

Bishops' Post December/January 2024-2025

"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom." (Isaiah 35:1, NIV)

A word of hope and salvation. God's people were in Babylonian captivity—a time of deep hopelessness. They had lost everything—Jerusalem, the temple, and their land. The prophets had warned them, but then it happened: the devastating war, the countless deaths, and the long road into exile.

The people of God—without hope.

But then God spoke again through a prophet. He had not forgotten His people. His love and grace were greater than His anger. He gave the prophet a vision, as described in Isaiah 35:1–10:

- *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."* (v. 5)
- *"Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."* (v. 6)
- *"Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert."*
- *"No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there."* (v. 9)
- *"And those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."* (v. 10)

Clearly, this is not about improvement but about renewal. Something entirely new is coming.

This newness is central to our reflection as Christians in Advent. Christ is born in a manger. God's salvation comes into the world. The Son of God becomes one of us, living among us, dying for us, and rising from the dead. A new reality breaks into our world—God's world of grace through Christ. Now, it is no longer about legalism but God's grace.

And yet, much remains the same. The blind remain blind, and the mute remain mute. Violence and fear still exist in our world. God's grace is present, but within a fallen world. God's peace is here, but it surpasses human understanding.

Something new has come through Christ, but its fulfillment is still to come. Thus, in Advent, we remember not only Christ's coming in the manger but also His promised return.

Advent is, therefore, a time of waiting. We prepare for Christmas—the birth of Christ—and we wait for Jesus' return. In this sense, this intermediate time truly is "Advent"—a

time of preparing for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. May this time be a blessed season for us all.

News from NELCSA

- On November 3, 2024, Pastor Martha Weich was installed as pastor of St. Peters-by-the-Lake congregation, serving in a 50% capacity. We wish her and the congregation God's abundant blessing and wisdom for their journey together.
- Pastor Remo Koehne has been elected as pastor of the West Rand Lutheran Congregation, also in a 50% position. He will combine this role with a 50% position at Wings for Life School in Vanderbijlpark. Pastor Koehne will begin his new role in January 2025, and we wish him much joy and fulfilment in his ministry. As a result, Friedenskirche in Hillbrow will become vacant in January 2025.
- After many years of faithful and dedicated service in the ELKIN (DELK), Bishop Burgert Brand will retire at the end of 2024. At his farewell on December 8, we will thank him for his valuable work and wish him a fulfilling and blessed retirement. His successor, Bishop Frank Schütte, will take office in January 2025. May God guide and bless him in this role.
- At the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), held from November 8–13, Bishop Kirsten Fehrs of the Hamburg and Lübeck region of the North Church was elected Chair of the EKD Council. We warmly congratulate her and wish her God's blessing in this new role.
- The church leaderships of ELCSA, NELCSA, and ELCSA (Cape Church) will meet on February 9–10, 2025, to discuss shared interests and foster closer communication in various areas. This collaboration is an important step, reflecting a desire for mutual exchange and support.
- Finally, we are pleased to announce that the 2nd session of the 8th NELCSA Church Synod will take place from September 11–14, 2025, at the United Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Wartburg. More details will follow in early 2025.

May God's blessing accompany all these developments and grant courage and strength to those involved.

Theo Jäckel