



'Tis the spring of souls today: Christ hath burst His prison,
And from three days' sleep in death As a sun hath risen;
All the winter of our sins, Long and dark, is flying
From His light, to whom we give Laud and praise undying.

FROM
THE
ELS

“The Spring of Souls”

Rev. Jay Webber
ELS World Outreach Administrator

Throughout the northern hemisphere, the coldness and death of winter are now giving way to the warmth and life of spring. This annual transition has long been seen as an illustration of the hopefulness of the resurrection of Jesus, following his death. The stanza quoted above from an Easter hymn of John of Damascus is an example of this.

The ancient pagans, in contrast, constructed their religion largely around the cycles of nature, as they often also personified the forces of nature as gods to be worshiped and appeased. The Christian gospel may find illustrations in nature, but it is not rooted in nature. It is rooted in real history. We believe in the Lord's resurrection because the apostles and others who literally saw Jesus alive after he had been killed testify to it; and because the Holy Spirit works through this eyewitness gospel testimony to create and sustain our faith. The Son of God had atoned for the sins of Adam's fallen race. Now, by his victory over death, Jesus as the Lord of life has been vindicated by his Father, and has opened for humanity the way to everlasting life.

As Europe is becoming an increasingly secular continent, Europeans are largely turning away from the Christian faith. Many of them are becoming interested again in the pre-Christian paganism of their remote ancestors. But the Christians with whom *Thoughts of Faith* works in Europe bear witness to the salvation from sin and death that Jesus has won for us by his death and resurrection, and that the Holy Spirit delivers to us in the means of grace. As the ancient peoples of Europe were once enlightened by this liberating truth when the famous missionaries of history preached the gospel to them, so too do we today proclaim the truth that sets men free from devilish deceptions. Through your prayerful support of this work, you can be a part of this. You are a part of this! We close with these words from St. Paul: **“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive”** (1 Corinthians 15:20-22, ESV).

LATVIA

Dear American Lutheran Friends,

Krišjānis Lācis, CLCL Student of Theology

This winter's severity highlights the value of hard, self-disciplining work for survival. Luther's doctrine of vocation calls us to serve as “masks of God,” being Christ to our neighbor through daily labors. In the cold, this means sharing firewood with the elderly, plowing paths for the isolated, or offering a warm meal to the hungry. Such acts embody the Second Table of the Law, loving neighbor as self, amid a creation groaning under sin (Romans 8:22). We labor not in self-righteousness, but in faith, trusting God's provision.

This cold winter reminds us also of a famous Latvian tale about freezing to death. Jānis Poruks's 1897 story *The Battle of Knipska* poignantly illustrated this through a Lutheran critique of pietism. Poor schoolboy Cibiņš, caught in a joyous snowball war between “Turks” and “Russians” at a rural school, embodies childlike innocence. Yet his tragic end stems from pietistic themes in his upbringing: rigid moralism, inward perfectionism, and fear of worldly contamination. Pietism, with its stress on subjective experience and self-imposed righteousness over Gospel assurance, warps



▲ Krišjānis with his dogs at frozen Baltic Sea

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Thoughts of Faith is a confessional Lutheran mission society dedicated to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to Ukraine, Czechia, and Latvia through printed materials and personal ministry. We are a 501(c)3 tax exempt organization. All donations are tax deductible to the extent of applicable law. Please check with your tax consultant on your specific situation. Contact info and how to donate: ■ jay.webber@blc.edu, 602-616-4357 ■ *Thoughts of Faith*, 6 Browns Ct, Mankato, MN 56001 ■ scan QR code ■ els.org/tofdonations



LATVIA continued

Cibiņš's conscience. Ashamed of his tattered clothes and empty stomach, he refuses charity from classmates, driven by pride in his "purity" and dread of appearing sinful. Wandering home alone, he succumbs to hunger and freezing in the snow. Here, the Law exposes our futile works.

As Luther warns, relying on self-holiness leads to despair. True righteousness comes solely through Christ's merit, justification by faith alone, not works. Cibiņš's fate reminds us that winter's frost, like the Law, accuses and kills, but the Gospel revives.

Nevertheless, winter is both curse and undeserved mercy in a fallen world—pruning the earth, fostering resilience, and drawing us to God's warmth. But we long for fulfillment. With Christ's second coming and the re-creation of new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21:1), we have the promise of an eternal season where warmth, life, green pastures, and light predominate. As Isaiah 35:1 prophesies, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom." In this renewed creation, the beauty of a hypothetical winter—crystalline snow under starlit skies—will not be marred by death's threat. Our glorified bodies, imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42-44), will not succumb to elements or temperatures. There, God Himself is the light (Revelation 21:23), banishing cold's peril forever.

In Christ,
Krišjānis Lācis ■

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▲ Ozolnieki Church—Krišjānis's home congregation



▲ Krišjānis Lācis, wife, and family

GIFT OF
LIFE—
UKRAINE

Winter Without Light—Yet Not Without Hope

Dmytro Maksymenko,
Director, Gift of Life

The winter of 2025–2026 has been one of the hardest Ukraine has faced since the full-scale war began four years ago. As the conflict continues, and while soldiers bear immense sacrifice at the front, civilians—particularly the most vulnerable—also continue to suffer the relentless disruptions of war in their homes and communities. Across much of the country, people endure rolling blackouts lasting 12–18 hours a day. In some cities, electricity and water have been unavailable for several consecutive days. This winter has also been unusually cold and snowy. During prolonged power outages, temperatures inside apartments have fallen to +4 to +8°C (39–46°F). In such conditions, daily life becomes a struggle for survival. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable. Tragically, there have been numerous reported deaths from hypothermia.

Our key ministry project, the Gift of Life Mobile Clinic, has not been immune to these challenges. The clinics rely on electricity to operate dental equipment, conduct basic laboratory tests, and provide essential medical care. During extended outages, our work was nearly paralyzed. At a time when people most needed medical support, we were often unable to serve them. Thanks to the generosity of donors and the swift response of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, we received emergency financial assistance to purchase diesel generators and backup battery systems. This support has allowed us to restore operations and continue providing care to those who have nowhere else to turn. Recognizing the growing needs in our region, we also opened a **Warming Center** at the base where our Mobile Clinics are stationed during the winter months in Ternopil'. Residents can come to warm themselves, drink tea or coffee, charge their phones, and—if needed—receive free medical and dental care. **In a season marked by cold and uncertainty, this space has become a place**

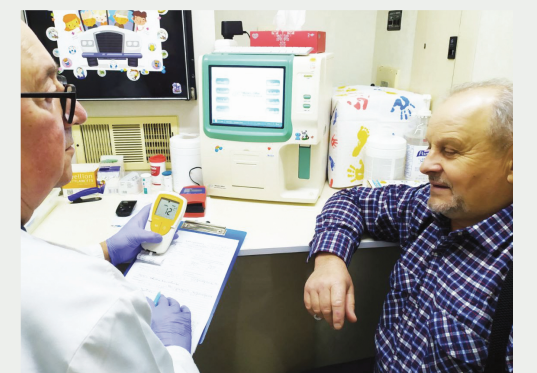
In a season
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warming center]
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We continually require hygiene supplies for children—especially diapers and wet wipes—as well as adult diapers and feminine hygiene products. New toothbrushes for both children and adults, along with toothpaste, are also in constant demand.

We are deeply thankful for all who continue to stand with us in faithful partnership. Those who would like to support us financially are kindly invited to visit the webpage for Thoughts of Faith donations, and add a note designating the gift for Ukraine: els.org/tofdonations. Gifts can also be sent by mail. If anyone has any questions, please feel free to reach out to me or to the World Outreach Administrator, Jay Webber. ■

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▲ free medical/dental care at the Warming Center



▲ local seniors receiving support at the Gift of Life Warming Center, Ternopil'



▲ diesel generator from ELS donors

CZECHIA

Volunteers from Texas

by David Hauck, teacher
Martin Luther School, Plzen

This semester, we have been blessed by the help of two volunteers from Texas, Isabella (21) and Tabor (23). They have stepped in to support our English department while one of our teachers recovers from a serious injury. By substituting English lessons and assisting in classes, they have become a great encouragement to both students and staff.

Isabella and Tabor share that they are grateful not only for the opportunity to teach, but also to be part of our school community. They see their time here as a chance to serve, build relationships, and reflect God's love through their work and daily interactions. We are thankful for their willingness to help and for the positive spirit they bring to our classrooms. ■

