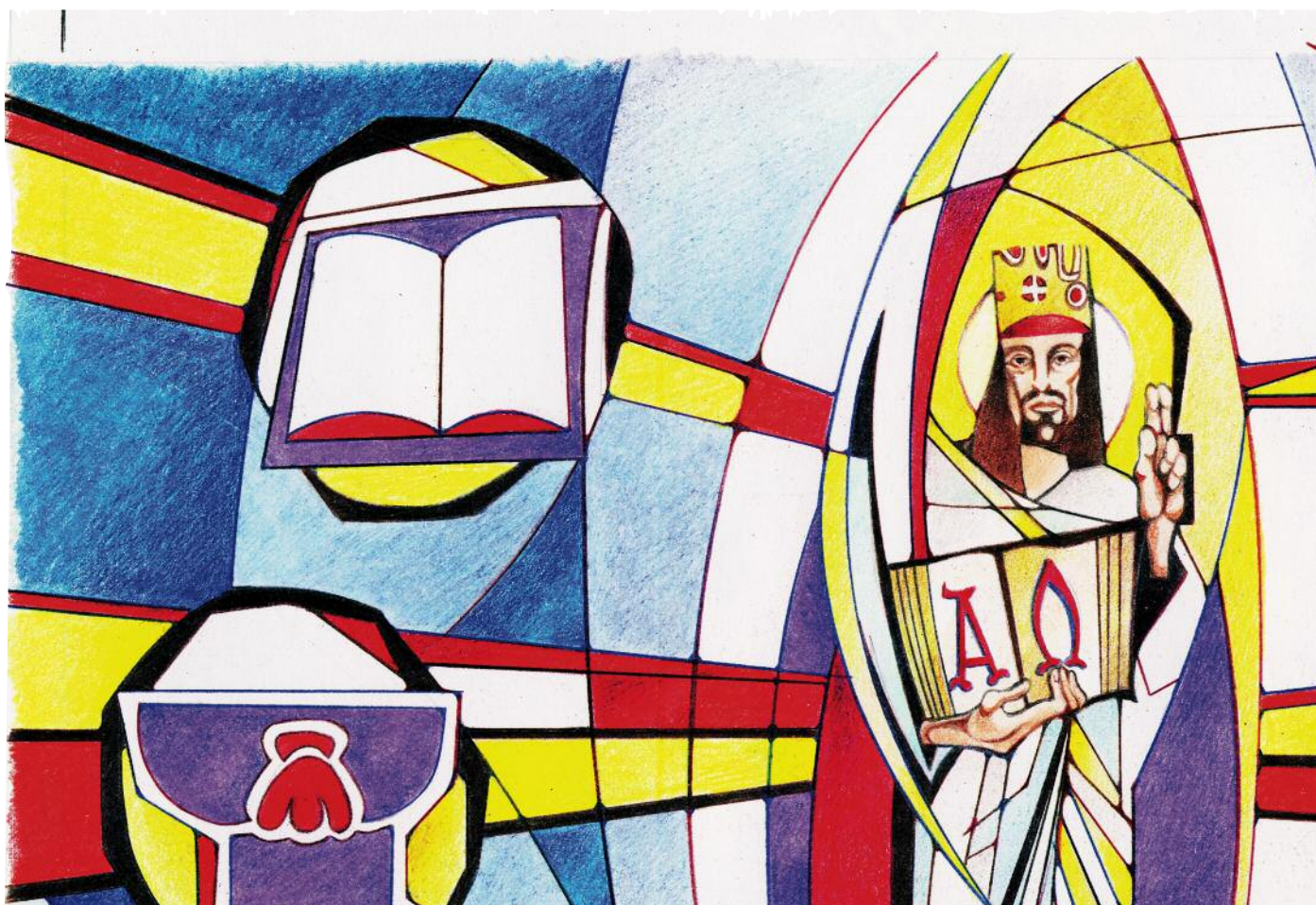


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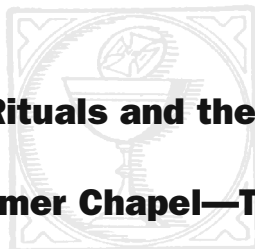
The Incarnational Life - p.6

Rituals and the Enactment of the Gospel - p.8

Born and Born Again - p.10

Kramer Chapel—The Jewel of the Seminary - p.12

In The Field - p.14



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CONTENTS



For the LIFE of the WORLD

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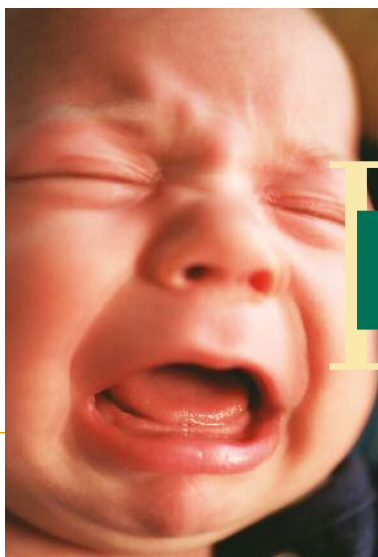
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FEATURES

- 2 From the President**
- 4 Letters to the Editor**
- 6 The Incarnational Life**
by Rev. Dr. Arthur Just Jr.
Professor Exegetical Theology
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Ind.
- Our life in the church is *incarnational*, for it brings us into communion with Jesus Christ so that we might delight in Him.
- 8 Rituals and the Enactment of the Gospel**
by Rev. Dr. John W. Kleinig
Lecturer at Lutheran Campus,
North Adelaide, Australia
- Rituals are important for Christians because the Triune God uses them to establish, sustain and extend the church on earth.
- 10 Born and Born Again**
by Debra L. Grime, MD
St. Louis, Mo.
- At our physical birth, we receive a name. At our spiritual birth, God writes His name on us as we are baptized, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
- 12 Kramer Chapel—The Jewel of the Seminary**
by Pam Knepper
Managing Editor
For the Life of the World
- Kramer Chapel continues to represent the center of life at the seminary. For in this house of worship, students, staff and faculty gather as a community to receive God's gifts in His Word and Sacraments. By gathering for worship, the seminary demonstrates the incarnational character of the Body of Christ—His Church.
- 14 In The Field**
by Pam Knepper
Managing Editor
For the Life of the World
- Features the Rev. Rick Milas, Campus Pastor at University Lutheran Church at the University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign.



BORN & BORN

By Debra L. Schaeffer Grime, MD

Have you ever seen the birth of a baby? It is an awesome experience for parents to see their son or daughter emerge, hear the first cry and touch those little fingers. Tears of joy flow freely. It's a miracle to see a birth. Seeing your child's birth is watching a manifestation of love—God's and yours.

People are often excited when they hear that I deliver babies. Everybody would like a job where you get to see a miracle each day. How much more exciting for the church to be able to witness spiritual births at baptisms! If we acknowledge the miracle of our fleshly birth, how much more should we celebrate the miracle of our spiritual birth.

"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' " (John 3:5-7)

I think that Jesus used the expression *born again* because He desires us to see the similarities of our spiritual and physical births. After delivering a friend's child, I was asked to be her godmother. Witnessing both her physical and spiritual births made me see parallels between the two events.

First of all, we are known both before our physical and spiritual births. My friend and I saw my future godchild by ultrasound before she was born. We knew she was a girl. We could even see her little fist that kept causing such pain for mom. We prayed for her before we knew her name. God also knows us before we are born either physically or spiritually. He searches for us, knowing our sin before we sin, providing salvation while we still are in our sinful state.

Being born either physically or spiritually is not a decision we can make. When children say, "I never

asked to be born," they are right. Birth is not in our control. It happens to us. The spiritual life of faith given at baptism is not reliant upon something we do or say. It is imparted to us through the water and the Word by our loving God. Physical and spiritual birth occurs to us not by us. Even conception isn't our action. Begotten by father and borne by mother, we come into this world inheriting their sinful nature. Being born again in baptism by the Holy Spirit, we are given a new nature that allows us to see a remnant of God's creation in Eden where He made our first parents in His image.

Our spiritual and physical births occur only once. We have only one birthdate and we have only one baptismal birthdate. The product of these births, our physical body and our spiritual life, may grow or change but we always have the same body and the same faith. We don't get more. You either have life or you don't.

At our physical birth, we receive a name. A name gives us an identity. Our last name is the family name to whom we belong. That family is responsible for you. At our spiritual birth, God writes His name on us as we are baptized, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This is the God to whom we belong. This is the One to whom and by whom our worship begins, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This is the name by which our "called and ordained minister of the Word" forgives all our sins. We are not "of the world" but "of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This is the name into which we are *born again*. God gives us our spiritual identity and faith.

In the womb, the baby is submerged in amniotic fluid, which we commonly call the *bag of water*. Prenatally,



The spiritual life of faith given at Baptism is not reliant upon something we do or say. It is imparted to us through the water and the Word by our loving God. Physical and spiritual birth occurs to us not by us.

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this *water* is vital for the maturation of the developing baby. At birth, this bag of water is either broken spontaneously or the physician opens the membranes allowing the water to pour out. Isn't it interesting that the essential element in baptism is water? The flow of water is vital for both physical and spiritual birth.

Lastly, being born is bloody business. The placenta that supports the life of the pregnancy is bathed in blood. After the birth is completed, this blood flows quite freely until the womb contracts. Blood is important to life because it takes away the body's waste products and brings vital oxygen and nutrients to the body's tissues. Spiritual life is bloody business too. Christ had to die. His blood was shed to take away our spiritual waste called sin and to bring us the vital spiritual nutrients of forgiveness, life and salvation.

"But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." (John 19:33-34)

New life always requires water and the shedding of blood. We see this in physical birth. We see this in the church's sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Having once been created in the mother's womb,
now created in the church's font, and
Having once been nourished by placental blood,
now nourished by the chalice of Christ, and
Having once been bathed with amniotic water,
now bathed with spiritual water,
May you always have life in the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

Debra L. Schaeffer Grime is a medical doctor in St. Louis, Mo.