In the Middle Ages, Christian theologians talked about God's “accepting the sinner” and what it took to make it possible for God to accept the sinner as His own. In certain respects, that term acceptation focuses on God. But often the means by which human beings became acceptable before God were contingent upon human contribution in one way or another, as we have seen, for instance, in the theology of Gabriel Biel. For Luther, the question was not so much expressed in terms of acceptation but in terms of justification; in a sense, focusing on the righteousness of the sinner before God instead of God’s action. But, in Luther’s theology, the justification of the sinner comes about, takes place, only because of the action of God Himself, God Himself in Jesus Christ.

There has been a good deal of debate in the 20th century over a number of aspects of Luther’s understanding of justification, and in this lecture we want to focus on the work of Christ atoning for the fallen human creature. There has been a good deal of debate in the 20th century over atonement motifs. Much of this debate has been shaped by the work of a Swedish theologian, Gustaf Aulén, whose book Christus Victor surveyed what he called three atonement motifs or atonement theories in the history of Christendom. Those three motifs were the Christus Victor motif, first of all—the ancient motif which emphasized God's victory over the external enemies of the human creature through the resurrection. Secondly, the motif of vicarious satisfaction, expressed above all for Aulén; at least in the work of the 11th- and 12th-century theologian Saint Anselm (1033–1109), who taught that Christ becomes vicar, becomes substitute for us in satisfying the demands of the law of God. And then thirdly, Aulén focused upon the motif which stresses Christ as an example for human creatures to follow so that they may attain their true humanity once again in following, in imitating, Christ.

This third theory of the atonement is not really so much a theory of atonement as a kind of semi-Pelagian theory of how good works may contribute to salvation. Elements, remnants of that theory or that motif are not really to be found in Luther; although Luther
stresses Jesus Christ as [an or the?] example for human living, he
does not connect it in any way with salvation.

Gustaf Aulén stressed that Luther was a theologian of the
Christus Victor type; most Luther scholarship had emphasized
the vicarious satisfaction. In Luther’s preaching, the key to
understanding Luther’s atonement theory, according to Aulén,
was indeed that Christus Victor motif. Paul Althaus, among
others, has rejected Aulén’s thesis and shows that Luther uses the
language of substitution and satisfaction a great deal.

Perhaps Ian Siggins has it really right when he says Luther
has no atonement theory at all. He never suggests this is a
total explanation of how and why God had to save through the
incarnation of Jesus Christ. Instead, Siggins says that Luther
shares the atonement motifs of the Scripture, that he uses every
scrap and bit of biblical material he can to express the mystery of
the atonement without trying to pin down an explanation.

Part of the problem does lie in the fact that Luther did not have the
benefit of modern analyses of the dogma of the church. Instead,
he simply looked at the Scriptures and let fly all the possibilities
for expressing the comfort that God gives in Jesus Christ.

In his hymns particularly we find expressions of his understanding
of the atonement based upon the need of the sinner for salvation.
In AD 1523, he wrote his famous hymn:

“Forlorn and lost in death I lay
A captive to the devil;
My sin lay heavy, night and day,
For I was born in evil.
I fell but deeper for my strife,
There was no good in all my life,
For sin had all-possessed me.

In those lines we sense the despair that Luther had felt a decade
earlier, as in his strife, in his struggle to produce the best he could,
he found no good at all. He speaks of his good works, which were
worthless and mocking him in their lack of merit:

Then God was sorry on His throne
To see such torment rend me;
His tender mercy He thought on,
His good help He would send me.
He turned to me His Father-heart:
Ah, then was His no easy part:
For of His best it cost Him!

To His dear Son He said, Go down;
'Tis time to take compassion.
Go down, My heart's exalted crown,
Be that poor man's salvation.
Lift him from out sin's scorn and scathe;
Strangle for him that cruel death,
That he with Thee live ever.

Here we find that the Savior is sent to strangle death. He obliterates the worst of the enemies.

The Son He heard obediently
And, by a maiden mother pure,
Tender, down He came to me,
For He would be my brother!
Secret He bore His strength enorm,
He went about in my poor form,
For He would catch the devil.

The enormous strength of God is captured in poor human form and for the purpose of, again, catching the enemy, imprisoning the enemy, destroying the enemy (this time, the devil).

He said to me: Hold thou by me [in faith, in other words],

Thy matters I will settle;

I will give Myself up for thee,

And I will fight the battle.

For I am thine, and thou art mine,

And My place also shall be thine [this trading off of the sinner's place and the righteous one's place];

The enemy shall not part us [the focus here is on death and the devil as the enemy].

This enemy will as water shed My blood,

My life he will take from Me.

All this I suffer for thy good, you sinner.

To that with firm faith cleave well,

For My life from death the day shall win,

My innocence shall bear thy sin,

So art thou blessed forever.

In this hymn, we see that Luther is focusing upon Christ's death and upon the curse of death in the human life; and behind that curse of death stands, above all, the devil.

To complete this introduction to an analysis of Luther's treatment of the atonement, I want to turn to another hymn and share with you stanzas from Luther's great “Easter Hymn,” which indeed does put an Easter focus on the matter, but it expresses again these same themes that we heard in the earlier hymn from 1523.
In the next year, Luther wrote:

Death held our Lord in prison
For sin that did undo us,
But He hath up arisen
And brought our life back to us.
Therefore we must gladsome be
And exalt God and thankful be,
And sing aloud, “Hallelujah.”

Again, the problem is death, and death is there because it is the wages of sin. “Death held our Lord in prison,” Luther begins, “because death held us in prison.” The second stanza:

No one yet death overcame [that is, no one overcame death],
All sons of men were helpless.
Sin for this was all to blame [the enemy is sin],
For no one yet was guiltless,
So death came that early hour
O’er us he took up his power,
And held us all in his kingdom.

Again, Luther stresses the enemy is death and death proceeds from our sin.

But Jesus came into our place descending,
And away with all our sins hath done,
And therewith from death rending
Right and might made Him agape.
Left Him nothing but death’s shape,
His ancient sting, He has lost it.

Death is only a form now; it has no power,
It has no right; it has no might.
That was a right wondrous strife,
When death in life’s grip wallowed,
Oft victorious came life,
Death He had quite up-swallowed.

The Scripture has published that, how one death the other ate,
and thus death has become a subject of our laughter.

Here is the true Paschal Lamb [quickly Luther switches from victor over death to the sacrificial Lamb]
Which God Himself attested;
That was on the tree of shame
In flaming passion roasted;
His blood on our doorposts lies,
Faith holds that before death's eyes,
The smiting angel can do not. [naught?]

“Hallelujah.”

Here we see Luther combines the sacrificial image, the substitutionary image of the Paschal Lamb; and that Paschal Lamb was sacrificed on “the tree of shame,” was “roasted” in the passion of Christ. But what this sacrifice, this substitutionary sacrifice does is to put the blood on the doorposts of our lives, so that faith can tell death to pass on because death and the devil have no more claim upon us.

As we look at Luther’s understanding of the atonement, it is easier
to use two images of Luther’s than to try to force Luther into the atonement motifs that Aulén used in his system of trying to analyze the whole history of Christendom. That may be because Aulén’s analysis is wrong. It may also be because Luther stands a little bit aside [outside?] of those major categories. Though I think we could argue that indeed Luther does express themes that we find across the board in a variety of Christian theologians, just with his own unique emphases, as is true of, of course, all of us as we proclaim the salvation of our God in Jesus Christ.

The first of these two themes that I think sum up Luther’s understanding of the atonement is his image of the “Magnificent Duel,” the duel between Christ on the one hand and either death or Satan or our sin or even the Law on the other. Luther loved this image of Jesus as, in German, the tot fresa. Fressen is the German term for “eating like an animal.” Once in a while, grandparents may say to grandchildren, “Don’t fress.” That is, “Don’t gobble your food down,” we might say. So we have here, in this “Magnificent Duel” between Christ and death, Jesus coming off as the one who gobbles down death, as Luther expressed in the hymn. He “up-swallowed death” in this translation. Death is gone; death is only a form, because it took on Jesus Christ in the magnificent duel. And, according to the theology of the cross, in His impotence and in His weakness, Jesus submitted to death and then swallowed death up so that it can threaten us no more. Jesus took on sin in a duel. And He took sin into Himself. Sin accused and condemned Jesus and then had to vanish because Jesus was the righteous one and all the accusations broke as they encountered Him.

Luther’s second theme is that of “the joyous exchange.” In the joyous exchange, we have very simple ideas we have already mentioned, a very simple idea into which Luther packs the might of the whole gospel. The joyous exchange simply says, “Jesus was righteous; the sinner was sinful.” Jesus the righteous one took the sinner’s sin into Himself and in exchange, joyfully for us, bestows upon the sinner righteousness and innocence. This focus on Jesus as the one who completes a joyous exchange, as an expression of the atonement, serves Luther throughout most of his public career. He began talking already in AD 1518 about this exchange between Christ the bridegroom and the church and its individual sinful members as the bride—this sharing of all, this trading of Christ’s goodness for our evil. And the expression of the joyous exchange continues through to the end of Luther’s life. Some of its most beautiful expressions and expositions do come in his Galatians lectures of 1531 and 1532, but it’s also there to be found in the Genesis lectures through to the end of his life.

In dealing with the joyous exchange, Luther cuts no corners in
confronting the wrath of God upon human sin. Much of the concern in the critique of Aulén was that his Christus Victor understanding seemed to allow a kind of shortchanging of Luther’s emphasis on the wrath of God against our sin. Something that Anselm’s Vicarious Satisfaction takes quite seriously. Well, Luther took it very seriously too. He recognized how he had suffered under the wrath of God. He recognized how God’s left-handed message, the message of the Law, had expressed God’s total disapproval, His anger with our sin. In the joyous exchange, we see that God comes to terms with His own wrath by the destruction of that which makes Him wrathful, the sin of the human creature which brings death upon us. Sin is taken into that person of Christ, sin is bled away from us in the death of Christ, sin is washed away through the blood of Christ’s death, and we are incorporated into His blood and into His death (Luther taught in accordance with Romans 6 or Colossians 2) in our baptisms. Luther does not try to solve the problem of the setting aside of God’s wrath. He does not provide a totally logical and coherent explanation. He simply shows that God turned His wrath against Jesus so that Jesus had to utter those words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). But in this there is no final and complete explanation. There is only a description of what the Scriptures say happened as the wrath of God descended upon Christ, rather than upon us.

Christ went to the cross and received the wrath of God, Luther emphasized, because He was obedient. And the theme of Christ’s obedience to the Father is really more important for Luther than Christ’s obedience to the Law. It is in the obedience to the will of the Father who wanted to save His human creatures through Christ’s sacrifice that Christ goes in obedience to the death of the cross.

It is also important for us to see that this whole joyous exchange is an exchange for the sake of the sinner. Again, as we emphasized in the last lecture, Luther’s understanding of the whole gospel as focusing on us, on me, it is “pro nobis” (for us), it is “pro me” (for me). It is God’s Word to me as an individual, certainly within the context of His people, but to me as Robert Kolb, as Martin Luther, as whoever you are, that Luther wanted to make certain the believer understood.

The joyous exchange also emphasizes the concept of Jesus then as the one who stands between God, the loving Father who in His wrath must oppose sin but who wants to reconcile the human creature out of fallenness to Himself. Jesus stands as mediator in this concept of the joyous exchange. God meets the human creature in the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth. God arranges the
mediation by becoming flesh. So, in this concept of mediator, the concept of priest is very important. And Luther emphasizes not only the historical priestly role of Jesus Christ, the priest who was Himself the victim, who sacrificed Himself on the altar of the cross, but that mediation continues as the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, stands at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us and to mediate forgiveness to us through the means of grace, even in the 16th century, even in the 20th century.

As Luther describes Jesus’ activity as priest in the first century, he indeed uses satisfaction language. He indeed uses substitutionary language. But Luther’s use of satisfaction language could never be understood in the total context of his exposition of Christ’s passion and death, could never be understood as merely fixing something that went wrong, merely as the adjustment of a malfunctioning humanity. That satisfaction language of Luther’s is always in this larger context in which death does its thing; death claims its victim; death works its work against the fallen human creature, but works its work, its mistake, for its own sake, its mistake because it earns death thereby. It works its work by delivering death to the innocent Jesus of Nazareth. So what Christ does in pouring out His blood isn’t merely to fix us, to provide us with some medicine for healing. In pouring out His blood, Jesus pours out our blood as sinners. Jesus dies our death, death takes its toll, we receive the wages of sin, and then we receive the gift of new life. So there is not an Anselmian kind of necessity. There is not a necessity of coming to terms with the Law. There is obedience to the Law. There is fulfillment of the Law, but there is the defeat of the Law’s accusation because the sinner who has died in Jesus Christ, who has died through Jesus Christ, is now a new creature, innocent and righteous, sharing the characteristics of Adam and Eve through the gift of the righteousness and innocence of Christ. So there can be no doubt that Luther’s understanding of the atonement stresses the substitution of Christ for us, his substitution under the Law, under the Law which kills. Christ became “cursed for us.” In Galatians 3:13, Luther found the source for expressing the joyful exchange in a particularly dramatic way, as we shall see later. But in His substitution for us under the Law, Christ has suffered death and thereby destroyed death and taken it and its dominion away from us.

So Luther emphasizes that Jesus not only means “savior,” but Jesus is Savior. He emphasizes the saving work of Christ as the Messiah, as that heir of David, that human king who came as the King of righteousness. Luther compared Christ to Melchizedek, “the king of righteousness,” who comes to make the sacrifice which saves His creatures. And He who saves eternally is then as Savior daily present. He has entered into our human life through
the means of grace, and the Holy Spirit brings the presence of Christ to bear on the believer’s daily life, constantly reminding the believer that Jesus is Savior, that Jesus puts away sin. For Luther, that key question of “How do I become righteous?” and “How do I remain righteous in God’s sight?” was answered by the continual mediation of this Priest who is Savior, who is Messiah for us today.

Luther also emphasized that the joyous exchange happens because Jesus is Redeemer. And by Redeemer, he understood one who comes as the liberator of God’s people, who is the avenger of God’s people. As we heard in Luther’s hymn, “Death Held Our Lord in Prison,” Luther emphasized the Old Testament setting and the Old Testament connection and the Old Testament prefigurement of what Jesus would do. And so he could sing, the true Paschal Lamb, God Himself, has attested. This was the Lamb that went to the tree of shame and in flaming passion was roasted so that His blood might be painted on the doorpost of our lives; and faith can hold this blood of Christ in the face of death when death threatens to take us from God. This Redeemer came to give Himself, to give His life as a ransom. There was redemption through blood in the Old Testament system, but as God worked that out in the sacrifice of the Lamb and in the liberation of His people as Redeemer, He was the liberator, the avenger who came to strike death dead by dying Himself.

Luther just loved the title “Lamb of God,” and he used it richly and often so that his hearers and his readers would understand the nature of the sacrifice of Christ, the great glory of God in becoming this sacrificial Lamb. But the Lamb was sacrificed to do death to death. The Lamb was sacrificed not simply to make sure that a set of regulations was kept, that a human kind of righteousness was fulfilled through substitution, but instead the Lamb was the one that gathered into itself, into Himself, all the sins and all the threats to human life, even death itself, so that through this sacrifice life could come to those for whom the sacrifice was made.

So it is no wonder that for Luther the forgiveness of sins was seen as the central element of the gospel. Luther had lived so much of his early life in this struggle against his own sinfulness. He had seen death written on the walls of his cell because he was continuing to live in sin, because he was continuing to fail to satisfy God’s Law properly. And so it is little wonder that as he conceived of life, he then conceived of the gospel as the forgiveness of sins—as the abolition of sin—as God’s gift of his being able to stand as a person who had put sin and its worst tool, death, behind him so that he could be righteous in the sight of
God. And that righteousness, he believed, depended simply upon Christ, and so the promise of Christ was his, and nothing could separate him from that.

Therefore, he looked forward with great hope, as he wrote at the end of his “Easter Hymn.” He looked forward with great hope to that eternal life that had already begun for him as he received the gift of forgiveness of sins, as he received the promise of God, as he received his identity under that promise in his baptism. He closed his magnificent “Easter Hymn” with these two stanzas:

And so we keep this high feast of grace [we celebrate Easter], [I put in brackets. Seems to be his addition.]

Hardy the joy and glee is that shines
On us from God’s face [the Son Himself]. [Again, I put in brackets.]

Ah, He is who by His brightness divine,
His light in our hearts makes shine,
The night of our sins is over, “Hallelujah.”

We eat [as paschal people] and so we well fare,
Right Easter cakes without leaven,
The old leaven shall not share
In the new word from heaven.
Christ Himself will be the food,
Alone filled us all with good,
Faith will live on nothing other.

Yes, faith for Luther feasted then upon the resurrected Christ, upon the One who gives His body and blood with this new word
from heaven so that the old leaven of human sinfulness might be completely set aside, might be gone totally. So Luther emphasized year-round the great gift of God in His victory over sin.

Another one of his favorite titles for Christ was “the destroyer of sin.” Even in bondage to Satan, it is God with whom we had to deal. Satan only distracted our faith from God. It was God whose wrath confronted us and crushed us. And all that is gone now. We have not to deal with Satan at all, we simply say to him when he comes to tempt us that “the victory is Christ’s”; that Christ has destroyed our need to depend on Satan. Christ has destroyed our sinful nature and has taken away from us Satan’s argument that we are sinners anyway so we might as well submit to his sin. Luther, of course, did not deny that sin continued to play altogether too formidable a role. And in our next lecture we will discuss the sinner part of Luther’s verdict that we are “saint and sinner” at the same time. But here as we look at the atonement proclamation of Luther, we see that Christ has reconciled us and we belong to God through the abolition of sin and death which Christ affected in His death and in His resurrection.

Perhaps nowhere else does Luther express his understanding of the gospel so dramatically and so completely and so fully as in his Galatians Commentary of 1531/1532, which he then edited and published in 1535. I want to trace through a certain theme in this Galatians commentary, because it fills out in a little more detail how Luther understood the atonement. In this case, with the enemy focused not so much on the person of the devil or that tool of the devil—death—nor even of human sin, though all these themes are amply treated in the Galatians commentary, but because of the nature of Paul’s writing to the Galatians, Luther also here deals with the Law—the Law seen as the enemy of the Christian, the Law as the accusing force through which the wrath of God is expressed. From the Law comes the knowledge of sin. And from that knowledge of sin we recognize the threat of death, the just threat that is imposed upon us by the wrath of God.

Now, indeed, before I trace through what Luther said about the battle between Christ and the Law in the Galatians Commentary, it is important for us to go back to the point we have already made. The Law itself is a good word from God. It is a word that structures human life. It is a word that describes what it means to be human. But this message of how our lives ought to be structured is for sinners the enemy. And Luther knew that well, because he had continually tried to size up his own life, to measure and assess his own life according to the Law, with the mistaken notion that through the Law he could work his way back to life with God, to a God-pleasing life. And so Luther had experienced the Law as the
crushing force of God’s wrath, as his enemy.

And so he said that the real use, the proper use of the Law in a fallen world, the most important use of this Law—its goal—is to accuse the secure. For that reason, God expressed His commandments largely in negatives rather than in positives. In one sense, I suppose, we could say it doesn’t make all that much difference because whether assessed positively or negatively, either by “the don’ts” of the Law or by the positive commands that would correspond to the prohibitions of the Ten Commandments, the burden still falls on the human creature. And whether we say, “Don’t,” or whether we say, “The Christian will” or “should” or “does,” the Law still gives us that word of the Lord which says, “No,” to every best human effort.

In treating Galatians then, Luther emphasized to his hearers and his readers that the Law comes to accuse the secure, to inform those who arrogantly believe they can contribute to their own salvation, that even their righteousnesses are “like filthy rags,” that they are guilty of sin; that they stand under the wrath of God; that they are doomed to death. The Law does that, Luther explained, because it can only demand, it can only measure. It is a tool of assessment, of structure. It is not life-giving. Only the Lord is life-giving; only the Lord can bestow life. But the Law is very useful, as it helps us recognize whether we are functioning as the kind of human beings that God wanted us to be in the first place or whether we have fallen from our humanity, whether we are mishandling our humanity, whether we are misfiring and misfunctioning as the human creatures of God.

From his memories that stemmed from that monastic cell, Luther then described the Law as the hammer of death, as the thunder of hell itself, as the lightning of God’s wrath. So Luther said the result of the Law’s engagement with us is often that it increases sin. It helps us see more completely how sinful we are. But it often also encourages the sinner to take on a certain kind of bravado, “to sin the more that grace may abound” or to defy God and dethrone God by sinning the more or by arguing that, as a sinner, “I cannot help it, and so I might as well simply follow my sinful desires and lusts.” At the same time, the Law arouses in us our sense that God is justly angry with us, it accuses us of being the people that God wanted us not to be. It pins the rap on us. It brings the bill of indictment against us. And therefore, while it may encourage arrogance and a false kind of security, its demand for perfection finally terrorizes the sinner. It finally demands death for the sinner.

That was the point to which the Law had brought Luther. And
that is the message that Paul is presenting in Galatians, Luther was convinced. To all those who like himself had once tried on the basis of their own natural powers to keep the Law and to produce a righteousness of works, Luther had one message: “You don’t understand!” There is a moralistic grammar that follows the literal words of Scripture and believes that they are possible. “Be perfect, for I the Lord your God am perfect,” God commands (Matthew 5:48). And Luther understood that only as an invitation to despair of all human works, not as offering a real possibility for the human creature. That’s the theological grammar of which Luther spoke. Those commands are not intended to be literally interpreted, because they present us with an impossibility. The fallen creature must only despair, and that is the theological function of such commands.

The epistle to the Galatians is, of course, a beautiful expression of Paul’s understanding of the gospel, and Luther saw it as that as well. So he saw the epistle to the Galatians as “a message of freedom.” Christ has liberated us from the Law that accuses us, from the sin which enables the Law to accuse us, from the death which sin visits upon us, from the devil who uses law and sin and death to back us into a corner and to try to claim us as his own. So the message of Galatians is a message of Jesus Christ intervening, standing between the sinner and the Law. The message of Galatians, Luther’s message, is a message of Christ coming to “block” the accusation of the Law, to lay down His priestly body as the bridge over the gap which separates us from God. The message of Galatians is a message of the gift of righteousness, of a righteousness which God bestowed first upon Adam and Eve with His pronouncement of their righteousness as He created them, and a message of gospel which pronounces us righteous once again.

In his treatment of Galatians, Luther emphasizes what we have already talked about as the best summary of his understanding of the motif of atonement. “Christ conquered the Law,” Luther taught in his Galatians Commentary, “by submitting to it.” He kept the Law in obedience to His Father. He died at the Law’s hand. And in dying at its hand, He devoured it. It cursed Him. He became cursed for us, but the curse couldn’t stick, for He was innocent and righteous. So the curse died, the Law died, death died, because Jesus took them on and swallowed them up.

In commenting on Galatians 3, Luther said, “Who was the worst blasphemer of all time, the worst thief, the worst adulterer, the worst murderer? It was Jesus Christ.” Not in Himself, but because He stood before the Father with the sins of all humankind upon Him. And there He stood, condemned under the wrath of His
Father, suffering the tyranny of the Law. He didn’t merely mask the Law. He didn’t merely remove the sinner from the view of the Law. Instead, He took on the accusation of the Law, a just accusation because it was based upon human sinfulness. And He stilled the wrath of God as expressed in the Law through His own substitutionary death. He died separated from God, though He is God Himself, and He thereby laid our sins in the tomb of Christ. And therefore, Luther proclaimed as he exposed the message of Paul in Galatians, that “the sinner now lives no longer a sinner but lives as child of God.” God had planned from the stretches of eternity to choose certain people to be His own, and gives them the gift of life by taking away all the causes for death, by destroying in the tomb of Christ, in the passion of Christ, in the entire life of Christ’s submission to His Father, He destroyed His own wrath by destroying the basis of that wrath, the accusation of the Law. And He destroyed the accusation of the Law by destroying its basis in human sin. And in doing this, He swept aside the devil. He sent the devil reeling. He devoured the devil and death and wrath and the Law and simply banished them from the sight of God and reconciled us thereby to our loving heavenly Father.

The work of Christ is one of the major themes in Luther’s theology, just as the person of the Christ is the center of Luther’s whole theology. And in his assessment of the work of Christ, we see that Luther took all the possible themes quite seriously, just as he took Christ’s human nature and His divine nature with ultimate seriousness in combining them so tightly in the person of Christ that they could not be separated, even though they are continually distinguished. So he takes together the obedience of the life of Christ, the suffering of the passion and death of Christ, and the triumph of the resurrection of Christ, and binds them so tightly that they cannot be separated and sorted out, but must be understood as the weapon of God in the “Magnificent Duel” that defeats Law, Satan, death, and sin. And they are that instrument which in the joyous exchange is the way in which God comes into human lives, even today, with the benefits of Christ, the benefits which take away our sinfulness and which bestow upon us all the goodness that Christ is and gives. Above all, the goodness of life everlasting with God, a life which Luther understood began already as the Holy Spirit brought the benefits of Christ in the death and resurrection which are conveyed, according to Paul in Romans 6, through the baptism of the sinner.

So Luther celebrated in hymns and sermons and lectures, and even in his polemical writings, the wondrous victory of Jesus Christ, which comes alone through His death and through His resurrection.