

REFLECTIONS

LENT AND HOLY WEEK

MARCH 2 - APRIL 16, 2022

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THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

Lent and Holy Week

MARCH 2 - APRIL 16, 2022

This season's Reflections were written by

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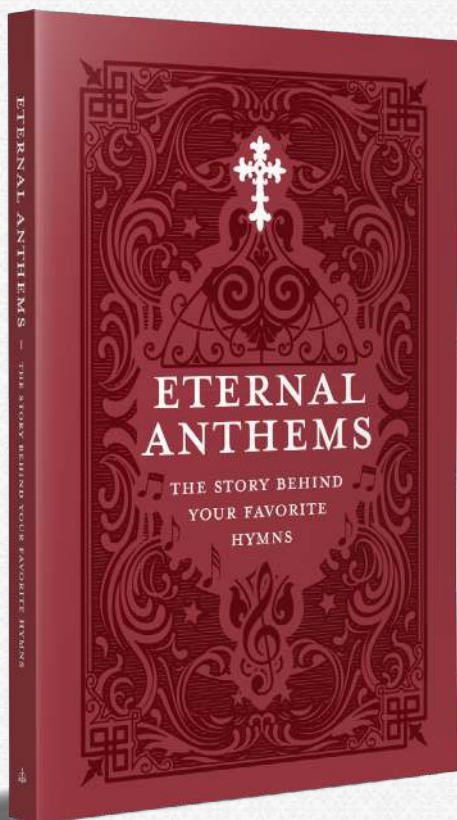
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A Short Form for Daily Reflection

ADAPTED FROM LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

Make the sign of the Holy Cross and say:

In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read "Today's Reading" if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles Creed.

Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:

(In the Morning)

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, such as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

(In the Evening)

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

Ash Wednesday

MARCH 2, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 1:1-9; Mark 1:1-13

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.”
(Matthew 6:16)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's not hard to imagine what the social media accounts of the Pharisees would have looked like if Twitter or Facebook had existed back in Jesus' day: Humble brags. Pre- and post-Sabbath Day selfies. More holy hashtags than spots on a dalmatian.

Jesus' words here in Matthew 6 reveal that virtue signaling was just as popular in the first century as it is now. The Pharisees were obsessed with the man in the mirror. They loved showing off their holiness like Joseph and his coat of many colors. They liked to strut their righteousness like a peacock through the streets. The problem, however, goes much deeper. What Jesus was teaching His disciples then, and is teaching us now, is that the problem of our sin, and its solution in Jesus' sacrifice for sin, is far more than skin deep. Jesus warns His disciples then, and us today, that underneath those furrowed brows and disfigured faces there is a far greater, more disfigured sinful heart that is wicked above all things.

The problem, Scripture tells us, isn't just with the Pharisees. It's our problem, too. There dwells within each of us a little Pharisee, our Old Adam, as Luther called it. Behind all unrighteousness is self-righteousness. Behind self-righteousness is the First Commandment. We do not fear, love, or trust in God above all things. Like the Pharisees, we constantly look to our own thoughts, words, actions, and emotions to justify ourselves before others, and before God. That's why Ash Wednesday is a good day. We're reminded that we are dust and to dust we shall return. That all our righteousness is like a filthy rag. We're also reminded that though our sins were as scarlet, Christ has made them white as snow. And though our unrighteousness is great, the righteousness that is given to us in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is far greater. Be of good cheer, yes, even in Lent. For your righteousness isn't found in the mirror or on your social media feed. It's found in Jesus crucified and risen for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Collect for Ash Wednesday)

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

MARCH 3, 2022

Today's Reading: Joel 2:12-19

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 1:20-2:3; Mark 1:14-28

"Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." (Joel 2:12)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Repentance is one of the watch words of the Lenten season. "Turn to Me," says the Lord. In other words, repent. Repentance means to turn away from sin and return to the Lord. Repentance means, "You were walking the way of sin and death; but now in Jesus' life and death and resurrection, you walk in His ways." As we learn and confess in Luther's *Small Catechism*, we live a life of repentance and forgiveness by daily dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ.

Repent. Return. Turn to Me. Sounds good. But how do we do that? How do we repent, turn away from sin and turn to God? We don't. We can't.

Wait, what? It sounds strange at first. But think about it. How do we know our sins? God's Word reveals them through His Word of Law. How do we see our sin for what it is and ask for forgiveness? The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. How do we return to God when all we really want to do is return to our sin? It is God who "repents" you, who turns your heart back to Him.

You see, God's work for you isn't done when He calls you to faith in Jesus. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work to save you and repent you as well. God shows us our sin so that He might all the more clearly show us our salvation in Jesus.

Repentance, then, isn't work we do to please God, but the work God is pleased to do in us through His Word by the Holy Spirit. Repentance isn't God's arcade game prize shop where we trade in our good works of repentance for a shiny trinket. No. From start to finish, repentance is God's work.

And wherever you find God's work of repentance, His Good News of redemption is there to save you. Confession leads to Absolution. As the prophet Joel declares, "Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:13). In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and, finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

MARCH 4, 2022

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 2:4-25; Mark 1:29-45

For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen. Even though the season of Lent has just begun, think back to Christmas. Imagine sitting around in a circle with family or friends at a Christmas white elephant gift exchange. There's always that one person who forgets the instructions and brings an expensive gift to a clean-out-your-closet gift exchange. You brought junk, but Uncle Fred over there brought treasure.

There's a glimpse of the Gospel in this famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) Christmas tradition. It's what Martin Luther called the blessed or sweet exchange. Luther said it this way: "God is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a wonderful exchange our sins are no longer ours but Christ's and the righteousness of Christ is ours. He has emptied Himself of His righteousness that He might clothe us with it, and fill us with it. He has taken our evils upon Himself that He might deliver us from them."

This is what Paul proclaims when he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Jesus takes on all our sin, unholiness, and unrighteousness, and in exchange, gives us His forgiveness, His holiness, and His righteousness. Jesus takes the punishment we deserved, the death we had coming, and the wrath of God that we had earned, and in exchange, He sets us free, raises us from the dead, and showers us with His steadfast love and mercy.

Sounds awfully unfair, doesn't it? And it is. But thank God He is unfair! Thank God we don't get what we deserve, but rather, that in Jesus crucified we get the opposite of what we deserve. We receive God's grace. Thank God for His outrageous forgiveness for undeserving sinners. Thank God that Jesus, who was perfect and sinless, became sin for us, so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God. In the Name ✝ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

MARCH 5, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the First Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 91:1-2, 9-10, 13; antiphon: v. 15a, c, 16)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 3:1-24; Mark 2:1-17

*I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
(From the Introit for the First Sunday in Lent)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow, on the First Sunday in Lent, many Lutheran churches will sing Martin Luther's famous Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress." At first, you might think this hymn is being sung a little out of season. After all, we typically sing it on Reformation Sunday in October. Strange as it may seem at first, "A Mighty Fortress" is a perfect hymn for the First Sunday in Lent.

In this hymn, we sing against the devil. As we did at our Baptism, we continue to renounce all his works and all his ways. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. So, we pick up this hymn as our Lenten war cry. When the devil throws our guilt and sins back in our face, or when he hurls his fiery darts of temptation our way, we sing, "A mighty fortress is our God!" In Jesus, our crucified and risen King, the devil is done. The ancient dragon is defeated. The serpent's head is trampled under the foot of Jesus crucified.

In this hymn, we echo the psalms: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1). Usually shadows are a bad thing. Dark deeds happen in the shadows. We live in the valley of the shadow of death. But the shadow of the Almighty is the shade of Jesus' Cross. Let sin, death, the devil, and this fallen world rage around you: In the wounds and words of Jesus, you are safe, secure, and saved.

In this hymn we also sing of God's sure and certain protection. The imagery of this hymn reflects the rich imagery of Scriptures, the psalms in particular. Throughout the psalms we find such beautiful, good, and true words like the ones we hear in Psalm 91. God is our mighty fortress. Jesus crucified is your refuge. His saving gifts of water, Word, Jesus' Body and Blood are our safe haven. His Holy Church is your ark and your shelter from the storm. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son my Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The First Sunday in Lent

MARCH 6, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 4:1-26; Mark 2:18-28

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is tempted three times. Tempted to turn stones into bread instead of relying upon the sustenance of God the Father's Word. Tempted to throw Himself down to His death instead of dying on the Cross. Tempted to bow down in idolatry instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in the Father above all things. Each and every one of Satan's lies and empty promises are met by Jesus' rebuke: "It is written." It is the Word of God made flesh and the Word He speaks that silences and chases away the devil.

Jesus is tempted three times. Sound familiar? Adam and Eve were tempted three times as well. Only they failed. They fell. They sinned. They swallowed the devil's lies. So do we. God's Word reveals that, like Adam and Eve, we're tempted, and fall into sin. Not just three times, but daily. We're tempted by our passions while at our computers. We're tempted with doubt and despair of God's promises when we have terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days. We're tempted by our pride to live as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. And like Adam and Eve, we fail, we fall, we sin.

This is why Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tempted, not for His own sake, but for yours. Jesus was tempted three times for all the times we are tempted. Jesus withstood temptation for all the times we fall into sin. Jesus overcame the devil's lies for all the times we have failed. Jesus was faithful for all of our unfaithfulness.

Where Adam and Eve, and each of us, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Jesus withstood temptation each and every time for you.

The battle Satan wages with Jesus in the wilderness is won in crucified victory on the Cross. And in Jesus crucified, all of our temptations, failures, and sins, are washed away in the blood of Jesus. For it is written, "It is finished." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the First Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the First Week of Lent

MARCH 7, 2022

Today's Reading: Genesis 3:1-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 6:1-7:5; Mark 3:1-19

Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. (Genesis 1:21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What's the first sacrifice in the Bible? Is it when Noah steps out of the ark onto the dry land of the new creation? Is it the animals or offerings of the field that Cain and Abel brought to the Lord? Those are all sacrifices, but they are not the first.

If you listen to the words of Genesis 3:21, it appears that the first sacrifice to cover sin follows closely on the heels of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. It seems like such a small verse. Like a small town you pass on the interstate. Blink and it's gone. The Lord God made tunics of skin and clothed Adam and his wife.

Clothing made of animal skins could only have come from one place. An animal gave its life to clothe naked, guilty, ashamed Adam and Eve. After the curses. After the promise of the Seed of the Woman who would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). God goes to work as a gracious tailor, exchanging Adam and Eve's fig leaves for a robe of sacrificial righteousness. They were covered by the death of an animal. A substitute. A sacrifice.

In the Scriptures, atonement for sin is always a bloody business. This unnamed animal here in Genesis 3. The sacrifices of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The countless sacrifices of Aaron and the Levites in the tabernacle and later the temple. It all points us to the great sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross for Adam and Eve and all creation, and for you.

Jesus, the innocent, holy, spotless Lamb of God is bruised, beaten, and bloodied on the Cross to save you. Like Adam and Eve you are clothed in the sacrifice of another. It wasn't an animal, but the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is your substitute. Your sacrifice.

Jesus dies that we might live. Jesus hangs naked on the Cross to clothe us in the robes of His righteousness. Jesus exchanges our filthy, sin-ridden garments with His holy, spotless garments of salvation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son my Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

MARCH 8, 2022

Today's Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 7:11-8:12; Mark 3:20-35

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

(2 Corinthians 6:2)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. When is the day of our salvation? Was it when Jesus died on the Cross and rose again? Was it the day of your Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection? Is it when you hear God's Word and receive His Holy Sacraments? The answer, Paul says, is "Yes. All of the above! Now is the day of salvation."

Ponder that for a moment. Your salvation happened the day Jesus was born for you. Your salvation happened when Jesus lived perfectly for you. Your salvation happened as Jesus died on the Cross for you. Your salvation happened when He rose from the grave on that first day of the week. Your salvation happened when He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. In God's gracious mystery revealed in Scripture, your salvation happened before the foundation of the world. And yet, Paul says, it also happens today. Now is the day of your salvation.

That means that your salvation happens, right now, as Jesus pleads for you, prays for you, and intercedes for you at the Father's right hand. Your salvation happens when you read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest His Holy Word. Your salvation happens when your pastor declares, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sin." Your salvation happens on the day of your Baptism and every day until our Lord returns in glory and raises us from the dead. Your salvation happens when you kneel and receive Jesus' Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

When God's Word fills your ears, now is the day of salvation. When you remember your Baptism, now is the day of salvation. When you eat and drink Jesus' Body and Blood, now is the day of your salvation.

Because Jesus was born, lived, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose again in the past, God's gifts to you are always present tense. Yesterday's sins, today's griefs, tomorrow's burdens. They are all answered and borne by Jesus crucified for you. And not only on the Cross, but also today. For now is the day of your salvation. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday of the First Week of Lent

MARCH 9, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Fourth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 8:13-9:17; Mark 4:1-20

Honor your father and mother. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.
(Small Catechism: Fourth Commandment)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. When it comes to the Ten Commandments, there are a few basic questions that we can ask ourselves every time we read them, whether in the Scriptures or in Luther's Small Catechism. Today's reading gives us the first basic question that follows each of the Ten Commandments. It's the quintessential catechism question: What does this mean? Thankfully, the catechism unpacks what it means to honor father and mother.

That leads us to the next helpful question: What gift is God giving us and protecting for us in this commandment? We might not think of God's commandments as gifts, but they certainly are. God's commandments diagnose our sin. They do damage control on a fallen world. And they discipline us, His people, in His ways. And behind all of that, the commandments also reveal God's divine, Fatherly goodness.

You see, God's Law is given because living in His ways and Word is how He gives us what is best for us. So, in the Fourth Commandment, God is giving us the gift of authority and vocation, and the gifts of family, parents, and other authorities. No matter where we go, no matter what we do, no matter who we are, we will always be under some kind of authority. Sadly, we know, sinful, fallen humanity has made a mess of God's gift of authority in every part of life, in the home, society, government, and even in the church. Why? Because every one of us is a sinner. Every one of us fails to honor father and mother. Every one of us breaks the Fourth Commandment.

This leads to the third, and most important question of all: How has Jesus kept this commandment for me? For every time we've broken the Fourth Commandment, Jesus perfectly honored, served, obeyed, loved, and cherished not only Mary and Joseph, but also His heavenly Father. He did this for you. Jesus kept the Fourth Commandment for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

MARCH 10, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 11:27-12:20; Mark 4:21-41

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. God is the God who calls. In the beginning God called out, "Let there be light," and there was light. God called Noah and saved his family in the ark. God called Israel out of Egypt and rescued them in the Exodus. God called David to be His anointed king and foreshadow the true Anointed King, Jesus. God called prophet after prophet until He finally called His only begotten Son.

All of this was foretold to Abram when God called him to leave his own country and go to the place God would show him. God is the God who calls. Here in Genesis 12, God calls Abram to faith. God gives him a promise: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God's promise to Abram is fulfilled and kept in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for you. That's right. God's promise to Abram is also God's promise to you. The God who called Abram also calls you. God is the God who calls.

God the Father calls you to faith in His Son Jesus by the Holy Spirit. And the same Lord who called His twelve disciples to follow Him calls you out of death and into life. You are called God's child in your Baptism. You are called out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light.

And just like Jesus' disciples, you are called to follow Him in whatever vocations He gives you throughout your life. God may not call you to leave your home country and family like He did Abram. But wherever He calls you to serve and love your neighbor, He will always be with you, just as He was with Abram. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, Who did cause the children of Israel to traverse the Red Sea dryshod; Thou Who did point out by a star to the Magi the road that led them to Thee; grant us we beseech Thee, a prosperous journey and propitious weather; so that, under the guidance of Thy holy angels we may safely reach that journey's end, and later the haven of eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday of the First Week of Lent

MARCH 11, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 13:1-18; Mark 5:1-20

The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever."

(Genesis 13:14-15)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Yesterday we heard how God called Abram. Today we hear how God gives to Abram. Even though Lot chose the proverbial greener grasses, God reveals that He is also the God who gives.

God tells Abram to look in every direction on the compass, north and south, east and west. "You see all that land, Abram? It's all yours. It's your inheritance and your descendants' inheritance."

God is the God who gives. God gives Abram a son: Isaac. God gives Isaac a son: Jacob. God gives Jacob a new name: Israel. God's gift and promise to Abram was starting to unfold. But God wasn't done giving yet. God gave Jacob many sons, one of whom was Joseph, who was eventually sold into slavery. And then, about 400 years later, God gave His children Israel His promise to rescue and deliver them out of bondage and slavery in Egypt. God gave them victory over Pharaoh and a path through the Red Sea. God gave them the tabernacle and sacrifices for sin. God gave them the Promised Land where one day, many, many years later, God would give His own Son to keep and fulfill the promises He made to Abram so long ago.

God gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. God is the God who gives. Jesus gives His perfect life in exchange for our failures and sins. Jesus gives His death on the Cross in exchange for the punishment we deserved. Jesus gives us His body into the grave and out again in the resurrection.

Jesus is still the God who gives. Jesus gives you a new name and makes you an offspring of Abram by faith delivered in water and Word by the Spirit. Jesus gives you His holy, saving Word of Absolution. Jesus gives you His Body and Blood in the Supper. Jesus gives you His Word and promise just like He did to Abram. And just like Abram, God is the God who gives His gifts to you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, we thank you for making the earth fruitful, so that it might produce what is needed for life: Bless those who work in the fields; give us seasonable weather; and grant that we may all share the fruits for the earth, rejoicing in your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

MARCH 12, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Second Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 25: 1-2a, 7-8, 11; antiphon: v. 6, 2b, 22)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 15:1-21; Mark 5:21-43

Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Let not my enemies exult over me. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.

(From the Introit for the Second Sunday in Lent)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. We generally think of remembering something as a purely mental activity. When it comes to God's remembering, however, it's more than a mental exercise. When God remembers, God acts. When Israel was enslaved in Egypt, God remembered and sent ten plagues followed by the rescue through the Red Sea. When Hannah prayed to God for a son, God remembered and acted. God gave Hannah a son, Samuel.

So the psalmist cries out, "Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old." When God remembers, He acts. We join the psalmist in praying these words by asking God not only to remember in His eternal, merciful mind, but also to act. To rescue. To save and deliver. And He does. God remembers. God acts. God sends His steadfast love incarnate. The God whose mercy is "from of old" becomes an infant just a few days old. The God who redeemed Israel with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm from Egypt, stretches out His arms on the Cross to redeem you. The God who remembered and acted to save Israel time and time again, remembers and acts to save you once and for all.

Do you remember what the thief on the cross said as they were hanging there dying? "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Remember me. Act. Save and deliver me. That is our prayer in our sin as well. That is our prayer in the hour of trial and distress. In our time of despair and doubt. In the face of death. Remember me, O Lord. Forgive me. Lord Jesus, Son of God remember me in your mercy. And He does. God remembers. God acts. Jesus is crucified for you. Risen for you. Ascended for you. Seated at the right hand of God for you where He lives and rules and reigns to remember, that is, to act eternally on your behalf. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Second Sunday in Lent

MARCH 13, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 15:21-28

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 16:1-9, 15-17:22; Mark 6:1-13

*"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."
(Matthew 15:27)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. She is desperate. She has no one to turn to. Her daughter is deeply oppressed by a demon. The woman is at the end of her rope. Jesus is all she has left. She heard He was coming into her region, the district of Tyre and Sidon, the far north coast county named after the great-grandson of Noah.

The problem is, she's a Canaanite. Canaanites were Gentiles, idolaters, enemies of Israel and God. She has no business talking to a Jewish rabbi. Yet somehow she knows Jesus can help. She's heard the stories of His healing and miracles. So she comes with all boldness and confidence: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David..." Strange words coming from the lips of a Canaanite. "Son of David" is Israelite talk. This is the language of the faithful expecting the promised Messiah.

But isn't that how it is for us, too? That we, who have no right to claim any favor from God, are given the right to be called sons of God. That's the promise of Holy Baptism. We were Gentiles, idolaters, and enemies of God. But then God threw us into the water, washed us, and gave us a new identity. We're transformed and given the faith of Abraham. Children of the promise. Heirs with Christ. We pray, "Our Father," in all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father.

We pray the same way the Canaanite woman did: "Yes, Lord. You're right about me. I am a poor, miserable, mangy, mutt of a sinner." And yet He cleanses you from all sin. Your Baptism is a divine flea bath, washing away all your sin.

Jesus gives more than a crumb. Jesus gives you Himself. Jesus became the outsider and the dog for you. Jesus died for the Canaanite woman and for you. Jesus died in humility in order to raise you up and seat you at His table, not as dogs but as His beloved Bride. Where we would settle for a crumb, Christ gives a feast, His Body and His Blood shed for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 14, 2022

Today's Reading: Genesis 32:22-32

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 18:1-15; Mark 6:14-34

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

(Genesis 32:28)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. No one likes losing. It doesn't matter if it's a job, a ballgame, a barroom brawl or Monopoly. You see, we follow the principle that if you're not first, you're last. Those are the ways of man.

But those are not the ways of God. When it comes to fighting with and for His people, God is the biggest and the happiest loser. For when God loses, we win; and when we win, God wins.

This is what happened back in Genesis 32. On the banks of the Jabbok Jacob wrestled with God. God got in the ring with Joseph and went all ten rounds. And to our surprise, Jacob won. God lost.

The remarkable thing is not that God appeared as a man, not that He picked a fight with Jacob, but that God lost. And here is the even more remarkable thing: God delighted in losing.

When God loses we win. That's the way it was for Jacob. "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have fought with God and have prevailed." Jacob is given a new name: Israel, the God-fighter. He saw God face to face and lived. God works the same for you. When God loses, you win. Look no further than the Cross where Christ, who is first, became last for our sakes.

Jesus turns the world upside down. No Cross, no glory. No death, no resurrection. Good Friday must come before Easter. And if you try to save your life on your own terms you'll lose it forever. If you lose your life for Jesus' sake you'll find it. That's the paradox of the Gospel. The Cross is Christ's glory and yours. Losing is living. Dying is life.

Christ comes ready to fight for our very lives. Jesus is not content until He has wrestled away every last sin from you and given you every last blessing of His. For when Jesus loses His life for you on the Cross, you gain everything in Him. And when He rises victoriously from the grave, death loses once again. And in Jesus you are alive. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven; Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 15, 2022

Today's Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 21:1-21; Mark 6:35-56

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Sanctification is the word of the day from Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians. Sanctification means “to make holy.” If you look at church history, you’ll notice that a lot of ink has been spilled about the Scripture’s teaching on sanctification, and the Christian life of good works. Some say that good works are required for salvation, like paying for tickets to ride a rollercoaster at the fair. Some say that good works are harmful to our salvation, because we might be tempted to use them like a crutch. Notice the problem in both errors about sanctification and good works: They both focus the Christian inwardly, back to our navel-gazing ways.

Paul, however, points us to the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our sanctification. It is the will of God, he writes. That’s the way it is with anything that is called holy. It all comes from, is supported by, and happens through the work of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s Word is holy, for it comes from Him who is holy. God’s gifts of Absolution, Baptism, and the Supper are holy because they are filled with His Holy Word, promise, and life.

Anything that is holy comes from God. The same is true of our sanctification, or our life of good works. We are God’s holy people because we have been declared and made holy in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy One of Israel.

When we look in the mirror, we see an unholy mess. Sexual immorality, lust, unbelief, stealing from others, and the list of our uncleanness goes on, Paul writes.

Thankfully, that list is wiped clean, and you are made holy by the blood of Jesus crucified. God gave His Son to live a holy, sanctified life for you. Jesus died an unholy death to clothe you in His holiness. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son to work faith in your heart, and holiness in your life. Rejoice, for your salvation and your sanctification are the will and work of God. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of Hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hand pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 16, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Fifth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 22:1-19; Mark 7:1-23

You shall not murder. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

(Small Catechism: Fifth Commandment)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Last week when we read about the Fourth Commandment, we reflected upon three questions: What does this commandment mean? What gift of God is He protecting and providing for us in this commandment? And, how does Jesus keep this commandment for us? The meaning of the Fifth Commandment goes deeper than we might expect. At first, we might think, "I've never murdered anyone! I'm good to go. Kept that commandment; now onto the next." Not so fast. The catechism helps us unpack the meaning of this commandment. It is not enough that we have refrained from murdering our neighbor.

Jesus also teaches us that whoever hates his brother in his heart has broken this commandment as well. That is to say, there's an inward spiritual dimension to this commandment, not only an outward action. We easily break the Fifth Commandment without ever picking up a weapon to murder someone. Not only that, we fail to keep this commandment when we do not help and support our neighbor in their physical need. And that's the answer to our second question. God gives the Fifth Commandment to protect and preserve His gift of our physical body and our bodily needs. This is what we pray for in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

This is also why we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses." For we have failed to keep this commandment as well. In thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone, we have broken the Fifth Commandment. What we deserve is the death sentence for our sins. Only that's not what we receive. Remember that important third question: How does Jesus keep this commandment for me? Jesus keeps both sides of this commandment, the inward and the outward parts. By His every thought, word, and deed, Jesus kept the Fifth Commandment for you. And on the Cross, He left nothing undone to save you, body and soul. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, you know that we have no power to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Patrick, Missionary to Ireland

MARCH 17, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:1-31; Mark 7:24-37

And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

(Mark 7:33-34)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. “Ephphatha. Be opened.” This is what happens when Jesus, the Word made flesh, speaks. Jesus’ Word opens. A little water in the form of spit united with His creative, does-what-He-says Word, and, “Open sesame!” The deaf man could hear. The mute man spoke. Jesus opened this man’s ears and loosed his tongue. Jesus’ Word opens.

Today the Church remembers and gives thanks to God for St. Patrick, missionary to Ireland. The same Lord who opened the deaf-mute man’s ears and mouth, also opened the mouth of St. Patrick to declare the praises and Good News of Christ crucified and risen to the Irish people. And there, too, God opened their hearts and minds by sending His Word and Spirit to create faith in Jesus.

Our Lord does the same thing for you as well. It doesn’t matter if you’re Irish or not, or whether or not you’re wearing any green at all. Our Lord has worked his *Ephphatha* for you, too. Jesus’ hands, feet, and side were opened on the Cross to save you from sin, death, and darkness. Jesus opened His grave on Easter Sunday so that your grave will one day be opened again when He returns in glory. Jesus opened heaven for you when you were baptized by water, Word, and the Spirit. There, just as He did for the deaf-mute man, Jesus opened heaven for you.

O Lord, open our lips to rejoice with St. Patrick: Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger. “I bind unto myself today The strong Name of the Trinity, By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three” (“I Bind unto Myself Today” LSB 604, st.1). In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You chose your servant Patrick to be a missionary to the Irish people who were wandering in darkness and error. You bound unto them the trinitarian name through Baptism and faith that they might dwell in the light of Christ. Bind unto us this same strong name of the Trinity as we remember our Baptism and walk in His light, that we may come to dwell at last in the eternal light of the presence of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Friday of the Second Week of Lent

MARCH 18, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 24:32-52, 61-67; Mark 8:1-21

“And this day I came to the well and said, ‘O Lord God of my master Abraham, if You will now prosper the way in which I go, behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass that when the virgin comes out to draw water, and I say to her, ‘Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink.’”
(Genesis 24:42-43)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There’s something in the water when it comes to wells in the Bible. In Genesis 24, Abraham sends his servant to find a bride from among his kinsmen for his son Isaac. Eventually, the servant returned home to Isaac with his bride-to-be, Rebekah. Later on, in Genesis 29, Isaac’s son, Jacob, meets his future wife, Rachel, at—you guessed it—the well.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman, an outsider, at, of all places, a well. Only this time, the Offspring of Abraham isn’t at the well to find a bride, but to show this woman, and all who call on His Name, that He is our heavenly Bridegroom, come to save us all by His life, death, and resurrection.

At the well in John 4, Jesus is fulfilling the promise God made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all believers of all time and place. Jesus is that Promised Seed, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Bridegroom who has come to save us, His lost, wayward, faithless Bride. Jesus sat next to that Samaritan woman at the well, not only for her sake, but for yours as well.

“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13,14).

The well of Genesis 24 gives way to a far deeper well, where the water of life flows freely out of Jesus’ wounded side on the Cross. Water and blood flows into the font and the chalice. And out of this wellspring of eternal life Jesus makes for Himself a Holy Bride: you, His baptized, beloved people. Indeed, there’s something in the water of your Baptism: the Word and promise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turned us from the old life of sin: Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in righteousness and holiness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

MARCH 19, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:1-29; Mark 8:22-38

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy him." (Matthew 2:13)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The last time an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, he was told not to be afraid. He was to take Mary as his wife. The child in her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. His Name is Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins, the angel told him. All was going according to God's plan of salvation.

Now, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph again. This time Joseph is warned in a dream to take the Christ Child and Mary, flee to Egypt, and escape Herod's treacherous, murderous plot to kill Jesus, the one born King of the Jews. And just as he did before, Joseph listened to the angel's word.

We don't often pay attention to Joseph. This, on the one hand, is good. Joseph isn't the center of the story, Jesus is. On the other hand, it is good to remember and give thanks to God for Joseph, guardian of Jesus. For God gave Joseph an important part to play in the story of our salvation.

It's quite the title, if you think about it: Guardian of Jesus. Wait, what? God Incarnate needs a guardian? Yes, He did. That's the joy and mystery of Christmas, but also of Lent and Easter. You see, God sent Joseph to be Mary's husband, and Jesus' guardian, so that when the time came to flee Egypt, he would be there to safeguard the Son of God and His mother. God sent Joseph to be Jesus' guardian so that in fleeing Herod's wrath, Jesus would one day grow up and go to the Cross to bear God's wrath for us. God sent Joseph to be Jesus' guardian so that Jesus would go to Jerusalem to be crucified under Pontius Pilate for you. God sent Joseph to be Jesus' guardian so that Jesus, the rightful King, would rule and reign from His crib to the Cross, and into all eternity, for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, from the house of Your servant David You raised up Joseph to be the guardian of Your incarnate Son and the husband of His mother, Mary. Grant us grace to follow the example of this faithful workman in heeding Your counsel and obeying Your commands; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Third Sunday in Lent

MARCH 20, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 11:14-28

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 27:30-45; 28:10-22; Mark 9:1-13

*"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when one stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."
(Luke 11:21-22)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. "He is possessed by Beelzebub and by the prince of demons he casts out demons" (Mark 3:22). It's the ultimate Old Testament insult: If you don't like what someone says, call 'em the devil. In the Old Testament Beelzebub was a Caananite god, the lord of the flies, the god of dung. A crass euphemism for the ruler of death. Eventually it became another name for Satan. The Scribes are accusing Jesus of being in league with the devil, like in an old country song. Problem is, that's most illogical. Divided kingdoms don't stand. Divided houses fall. If Satan is actually opposed to himself, then his days are over.

Jesus didn't join the devil's ranks. He came to defeat the devil. And it's a good thing He did. Like Adam and Eve, we're guilty of treason. "Fast bound in Satan's chains we lay" ("Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" LSB 556, st.2). That's why Jesus, the rightful King, lands in enemy occupied territory. Jesus comes for you. To your rescue. To save you. It's a great invasion, and Bethlehem is the beachhead. The wilderness temptation is a key battleground and skirmishes break out all over. Demons are cast out in Capernaum, Galilee, and Gerasene. Jesus is on the move, headed toward Jerusalem and the Cross, the last battle.

Jesus dies the same way He is born: in humility and utter helplessness. "He must be crazy. So weak. How foolish," the world cries out. But the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisest men. And the weakness of God is stronger than both men and the devil. So, this is Jesus' battle plan: "Bind the strong man" and plunder his goods. Jesus does what we are unable and unwilling to do. Jesus the Burglar comes in human flesh, ties up the devil, storms the dragon's lair and reclaims you, His rightful treasure. We're the plunder the Divine Thief carries off after He's tied up the strong man. We who were once dogs, rebels, and sinners are now Jesus' greatest treasure in the Cross. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 21, 2022

Today's Reading: Exodus 8:16-24

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 29:1-30; Mark 9:14-32

Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.
(Exodus 8:19)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. God's finger brought judgment upon Pharaoh and all his idols. Flies and lice soon gave way to darkness, and eventually death, save for those Israelites whose doorposts were covered by the blood of the Passover lamb.

Pharaoh, however, isn't the only one whose hands have wrought wickedness and sin. We may not worship Ra or Amun like the Egyptians did, but make no mistake, we have our own idols all the same. Who or what is it that we look to for all our good? Who or what is it that we fear, love, and trust in above all things? Because of all the sin our hands and fingers, and sinful hearts have worked, we, too, deserve the wrath of the finger of God.

But that's not what happened. Israel was saved from God's wrath by the blood of the passover lamb. You are saved by the One who is the Passover Lamb of God in human flesh: Jesus Christ. What's more, you are saved by the very same fingers of God that saved Israel in the Exodus.

That's right, in Jesus, the Son of God and son of Mary, God has ten human fingers that touched and healed the sick. Fingers that took bread and broke it and gave it to His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed. Fingers that writhed in pain as Jesus hung on the Cross to pay for all the sin our hands have wrought.

The finger of God brought wrath and judgment to Pharaoh and Egypt. But in Jesus, God's fingers have brought you life and salvation forever. God rescued His children of Israel, just as He promised, through the blood on the doorposts, and the water of the Exodus. Our Lord Jesus does the same for each of us as well. He paints the doorposts of our mouth with His Holy Body and Blood and He saves us from bondage to sin, death, and the devil through the Red Sea of your Baptism. So whenever you see the Scriptures, the font, and the altar, you, too, can say, "This is the finger of God come to save me." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Look upon the heart-felt desires of your humble servants, Almighty God, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 22, 2022

Today's Reading: Ephesians 5:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 35:1-29; Mark 9:33-50

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth). (Ephesians 5:8-9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Darkness in Scripture is always more than the physical absence of light. It is a spiritual darkness, too. The presence of disorder, chaos, and wanton evil. The darkness of sin. The shadow of death. The tenebrous shroud that overshadows God's creation which was once proclaimed, "very good."

We live in darkness. A fallen world full of fallen men, who, Jesus declares, "love the darkness rather than the Light" (John 3:19). Humanity follows the broken compass of our fallen flesh, a needle constantly pointed inward, drawn by the gravity of our sinful, selfish desires. Such is the darkness of fallen mankind, a mind, will, and heart of darkness whose thoughts are continually evil. No wonder that C.S. Lewis, when writing his science-fiction space trilogy, called earth the "silent planet." Silent and dark.

Notice Paul's choice of verbs. Once you were darkness. Past tense. Now you are light in the Lord. Present, indicative tense. In Christ, who is the Light of the world, our past sin and darkness have been changed into an eternally present reality: You are light in the Lord Jesus.

Unlike our love that so often fades, God's brilliant love for us in Christ does not flicker. His grace and mercy to you cannot be snuffed out. Christ's peace is no rolling blackout whose light comes and goes. No. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, the Light no darkness can overcome. In His birth for us, His life for us, His death and resurrection for us, we have received God's true, enduring, endless, and eternal Light.

In Jesus, you are a child of the light. You are a city set on a hill. Do not hide who you are, but "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Reflect the light of Christ as you share the Good News of Jesus, born for you, with your friends, coworkers, and neighbors. This, too, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 23, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Sixth Commandment

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 37:1-36; Mark 10:1-12

You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in all we say and do, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.

(Small Catechism: Sixth Commandment)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul writes, “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” Paul’s words give us a good summary of Luther’s explanation to the Sixth Commandment. Whether you are married, engaged, dating, or single, God calls you to be chaste—to honor our bodies in all stations of life.

The Sixth Commandment isn’t God’s way of being a spoilsport. No, like all the other commandments, God gives this one for our good. In the Sixth Commandment God is protecting and preserving for us His gift of marriage and human sexuality. Sadly, like all of God’s other gifts, sinful, fallen humanity has made a royal mess of this commandment and gift as well, through adultery, pornography, homosexuality—the list goes on.

Scripture reveals the truth that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us have broken the Sixth Commandment. All of us have abused or misused or taken for granted God’s gift of marriage and human sexuality.

It might seem like the Sixth Commandment is the worst or biggest commandment we could break. And yet, even for our sins against this commandment, there is forgiveness. No matter how great our sins are against this or any other commandment, Christ’s purity and holiness and faithfulness for you are far greater. Jesus led a pure and decent life in all He said and did for you. Jesus went to the Cross, revealing the depth of the Father’s love and His compassion to save you.

Indeed, you were bought with a price. In Jesus crucified, you are forgiven, redeemed, cleansed, and restored. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 24, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 39:1-23; Mark 10:13-31

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. (Genesis 39:2)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Even though he was thrown in a pit by his brothers. Even though he was sold into slavery. Even though his father Jacob thought he was dead. Even though he was hounded by temptation and sin by Potiphar's wife, thrown into prison, a long, long way from home down in Egypt. Even through all that, the Lord was with Joseph.

The Lord never stopped being with Joseph. In the next chapter of Genesis we hear that God gave Joseph the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, and, in doing so, was able to prepare the land for a great famine.

The Lord was with Joseph so that through him, Egypt, and even his own family, would find food when it became scarce. The Lord was with Joseph and brought about reconciliation between him and his brothers. What they meant for evil, God used for their good.

And not only their good, but yours. Because the Lord was with Joseph, the people of Israel ended up in Egypt for over 400 years. Because Israel was in Egypt, the Lord rescued them in the Exodus and delivered them to the Promised Land. Because Israel was in the Promised Land, God brought about the passing of time through the period of judges, kings, a divided kingdom, exile, and return, preparing the way for the long-expected Messiah. And in the fullness of time the God who was with Joseph in Egypt was born to be our Immanuel, God with us.

Like Joseph before him, Jesus even spent some time in exile in Egypt that He would rescue us all from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. Like Joseph before us, God is with us, too. When we are tempted to sin, the Lord is with us. When we fall into temptation, the Lord is with us to bring us to repentance and forgiveness. When we were in bondage to slavery and captive in the pit of death, Jesus was with us, just as He was with Joseph, to rescue, redeem, and restore us.

And the same Lord who was with Joseph and with us in human flesh still dwells with us in His Word, water, Body and Blood. No matter what, the Lord is with you. Today. Tomorrow. Forever. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Keep watch over your church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Annunciation of Our Lord

MARCH 25, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 40:1-23; Mark 10:32-52

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
(Luke 1:31-33)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. An angel, the Virgin Mary, and the message that the Savior is soon to be born? Aren't we in the middle of the season of Lent? What's going on here? No, you didn't read the calendar wrong. Today the Church remembers and gives thanks to God for the angel Gabriel's annunciation of Jesus' birth to the Virgin Mary. There might still be nine months to go until Christmas Day, but in many ways, Lent is a wonderful time to remember the Annunciation of our Lord.

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' crucifixion for us, we pause to celebrate His birth for us. As we prepare for the joy of Easter and Christ's resurrection, we stop to remember the joy of His incarnation for us. As we prepare to celebrate with the angels at the empty tomb of our risen Lord, we pause to remember the message of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary.

It might seem odd to us, celebrating the Annunciation of Our Lord as we prepare to celebrate Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. And yet, for Christians in the ancient Church, this made perfect sense. The date of the Annunciation of Our Lord is March 25th because many in the early Church believed Jesus' crucifixion occurred on that date. Additionally, many people in the ancient world linked the day of a person's conception with the day of their death. So, when we celebrate the Annunciation of our Lord in March, in the middle of Lent, the Church is remembering both the Incarnation of Jesus and the crucifixion of Jesus, two events that reveal our Lord's great love, grace, and salvation for us.

So today, with Mary, we rejoice that God has done and accomplished and made possible what we deemed impossible: His virgin birth and His death and resurrection to save us. Let it be to us, according to His Word! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, as we have known the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the message of the angel to the virgin Mary, so by the message of His cross and passion bring us to the glory of His resurrection; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Saturday of the Third Week of Lent

MARCH 26, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 122:1-2, 6, 8; antiphon: Isaiah 66:10a, 11a)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 41:1-27; Mark 11:1-19

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
(From the Introit for the Fourth Sunday in Lent)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Psalm 122 is one of several ascent psalms in the psalter, the Old Testament hymnal. In this psalm, God's faithful people would sing His praises as they made their way to the temple, the Lord's house, to receive the Lord's gifts.

Tomorrow in Divine Service we will sing or say together the Introit, taken from Psalm 122. As we sing or say these words together, God is gathering His Church, the new Israel, around His Gifts of Word, water, Body and Blood. As we sing or say these words together we are in the house of the Lord where the Lord has promised to dwell with us to heal, forgive, and save us.

Even the word "Introit" tells us what's going on. "Introit" means "to enter." In the Divine Service that's what we do. We enter the Lord's house on the Lord's Day to receive the Lord's Gifts in Word and Sacrament.

It is good for us to sing the psalms of ascent as we approach our Lord's table, because all too often we have not ascended to our Lord in praise, but have descended into sin. In our sinful flesh we descend into chaos; we sing the funeral dirge that our sins have earned. We confess that we are poor, miserable sinners. This confession of our sin may not be popular or pretty, but it is good. That's why we confess our sins just before the Introit of the day.

We start with confession, then receive the Absolution. For all the times we've descended into sin, Christ's forgiveness and love have descended to us to save us. Jesus went up to the Cross, was crucified, died, and was buried. Jesus descended into hell, and on the Third Day rose again. He ascended into heaven. He did all of this so that when you descend into sin, you will be forgiven. And you will sing with joy tomorrow and forever. I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

MARCH 27, 2022

Today's Reading: John 6:1-15

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 41:28-57; Mark 11:20-33

Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

(John 6:10)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Ever heard a song, watched a movie, or read a book, and afterwards thought, "That sounds familiar; where have I heard that before?" Sometimes we call that feeling *deja vu*, the feeling that you've been there or heard something before.

There's something of a *deja vu* moment happening in today's reading from John 6. Consider some of the details of the feeding of the 5000 here in John's Gospel. There's a crowd following Jesus. They're in the wilderness near a mountain. It's close to the time of the Passover. The crowds are hungry. Jesus has the crowds sit down on the green pastures. He gives thanks. Jesus miraculously feeds over 5000; there are even leftovers. And to top it all off, Jesus is called the Prophet who is coming into the world.

That all sounds rather familiar doesn't it? Like we've heard that story before. Indeed we have, in Exodus and Psalm 23. John's account of the feeding of the 5000 comes out of God's cookbook in the Old Testament Exodus. John reveals that Jesus is Moses 2.0, not a new lawgiver, but the Prophet who was foretold. The Prophet who would be like Moses and come after him and turn the hearts of the people to God.

Coincidence? Of course not. The good things that God called Moses to do, and accomplished through Moses, point forward to the Prophet of God come in human flesh: Jesus. But of course we know that Jesus is a prophet—He speaks and teaches and foretells God's Word. But unlike any other prophet, Jesus is the one Prophet who not only speaks for God, but IS God. He not only declares God's Word, He is the Word made flesh.

Jesus' words give life. Jesus' Body and Blood are our true Bread from heaven come down to save, forgive, and heal. Jesus is truly the Prophet who has come into the world to save you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 28, 2022

Today's Reading: Exodus 16:2-21

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 42:1-34, 38; Mark 12:1-12

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"
(Exodus 16:11-12)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Yahweh provided bread from heaven. The food of angels, they called it. "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you, declares the Lord, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion for every day" (Exodus 16:4).

Israel didn't have to work for this bread. No labor, planting, or harvesting. No sweaty brows, calloused hands, or sore backs. All they had to do was go outside their tents and there it was. Manna in the wilderness. Yahweh provided just enough for each day—no more, no less.

And yet Israel still grumbled against the Lord: "We loathe this worthless food. Why did you bring us out into the wilderness to die? Would that we were in Egypt where we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full." Bread couldn't save Adam. The bread from heaven that God gave through Moses couldn't save Israel, either. And neither will Adam or Moses save us.

For like Adam, we have hungered and thirsted for self-righteousness. We have labored to fill our bellies with the food of this world. Like Israel, we've grumbled and groaned against God's grace. We've pushed aside the Lord's bread to get all we can eat at the world's buffet. We foolishly think that slavery to sin looks more appetizing and satisfying than the Bread of life that God offers freely.

As Jesus tells the crowds in John 6, "Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died." That's the problem. Like Adam and Israel, we eat bread to our death. Ordinary bread won't save us.

The bread that Jesus gives, however, is completely different. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51). The next time you go to the Lord's Supper, rejoice! In Jesus' Body and Blood you have true Manna from heaven. Eat this bread and live forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord our God, in your Holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell forever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 29, 2022

Today's Reading: Galatians 4:21-31

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 43:1-28; Mark 12:13-27

The Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

(Galatians 4:26)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Church father Cyprian once wrote that, "No one can have God as his Father, who does not have the Church as his mother." St. Augustine and Martin Luther would later quote these famous words as well. Cyprian wasn't saying anything new, though. He was quoting Paul here in Galatians.

The Jerusalem above, the Mother of us all, is free (Galatians 4:26). How is the Church our Mother? Think about all the ways a mother cares for her child. Even before a child is born, he is cared for in her womb and, Lord willing, brought safely through childbirth. So, too, in the Church we are born from above by water, Word and the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism. God works faith in our hearts by His Word just as He creates life in the womb.

Our earthly mothers then go on to feed us, care for us, love and nurture us. So, too, in the Church, God our Father provides the daily bread of His Holy Word, Holy Absolution, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. In His Gifts of Word and Sacrament in the Church God feeds us, cares for us, loves us, and nurtures us.

As we grow older, our earthly mothers and fathers discipline us, teach us many things needful for our life, and most of all, lead us in the ways and words of our heavenly Father. The same thing happens in the Church, the new Jerusalem. The free gifts of life and salvation are given to us. We are children of the promise, just as Isaac was. And yes, at times we are disciplined. And at other times we are instructed in many things from the Scriptures, as in confirmation or Bible class.

In these ways, our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit, leads us in His ways and words throughout our life. And in this holy Christian Church you are freely forgiven, and live to freely love one another as Christ first loved us. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turned us from the old life of sin: Grant that we, being reborn to new life in him, may live in righteousness and holiness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 30, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: Seventh Commandment*

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 44:1-18, 32-34; Mark 12:28-44

You shall not steal. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income. (Small Catechism: Seventh Commandment)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Small Catechism is full of questions and answers, like the famous catechism question, "What does this mean?" Whenever we spend time unpacking the meaning of the commandments and their explanations, it's also helpful to ask a few additional questions. What gift of God is being preserved and protected by God in the Seventh Commandment? How have we failed to keep this commandment? And, most important of all, how does Jesus keep this commandment for us?

Luther's short but insightful explanation reveals the meaning of the Seventh Commandment. It also reveals the gift of God in this commandment: our possessions and earthly blessings, or, in other words, our stuff. Everything we have from the kicks on our feet, to the lid on our dome, is all a gift from God.

When we come to the Seventh Commandment, it's easy to think, "Well, I haven't been arrested for grand theft auto or stolen anything lately, so I'm good to go." Not so fast! Have we always helped our neighbor to improve his possessions and income? Have we taken a pencil from school? Spent five more minutes at our lunch break at work than we should have? And the list goes on. Not one of us can say we've perfectly kept the Seventh Commandment.

Thankfully, while it's true that we have broken the Seventh Commandment, it's also true that our Lord Jesus kept this commandment perfectly in our place. How so? Consider Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 8:10: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

You see, everything in all creation belongs to our Lord Jesus. And yet He provides for all our physical needs. And more than that, he uses the stuff of His creation—water, word, bread and wine—to give us heavenly treasures of His grace in His holy, precious Word and Sacraments as well. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Joseph, Patriarch

MARCH 31, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 45:1-20, 24-28; Mark 13:1-23

*"I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life."
(Genesis 45:4-5)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. There are many Old Testament people whose lives foreshadow and point us to the person and work of Jesus. Jesus says that His death and resurrection are foretold in Jonah's three-day rest in the belly of the fish. Jesus says that His own body is the new and greater temple. Jesus declares that Abraham saw and believed in Him long before His incarnation for us. Joseph the patriarch is no different.

Consider just a few of the many ways Joseph's life foreshadows and points us to the life and work of Jesus. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and left for dead. Jesus is betrayed by one of His own disciples so that He would be left for dead on the Cross. Joseph went down to Egypt to provide for the people of Egypt as well as for His own family. Jesus also went down to Egypt with His earthly family so that when He returned to Nazareth after Herod's death, He would begin His life and ministry that would provide life and salvation not just for Israel, but for all nations. Joseph tells his brothers that what they meant for evil, God worked for good. Jesus, our greater Joseph, takes all the sin and evil that we have worked onto Himself on the Cross, and there, He works the greatest good for us in His crucifixion for us.

Today, as we remember and give thanks to God for Joseph the patriarch, we are also giving thanks to God and remember the grace and mercy of God which kept Joseph. For the same Lord who watched over Joseph in prison, slavery, and famine, is the same Lord who watches over you in all trials and travails of this life. Like Joseph, Jesus the greater Joseph was sent by God. The Father has sent His Son Jesus before us to preserve our lives, now and forever. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord God, heavenly Father, in the kingdom of Egypt the needy and suffering people were told to go to Joseph and do all that he shall say to them. May the needy and suffering people in the kingdom of Your Church now be provided for by those who follow in the example of Joseph as they love their neighbors as themselves; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent

APRIL 1, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 47:1-31; Mark 13:24-37

So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly.

(Genesis 47:27)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Israelites were tempted to think that their time in Egypt was one of glory and ease, and that they had deserved the possessions they had and land they dwelled in. But of course, we know how the story goes. As we learned yesterday, all the good things that happened to Joseph were not because he was a perfect, deserving guy. Far from it. In truth, everything Joseph had done and received in life—the dreams, the ascent to Pharaoh's court, and so on—was accomplished by God's grace.

The same was true for the people of Israel. Even when they were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, the grace of God watched over and was with them. God waited for the perfect time when He would lead his servant Moses to take His people Israel out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land. And along the way there, the grace of God accompanied His people all the more. The Passover lamb. The Red Sea Exodus. The manna and quail in the wilderness. The water from the rock. The Divine Service of the Old Testament in the sacrifices of the tabernacle. It was all given and accomplished by the grace of God for His people.

The same is true for you. It's tempting to think that we are entitled to God's mercy. That we deserve His grace. That we have earned His favor. Just like Israel, we are tempted to look at our thoughts, emotions, and works as a ladder we try to use to ascend to God, or some kind of assurance that we are loved by God. And just like Israel, we are dead wrong. That's the real kind of slavery: slavery to sin.

Thankfully, God has compassion on us as He did for Israel. Only He didn't send Joseph or even Moses. God the Father sent His only-begotten Son, so that in Jesus we would possess everything God desires to give us: His grace, mercy, peace, life, and salvation. Everything we have, all our gifts of body and soul, are given to us by God's grace in Christ Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O God, you have given us the good news of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

APRIL 2, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

(Psalm 43:3-5; antiphon: v. 1-2a)

Daily Lectionary: Genesis 49:29-50:7, 14-26; Mark 14:1-11

Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!

(From the Introit for the Fifth Sunday in Lent)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Throughout Holy Scripture, God does some of His most important work on mountain tops. God brought Noah and the ark to rest on the mountains of Ararat. God spared Abraham's son, his only son Isaac, from sacrifice on Mount Moriah. God gave his Torah to Moses and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai. God dwelled with and for His people in the glory and the sacrifices on Mount Zion. As good as these things were, we haven't even approached the summit of God's mountainous grace.

For that we must hike to where the Torah, psalms, and prophets lead us: to Jesus, God's incarnate mountain man. Jesus feeds the multitudes and prays on the mountain sides of Judea. Jesus is transfigured on a mountain top as He and Moses and Elijah talk about His exodus to come in Jerusalem. Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and prays with His disciples on the Mount of Olives before He walks His own Cross, and all of our sin, to the top of Mount Calvary, Golgotha, the peak of His glory, in crucifixion for you. So it should come as no surprise that when Jesus ascends to heaven, He does so on a mountaintop. And one day, He will return again so that what was written in the book of Hebrews will be fully seen and rejoiced in as we dwell on Mount Zion forever.

"For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore...But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:18-24). In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

APRIL 3, 2022

Today's Reading: John 8:46-59

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 1:1-22; Mark 14:12-31

*[Jesus said,] "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."
(John 8:51)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Do you ever think that terrible things can't happen to you? Car accidents may happen to other people, but not to you. Horrible illnesses may happen to other people, but not to you. Bullies may take advantage of other people, but not of you. The devil and your own sinful mind tempt you to believe that you're invincible and that nothing can hurt you. But the truth is different from that. The truth is that bad things will happen to you since you live in this sinful world. One of those bad things, according to your human perspective, is death.

But Jesus makes a bold statement: If you keep His Word, you will not see death. If you keep Jesus' Word, you are invincible. This isn't just the hopefulness of a young person, but the promise of the fully incarnate God in the flesh. When Jesus says that you will never see death, He means it. That can be hard to wrap your head around today. We are drawing closer and closer to Good Friday. Some churches have a special focus on the Cross and the Passion of Jesus for the next two weeks. And that's right, since we preach Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). Jesus died and has given you His Word so that you will never see death.

But that conflicts with common sense, doesn't it? It seems that everyone dies. But Jesus promises that those who keep His Word won't see death. So do you believe in your common sense, or do you believe Jesus? Whatever your common sense says, Jesus declares that you are invincible in Him, because "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). You live in Jesus Christ, because He has made it so. He is your Lord, the One who rules over all things and calls you His very own. He has promised that you will never see eternal death because of His goodness and mercy for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent)

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 4, 2022

Today's Reading: Genesis 22:1-14

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 2:1-33; Mark 14:32-52

*"God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."
(Genesis 22:8)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What does God expect of you? Does He expect a perfect life? Or maybe He wants proof of your faithfulness by seeing what a great job you do of telling other people about Jesus. Certainly, God doesn't expect you to offer animal sacrifices anymore, but sometimes you might wonder if more time, more money, or more of your skills at church or at youth group are going to impress God. Maybe you're already shaking your head and saying, "That's not how God works." That doesn't mean that you aren't sometimes tempted to prove your faithfulness to God. And that makes you ask, "What does God want? What can I give God?"

Isaac asked a normal, innocent question. "We have everything we need except the lamb for the sacrifice." Where were they going to get that? In the remote mountains, there wasn't a grocery store or a "Sacrifices 'R' Us" store for Abraham and Isaac to get a sacrificial lamb. How was this going to work? Abraham's answer was literally, "God will see the lamb." While many translations say something like "God will provide the lamb," or "God will see to the lamb," the clearest understanding is that God will see the lamb.

God did see the lamb, but it wasn't a fluffy, white lamb carried to the top of the mountain. It wasn't Isaac, the only son of his father, Abraham. It wasn't even the ram caught in the thicket by its horns. The Lamb that God saw was His own Son, Jesus Christ. The only-begotten Son of God was the Lamb given so that all who believe in His Name would not perish but have eternal life. God sees Jesus as the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for you.

Where's your sacrifice? You already have one. God sees the Lamb whom He has sent to take away the sin of the world. You don't need to prove yourself to God. You don't need to do anything to earn His grace, and God won't remove His grace if you don't do the right thing to thank Him. He has provided His Son for you, and that settles the matter. God has seen His ever-present grace for you. God has not withheld His Son from you, and that's all you need. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The dying Lord our ransom paid, One final full self-off'ring made, Complete in ev'ry part. His finished sacrifice for sins The covenant of grace begins, The law within the heart. ("No Temple Now, No Gift of Price" LSB 530, st.2)

Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 5, 2022

Today's Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 2:23-3:22; Mark 14:53-72

[Jesus] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Blood makes people squeamish. Some people faint or pass out at the sight of blood. Few people like to look at blood. Blood has a unique smell, a slick, sticky feel. Kinda grosses you out, doesn't it? But throughout Scripture, blood is a big deal. From Abel's blood crying out to God from the ground in Genesis 4, to the blood of the Passover lambs being collected in bowls and smeared on door frames, to the blood sprinkled in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, even on the mercy seat on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, blood is all over the Old Testament. Aren't you glad that there isn't blood-talk in the New Testament?

Well, that's when the writer of Hebrews breaks your hopefulness and points out the importance of the blood of Jesus Himself. There's nothing distant or far away about that. Just when you thought you got those squeamish, bloody thoughts out of your head, here they are again. It's important for you to know and to remember that Jesus has blood, as gross as that seems. Leviticus 17:11 says, "The life is in the blood," and it's why God commanded His people not to eat meat with blood in it. But Jesus, the fully enfleshed God, came with real flesh and real blood. That real blood, full of the life of the Son of God, was poured out for you and brings you forgiveness of all your sins. It covers you as one of God's saints whose robe has been made white in the blood of the Lamb of God.

It's serious business that Jesus shed His blood for His saints, and He gives that Blood alongside His Body to strengthen your faith, to forgive your sins, and to bring life and immortality to light. Is blood yucky? Maybe, but the blood of Jesus Christ is what you count on to save your life, because your life is in the blood of Jesus, shed for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, Takes all our sins away; A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they. ("Not All the Blood of Beasts" LSB 431, st.2)

Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 6, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism: Eighth Commandment*

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 4:1-18; Mark 15:1-15

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" (Exodus 4:1)

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

(Small Catechism: Eighth Commandment)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. What happens when you tell the truth and people don't believe you? You know what you said is true, but they just will not believe what you have said. Exodus 4 has a lot to say about truth and belief. God revealed His truth to Moses, but Moses was afraid that the people of Israel wouldn't believe him when he told it to them. Not only was Moses entrusted with God's truth, he thought it was up to him to get people to believe God's truth.

Do you ever feel like telling the truth is a lost cause? Like even if what you say is true, people won't believe it and it won't make a difference? Perhaps if you try to set a rumor straight, people would still want to believe the rumor instead of the true account, or if you try to tell others why they have misjudged a classmate or a friend, they won't listen to you. What should you do then? One answer might be to not even try, and another response might be to try once and let it go.

But that's not how God treated Moses, nor is it how God wanted Moses to treat the people of Israel. Instead, God repeatedly told His truth to Moses, and gave Moses ways to repeatedly tell that truth to the people. The Lord gave Moses His own Name to declare to the people: YHWH, I am who I am. The Lord gave Moses three miracles. Then the Lord promised that Moses' brother, Aaron, would come and he would do the talking. Again and again, the Lord put truth in Moses' ears and in his mouth.

The Lord puts truth in your ears and in your mouth, too. He has given you the living Word, Jesus Himself. When you doubt and disbelieve, even then your Savior is the way, the truth, and the life. Even then your Savior shows you something better than a miracle: His own death and resurrection for you. He brings you the forgiveness of your sins. That's no false testimony. Jesus Christ is the truth for you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the way, the truth, and the life. You put Your truth in Moses' ears and in his mouth. Place Your truth and Your presence in me that I would not disbelieve but believe Your wonderful promises and speak that truth to all those around me, through You, my Lord, as You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 7, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 4:19-31; Mark 15:16-32

And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go." (Exodus 4:21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Wait, what? The Lord is the one who hardened Pharaoh's heart, who brought about the lack of faith, who brought the ten plagues against Egypt. That doesn't sound like good news at all. How can a good, gracious, and loving God harden Pharaoh's (or anyone's) heart?

It is the will of God that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, as 1 Timothy 2:4 says. Yet not only does God allow people to disbelieve His promises and truth, He Himself even hardened Pharaoh's heart. So where do you stand? Has God hardened your heart? What about others who don't believe in God's Name? Is that God's fault, or their fault?

Luther's *Small Catechism* gives a good answer to this regarding the Third Article of the Apostles Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The Holy Spirit has called YOU to faith, enlightened YOU with His gifts, sanctified and kept YOU in the faith. What the Holy Spirit does for you He also does for the whole Church. There's nothing here about Pharaoh or those who don't believe, because that's not your business. That's God's business to deal with in His righteousness and justice. You are called simply to believe in His Name, to confess your sins before Jesus Christ who intercedes for you before the Father, and to confess that faith in the Triune God in love to your neighbors.

Is your heart hard? Even though you are fully and completely a sinner (just like Moses who didn't circumcise his children in accordance with God's commands), your heart has been softened by the Holy Spirit who has called you as God's own. You are also completely one of God's saints. Jesus Christ was crucified for you to see to your holiness and perfection. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Holy Spirit, you have called, gathered, and enlightened me with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sanctify and keep me in that Gospel always, until Jesus' return in glory and the everlasting Kingdom, through the same Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 8, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 5:1-6:1; Mark 15:33-47

And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

(Mark 15:39)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. The words of the centurion by the side of the Cross are, for the most part, some of the most important true words spoken. Jesus is truly the Son of God. However, there is one thing the centurion gets wrong: Jesus isn't in the past. Often, when someone dies, people speak to them "as they were" or in the past tense. But Jesus isn't in the past tense. Jesus is the Son of God, and that doesn't stop. It didn't stop with His death on the Cross, and it doesn't stop during His resurrection, and it will never stop.

Jesus laid in the tomb is just as much the Savior of the world as Jesus on the Cross or as Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem. Jesus raised from the dead is just as much the Savior, too. A situation that looked hopeless and that looked like Jesus was left in the past tense isn't what it seems. Instead, the crucified Jesus was laid to rest in the tomb in order to rise again.

The fact that Jesus is not in the past tense is important for you because you will never be in the past tense, either. Jesus' eternal life gives you eternal life. You will live forever in the present tense because Jesus lives forever. The One who died is the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Him will never die—and that message is for you.

The devil might try to tell you that Jesus is disconnected and far away from you. Your own common sense might try to tell you that, too. But your Lord Jesus, the Son of God, has drawn close to you, delivering His death and resurrection to you every time it is preached into your ears, when you read about His great love for you, when you were baptized into that death and resurrection, and when you receive the Body and Blood of Jesus for you for the forgiveness of sins. If the centurion saw and believed that Jesus was the Son of God, so do you, one of God's redeemed children for whom He died. Your Savior has forgiven you all your sins and holds you continually in His grace, not in the past but in the present. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Upon the cross extended See, world, your Lord suspended. Your Savior yields His breath. The Prince of Life from heaven Himself has freely given To shame and blows and bitter death. ("Upon the Cross Extended" LSB 453, st.1)

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

APRIL 9, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for Palmarum
(Psalm 24:7-10; antiphon: Psalm 118:26)

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 7:1-25; Mark 16:1-20

Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory! (From the Introit for Palmarum)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Get ready! Palm Sunday is coming! This reading from the psalms sets the stage for Palm Sunday. It seems a little strange to address part of this psalm to the doors, the city gates of Jerusalem, but that is exactly where these words are directed. Get ready, because someone who is coming through you is the Lord, mighty in battle. The Lord Himself will pass through these gates!

This is the same Lord who created the heavens and the earth. This is the same Lord who saved Noah and his family when the world was flooded. This is the same Lord who called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the same Lord who rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. This mighty Lord established His people in the city of Jerusalem. The same Lord would come into Jerusalem and visit His people.

But this is not an ordinary visit. Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, wasn't just going to pay a social call to Jerusalem. He wouldn't just show His face and then disappear again. The Lord, mighty in battle, was coming into Jerusalem for a battle of cosmic proportions. He was coming to do the most glorious of all His actions: to bring salvation to all creation. Jesus entered the gates of Jerusalem to be betrayed, to suffer, die, and rise again. The mighty Lord has come, not just entering into Jerusalem, but entering into you and your life in the waters of Holy Baptism. He has called you His own! Not only has He entered the gates of Jerusalem, He has entered you to make you His holy temple. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die. O Christ, Thy triumphs now begin O'er captive death and conquered sin.

("Ride On, Ride On in Majesty" LSB 441, st.2)

Palmarum

APRIL 10, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 21:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 8:1-32; Hebrews 1:1-14

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Today is a day full of strange words. Where else other than church and devotions do you see the word "Palmarum"? But that one is pretty easy—it simply means "of the palms" or "day of the palms." You could also call today "Palm Sunday," remembering that a week before Easter Jesus entered into Jerusalem as people waved branches over Him and welcomed Him into the holy city as He was called the Son of David, the One who comes in the Name of the Lord.

That reveals another strange word, the Hebrew word "Hosanna," which means, "Save us now!" It is a prayer for deliverance, and it is a prayer that Jesus, the Son of David who comes in the Name of the Lord, comes to answer. As the crowds cried out, "Hosanna," Jesus was coming to do just that, preparing for His death that would save not only the crowds, but you.

That prayer of "Hosanna" is one that is repeated in the Divine Service today. In preparation for the Lord's Supper, the words of the Palm Sunday crowds are combined with the words of the angelic song of Isaiah 6:1-8 so that Christ's Church sings, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," in the canticle (Bible song) called the Sanctus. This is a confession that your Lord, Jesus, is holy, and that it is your Lord, Jesus, who comes in the Name of the Lord, not only on a donkey in Jerusalem but also in His Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. There, given and shed for you, He brings forgiveness, life, and salvation that saves you. He gives you this will and testament as an answer to your prayer as you greet Him, the One who comes in the Name of the Lord. That's not a one time event, but an ever present reality for you, one of His Christians. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Palmarum)

Monday of Holy Week

APRIL 11, 2022

Today's Reading: John 12:1-43

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 9:1-28; Hebrews 2:1-18

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
(Hebrews 2:9)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Jesus was crowned with glory and honor, but it sure looks odd. The Cross with Jesus on it doesn't look like glory and honor. Instead, it looks like there is a lot of shame and tragedy on the Cross. A crown of thorns doesn't look like glory, and a man stripped naked doesn't look like honor. No, it's on the Cross that Jesus, God in the flesh, tastes death for everyone. Or to put it another way, God died on the Cross. Now, don't start thinking that the Father died on the Cross, or that the Holy Spirit died on the Cross. They didn't. But Jesus is fully God, and when Jesus died on the Cross, God died. That's a big deal! He tasted death for everyone.

That means that Jesus tasted death for you. The death your sin deserves has been died by Jesus, God in the flesh. That's not just true for you, though. It's true for everyone. He tasted death for everyone, and there is no one who is outside of Jesus' death and the mercy and grace that He has for sinners. That doesn't mean that everyone is saved, because salvation is by grace through faith. Do you believe what Jesus has done for you and that He is your Lord and your God? That faith in Jesus that you have been given is the center of your life. Jesus is your only hope and your only Savior. Thanks be to God, He shows you His glory and honor from the Cross for your everlasting life.

It's because of God's grace that Jesus came into the flesh to die for you. You see His grace on the Cross. From there the forgiveness of all your sins was earned. Jesus delivers that forgiveness to you when you are baptized into His death and resurrection and when He feeds Christians His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. God has poured out His grace on you, and He forgives you all your sins. You are pure and holy because of Jesus' death for you. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, grant that in the midst of our failures and weaknesses we may be restored through the passion and intercession of Your only-begotten Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.
(Collect for Monday of Holy Week)

Tuesday of Holy Week

APRIL 12, 2022

Today's Reading: Mark 14:1-15:47

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 9:29-10:20; Hebrews 3:1-19

There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that?" (Mark 14:4)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever wasted something? Honestly, you've probably wasted time, and maybe you've been told you were wasting energy. Certainly, no one wants to waste money or food or anything else physical. Precious things are precious, and shouldn't be wasted. That's what the people thought had happened at the dinner Jesus attended. That ointment that could only be used once was being wasted on Jesus. When the objection was raised that the money could have been used for the poor, Jesus pointed out that the poor would always be in the world, but Jesus Himself wouldn't always be here. Putting this expensive, precious ointment on Jesus seemed to be a waste. But then Jesus said that the ointment was preparing Him for His death.

Jesus' death seemed wasteful, too. As Jesus was crucified and was dying on the Cross, it would have been easy to think "What a waste of a life!" There, as Jesus' blood was shed from the Cross it could certainly seem that His life, like that precious ointment, was being wasted. But Jesus' death wasn't wasted. Instead, it was the precious blood of Jesus that cleansed you from your sin and calls you to believe in His gracious Name. Jesus didn't waste His life on you. Instead, He spent His life for you. It's like the explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles Creed in Luther's Small Catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity." You, a poor and condemned person, were saved by the holy, precious blood of Jesus and His innocent suffering and death. Now you belong to Jesus because of His goodness. Jesus' life was not wasted on you, but He is the price of your redemption and your forgiveness. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, grant us by Your grace so to pass through this holy time of our Lord's passion that we may obtain the forgiveness of our sins; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for Tuesday of Holy Week)

Wednesday of Holy Week

APRIL 13, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 22:1-23:56

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 10:21-11:10; Hebrews 4:1-16

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. (Luke 22:3-6)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Hard hearts are hard to understand. You might get this, at least a little bit, if you have ever apologized to someone and they wouldn't forgive you. That is a difficult situation. In Exodus, Moses records that there had been ten plagues calling the people of Egypt and the people of Israel to repentance. Pharaoh's heart was hardened. It even says that the Lord Himself hardened Pharaoh's heart. That can be troubling. Why would God harden Pharaoh's heart? The Lord explained why He did this in Exodus 7:3-5: "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them." The Lord did this so the Egyptians would know this was the Lord's doing, and the people of Israel would be delivered by the hand of the Lord.

Scripture doesn't say that Judas Iscariot had a hard heart, but Luke does say that Satan entered into Judas. He agreed to turn Jesus over to the chief priests. But Satan can't do anything that God doesn't allow him to do. Why did God allow Judas to betray Jesus? Why did God let this bad thing happen to His only-begotten Son? It was in order to show His grace. It is by the betrayal and death of Jesus that hearts would be called to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. It is by the shedding of the blood of Jesus that you are made holy before God. God's work is seen even as Jesus is betrayed and as He died for you. Jesus has the opposite of a hard heart. For you, a sinner who has not obeyed God's Law, He has shown the depth of His mercy. He has rescued you from sin, death, and the devil. That's the Gospel truth. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Merciful and everlasting God, You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all to bear our sins on the cross. Grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in Him that we fear not the power of sin, death, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for Wednesday of Holy Week)

Maundy Thursday

APRIL 14, 2022

Today's Reading: John 13:1-15, 34-35

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 12:1-28; Hebrews 5:1-14

[Jesus said] "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
(John 13:34-35)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Today is all about commands. That doesn't sound very Lutheran, though. Lutherans like to talk about God's Law and God's Gospel. But "commandment" is law language. Even the name for this day, "Maundy" Thursday, comes with commandment language. The word "Maundy" comes from the Latin word *mandatum* (like "mandate") that means "commandment." On this day we remember that our Lord Jesus commanded us to love one another. But He also commands that we receive the specific Gift of the Lord's Supper. Jesus calls you to love one another. Love other people in Christ's Church. Love your classmates, your friends, even those you might think of as your enemies. How is that going for you? Especially now, at the end of Lent, you can probably say that you haven't always loved one another and you certainly don't deserve God's goodness or love. Instead, you deserve God's punishment and anger. You haven't kept His commandment. You need help.

The Lord's Supper was given on the day of Passover. That's because Jesus is the Passover Lamb. You remember that from Exodus—how the lamb that was killed was drained of its blood and then cooked. Jesus shed His blood on the Cross for you, and Jesus declared that the bread that was broken is His Body and the wine in the cup is His Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus has given this command: Take, eat; take, drink, because you haven't kept all the other commands He has given to you. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives you Himself. The One who washed the feet of His disciples is the One who died for you. He brings you the forgiveness that He won for you on the Cross and delivers it to you, here and now. Since today is another day of your being a sinner, this is another day for you to believe that Jesus is your Passover Lamb, that He shed His Blood for you and has given His own Body as a feast of forgiveness. Come, receive the promises of Jesus, just as He has commanded you for your good and for your forgiveness. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for Maundy Thursday)

Good Friday

APRIL 15, 2022

Today's Reading: John 18:1-19:42

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 12:29-32; 13:1-16; Hebrews 6:1-20

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
(Colossians 1:18-20)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Jesus is the firstborn. But wait, that sounds like a Christmas statement, not a Good Friday statement. But it is also a Good Friday thing to say. Not only was Jesus the firstborn of the Virgin Mary; but He is also the only-begotten Son of God. Colossians refers to Him as the firstborn from the dead. Revelation 1:5 says that Jesus is the “firstborn of the dead.” Jesus is the firstborn, and Jesus died. The only-begotten of God, who is God in the flesh, died. Those are powerful words that don't always make a lot of sense to us. After all, how can God die?

That's not something that can be explained rationally. It can only be confessed. God took on flesh, and according to His human nature, He died. That doesn't mean that just the “human part” of Jesus died: Everything that is true of the human nature of Jesus is also true of the divine nature of Jesus. Jesus died. He is the firstborn of the dead. He is the most important person, who died for you so that you are His dear child. Colossians uses the word “preeminent” to say this. “Preeminent” can be understood as “most important” or “in the most important place.”

Exodus 13 talks about the sacrifice that needed to be made for a firstborn son. It was necessary to redeem a firstborn son by the sacrifice of a lamb. You are now all the firstborn who have had the Lamb of God sacrificed for you to redeem you. That's what's necessary for you.

That promise is unchanging. From the day that Jesus hung on the Cross until now, to the day when Jesus returns in the resurrection, nothing will change the fact that He is the One who was and who is and who is to come. As you observe Jesus' death today, remember that this reality is for you, now and always. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Your cords of love, my Savior, Bind me to You forever, I am no longer mine.
To You I gladly tender All that my life can render And all I have to You resign.
("Upon the Cross Extended" LSB 453, st.6)*

Holy Saturday

APRIL 16, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 27:57-66

Daily Lectionary: Exodus 13:17-14:9; Hebrews 7:1-22

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:3-4)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. When God created the heavens and the earth and everything that fills them in six days, He rested on the seventh day. He commanded that the seventh day, Saturday, be a day of rest for His people. That seventh day is called the “Sabbath,” which literally means “the rest day.” But the day of rest has been disfigured by sin and sinfulness. Instead of resting in the grace of God, people (including you!) have filled it with work and play and have ignored the rest that God has given.

That’s why the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is so important. On Friday afternoon, the body of Jesus was laid to rest in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. He rested there until His return to life and His resurrection. It’s like creation held its breath between one week and another, between the fullness of sin and the fullness of God’s grace revealed. Jesus Christ died so that you would have the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He rested, inviting you into the rest of His grace.

How will you spend this day, the day that seems suspended between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Is today a day simply for Easter egg hunts or shopping for Easter clothes or the mundane activities of weekly life? Maybe. But make today also a day of resting in God’s grace. As Jesus rested in the tomb for you, rest in the grace of Jesus Christ. He has taken your sins to the Cross, and now that He has died for those sins, you truly have rest. Today is a day of joy and true relaxation, because Jesus has died for you and given you what sinners without God’s grace can’t have—rest.

Today, if the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature come to you calling you a sinner who doesn’t deserve God’s rest, tell them to leave you alone, because you have the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and that gives you the fullness of God’s rest. After all, it is Jesus who holds all creation together and He is the One who gives you complete and total rest. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, creator of heaven and earth, grant that as the crucified body of Your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Holy Saturday)

Notes

*Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers taken from
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.*

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