this, God uses teachers as the means to bring his word to his little children. By our witness, God’s name is glorified even through the mouths of the little ones. We want our students to embrace and learn about these virtues placed in their hearts by God. We want them to see how these virtues make them beautiful in the sight of God and in the sight of their neighbors. Teachers get the joyous job of helping our students enjoy this beautiful fruit as well. The beauty of seeing the children glorify God, sing his praises, learn to pray with words of God’s greatness, memorize the scriptures, and treat each other with the same love that Christ shows us is the greatest gift of that fruit.

On the surface, the fruit that we eat physically has nothing in common with the fruit of the Spirit, but after looking at it on a deeper level, we can see that there are some connections after all. Just as we want to continue to eat the sweet grapes, apples, or oranges, so it is the same for the fruit of the Spirit. We want to partake continually of this great gift that God has given to us. Through the Spirit’s work in our hearts, we are able to continually enjoy the fruit and give God all the glory and honor.

It is my fervent hope that we live lives of thankfulness, using the fruit of the Spirit’s labor to glorify God in all that we do and using our knowledge to help students do the same. Psalm 72:19: “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.”

References


Heidi is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church, is a senior at Dordt College, and is studying to be an elementary school teacher.
A Christian schoolteacher is called by the Lord to this very special vocation of teaching the covenant children. This individual must have a love for the children of the church and want to help them grow not only academically, but spiritually and mentally as well. This is not an occupation that is a last resort or something to settle for quickly. The work of a teacher in the Christian school is a labor that is “extremely demanding mentally, emotionally, and physically” (Dykstra 2017). The teacher will endure many stressors, including, but not limited to, long hours preparing lessons, grading, trying to find the best way to help a struggling student, and balancing her calling and personal life. Although there are many difficulties that may occur, the blessings from this occupation abound. The fruits of the Spirit must be evident in the life of a teacher. The fruits of the Spirit are crucial when influencing those around them, especially their students, who are the future generation of our churches.

First, it is important to know what these fruits of the Spirit are. They include love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. They are fruits that are produced when we walk in a life filled with Christ, being joined to him, and in him live through faith. The fruits of the Spirit must be evident in the life of a teacher. The fruits of the Spirit are crucial when influencing those around them, especially their students, who are the future generation of our churches.

Stated earlier were some difficulties a teacher might face. A teacher lacking the fruits of the Spirit cannot and will not be able to help her students grow in any way positively. These fruits are a matter of the heart. If you truly desire to grow in your spiritual life and in your relationship with God, you will reap these fruits and see benefits from them. We see this in Colossians 1:10: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Godly teachers will strive to build their knowledge of God. We will then have willing hearts to help the students around us and want to see them succeed in their work. Having love, we will help these children grow in their faith as well.
Not only will teachers use these fruits in their work lives but also in their everyday personal walks. They will love those around them. Others will see their positive attitudes and holy hearts and be pleased with those individuals who are the ones educating their children. Article 24 of the Belgic Confession states that the faith we have through Christ makes men live pious and holy lives. Everything they do is for the glory of God, not for self. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Teachers must have this exact attitude. They must have a love for those around them and be meek. They don’t think of themselves as best or want their own praise but want what is best for those around them. Pride is absent in this whole atmosphere. We sacrifice ourselves for our students out of love; this is that serious of a calling. Nothing we do is for the benefit of ourselves, but it is to help those around us and to see them grow in Christ as well. It will give us as teachers joy to live in this way of love and gentleness, because God commands this of us.

Those who are fully equipped and prepared for this calling will more fully complete this task of teaching the covenant children. This is seen in the Canons of Dordrecht 3–4.17 when it says, “The more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is His work advanced.” When someone is unprepared for his work, he is most likely not going to do well. The vocation of teaching is something very serious to consider. Yes, it is a lot of work. Yes, you will continuously be busy. But seeing the results of the covenant children growing not only in earthly knowledge but also in personal and spiritual ways is something that can never be taken away from you. The relationships you grow in and the amount of love you see with the students, parents, and families is priceless. You really see God working in all those around you.

The Christian schoolteacher must be an example to those students and children whom he or she is teaching. These children are the future generations of the church of Christ. Showing them how to walk and follow Christ is something that teachers must always remember to do. Parents send their children to a covenant school to gain knowledge according to a Christian perspective. It is our job as teachers to give them the knowledge and understanding of how to live a Christian life and display that to others in the world around us.

If we as teachers are not living a strong spiritual life, we will not be helping the students grow in theirs. It is my goal to see the growth of the fruits of the Spirit in my students as well and be an example to them in my everyday walk. We must show self-sacrificial love all day and have positive attitudes even in times of distress. We must have peace with the other teachers and make sure there is harmony between the students. Be patient when a student is not grasping a concept right away. Be kind to the students, treat them with respect, and have a welcoming atmosphere. Have a strong faith and belief in Christ, and make that manifest to those around you. Be humble and down-to-earth, putting yourself in the students’ shoes to give them empathy. Have self-control and be slow to anger. This is not easy to do, especially by our own means. We cannot gain these qualities by ourselves. The producing of these fruits is sometimes spiritually painful; however, the goal is the blessed life of living in these fruits and glorifying God in this (Smít 2012).

Being a teacher will change your life more than you think, in so many ways. There is growth in relationships, knowledge, patience, and your spiritual life. Teaching has to be one of the most rewarding occupations there is. You are witnessing the future generation growing up and shaping into their future selves. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is meant as a command not only to parents but to teachers as well. Since they stand in the parents’ place for many hours of the day, teachers having the fruits of the Spirit and then teaching the children about those fruits and how to live in them is what those students need. They need to be taught how to walk after Christ on this earthly pilgrimage, and we as teachers are a main example which they are to follow.

References:


Heidelberg Catechism in The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches
The book of Isaiah is often referred to as the “fifth gospel,” an Old Testament prequel to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is a book about the Messiah, even though it was written many years before his incarnation. Jesus himself makes clear that he is the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies by frequently quoting from them during his earthly ministry. He began his earthly ministry by quoting from Isaiah 61: “And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias...And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:17—21).

If you were to think about the book of Isaiah and Christmas, perhaps a few of the classic Messianic prophecies showcased in Handel’s “Messiah” would come to your mind, such as Isaiah 7:14 or 9:6. But I would argue that all 66 chapters are beneficial to read during this time of year. The context of the entire book is necessary in order to properly understand these well-known Christmas passages. The book of Isaiah as a whole reminds us that Christmas is not only a time of celebration, but a chance to reflect on God’s plan of redemption for his chosen people. Isaiah is dedicated to the history of God’s people—their past redemption, their current disobedience, and the deliverance that they have been promised. It clearly presents the message of the gospel that we need to be reminded of during Christmastime and all year round.

We do not know much about the prophet Isaiah except that he was the son of Amoz, was married to a prophetess, and had at least two children. But we can deduce from his writings that his family was very influential in Judah, possibly relatives of the royal family, because of Isaiah’s level of education and his access to the king. Isaiah prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. While Uzziah and Jotham were in power, Judah experienced a time of national growth and wealth. As often happens in a time of prosperity, this led to a great spiritual decline as the people turned away from God and trusted in themselves instead. This spiritual apostasy was especially evident when Ahaz was king. Although there was a measure of revival under the reign of Hezekiah, it was too late. God promised that judgment was coming in the form of the Babylonians.

When reading a book of the Bible such as Isaiah, it is helpful to keep in mind some characteristics of prophetic literature. First, prophecy usually contains a lot of symbolic language that requires careful thought to decipher. Since we will be reading through several chapters of Isaiah each day, you probably will not have the chance to do a careful study of all the symbolism. Just try to gauge the overall message of each chapter and seek assistance from a study Bible or commentary if you are having
trouble. Another thing to keep in mind when reading is that the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies is not limited to one specific time. We can think about God’s promises of deliverance in terms of the nation of Judah, but also the deliverance of all of God’s people when Jesus came. In addition, the time between the events that are predicted is not always clear. It is best to focus on the facts of the prophecy rather than getting too wrapped up in the actual timing.

Isaiah and the other books of prophetic literature were not given to God’s people so that they would be able to predict the future in great detail like a fortune teller. Rather, they were meant to affect the heart of the believer. All prophecies are given by God in order to display his sovereignty over all things, and in doing so to glorify himself and inspire his people to praise and worship. Reading prophecy also serves to strengthen the faith of the believer. When we look back and trace the promises of God in the Old Testament to their fulfillment in the New Testament, we are further encouraged to have confidence in God’s purposes. Prophecy always contains a call to repentance and godly living as well. We are reminded that God is faithful to his word, whether it be a promise of blessing and deliverance or a promise of judgment and chastisement. And finally, reading prophecy increases our expectation for the fulfillment of God’s promises. As you look forward to the holiday season, pray that God will use your readings in Isaiah to work in your heart a longing for Christ to come again.

Commentators usually split the book of Isaiah into three different sections. Each of these sections emphasizes a different need of the people and a characteristic of the promised deliverer who would fulfill that need. Together they paint a beautiful picture of the threefold office of Christ. Chapters 1–39 promise a king who would come to rule in justice. Chapters 40–55 promise a priest who would serve as a mediator to facilitate reconciliation between God and his people. Chapters 56–66 promise a prophet who would declare the message of the gospel to God’s people and the whole world. As you read each section, think about how God fulfilled these promises to the nation of Judah and how he ultimately fulfilled these promises by sending his only begotten Son to save his people. Isaiah looked forward to deliverance for Judah from her earthly foes. But we can look forward to something so much better. Jesus does not simply bring deliverance from our earthly circumstances but deliverance from sin itself. The restored Jerusalem that Isaiah describes is only a dim picture of the great splendor that awaits God’s people in heaven when we will dwell with our Lord forever.

### Isaiah Reading Plan

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Sing or pray</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 8</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 1, 2:1–5</td>
<td>Psalter #413</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 9</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 2:6–22, 3</td>
<td>Psalter #414</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 10</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 4–5</td>
<td>Psalter #415, vv. 1–5</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 11</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 6–7</td>
<td>Psalter #415, vv. 6–10</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 12</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 8, 9:1–7</td>
<td>Psalter #416, vv. 1–4</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 13</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 9:8–21, 10</td>
<td>Psalter #416, vv. 5–7</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 14</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 11–12</td>
<td>Psalter #417</td>
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<td>December 15</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 13–14</td>
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<td>December 16</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 15–16</td>
<td>Psalter #419</td>
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<td>December 17</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 17–19</td>
<td>Psalter #420, vv. 1–3</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 18</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 20–21</td>
<td>Psalter #420, vv. 4–6</td>
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<td>December 19</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 22–23</td>
<td>Psalter #421, vv. 1–3</td>
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<td>December 20</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 24–25</td>
<td>Psalter #421, vv. 4–6</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 21</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 26–27</td>
<td>Psalter #422, vv. 1–4</td>
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<td>December 22</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 28–29</td>
<td>Psalter #422, vv. 5–8</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 23</td>
<td>Read Isaiah 30–32</td>
<td>Psalter #423, vv. 1–3</td>
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December 24  Read Isaiah 33–34  Sing or pray Psalter #423, vv. 4–7.
December 25  Read Isaiah 35–36  Sing or pray Psalter #424.
December 26  Read Isaiah 37–39  Sing or pray Psalter #425, vv. 1–3.

**EXPECTING A PRIEST**

December 27  Read Isaiah 40–41  Sing or pray Psalter #425, vv. 4–6.
December 28  Read Isaiah 42–43  Sing or pray Psalter #426, vv. 1–5.
December 29  Read Isaiah 44–45  Sing or pray Psalter #426, vv. 6–10.
December 30  Read Isaiah 46–48  Sing or pray Psalter #427, vv. 1–4.

December 31  Read Isaiah 49–50  Sing or pray Psalter #427, vv. 5–8.
January 1  Read Isaiah 51–52  Sing or pray Psalter #428, vv. 1–5.
January 2  Read Isaiah 53–55  Sing or pray Psalter #428, vv. 6–10.

**EXPECTING A PROPHET**

January 3  Read Isaiah 56–58  Sing or pray Psalter #429.
January 4  Read Isaiah 59–60  Sing or pray Psalter #430.
January 5  Read Isaiah 61–62  Sing or pray Psalter #431.
January 6  Read Isaiah 63–64  Sing or pray Psalter #432.
January 7  Read Isaiah 65–66  Sing or pray Psalter #434.

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**God Gathers**

God spoke and said to those who thronged his throne,
"Who will go forth to give my child birth?"
And Life replied, “As a gift from thee alone,
I will go down and make him on the earth.”

God spoke again and said, “My Child’s lost:
Who will find and bring him back to me?”
And Grace replied “Since Christ has paid the cost
I will save and draw him close to thee.”

God spoke and said, “My Child’s place is made;
I want him taken to his mansion bright.
Death, bring him here.” And Death obeyed,
And tore the trembling child from dark to light.

From time’s beginning to its end, God makes
His Church, defends, preserves, to glory takes.
HISTORY OF “AWAY IN A MANGER”

“Away in a Manger” is one of the first Christmas hymns many of us learn. It is simple to sing, and the words are easy to remember.

The first two verses of the song first appeared in print in a magazine in the United States in 1882 with the claim that the song was written by Martin Luther to sing to his children and that German mothers still sang it to their children. This claim was repeated as the song was printed in more publications in 1883-1885. References in these articles show that the Christmas hymn quickly gained popularity and was already a part of children’s Christmas programs by 1885.

There are, however, no copies of “Away in a Manger” anywhere in Luther’s writings nor any published versions of the song in German until 1934, a version that was clearly translated from the English. So Martin Luther didn’t actually write “Away in a Manger.”

Instead, the song was probably written by an unknown author sometime before 1882 with the fictional story about Martin Luther. Since 1883 was the 400th anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth, there was a broader interest and celebration of his life and work around that time. While Martin Luther didn’t actually write it, his name was still associated with the song, and it was often called “Luther’s Cradle Song” or “Luther’s Cradle Hymn,” as well as “Away in a Manger” for many years.

The tune we in the United States still use for the song was composed in 1887, and the third stanza was added to the song in 1892. The other common tune used around the world for “Away in a Manger” was composed in 1895 by the same person who changed the last line of the second verse from the awkward wording of “And stay by my cradle to watch lullaby” to “And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh,” which are the words that we still sing today.

For over a hundred years, “Away in a Manger” has been a favorite Christmas song, and we can be thankful for the way God used an unknown writer and the interest in a fictional story of Martin Luther to give us a children’s hymn we still use in our church Christmas programs today.
**BAPTISMS**

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

- Jacob Yi Sheng, son of Mr. & Mrs. Josiah & Koh Hui Qu Tan—First, MI
- Lennex Phillip, son of Mr. & Mrs. Calvin & Alisha Bruinsma—Peace, IN
- Carter Jax, son of Mr. & Mrs. Grant & Kyra Feenstra—Redlands, CA
- Josie Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Drew & Breanna Buiter—Randolph, WI
- Owen Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Heather Regnerus—Randolph, WI
- Ike Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bob & Jenna Alsum—Randolph, WI
- Alison Anna, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. Eric & Cherith Guichelaar—Randolph, WI
- Freya Wynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Liz Thompson—Southeast, MI
- Layla Jade, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Tricia Bouma—Unity, MI
- Judah Charles, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Jillian Hilt—Wingham, CAN

Baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Sponsors present.

May God grant these children a firm faith and a faithful life for the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Stella Evelyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Spencer & Jess Crich—Wingham, CAN
Logan Jude, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ethan & Kristi Kalsbeek—Wingham, CAN
Miriam Joan, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Travis & Averly Hanko—Wingham, CAN

**MARRIAGES**

“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. & Mrs. Keagan & Olivia Flikkema—First, MI
Mr. Jared Altena and Miss Krista VanSledright—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Mitchell Lubbers and Miss Taylor Schuiteman—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Zachary Lubbers and Miss Brooke Mulder—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Trevor DeVries and Miss Katelyn VanOverloop—Grace, MI
Mr. Reece VanDyke and Miss Carlie Poortinga—Peace, IN
Mr. Jordan Steenwyk and Miss Ashlinn Hassevoort—Unity, MI