



*The LORD is my shepherd ... He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:1a, 3-4, KJV)*

Our Good Shepherd is with us always. He was with us (and formed us) in our mothers' bellies. He is with us now. He will be with us at the time of our death. After we fall asleep in Him, He will keep our souls with Him and will keep our bodies safe in peaceful sleep until His reappearing. And on the Last Day, He will raise us again in glorified bodies reunited with our souls to live forever in His presence. Indeed, there has never been a time in which He was not with us, and there will never be such a time.

All of this means that, when faced with crises in this vale of tears, we can be confident that our Good Shepherd is right there with us. This includes unexpected and/or difficult pregnancies and painful chronic and even terminal illnesses. He intimately knows what we go through when we suffer, as He Himself suffered. His suffering sanctified ours, which means that as we suffer, He suffers with us and at the same time comforts us in our affliction. He does so by His presence with us in His Word and Sacraments. He does so also by His presence with us in our neighbors in their vocational calls to help us bear our burdens. When we are tempted to take that which the world offers as an "easy way" out of our suffering, He fully sympathizes with us, having Himself been similarly tempted. Furthermore, when we pray, "And lead us not into temptation," we know that He has promised to guard and keep us that "the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us." (Small Catechism, 6<sup>th</sup> Petition) And when we stray like lost sheep and fall into temptation, God, who sent His Son, Our Good Shepherd, to die for us on the Cross and rise again to declare us right with Him, remains patient with us, brings us to repentance, and grants us His forgiveness, drawing us back to Himself.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Psalm 23:6, KJV)*

God has delivered us from the danger of everlasting death and has promised to make us partakers of His eternal joys. To Him be the glory, Alleluia!