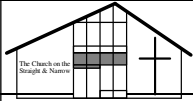


The Straight & Narrow Way



A Newsletter for OUR SAVIOUR LUTHERAN CHURCH

March 2007

In the News

Rev. Dr. Paul L. Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University and second vice-president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has received numerous questions about the alleged discovery by James Cameron, et. al., of the burial remains of Jesus Christ. Dr. Maier offers these comments to help Christians know the real truth. If you are interested in reading more on the subject, you may want to go to Professor Jeffrey Kloha's article at:

www.csl.edu/Img/about%20csl/LostTomb.pdf

February 27, 2007

Dear Friends and Readers,

Thanks for the profusion of e-mails I've received over the last two days regarding the Talpiot tombs discovery in Jerusalem, a.k.a., "the Jesus Family Tomb" story. Some of you also suggested that "life seemed to be following art" so far as my *A Skeleton in God's Closet* was concerned. Believe me, this is *not* the way I wanted my novel to hit the visual media!

Alas, this whole affair is just the latest in the long-running media attack on the historical Jesus, which I call "More Junk on Jesus." We all thought it had culminated in that book of falsehoods, *The Da Vinci Code*. But no: The caricatures of Christ continue.

Please, lose no sleep over the Talpiot "discoveries" for the following reasons, and here are the facts:

(1) Nothing is new here: Scholars have known about the ossuaries ever since March of 1980, so this is old news recycled. The general public learned about the ossuaries when the BBC filmed a documentary on them in 1996, and the "findings" tanked again. James Tabor's book, *The Jesus Dynasty*, also made a big fuss over the Talpiot tombs

more recently, and now James Cameron ('Titanic') and Simcha Jacobovici have climbed aboard the sensationalist bandwagon as well. Another book comes out today, equally as worthless as the previous.

(2) All the names—Yeshua (Joshua, Jesus), Joseph, Maria, Mariamene, Matia, Judah, and Jose—are extremely common Jewish names for that time and place, and thus nearly all scholars consider that these names are merely coincidental, as they did from the start. Some scholars dispute that "Yeshua" is even one of the names. One out of four Jewish women at that time, for example, was named Maria. There are 21 Yeshuas cited by Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, who were important enough to be recorded by him, with many thousands of others that never made history. The wondrous mathematical adds hyped by Jacobovici that these names *must* refer to Jesus and His family are simply playing by numbers and lying by statistics.

(3) There is no reason whatever to equate "Mary Magdalene" with "Mariamene," as Jacobovici claims. And so what if her DNA is different from that of "Yeshua"? That particular "Mariamme" (as it is usually spelled today) could indeed have been the wife of that particular "Yeshua," who certainly was not Jesus.

(4) Why in the world would the "Jesus Family" have a burial site in Jerusalem, of all places, the very city that crucified Jesus? Galilee was their home. In Galilee they *could* have had such a family plot, not Judea. Besides all of which, church tradition and the earliest Christian historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, are unanimous in reporting that

Mary, the mother of Jesus, died in Ephesus, where the apostle John, faithful to his commission from Jesus on the cross, had accompanied her.

(5) The "Jesus Family" simply could not have afforded the large crypt uncovered at Talpiot, which housed, or could have housed, 200 ossuaries.

(6) If this were Jesus' family burial site, what is Matthew doing there—if indeed "Matia" is thus to be translated?

(7) How come there is no tradition *whatever*—Christian, Jewish, or secular—that any part of the Holy Family was buried at Jerusalem?

(8) Please note the extreme bias of the director and narrator, Simcha Jacobovici. The man is an Indiana Jones wannabe who oversensationalizes anything he touches. You may have caught him on his TV special regarding *The Exodus*, in which he "explained" just about *everything* that still needed proving or explaining in the Exodus account in the Old Testament! It finally became ludicrous, and now he's doing it again, though in reverse—this time attacking the Scriptural record. As for James Cameron, how do you follow the success of *Titanic*? Well, with an even more "titanic" story. He should have known better, and the television footage of the two making their drastic statements on

IF CHRIST BE NOT RAISED,
YOUR FAITH IS VAIN...
1 CORINTHIANS 15:17

Monday, February 26, was disgusting, and their subsequent claim that they respected Jesus nauseating.

(9) Even Israeli authorities, who—were they anti-Christian—might have used this "discovery" to discredit Christianity, did not do so. Quite the opposite. Joe Zias, for example, for years the director of the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, holds Jacobovici's claims up

for scorn and his documentary as “non-sense.” Those involved in the project “have no credibility whatever,” he added. Amos Kloner, the first archaeologist to examine the site, said the conclusions in question fail to hold up by archaeological standards “but make for profitable television.” William Dever, one of America’s most prominent archaeologists, said, “This would be amusing if it didn’t mislead so many people.”

(10) Finally, and most importantly, there is no external literary or historical evidence *whatever* that Jesus’ family was interred together in a common burial place anywhere, let alone Jerusalem. The evidence, in fact, totally controverts all this in the case of Jesus: All four Gospels, the letters of St. Paul, and the common testimony of the early church state that Jesus rose from the dead, and did not leave His bones behind in any ossuary, as the current sensationalists claim.

Bottom line: This is merely naked hype, baseless sensationalism, and nothing less than a media fraud—“more junk on Jesus.”

With warm regards,

Paul L. Maier, Ph.D., Litt.D.



Charting the Course

Sermon on Prayer

Matthew 15:21-28

“Why won’t you help her? She’s crying out after us. Everyone can hear her pleas, and you ignore her. Can’t you just give her what she wants and send her away? The woman is clearly an embarrassment.” Jesus appears to be oblivious to her need or utterly uncaring. Why won’t he at least acknowledge her cries? But Jesus pays her no mind at all.

Do you believe that? Do you think that Jesus was ignoring her? How could he do such a thing! She cried out to

him, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” Do you believe that Jesus was ignoring her? He didn’t answer her. But as we just sang, “Though he answers not, he hears; Pray with faith, for though He try you, no good thing can God deny you.”

He doesn’t appear to hear or to know or to care. But don’t you judge him by appearances. He knows what you need. He knows better than you do. Prayer is the exercise of faith. True prayer is prayed out of our need. Whenever we pray we pray because we need what only God can give. And every answer to prayer is found in Jesus. This is why we always pray in Jesus’ name.

We pray out of our need. The Canaanite woman knew what she needed. Her daughter was possessed by a demon. She had no control over her own body. She suffered from a power that was far greater than any power she possessed. And that power literally possessed her. She couldn’t control her own words or actions.

Does this sort of thing happen today? Most people have heard of exorcisms taking place today, but few people have actually witnessed one. There is no question that demon possession was common in Jesus’ day, and there is good reason for that. When the Son of God

joined the human race, the demons shuddered in fear and rage. They know the true meaning of Genesis 3:15 far better than the fallen children of men know it. God said to the devil, who had taken control of the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” The meaning was crystal clear. A virgin would conceive and have a Son who would be both true man and true God. He would become a man in order to destroy the devil and all his power. Just as the devil led our first parents into sin and thereby took control over sinners, the promised Seed of the

woman would live an innocent life in the stead of all sinners and in this way take control away from the devil. When Jesus was born, the devil pulled out all of the stops and gathered all the hordes of hell for a final defiant stand against God. At no time in the history of the world was demon possession so common. The final battle between good and evil was taking place. The devil was flexing his muscles.

And the poor daughter of the woman from Canaan was suffering. She was being tormented and she was powerless to resist. Her mind and her body were under constant attack. The Canaanite woman needed help for her daughter. She needed God’s help. Only God could help her.

The devil is real. Whether or not demon possession is common or rare in our day doesn’t change the fact that the devil is, as the apostle says, walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8) Satan and his demons do real harm to real people. The strategy is always to keep people away from Christ. This happens in a multitude of ways. Satanism has become a real threat to young people today. They fall into it on account of the power it promises. But it never delivers on its promises. It only enslaves. Jesus is the only one who can set sinners free.



The devil can only enslave people in lies. Satan cannot give you what isn’t his to give. He can give you nothing. He can only take away. Only God can give you what is good. The devil can only distort, destroy,

and pervert what God has given.

In our day the most effective tool of the devil is not in the more dramatic displays of power that he showed during our Lord’s earthly ministry. Today the father of lies and murderer of souls works through respected and respectable clergymen who advocate very reasonable ideas.

They are reasonable, but false. St. Paul warns Timothy about “deceiving

spirits and doctrines of demons.” (1 Timothy 4:1) The power of the devil is in the power of the lie. The lie is exceptionally powerful. It fueled one of the most efficiently tyrannical governments in the history of the world, the Communist Party of the former Soviet Union. Who can deny that the devil himself was behind the sustained state sponsored mass murder of the Soviet Union with its vicious persecution of Christ’s church? Satan is today the power behind Islam, a religion that rejects Christ’s suffering and death for sinners. Only the suffering and death of Jesus can set sinners free. So Islam is nothing more than a vast satanic delusion, enslaving the hearts and minds of untold millions of devotees throughout the world during the past several centuries.

The devil’s primary point of attack, however, is within Christ’s holy church. The object of his attack is always Jesus. He doesn’t want sinners to find refuge in Jesus. He wants us to look elsewhere for the assurance that we are forgiven of our sins and have everlasting life. He attacks the biblical teaching that Jesus has taken away all our sins by his holy life and death and that we receive forgiveness of sins only by trusting in the gospel of Christ. Of course when people actually believe this the devil loses power over them. So he attacks this gospel. He misleads millions. He attacks the Bible because this gospel truth is taught plainly in the Bible. The devil will argue that the Bible is not enough, that we must also submit to the authority of the bishop at Rome and only those who submit to him can know the truth the Bible teaches. He leads Protestants who reject the false claims of the papacy into error as well. He taught Zwingli and Calvin that the Lord’s Supper wasn’t really the body and the blood of Jesus and this lie has been passed down for hundreds of years now, depriving millions of people of this precious and life giving sacrament. Once the devil leads people away from trusting in the sacraments of Jesus it’s easy enough for him to lead them to trust in their own decisions for Jesus. Of course, there is a fine

line between trusting in our decisions and trusting in ourselves. The devil knows this full well. This is why he always directs attention away from Jesus dying for us and focuses instead on what we do for Jesus.

The devil understands that Jesus sets sinners free. He knows, even better than the most pious and faithful Christians know, that the soul resting in Christ’s wounds and clinging in simple faith to Christ’s crucifixion, is the soul that cannot be harmed. The devil knows his power. The only power of the devil is to lie about Jesus. For when we have the truth about Jesus, when we trust in it, the devil cannot touch us.

The Canaanite woman trusted in the truth about Jesus. She knew it. She believed it. And on it she took her stand. And what a wonderful expression of faith it was! She prayed to Jesus and Jesus appeared to ignore her. He did not answer her. When his disciples urged

him to send her away he acted as if he wanted nothing to do with her. It was as if Jesus were doing precisely what the devil himself says about him. Isn’t it the devil who would persuade you not to put your confidence in Jesus? Isn’t it the devil’s lie that Jesus won’t help you unless you first do all sorts of things that you just cannot do? Isn’t that how the devil works? The very idea that Jesus would not help this poor woman is satanic. And yet, what does Jesus himself say? He says, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of Israel.” Well, she was a Canaanite. She was not an Israelite. She didn’t belong. She had no claim on being a sheep, lost or found. She was a foreigner, an outsider, and that’s what everybody knew and taught and believed.

But she refused to believe that. Fine, I’ll take you at your word, Jesus. You say that you were sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. She then came to him and worshipped him and called him Lord. Only an Israelite could do that! Only a true daughter of Abraham could call Jesus Lord. She would claim a status that no one would give her and

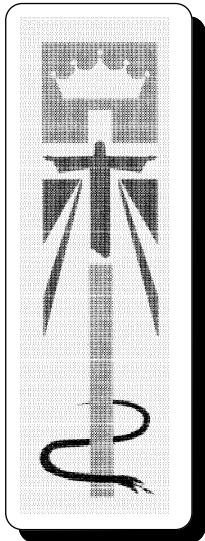
she would do so on the grounds of her dire need and his boundless mercy. And then Jesus speaks words that must have sounded like the final rejection. “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” That’s what you are, lady: a little dog. A family pet, maybe, but not a member of the family.

There you have it. It is as if Jesus Christ Himself is agreeing with the devil. For isn’t it the devil’s doctrine that Jesus cares nothing for you and either will not or cannot help you? Isn’t it the devil’s doctrine to drive you to trust in something or someone other than Jesus? And here from Jesus’ own lips are words that sound like a crushing rejection. It’s as if Jesus is promoting heresy! It sounds as if Jesus himself is promoting the doctrine that this desperate and helpless woman is beyond the care of a gracious and loving God. What does faith do when it sounds as if God is talking like the devil?

This is what faith does. It takes God literally at his word! It lives on every single syllable and holds God to everything God says. “Yes, Lord” the woman replies, “Yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” There! Jesus is trapped in his own words! He calls her a little dog and so as a little dog she tells Jesus the way it must be. The little family pet gets to eat the crumbs that fall from the table. So she’ll be that little family pet and make no more claim on Jesus than a dog would make.

“Though you deem he hears you not, still your wants are ne’er forgot; cry to him when storms assail you, let your courage never fail you.” Jesus replied, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. The demon left her and she was set free. She was set free by the almighty power of Jesus. She was set free from the liar and murder of souls. She was set free by the act of Jesus, by his will, by his decision to help.

Prayer is grounded in this simple fact that Jesus loves sinners who are weak and helpless and that he will surely give us what we ask of him. If we don’t feel our need we aren’t going to pray. If our need is not for what Jesus



gives us we won't pray in his name. The power of prayer is not the power of the one who prays. It is always the power of Christ who by his innocent life and his suffering and death has destroyed the power of the devil. The power of Christ comes to us in our weakness.

There isn't a pain or loss or sorrow in life that doesn't bear the stamp of satanic influence. The simple fact that the devil led our first parents into sin should make this clear enough for us to see. A lingering illness, a pain that won't go away, a failed marriage, a personal habit that is grounded in sin and keeps on bringing us back to the same old sins again and again – these and many other things bring us pain that would belie God's promises. We experience the very opposite of what God promises. God promises us victory and watches us as we suffer defeat. The illness doesn't go away. The pain intensifies. The marriage ends in divorce. The temptation to sin grows stronger and stronger. It looks like the devil is winning and we are losing.

There's a song in which the singer says to God that he hasn't prayed in a while because he was too sick to pray. Now that's just not so. Nobody is too sick to pray. Prayer comes from two simple things: our true need and the true faith. Our true need is that God will deliver us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The true faith is that Jesus Christ is our deliverer, our redeemer, the one who sets us free and gives us victory in every defeat. Prayer is when we ask Jesus to meet our need. Today's Gospel Lesson teaches us that Jesus never fails to do so. He may try us but he will never deny us.

Rev. Rolf Preus is pastor of an independent Lutheran parish on the Minnesota—North Dakota border. He is the son of the former seminary president and international Lutheran Scholar, Dr. Robert D. Preus. The following sermon on Matthew 15 is reprinted from his website <www.christforus.org>. Here you can find many other stimulating sermons and papers from his fertile and orthodox pen.

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Excursions in Faith

◆ Holy Week

Our Lenten observance culminates beginning on **Palm Sunday**, April 1. This day will be marked off with the traditional procession with palms into the Sanctuary and features the reading of the Passion Narrative according to St. Matthew.

On **Maundy Thursday**, April 5 at 7:00PM we will observe the day that Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Altar, providing us with His body and blood to eat and to drink. This service recesses with the reading of Psalm 22 while the altar is stripped bare in preparation for Good Friday.

On **Good Friday**, at 3:30PM Kemmerer will observe the ancient devotion of the "Stations of the Cross," then, we will gather at 7:00PM for the *Solemn Liturgy* and procession with the rough-hewn cross.

On **Holy Saturday** at sundown (8:15PM), Our Saviour will gather for the *Easter Vigil*—one of the oldest liturgies of Christendom. The service begins at a small fire outside the church and processes inward behind the Paschal Candle. After reading a series of Old Testament stories of deliverance, it closes around the baptismal font in an intimate reminder of our incorporation into Christ.

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Pending Pericopes

The Season of Lent is exactly 40 days long from Ash Wednesday until Holy Saturday. In addition to the forty days of Lent, we add 6 Sundays. These Sundays are "in" Lent, but not "of" Lent. They are little oases of refreshment along the Lenten fast. Even so, their liturgy reflects the subdued mood of the season.

For this reason, much of the liturgy is spoken, all "alleluias" are omitted and we don't even sing the song of the angels: "Glory be to God on High." As Easter approaches, these omissions grow even more pronounced. the cross will be veiled, we will stop saying,

"Glory be to the Father..." and we will even omit the Nicene Creed beginning on Palm Sunday.

All of this contributes to highlighting the great contrasting joy which will happen on Easter Sunday, when, all at once these omissions are all restored with one great "Alleluia."

◆ Ash Wednesday - February 21

Psalm: 130
Old Testament: Jonah 3:1–10
Epistle: 2 Peter 1:2–11
Gospel: St. Matthew 6:1–6; 16–21

◆ Invocavit - February 25

Psalm: 91
Old Testament: Genesis 3:1–21
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1–10
Gospel: St. Matthew 4:1–11

◆ Reminiscere - March 4

Psalm: 25
Old Testament: Genesis 32:22-32
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7
Gospel: St. Matthew 15:21-28

◆ Oculi - March 11

Psalm: 9
Old Testament: Exodus 8:16-24
Epistle: Ephesians 5:1-9
Gospel: St. Luke 11:14-28

◆ Laetare - March 18

Psalm: 122
Old Testament: Exodus 16:2-21
Epistle: Galatians 4:21-31
Gospel: St. John 6:1-15

◆ Judica - March 25

Psalm: 43
Old Testament: Genesis 22:1–14
Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-13
Gospel: St. John 8:42–59

◆ Palm Sunday - April 1

Psalm: 73
Old Testament: Zechariah 9:9-12
Epistle: Philippians 2:5–11
Gospel: St. Matthew 26:1—27:66

◆ Maundy Thursday - April 5

Psalm: 111
Old Testament: Exodus 12:1–14
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 11:23–32
Gospel: St. John 13:1-15

◆ Good Friday - April 6

Psalm: 22
Old Test.: Isaiah 52:13—53:12
Epistle: 2 Corinthians 5:14–21
Gospel: St. John 18:1—19:42

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