



# A BIBLE STUDY ON JOHANNES GUTENBERG



REFORMATION  
2017 It's Still All About  
**Jesus**

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## “THY STRONG WORD”

((LW 328; LSB 578)

(Gen. 1:3; John 1:1–14; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Peter 2:9)

### Even non-Christians sing the praises of the entrepreneur Johannes Gutenberg.

His printing press has been widely acknowledged as the most important invention in the last thousand years; the Bibles that came off his press are now priceless historical treasures. In the same way that Scripture describes the time of Christ's appearing as “the fullness of time” (GAL. 4:4), so it was at the time of the Reformation. Technology, politics, language and communications all came together in a miraculous way to propel the rediscovered Gospel from little Wittenberg, Germany, to the farthest corners of Europe. It is estimated that during Luther's lifetime, over 2 million pamphlets from the hand of the Wittenberg reformer were printed and distributed around Europe.

### STANZA ONE

*1 Thy strong word did cleave the darkness; / At Thy speaking it was done. / For created light we thank Thee, / While Thine ordered seasons run. / Alleluia, alleluia! / Praise to Thee who light dost send! / Alleluia, alleluia! / Alleluia without end!*

**When the fullness of time had come — at just the right season — God in His grace used Martin Luther and the Reformation to reveal the saving light of Christ and His Word. The darkness of an obscured and twisted Gospel was rent asunder by the proclamation of the Lord's powerful Word, sent through the prophets and apostles and broadcast to a darkened world by means of Gutenberg and his printing press.**

**1.** Review the means by which God created light in Gen. 1:3. How is God's creation confessed in Luther's Small Catechism (the Explanation to the First Article of the Creed)?

### STANZA TWO

*2 Lo, on those who dwelt in darkness, / Dark as night and deep as death, / Broke the light of Thy salvation, / Breathed Thine own life-giving breath. / Alleluia, alleluia!*

*/ Praise to Thee who light dost send! / Alleluia, alleluia! / Alleluia without end!*

**Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (MATT. 5:14–16).**

**2.** A common graphic representation of the Reformation depicts a divinely guided hand removing a bushel basket from the light of a candle atop an open Bible (MATT. 4:16; IS. 9:2). Martin Luther knew that the light of Christ and His Word was breaking into a fallen, sinful world condemned to darkness and death. How is this darkness of despair redeemed by the Word made flesh described in John 1:1–14?

**3.** How does this rending of the darkness by God's strong Word parallel the rending of the temple curtain in Matt. 27:51?

### STANZA THREE

*3 Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; / Bright with Thine own holiness, / Glorious now, we press toward glory, / And our lives our hopes confess. / Alleluia, alleluia! / Praise to Thee who light dost send! / Alleluia, alleluia! / Alleluia without end!*

**“Thy Strong Word” was written by Martin Franzmann in 1954 and 1959 as a processional hymn for the commencement service at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (whose motto is based on Matt. 4:16: “Light from above”). Through this hymn, the Christian Church sings of the enlightening Word of Christ, written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, translated by faithful pastors and teachers, printed and proclaimed to anyone who will listen and anyone who will read. Johannes Gutenberg was used by God to extend the light of the Gospel, enlightening all who would receive the light of Christ by faith (JOHN 1:9).**

**4.** Why has the Lutheran Church always put a premium on the faithful translation of the Scriptures into the language of the people? Why did Martin Luther believe that the light of Christ must be allowed to do its revealing work through accurate and skillful translation of the Bible and accompanying catechisms and hymnals? Why do pastors continue to learn biblical Hebrew and Greek in their preparations to be faithful under-shepherds of Christ and His Word (PS. 119:105)?

#### STANZA FOUR

*4 From the cross Thy wisdom shining / Breaketh forth in conqu'ring might; / From the cross forever beameth / All Thy bright redeeming light. / Alleluia, alleluia! / Praise to Thee who light dost send! / Alleluia, alleluia! / Alleluia without end!*

**By God's unmerited grace, Martin Luther placed the significance and meaning of Christ's cross in sharp focus. "Christi crux est mea lux — The cross of Christ is light to me" (the motto of Concordia University, Portland, Ore.).**

**5.** Why is the unbelieving world dumbfounded at the words of this fourth stanza — as it is the true Gospel of the Bible? How does this fourth stanza serve to reveal the wisdom of the cross as the one event that most clearly defines the great reality of our sin, while, at the same time, defining the even greater redemption won for a lost world (2 COR. 4:6; 1 COR. 1:23)?

#### STANZA FIVE

*5 Give us lips to sing Thy glory, / Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim, / Throats that shout the hope that fills us, / Mouths to speak Thy holy name. / Alleluia, alleluia! / May the light which Thou dost send / Fill our songs with alleluias, / Alleluias without end!*

**The Christian holds tightly to Christ and His Word come to save through the Scriptures, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper as the only means through which our lips and mouths and throats will be freed to sing Christ's praises. Faith created by the Word cannot but echo back to God and our neighbor the glorious, merciful, holy Word of the cross of Jesus (1 PETER 2:9).**

**6.** The redeemed Christian praises the Lord with alleluias. We confess with the psalmist that even this ability is graciously given by God. Why is it appropriate that the service of Vespers begins with the words of Ps. 51:15? How do we open our lips and give praise to God when we support the printing and distribution of accurate and skillful publications of the Bible, the catechism and the hymnal?

#### STANZA SIX

*6 God the Father, light-creator, / To Thee laud and honor be. / To Thee, Light of Light begotten, / Praise be sung eternally. / Holy Spirit, light-revealer, / Glory, glory be to thee. / Mortals, angels, now and ever / Praise the holy Trinity!*

**The revelation of saving light through the Holy Trinity properly ends in a never-ending doxology. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (JOHN 1:5).**

**7.** By God's grace, the rediscovery of the light of Christ's Gospel at the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation was a "Word event," as the Church was called to return to the Word of God and the Word of God alone (*Sola Scriptura*). Because of the ingenious innovations of Johannes Gutenberg, the Reformation was also a printed word event, with almost 2 million pamphlets during Luther's lifetime disseminating the Bible's distinction between the darkness and the redeeming "Light of Light begotten." How was the sending out of the Word of God into all the world at the time of the Reformation (as it is today) a trinitarian event worthy of our eternal praise?

