

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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By the Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

What can you do when life crashes in? How do you keep going when everything you hold near and dear is taken from you? What happens when health is jeopardized, when you lose your job, when someone you love dies, when you face intractable physical or emotional pain? What if you feel like God is out to get you? What then?

7 Christ in Death—Christ in Life

By the Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy, Senior Pastor at Woodbury Lutheran Church, Woodbury, Minnesota, and Third Vice President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Whether it's Christ in death or Christ in life, let Christ be real. Borne by confirmands and children, pastors and poets, musicians and artists, and all the company of faith, the Christ of the Gospels endures. In death and in life, He is "Son of God and Son of Man." He is the beginning and end of history.

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By the Rev. Lance A. O'Donnell, Pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Van Wert, Ohio

And somewhere in all of this, amidst the tears of agony and sorrow, I realized that I was in the midst of an epiphany about grace. You see, with each little heartbeat I loved that boy more . . . And our family verse, whose reference is etched on my wedding ring, the verse I repeat each morning, kept ringing in my ears: "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the *joy* set before Him endured the cross . . ."

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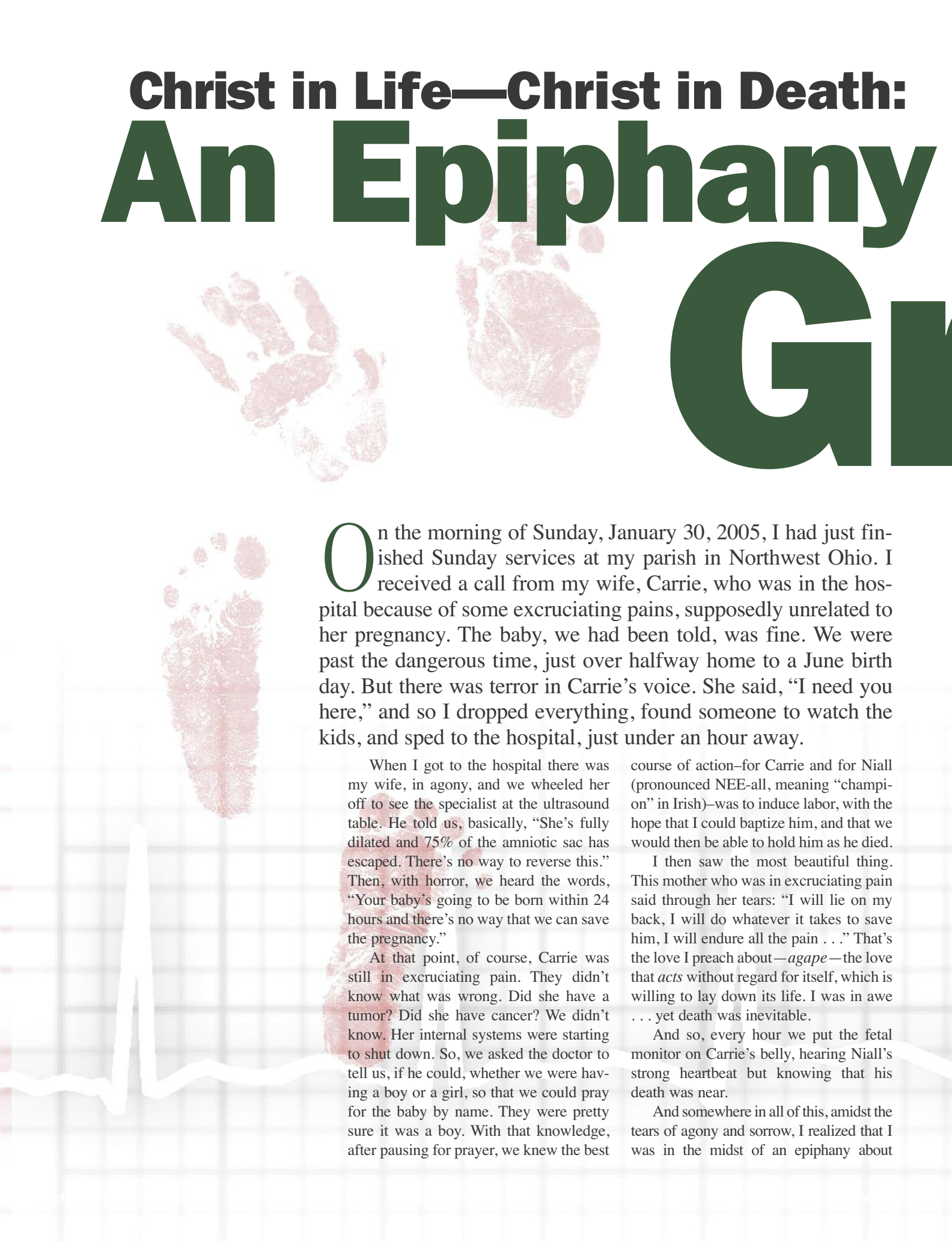


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Christ in Life—Christ in Death: An Epiphany



On the morning of Sunday, January 30, 2005, I had just finished Sunday services at my parish in Northwest Ohio. I received a call from my wife, Carrie, who was in the hospital because of some excruciating pains, supposedly unrelated to her pregnancy. The baby, we had been told, was fine. We were past the dangerous time, just over halfway home to a June birthday. But there was terror in Carrie's voice. She said, "I need you here," and so I dropped everything, found someone to watch the kids, and sped to the hospital, just under an hour away.

When I got to the hospital there was my wife, in agony, and we wheeled her off to see the specialist at the ultrasound table. He told us, basically, "She's fully dilated and 75% of the amniotic sac has escaped. There's no way to reverse this." Then, with horror, we heard the words, "Your baby's going to be born within 24 hours and there's no way that we can save the pregnancy."

At that point, of course, Carrie was still in excruciating pain. They didn't know what was wrong. Did she have a tumor? Did she have cancer? We didn't know. Her internal systems were starting to shut down. So, we asked the doctor to tell us, if he could, whether we were having a boy or a girl, so that we could pray for the baby by name. They were pretty sure it was a boy. With that knowledge, after pausing for prayer, we knew the best

course of action—for Carrie and for Niall (pronounced NEE-all, meaning "champion" in Irish)—was to induce labor, with the hope that I could baptize him, and that we would then be able to hold him as he died.

I then saw the most beautiful thing. This mother who was in excruciating pain said through her tears: "I will lie on my back, I will do whatever it takes to save him, I will endure all the pain . . ." That's the love I preach about—*agape*—the love that *acts* without regard for itself, which is willing to lay down its life. I was in awe . . . yet death was inevitable.

And so, every hour we put the fetal monitor on Carrie's belly, hearing Niall's strong heartbeat but knowing that his death was near.

And somewhere in all of this, amidst the tears of agony and sorrow, I realized that I was in the midst of an epiphany about

about race

By the Rev. Lance A. O'Donnell

My friends, there is a love that is pure and undefiled. It is the love that is in God, that love within the Holy Trinity of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit. As I felt my own agony amidst the growing love that I had for this little son of mine, I could not but think of God the Father. Somehow, from all eternity God knew what would happen. Especially from the moment of Jesus' conception there was *the inevitable*.



The Scriptures say that faith—the faith that saves—comes by hearing the Word of Christ, and Niall’s little soul had heard the Gospel over and over again—every night as we sang a bedtime hymn and prayed The Lord’s Prayer; every morning—almost every morning—he heard the Gospel through the stories of God’s saving acts through history. Indeed, I had no doubts about Niall’s salvation, that when he died his beautiful soul would see the face of Christ, but that did not change the agony of his death.

grace. You see, with each little heartbeat I loved that boy more. With each passing moment I loved him and I longed to hold him and stop this unbearable process that had begun. And our family verse, whose reference is etched on my wedding ring, the verse I repeat each morning, kept ringing in my ears: “Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the *joy* set before Him endured the cross . . .” (Heb. 12:2).

My friends, there is a love that is pure and undefiled. It is the love that is in God, that love within the Holy Trinity of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit. As I felt my own agony amidst the growing love that I had for this little son of mine, I could not but think of God the Father. Somehow, from all eternity God knew what would happen. Especially from the moment of Jesus’ conception there was *the inevitable*.

To be sure, I had no doubts about Niall. He was an answer to prayer. His little soul heard the Word of God and the message of salvation in Christ from the day he was conceived. The Scriptures say that faith—the faith that saves—comes by hearing the Word of Christ, and Niall’s little soul had heard the Gospel over and over again—every night as we sang a bedtime hymn and prayed The Lord’s Prayer; every morning—almost every morning—he heard the Gospel through the stories of God’s saving acts through history. Indeed, I had no doubts about Niall’s salvation, that when he died his beautiful soul would see the face of Christ, but that did not change the agony of his death. With every heartbeat I loved him more; with every moment I loved him more and so the agony of his coming suffering was intensified with every heartbeat and every moment.

“Could it be otherwise with God?” I thought. “If my agony is this great and I have not yet even met my son, what was it like for God the Father?” But then the verse again, “. . . for the *joy* set before Him.”

How is that possible? My suffering and Carrie’s suffering were so great; our love was so great, and so I thought to myself, “I know that I am finite. If my finite love is like this, who can comprehend the love of God?” My thoughts continued, in the midst of the tears and the fading heartbeat: “How could that be? God loved me *that much*? God had *joy* in the midst of suffering?”

Indeed, with every heartbeat. “Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

That’s my painful epiphany about grace, about *agape*—the love that gives even though there is nothing necessarily good in the beloved; even though the beloved does not understand it. It is the love that endures all things, the love that never fails.

That’s what God does for us. That’s what God does for you and what God did for Niall.

Even so, we grieve. And it is right that we do, because there is a time to mourn and a time to dance and a time to cry. But we do not grieve as those who have no hope, do we? We do not grieve as those who have no hope, because Christ is raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep. We do not grieve as those who have no hope, because we have the promise that on the last day our bodies will rise at the call of Christ and be joined to their souls. On the last day we will rise together, and we will join the beloved and sing, “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest. Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!”

This shall be Niall’s enduring lesson to me, this epiphany about grace, that I have received a love beyond measure—and so have you.

The Rev. Lance A. O’Donnell is Pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Van Wert, Ohio, and a Ph.D. (Missiology) student at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.