

WON-YONG JI

Luther Scholar, Missionary Professor

BORN: 1924 Ga-Rae-Goi, Korea

DIED: DECEMBER 31, 2012 St. Louis, Mo.

WON-YONG JI WAS BORN IN KOREA. He was not raised in a Christian home; rather, his family followed Confucian teachings. However, Presbyterian missionaries came into the village and, when he was 16 years old, Ji found a book about Martin Luther. His eyes were opened, and he wanted to learn more about the Christian faith. He heard the Good News of Jesus and was baptized the following year. His parents and brother also became Christians. As he grew older, Ji knew he wanted to be a pastor.

This was a difficult time in Korea, during World War II and the Japanese occupation. After the war, Ji graduated from a theological college in Korea. U.S. airmen stationed in Korea befriended him and arranged a scholarship for him to continue his studies.

In 1948, a new period in Ji's life began. He left his homeland for the U.S. On the ship over the Pacific, he met a Lutheran serviceman who cabled his mother to meet Ji when he arrived in Seattle. She introduced him to a Lutheran pastor and they became good friends. In 1952, Ji began studying at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where he received several degrees, including his doctorate in theology in 1957. While in St. Louis, he urged the LCMS to begin mission work in Korea. In 1958, Ji returned to Korea to work with the LCMS missionaries there, serving for 10 years.

In 1968, another big change came in Ji's life. He moved from Korea to Geneva, Switzerland, to serve as Asia Secretary for the Lutheran World Federation, a position he held for seven years. From 1975 to 1978, he was a consultant to the Department of Missions of the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Bavaria, Germany. In 1978, he returned to the U.S. to begin teaching at Concordia Seminary where he served until retiring in 1997.

Ji was a much-loved seminary professor, and he was also a dedicated scholar. He never forgot the work of the church among the Korean people, and he translated 12 volumes of Luther's works into the Korean language. He also translated the Lutheran *Book of Concord* and Walther's *Law and Gospel* into Korean.

Ji was a missionary, educator and theologian, but above all else he was a joyful messenger of the Gospel of Jesus. In this faith he found great comfort. In his autobiography, Ji gave credit to his Savior for all he had accomplished: "The Creator has given me a very interesting life with many meaningful events, interesting work. By His grace, I am what I am; I will be what I will be in the redeeming mercy in Jesus Christ in whom alone I live" (Ji, *By the Grace of God I Am What I Am*, 376).

For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.

DISCOVER MORE

Won-Yong Ji, *By the Grace of God I Am What I Am* (Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2004)

Won-Yong Ji, *A History of Lutheranism in Korea: A Personal Account* (Concordia Seminary, 1988).



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