



REFLECTIONS

EPIPHANY

JANUARY 6 - FEBRUARY 5, 2022

HIGHER
THINGS[®]

DARE TO BE LUTHERAN[®]

Epiphany

JANUARY 6 - FEBRUARY 5, 2022

*This season's Reflections were written by
Rev. Bradley Drew, pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Metairie, LA.*

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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.

The Epiphany of Our Lord

JANUARY 6, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Daily Lectionary: Isaiah 66:1-20; Luke 3:21-38

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

(Matthew 2:10)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Why not rejoice with “exceedingly great joy”? Though they came from so far away, the wise men were certainly included in the angelic announcement made at Jesus’ birth: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

Rejoice, all of them. And, rejoice, you, too. For God scoops you up with the birth of His Son and includes you, too, in that promise. Here, in this Child, is God’s answer to all of your sin, whoever you are. Here, Jesus, is God’s answer to your own unbelief. Here is God’s answer to all the darkness and misery of yesterday’s, today’s, and tomorrow’s sin and unbelief. For here, in Jesus, is the Good Shepherd who “lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11) that they, the wandering and unimpressive, now have eternal life.

It’s no ordinary joy, then, that God splashes onto you every day in your Baptism. It’s “exceedingly great joy.” It’s Jesus joy. Jesus is born to live for you, perfect faith in God and perfect love for neighbor, He not only sacrifices for you on the Cross, He now washes it over you every day in your Baptism. Your past? Holy in God’s sight. Your present? Holy. Your tomorrow? Holy. Your last day? You guessed it--holy now in God’s sight. So great is this joy.

No, this is no ordinary joy. It is exceedingly great joy. So great, God gives you a pastor to deliver it to you every Sunday in the Absolution and in the preaching of the Gospel. So great, God even prepares a Table of this joy with Jesus’ own Body and Blood, “for you, for the forgiveness of sins.”

No matter the distance, then, no matter how far away you feel from God, the star, the wise men, the Cross, and the Word, water, and Supper of Jesus all announce: “Fear not. The promise is for you, too. Always for you, too.” In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

O God, by the leading of a star You made known Your only-begotten Son to the Gentiles. Lead us, who know You by faith, to enjoy in heaven the fullness of Your divine presence; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

(Collect for the Epiphany of our Lord)

Friday of Epiphany Week

JANUARY 7, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 1:1-14, 22-28; Romans 1:1-17

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. (Isaiah 60:1)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Up and at 'em!" my father would call out from the doorway as I tried desperately to catch a few more Zs. But Dad wasn't having it. It was Saturday. There were chores to do. Things that needed to be done. "Up and at 'em!" came the cry, at the crack of noon.

For years, I wondered what in the world "Adam" had to do with Saturday mornings. I didn't realize, until years later, Dad was saying "at 'em," not "Adam." Still, with a grin on his face, born no doubt more of the pain on mine than over any confusion over who "Adam" might be, Dad cried out, "Up and at 'em!" Sometimes it was just, "Rise, and shine!" Either way, I was nowhere near ready to rise and "whatever," especially on Saturdays. "Come on, Dad. There's nothing in me, from me, about me that wants to. Can't you just leave me alone, Dad? At least until I feel more like being at 'em or rising and shining?"

Dad didn't cry out to me because he knew how bright and cheery I was, especially on Saturdays, but because he knew, even then, that I was his. It's the same with God in today's reading from Isaiah. He knows our sin, and all the darkness and burden our sin, and the sin of the world, has brought. He also knows there is nothing in us, from us, or about us that wants to "rise and shine." But He also knows that we're His, now, no matter what, because that's the promise of the Gospel.

That's the promise of Jesus' sacrifice for you on the Cross. It's the promise Jesus washes onto you every day in your Baptism, speaks to you through your pastor every Sunday, and feeds you with at His Supper. God will even claim you again with Jesus on the Last Day.

So for now? You got it. "Up and at 'em!" For you are not your own light anymore. You are not your own righteousness, or hope, or brightness, or anything else with God. Jesus is. Jesus always is. And that's mighty Good News, especially on those "Saturdays." "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Arise and shine in splendor, Let night to day surrender. Your light is drawing near. Above, the day is beaming, In matchless beauty gleaming; The glory of the Lord is here. ("Arise and Shine in Splendor" LSB 396, st.1)

Saturday of Epiphany Week

JANUARY 8, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Baptism of Our Lord
(Psalm 89:1, 26-28; antiphon: Liturgical Text; Psalm 89:20)
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 3:12-27; Romans 2:1-16

I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

(From the Introit for the Baptism of Our Lord)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Yesterday came the happy cry, "Arise, shine, for...the glory of the LORD has risen upon you (Isaiah 60:1)." That's because for God's children there is always much to do every day: learning to confess our own sins, trusting the promise of Jesus' Cross in our Baptism, in His Word, and at His Supper, helping to lighten the load a little for those around us with the good works we can do for them.

And before we even give a thought to any of it, God has already declared all of it, and you, holy in His sight. "Arise, shine, for...the glory of the LORD has risen upon you!"

This is why, like tomorrow's psalmist, the baptized will gather in the house of the Lord and sing not of their steadfast love, but of God's. In the liturgy, the hymns, and the prayers, our mouths will echo the forgiveness and the salvation God has spoken to us in the Absolution, preached to us in the sermon, and delivered to us at the Supper. Like tomorrow's psalmist, the baptized will confess that it is the forever faithfulness of God that makes Jesus "the Rock" of our salvation (Psalm 89:26).

The psalm from tomorrow's Introit is all about Jesus. "He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation'" (Psalm 89:26). Hear Jesus crying this for you, as He is conceived and born for you. Hear Him crying it, for you, as He lives for you and as He suffers and dies for you. Hear Jesus crying this for you as He rises from the dead for you and ascends "to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17). Hear this cry every day in your Baptism. Hear it tomorrow in the Invocation, in the Absolution and sermon, in the Supper and Benediction. For this cry is now your cry, too. From Jesus' lips to yours lips, all the way to the Father's ears.

And because the Father always hears Jesus, rest assured, He always hears you, especially when it's the words of Jesus that are on your lips. It's the promise of the Gospel. "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation (Psalm 89:26). In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Take my voice and let me sing Always, only for my King; Take my lips and let them be Filled with messages from Thee.

("Take My Life and Let It Be" LSB 783, st.3)

The Baptism of Our Lord

JANUARY 9, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-32; Romans 2:17-29

John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"
(Matthew 3:14)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. John thinks man should be the confidence of his own life before God. Jesus thinks He should be. John thinks if there is to be forgiveness, it must be because of our own works. Thinking from above, Jesus knows that if there is to be forgiveness, it must be up to His works. It's why Jesus is baptized today.

And John does not say, "We were beginning to wonder about you, Jesus, and whose side You are on. Thanks for clearing that up for us." Jesus knows that Baptism is not something we do for God, but something God does for us. It's for the forgiveness of sins. It's why John balks at the thought of baptizing Jesus.

But Jesus is baptized because God sent Jesus for us, to be our righteousness for us. It is why Jesus answers, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus will sacrifice His own sinless life for you on the Cross. It's why He places Himself into the water, today. For you. For in the water, Baptism washes Jesus and all His righteousness onto you as it washes you and all your sin onto Him.

That means, if heaven stands open to Jesus at His Baptism, it stands open now to you at yours. It means that as the Spirit descends and remains on Jesus, and the Father smiles and says, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," these same treasures belong to you in your Baptism.

So, when sin gets the better of you, and you don't measure up, and you wish you were a better Christian, make the sign of the Cross and remember your Baptism into Christ. You are not your own confidence before God. You are not your own righteousness with God. Jesus is, for you.

And guess what? God can't imagine a better righteousness than that. So smile. Your Baptism promises that God is always smiling on you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

(Collect for the Baptism of our Lord)

Monday of the First Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 10, 2022

Today's Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-32; Romans 2:17-29

"I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:6-7)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. What if I told you that God has a picture of you on His refrigerator in heaven and it makes Him smile every time He passes by it? What if I told you that God sees no sin at all in your past that diminishes that smile? That you are completely holy and righteous in His sight, even right now? What if I told you that God promises you nothing will change His mind about you tomorrow, that this same judgment will be yours all the way through to the Last Day and beyond?

I know. "That's not true for me," you say, "because you don't know me." At least, not like God does, right? Well, that's my loss, not God's. Because here's what you're forgetting: God promises never to deal with you apart from the prism and promise of Calvary. That's the promise He made to the whole world the day Jesus suffered and died for us on the Cross. It's the promise He made with you personally the day you were baptized. And it's the promise He keeps putting into your ears with every Absolution and sermon you hear from your pastor and every time He prepares His Table before you with Jesus' Body and Blood. "For you, for the forgiveness of sins."

You are the prisoner whom Jesus sets free every day, from every sin. You are the one Jesus brings forth from the darkness. Your blind eyes are the eyes God opens by making Jesus His forever promise to you.

And even if you are "a bruised reed" right now, or a "faintly burning wick," God always promises you Jesus: He's got this, now. He's got you, now. And He's never letting go.

That's the covenant, the promise, that God makes with you in Jesus. And He's not at all discouraged about it. It's why, because of Jesus, He smiles every time He passes His refrigerator. Your face is on it, after all. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, let me stand; I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, Lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord; lead me home.

("Precious Lord, Take My Hand" LSB 739, st.1)

Tuesday of the First Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 11, 2022

Today's Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 33:1-20; Romans 3:1-18

*For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.
(1 Corinthians 1:26)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. How insulting. Imagine your pastor walking out on Sunday morning and addressing your congregation like Paul addresses the Corinthians here, going so far as to call the majority “foolish,” “weak,” “low and despised,” and even “not noble” (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). How rude. Right? The story is as old as Cain and Abel. You can read in Genesis about the accomplishments of their families. Cain’s has all the high achievers. Earth is clearly their home. Abel’s? It’s as if his people are pilgrims here, strangers and aliens. Their thoughts seem to be elsewhere.

With his offering, Cain was shocked when God didn’t recognize his amazingness. In contrast, Abel trusted that God would remember the coming sacrifice of His Son on the Cross for the sins of the whole world, including his own. Heaven is clearly his home.

There is a Cain in all of us, sticking his chest out, imagining that God’s got the best pickup team of all time since he has us on His side. The old Adam within doesn’t always have a tail and a pitchfork. Sometimes he sports a halo and wears a crown.

Repent of that Cain within. And repenting, hear the promise and joy of the Gospel again: “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Not because of you, but because of God--His doing, His water, His Word, and His Supper--you are in Jesus now. That is, you are in God’s wisdom now, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. You are saved not by the aid or help of grace, but entirely by grace. Insulting? Sure. But for the “foolish,” the “low and despised,” who have only sins to offer God? What good news!

Luther says he needs to hear the Gospel every day, because he forgets the Gospel every day. Great confession! Because it’s not our smarts, our grip, or anything about us that saves us. It’s all God. It’s all grace. It’s all Jesus. Call that our shame, fine. We call it our boast. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Thy works, not mine, O Christ, Speak gladness to this heart; They tell me all is done, They bid my fear depart. To whom save Thee, Who canst alone For sin atone, Lord shall I flee? (“Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ” LSB 565, st.1)

Wednesday of the First Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 12, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Youth

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 34:1-24; Romans 3:19-31

Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time. (1Pet 5:5-6)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Under the discipline of "those who are older," God's hand can seem quite mighty at times. Add to that the burden and pressure of all the other things life throws at you, and that hand seems even mightier.

Through it all, trust that hand. It bears you no harm at all. God's hand poured out all its harm on Jesus when Jesus humbled Himself and carried your sin to the Cross for you (Philippians 2:4-11). All that is left in God's hand, now, is forgiveness and love for you.

Through it all, then, trust that hand. God is training you as a Father (Hebrews 12:7-11) to live each day according to His promises, not according to your surroundings. He's teaching you to find meaning and life not in what could be, but in what actually is. God is disciplining you, as His child, so that you learn to find courage and strength not in your circumstances, but in His Word alone. What has He spoken to you in His Word? What has He promised you?

Jesus. That's What. That's Who. Jesus on the Cross for you. Jesus in Baptism for you. Jesus in Absolution and sermons for you. Jesus in the Supper for you. Jesus on the Last Day for you. Jesus, to forgive and to save you all the way through.

It's okay not to be the one in charge, because the One in charge is God Himself. He's the maestro. We are the orchestra, His masterpiece. I know. Sometimes, you don't like the sound of the music. I get that. He gets that, too.

But, don't ever forget this: By sending Jesus to the Cross for us, God has reconciled the entire band to Himself. And that includes you. God knows where you are. He put you there. He knows what you are going through. He's there with you. Give it time. For the time will come when God raises you up to see that His goodness and mercy were always there. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

What God ordains is always good: He is my friend and Father; He suffers naught to do me harm Though many storms may gather. Now I may know both joy and woe; Someday I shall see clearly That He has loved me dearly.

("What God Ordains Is Always Good" LSB 760, st.4)

Thursday of the First Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 13, 2022

Today's Reading: Joshua 3:1-3, 7-8, 13-17

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 36:13-28; Romans 4:1-25

Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. (Joshua 3:17)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Have you ever asked yourself, "Why is my Bible so heavy?" Jesus. That's why. The Holy Spirit just can't contain Himself. He keeps putting Jesus here and there. Out in the open. Under every branch and leaf. Again and again, verse after verse, you will find Jesus.

Our reading begins, "Then Joshua rose early in the morning" (Joshua 3:1). Why do we need to know when Joshua rose? Think Jesus. For Jesus, Joshua's New Testament namesake, also rose early one important morning--the morning that He led us across the river we call death by dying for us, our death, on the Cross.

We are told that "at the end of three days" they sent officers throughout the camp (Joshua 3:2). Why do we need to know it was "after three days"? Again, think Jesus. For it was on "the third day" (Luke 24:7) that Jesus rose from the dead for us, forever sending the bright beams of resurrection life throughout the camp of all the baptized.

In the beginning, middle, and end of our reading we get the phrases "passed over" (Joshua 3:1,16), "passover" (v.14), and "passing over" (v.17). Again, think Jesus. For with all your sin on the Cross, God's wrath has nowhere else to land but upon Jesus. God's wrath passed, is passing, and will forever pass over you now.

Your Bible is so heavy because the Holy Spirit can't help Himself. He can't stop talking about Jesus. He wants you to hear that Jesus is the "dry ground" your Baptism promises will be under your feet every day. That Jesus is the "dry ground" God puts under you with every Absolution and sermon you hear from your pastor. That Jesus' Body and Blood, given you at His Supper, is the "dry ground" upon which you have already crossed, and will always cross, the muddy Jordan, untouched by its death (John 6:54).

Our Joshua has arrived. And like Joshua of old, our Joshua will safely lead us across the Jordan into the Promised Land of eternal life. It's why God sends Jesus. It's why your Bible is so heavy. For you! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Come you faithful, raise the strain Of triumphant gladness! God has brought His Israel Into joy from sadness, Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and daughters, Led them with unmoistened foot Through the Red Sea waters.
(*"Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain" LSB 487, st.1*)

Friday of the First Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 14, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 2:41-52

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 36:33-37:14; Romans 5:1-21

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. (Luke 2:51)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Stunning. The One who gave the Law places Himself under the Law, even under the Fourth Commandment. Why? For you, "to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5). That's the promise you received in your Baptism (Galatians 3:27).

Stunning. Jesus places Himself under the Law to do for us what we cannot, and will not, do for ourselves (Romans 8:7). He will honor His father and mother. He will obey them. He will be submissive to them. He will keep the Fourth Commandment, and all the other commandments, perfectly. He will live His life in such a way that His own Law could never accuse or condemn Him.

And yet, it did. For you. Stunning. For 12-year-old Jesus would one day take His life and sacrifice it for you on the Cross. It's where the Passover sacrifices in the temple were all pointing--to Jesus, to His Cross, to the sacrifice by which you at age 12, and every age before and every age after, are reconciled to God, and promised your spot in the Father's house. In the place of sacrifice at age 12, Jesus was already thinking about you.

And Jesus still is thinking about you. In Baptism, Jesus washes you every day with the promise of His Cross. In the Absolution and sermons you hear from your pastor, He is still speaking His sacrifice over you. And at the Supper, with His Body and Blood, Jesus still makes sure that when His Father looks at you, all He sees is another Law keeper: "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Stunning.

And while you may feel like beating yourself up for the times you have been the cause of your parents' distress, take comfort in knowing even Jesus' parents were once distressed over Him. If Jesus could be so misunderstood, don't be surprised that you can be, too. Remember that God has already declared you holy and His, because of Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Within the Father's house The Son has found His home, And to His temple suddenly The Lord of life has come. Lord, visit Thou our souls And teach us by Thy grace Each dim revealing of Thyself With loving awe to trace Till we behold Thy face And know as we are known Thee Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Coequal Three in One. ("Within the Father's House" LSB 410, st.1, 5-6)

Saturday of the First Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 15, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany
(Psalm 66:1-5, 20; antiphon: Psalm 66:4; 92:1)

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 37:15-28; Romans 6:1-23

All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name. (From the Introit for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow's Introit calls out at four times the promise of the Gospel, that "all the earth" is included at the Cross, that "all the earth" has been scooped up by God and reconciled to Him by the blood Jesus shed for all upon the Cross, and that "all the earth" belongs to its rightful Maker again--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

"Come and see what God has done" (Isaiah 66:5). That is the essence of true worship. God does not want to be worshipped by our showing Him works in exchange for His love. All we can offer God, even with our "righteous deeds," are sins (Isaiah 64:6). That's a harsh judgment, not shared at all by the world around us. Nevertheless, it is the judgment of God's holy Law (Romans 3:23).

God wants to be worshipped by your seeing and receiving the works He does for you. He sent Jesus to the Cross for you, with all your sins. Jesus died for you, for all your sins. Jesus rose for you, with all of your sins answered for in His death for you upon the Cross. Now Jesus comes to you in His Word, in His water, and at His Supper with all the promise and blessing of His Cross, declaring you holy in God's sight, His child, an heir to eternal life.

And while it may seem a huge overstatement when tomorrow's Introit cries out, "All the earth worships you and sings praises to you," don't be fooled by what you see all around you. I know, it doesn't look that way and it seems that God has been left out of the picture. But you and I also know this: "All the earth" is included at the Cross, has been scooped up by God and reconciled by the blood Jesus shed for it, and it belongs to its rightful Maker again. That means even the craziness and evil of this world must, and will, serve only the plans and purposes of your heavenly Father. What Gospel! In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

The world's remotest races, Upon whose weary faces The Sun looks from the sky, Shall run with zeal untiring, With joy Your light desiring That breaks upon them from on high. Lift up your eyes in wonder—See, nations gather yonder From sin to be set free. The world has heard Your story; Her sons come to Your glory; Her daughters haste Your light to see.

("Arise and Shine in Splendor" LSB 396, st. 3-4)

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

JANUARY 16, 2022

Today's Reading: John 2:1-11

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 38:1-23; Romans 7:1-20

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. (John 2:1)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Jesus could have chosen anywhere for His first miracle. The Jordan River or the Red Sea. A cemetery or hospital. The temple in Jerusalem. The wilderness or some mountain top. But Jesus chooses a wedding where a man and a woman are brought together and declared one.

You say you and God are like Mars and Venus? Or maybe oil and water? You don't mix? You're always questioning God? Doubting His Word? Convinced someone, or something else, is in control? You don't fear God's threats or trust His promises like you should? You are often unfaithful in your calling as a son, daughter, student, or neighbor? At times you are even angry at God? Well, you are no different than I am, then.

Good News, fellow Martian: Just like Jesus' birth, just like Jesus' death, just like Jesus' Resurrection, and ascension, and Word, and water, and Supper, Jesus' first miracle promises you that you and God are together, now and forever. Declared to be at one with each other, in Jesus.

For all that Mars and Venus, or oil and water business? Yeah, God knows all about the unbelief and sin in us that separates us from Him. That makes us all damnable sinners in His sight. But here's the Good News: God put that on Jesus when Jesus went to the Cross for you. He became the Martian, the sinner, the "you" for you. And His blood now covers it all.

And to teach you to trust this Good News, Jesus adds His Word to water in Baptism today, preserving your union with God as holy and pure. All God sees when He looks at you now, in Jesus, is His blameless and righteous child. Jesus even adds His Word to bread and wine, making sure the wedding feast continues at the Supper: "Take, eat; take, drink; My Body, My Blood, for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

Sounded crazy when Mary told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." But it worked out well for everyone, didn't it? It will for you, too, as Jesus tells you with His first miracle. "Fear not. Trust Me. You and God are one now, in Me. Together now, forever." In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; 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 Second Sunday after the Epiphany)

Monday of the Second Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 17, 2022

Today's Reading: Ezekiel 33:12-23

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 39:1-10, 17-29; Romans 7:21-8:17

*Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight."
(Exodus 33:12b)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. How do you know that you've found favor with God? When you're popular and everyone likes you? What if they don't, and even friends betray you? Is it when you are healthy and strong? What about when you are sick and weak? Is it when you are rich? What if you are poor? How do you really know you have found favor with God?

Beware of the devil's preachers. They love pointing away from the Cross. Rather than teaching you to hide yourself in the promise of Jesus and His sacrifice for you on the Cross, they teach you to ignore all that and instead to look at yourself and your circumstances. After all, they know the plans God has for you--that you will be popular, liked by all, healthy, strong, and rich in this life. Fall for that, and you will end up hating God when those plans don't work out.

Remember, Moses was a sinner, a murderer, even. Yet Moses found favor with God. Look at Moses and his circumstances, and you'd never believe it--sinner that he was, exiled from his homeland, wandering around in the wilderness for 40 years, not even being allowed to enter the Promised Land. But don't look there anymore than you would look at yourself or your circumstances to see if you have God's favor or not.

Instead, like Moses, listen to God's promises to you. "I know you by name" (Exodus 33:12). That's the promise God makes to you every day in Baptism, tying you to the promise of Jesus' sacrifice for you on the Cross. "My presence will go with you" (Exodus 33:14). That's the promise God makes with Jesus' Body and Blood at the Supper, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." "And I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14) is the promise God makes with you in every Absolution and sermon you hear from your pastor.

How do you know that you've found favor with God? Hide yourself! Hide yourself in Jesus. All eyes on His Cross. Because whatever your circumstances, Jesus' death declares you to be holy to God, His child, an heir to eternal life. That's the favor God has promised you in this life. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee; Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure: Cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.
(“Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” LSB 761, st.1)*

The Confession of St. Peter

JANUARY 18, 2022

Today's Reading: Mark 8:27-9:1

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 40:1-4; 43:1-12; Romans 8:18-39

*And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."
(Mark 8:29)*

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Peter properly says, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29). But because man is always trying to squash Jesus into his own scheme of things, Jesus "strictly charged them to tell no one about him" (Mark 8:30). Jesus would tell us about Himself and what it means for Him to be the Christ for us. And what a telling it is. "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected...and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

Man thinks he can save himself. Jesus thinks man must get out of the way. "For whoever would save his life will lose it" (Mark 8:35). Man thinks he can give his own death in return for his life. Jesus responds, "What can a man give in return for his life?" (Mark 8:37) With his mind set "on the things of man" (Mark 8:33), what is Peter thinking? That a faith trusting its own work and merit is how best to follow Jesus? At the very least, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

Nobody really wants to be ashamed of herself and her own righteousness. What we must all learn, however, is that such a cross, or such despair of self, is actually godly and wholesome. It frees us to abandon our confidence in ourselves and trust in Jesus alone. Not cheerleader Jesus. Dead Jesus. Risen Jesus. Not life-coach Jesus. Word Jesus. Water Jesus. Supper Jesus. The Jesus who takes the fruit and promise of His Cross and gives it to us as our own. Who would even bark, "Get behind Me, Satan!" to any voice trying to get in the way of His going to the Cross for us.

No, you are not the source of your confidence before God. Jesus is. The "FOR YOU" Jesus whom God sends for Peter and you. The beaten, dead, and risen Jesus. These are the things of God. And they are for Peter. And they are for you. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*Heavenly Father, You revealed to the apostle Peter the blessed truth that Your Son Jesus is the Christ. Strengthen us by the proclamation of this truth that we too may joyfully confess that there is salvation in no one else; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
(Collect for the Confession of St. Peter)*

Wednesday of the Second Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 19, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism:* Table of Duties, To Widows

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 44:1-16, 23-29; Romans 9:1-18

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. (1Timothy5:5)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. At the time of Luther, the church was saying that there were works to get to, super-duper good works, in order for you to be declared good in God's sight. Pray the rosary so many times each day. Pray to the saints. Join a monastery. Put enough money in the offering plate to make God Himself take notice. Do the penance prescribed by the priest. Make a pilgrimage to Rome. On and on went such lists.

And if all you did was go to work, change diapers, wipe noses, raise a family, provide for your children, bear with the sins of others? You were never going to be declared good enough in God's sight. Not in this life, anyways. Make it to purgatory by being at least "good enough" in the eyes of the church, and your sufferings there would do for you what Jesus' Cross here never could, according to that teaching: declare you, a sinner, holy and righteous in God's sight.

Luther knew better. The Gospel taught him better. Jesus' death for the sins of the whole world has already declared you good in God's sight. Righteous. His child. An heir of Paradise. There are no works, ordinary or super-duper, for you to get to in order for those declarations to be true for you now. Jesus' death upon the Cross for you makes that true for you now. His Word promises it to you. Your Baptism seals it for you. The Supper celebrates it for you.

And that makes even the most ordinary works you do extraordinary now in God's sight. Even just a prayer? Yes. For by the death of His Son for you upon the Cross, God has you so wrapped up in His redeeming love that there is never a moment now when He isn't delighting in you. Even if "all" you can muster is a quick prayer. Or a diaper change. Even then. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Sin, disturb my soul no longer; I am baptized into Christ! I have comfort even stronger: Jesus' cleansing sacrifice. Should a guilty conscience seize me Since my baptism did release me In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with Jesus' blood?

Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ! Drop your ugly accusation, I am not so soon enticed. Now that to the font I've traveled, All your might has come unraveled, And, against your tyranny, God, my Lord, unites with Me!
(*"God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It" LSB 594, st.2-3*)

Thursday of the Second Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 20, 2022

Today's Reading: Romans 12:6-16

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 47:1-14, 21-23; Romans 9:19-33

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty. (Romans 12:15-16a)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. COVID. Mask mandates. Vaccinations. Earthquakes. Fires. Hurricanes. The Taliban. Afghanistan. Wars. Rumors of wars. Critical Race Theory. The border. China. Russia. Defund the police. Cyberattacks. Global warming. I could say, it's all going according to plan (Matthew 24:6-14). Still, there's enough fear going around, it can get anyone lost inside themselves.

What to do? Here's what to do: Listen to your pastor. Listen as he speaks the words of Holy Absolution to you. Those words were purchased for you by Jesus' death for you on the Cross. Listen as he preaches the Gospel to you. Jesus was crucified for you, erasing the distance between you and God. Listen as he points you to your Baptism, where Jesus daily preserves your status before God as holy and righteous. Listen as he brings you the Body and Blood and says, "For you, for the forgiveness of sins." Pray the liturgy. Sing the hymns. Go home again with the peace of God given you in the Benediction.

Your heavenly Father never asks you to pick yourself up by your own bootstraps. He knows you can't. He knows you are a child. But He also knows you are His child. It's what the Gospel is for. It's why God not only gives you the Gospel, but also leaves the Gospel with you. The Gospel is not only for eternal life, it's for this life as well.

For with the Gospel, God not only frees and brings you to Himself, He frees and brings you to your neighbor. That's what Paul is writing about today. Let God play the role of God, while you play the role of neighbor. He's got this. With those who rejoice, rejoice. With those who weep, weep. He's got this. With those who fear, point to the hope God has promised all of us in Jesus. He's got this. Abhor evil and cling to the good. He's got this. In tribulation, be patient. And pray. He's got this. Bless, don't curse. He's got this. Find a way to outdo others in showing love and honor to all. He's got this.

And, best of all, through thick and thin, He's got you, too. That's the promise of the Gospel. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Christ, our human likeness sharing, Heaven's love on earth portrayed; Christ, the Shepherd, tending, caring, In His death our ransom paid: Christ, the Savior, Christ the Servant, Be your love in us displayed.

("Christ, Our Human Likeness Sharing" LSB 847, st.1)

Friday of the Second Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 21, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Joel 1:1-20; Romans 10:1-21

*Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar...
Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the
LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.* (Joel 1:13-14)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. As the people of God gather today, the minister still takes the lead: "O almighty God, merciful Father." The rest of God's children then join in the cry, "I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment" (LSB, p.184).

With the prophet, we, too, know that there's no point digging in our heels. While there may be no direct correlation between our sin and the trials and troubles we face in life (think Job), the trials and troubles we do face could never hold a candle to the trials and troubles, both "temporal and eternal," our sins say we deserve.

The proper response among God's people to any trial, or to the locust plague Joel writes about today is not, "Why me, God?" As Luther's first of 95 theses teaches, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." In other words, the proper response is, "Thank You, God, for not giving me what I truly deserve, what my sins rightly merit. Thank You for giving all of that instead to Jesus, on the Cross, for me. And thank You for all the blessings You do give me."

You will never find such faith by looking within. It's not born by mulling over your own subjective experiences. It is born of the Gospel. That is, it is given by God Himself every day in the water and promise of Baptism. By God as your pastor absolves you and preaches the Gospel to you. By God with Jesus' Body and Blood, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Faith is yours as the Gospel is yours.

As the Gospel promises, everything that is yours belongs to the Cross now, and everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to you, now. There's your faith. Jesus. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

My soul, now praise your Maker! Let all within me bless His name Who makes you full partaker Of mercies more than you dare claim. Forget Him now whose meekness Still bears with all your sin, Who heals your every weakness, Renews your life within; Whose grace and care our endless And saved you through the past; Who leaves no sufferer friendless But rights the wrong at last.

("My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker" LSB 820, st.1)

Saturday of the Second Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 22, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany
(Psalm 97:1, 10-12; antiphon: v.6, 9)

Daily Lectionary: Joel 2:1-17; Romans 11:1-24

For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad. (From the Introit for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. I have a friend who had asthma as a child. He tells how, when he would suffer an attack in the middle of the night, his father would convert one of their bathrooms into a steam room by turning on a hot shower and closing the door. He would then hold him in his arms and gently rock him while saying, "Breathe." "That always helped," my friend says. "After that, I would always breathe a little easier."

With all that is going on in the world today, it's easy to start thinking that you're suffocating. By pointing to Jesus, tomorrow's Introit encourages you to breathe. Everything is under control--His control. That's what it means for Jesus to be at God's right hand. That's theology, not geography. Politicians and armies do not rule. Plagues and viruses are not in control. Mother Nature does not reign. Nor does fate. Chance. The devil. Or anyone or anything else. Only Jesus does. Breathe.

Even sin, our own sin, including the unbelief that whispers, "God is not in control!" does not rule. Seeing all of our unbelief and sin from the moment we were conceived to our final breath, God put it all on Jesus when Jesus died on the Cross for us. You are forgiven everything. You stand before God, now, holy and righteous, His child. And God will not allow anything in all creation to end in the suffocating of His holy and righteous children (Romans 8:28).

"Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name" (Psalm 97:12). In other words, "Breathe." Live in the glad confidence that Jesus is always with you. He is not gone. He just hides His power sometimes behind this world's trials and troubles (Isaiah 45:15). But He's still there. And you are still baptized. Still absolved. Tomorrow you will hear again the promise that by the Cross of Christ God still declares you His concern, His righteous child. You will even eat and drink the Body and the Blood, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." And though everything around you changes, God's promises never will. Breathe. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest upon His unchanging grace; In ev'ry high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.

("My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" LSB 575, st.2)

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

JANUARY 23, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 8:1-13

Daily Lectionary: Joel 2:18-32; Romans 11:25-12:13

"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 8:11)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. A great theme during the Epiphany season is that the Gospel is for everyone. It's why we sing, "Joy to the World." Not just to some, but to the world. No one is right with God because they are different somehow, or better than others. Not even you. You're not in with the Almighty because you responded the right way and met all of God's promises with faith. Or because you have this work or virtue in you that sets you apart from others and declares you to be God's child.

No. Jesus would rather we identify with the leper at His feet who, because of his present condition, has no claim at all on God. His only hope is that God lays claim on him through Jesus, no matter what. Jesus would want us to identify with the centurion who also knew how unworthy he was. "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matthew 8:8).

Faith does not say, "Look at me, God. I've got what it takes." Faith knows it has no merit, no value or worth of its own to count on. It's why faith says, "Look at Jesus, God. He's all I have to count on. In fact, He's Your claim on me, God. Your promise of love and forgiveness for me, no matter what." As rare as that may seem, Jesus calls that faith.

Are you concerned that there's nothing in you, from you, about you--no quality, virtue, or work--that sets you apart from the damned, that gets you in with God or qualifies you for His forgiveness and favor? Fear not. For under orders from God in heaven to bring His goodness and mercy to all on earth, Jesus is God's favor on you. He is God's claim on you. "Joy to the World."

Don't let anyone tell you faith means anything less--as if faith isn't so great. Faith does not mean the leper, the centurion, or you. It just means Jesus. How great is that? Like I said, a great theme of the Epiphany season is that the Gospel is for everyone. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities and stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
(Collect for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany)

St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor

JANUARY 24, 2022

Today's Reading: 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Daily Lectionary: Joel 3:1-21; Romans 12:14-13:14

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. (1 Timothy 6:15a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Flee...pursue...fight." With such language, you might think Paul is talking about kickboxers in an octagon or wrestlers at WrestleMania. No. He's talking about that fighter in the pulpit, your pastor. Yes, your pastor is a fighter, too. Why? Because he's just like you. Let me explain.

Like you, your pastor struggles every day with doubt and despair over and against the promises of God. "Am I forgiven?" "Am I His?" "Does God care?" "Can I trust, in spite of everything I know, that I am holy and righteous in His sight, His child, an heir to eternal life?" Believe it or not, your pastor is a lot like you.

But as your pastor, your pastor also knows that a happy answer can never be found in us (Romans 7:18), in our prayers (Romans 8:26), our works (Isaiah 64:6), our choosing (John 15:16), our love (1 John 4:10), our desire, or anything else that is ours (Romans 9:16). The answer lies outside of us, in Jesus.

That is what makes the faith worth fighting for. The faith is not about some Jesus in us, but about the Jesus who is outside of us. The Jesus for us on the Cross. The Jesus for us in the water. The Jesus for us in the Word. The Jesus for us in the Supper. For this is the Jesus who saves, who brings us to the Father holy and righteous. This is the Jesus who calls us to faith, and keeps us there (2 Corinthians 13:5). Not the Jesus in us, but the Jesus for us.

Does God care? Am I forgiven? Holy and righteous in His sight? An heir to eternal life? Don't listen to your heart. Listen to the faith, for Baptism, the Absolution, and preaching of the Gospel, and the Supper all say, "Yes!"

That is the faith every pastor should be fighting for. And today, we give thanks to God for Timothy and for all pastors fighting "the good fight of the faith." In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have always given to Your church on earth faithful shepherds such as Timothy to guide and feed Your flock. Make all pastors diligent to preach Your holy Word and administer Your means of grace, and grant Your people wisdom to follow in the way that leads to life eternal; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor)

The Conversion of St. Paul

JANUARY 25, 2022

Today's Reading: Acts 9:1-22

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 1:1-21; Romans 14:1-23

"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine."

(Acts 9:15a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The Lord has a funny way of choosing, doesn't He? He finds an unbeliever, His harshest critic, His biggest enemy, an infamous persecutor. And says, "Here's my guy!" On what basis does God choose us? Certainly not on the basis of the Law and its works.

No, God does not choose you because you love or believe in Jesus, any more than He chose Paul that way. Yes, you do love and believe in Jesus. But as with Paul, that doesn't come first. Jesus comes first. Jesus always comes first. And second. And third. And last.

Don't look at it as though you are saved because you love Jesus. You love Jesus because you are saved. It's the same with believing. You're not saved because you believe. You believe because you are saved. You don't come first. Or second. Or third. Or at all in the matter of salvation. Only Jesus does.

Think Jesus, then. Think the Cross. Think Baptism. Think the preaching of the Gospel. Think the Holy Supper. Leave you, the sinner, out of it, because it is not at all on the basis of the law and its righteousness that God chooses for you. It's all by His grace (Romans 3:23-24), by His love (1 John 4:10, 19), by His choosing (John 15:16).

When Paul was baptized, "Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes" (Acts 9:18). Smile at that. For while it is debatable whether Paul ever regained his physical eyesight (Galatians 4:15), he now had the converted and clear eyes of faith. God chooses us, chooses Paul, chooses you, chooses me, chooses sinners now, because of Jesus. And only because of Jesus.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15). Those are Paul's words to Timothy and to us. They remind us that it's all Jesus. Always Jesus. Only Jesus. That there is no surer ground for us, no surer confidence before God, than Jesus. Only Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You turned the heart of him who persecuted the Church and by his preaching caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world. Grant us ever to rejoice in the saving light of Your Gospel and, following the example of the apostle Paul, to spread it to the ends of the earth; 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 Conversion of St. Paul)

St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor

JANUARY 26, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 10:1-9

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 2:1-3:10; Romans 15:1-13

"And say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" (Luke 10:9)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. "Has come near" does not capture the full sense of the word that Jesus uses. "Has arrived" or "is present" says it better. It's what Jesus is telling His early "pastors" to teach and preach in His Name. Every leper cleansed, every sick person healed, every blind eye and deaf ear opened was a sermon in itself that said, "God and sinners are reconciled, now, in Jesus." Sins are forgiven. Judgments erased. Death defeated. Lives restored. Eternity promised.

Glad tidings to all, even to Titus who, unlike Paul and Timothy, was a Gentile. He was from Greece which, according to Jewish tradition, made him part of the "70 nation" world that surrounded Israel. By sending out the 72, Jesus is showing us that it really is the whole world God is embracing in His Son (John 3:16).

A co-worker of Paul's and friend to Timothy, Pastor Titus was now preaching and defending this kingdom's Gospel from the pulpit (Titus 1:3,9), the font (Titus 3:4-7), and the altar (Titus 3:10, 15). And the kingdom's Gospel is this: The kingdom isn't just near to us in these places. It is with us in these places. For Jesus is promised to us, is with us today, in these places.

"Peace be to this house!" (Luke 10:5) That's the kingdom's embrace you are promised at the font in Holy Baptism. It's the Jesus you hear from your pastor in every Absolution and sermon he speaks. It's the peace given you at the Supper with Jesus' Body and Blood, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

No matter the trial or burden you are facing, then, or the sin you must own up to, God is not rejecting you by sending you Jesus. He is owning you. He is claiming you. He is forgiving and embracing and reconciling you to Himself, setting you free from all your sin and from all your trials. And promising you a Day, even an eternity, to prove that to you. A forever Father in heaven who will never let go.

That's peace. And it's not just "near to you" with Jesus. It's with you, with Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You called Titus to the work of pastor and teacher. Make all shepherds of Your flock diligent in preaching Your holy Word so that the whole world may know the immeasurable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
(Collect for St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor)

Thursday of the Third Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 27, 2022

Today's Reading: Exodus 33:12-23

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 4:1-5:11; Romans 15:14-33

*"And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."
(Exodus 33:19b)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. They had lost every right to call themselves God's children. In fact, the taste of the golden calf, which Moses had them melt into a beverage and drink, was still in their mouths when God spoke these words. They had worshiped the golden calf, calling it their god, giving it the praise and glory for their rescue from Egypt. In wrath, God swore He would disown them. "And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them'" (Exodus 32:9).

Moses steps into the breach by reminding God of His promise to redeem His children from all their sins (Exodus 32:11-14). For it is only that faithfulness, God's continued, forever faithfulness to Jesus and the Cross, that saves sinners from all their sins. It is the only reason God does not wipe out sinners, but continues calling them, even today, even you, His own.

This is who God is. Unpack His Name, and what you get is the promise of the Cross. Jesus will carry all of your sin to its logical conclusion for you. He, not you, will be disowned by God when He suffers and dies for you on the Cross. His sacrifice now defines you before God. You are holy. You are forgiven. You are redeemed, for God's faithfulness will always be greater than your sin.

Like we often do, Moses wanted to pry deeper into the mysteries of God. But as with Moses, God simply tells you the mystery that you need to know. He points you to your Baptism, where with His Name God promises you the daily cleansing and mercy of Jesus' Cross. He sends you pastors to absolve you and to preach Christ crucified to you. He even gives you Jesus' Body and Blood at the Holy Supper, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins."

And the only mystery you need to know is known: God's faithfulness is your joy, your confidence before God. Because God's continued faithfulness to the Cross and its promise is, and always will be, your salvation. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Jesus has come as the mighty Redeemer. See now the threatening strong one disarmed! Jesus breaks down all the walls of death's fortress, Brings forth the prisoner triumphant, unharmed. Satan, you wicked one, own now your master! Jesus has come! He, the mighty Redeemer!

("Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure" LSB 533, st.1)

Friday of the Third Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 28, 2022

Today's Reading: Romans 12:16-21

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 6:1-7:14; Romans 16:17-27

Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil.

(Romans 12:16c-17a)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It seems like the smart thing to do. I mean, someone wrongs you, you wrong them back. Right? If they speak evil of you, you speak evil of them. Meet hatred with hatred, pushing and shoving with pushing and shoving. After all, if you aren't looking out for you, who is? Right?

To all that, you can hear Jesus saying, "O you of little faith" (Matthew 6:30). And He is right. Thinking I am alone in this world, with no one to look out for me but me, I often take matters into my own hands, only to end up lashing out at others. Yes, such little faith.

You, too? Repent, because those thoughts aren't true. You are never alone in this world. That our flesh insists on believing otherwise is just evidence of the unbelief still tucked away in our hearts. That's where all our sin comes from, "O you of little faith."

Good News: The antidote is not you, but Jesus. For every proof of the unbelief you and I were born with and that will be with us all the way to the grave Jesus answered for by His sacrifice upon the Cross. All the evidence of our unbelief lies forever buried now beneath His death for us upon the Cross. You are holy to God. You are His child. You are forgiven everything. God's gracious presence and happy smile are with you now and forever. Jesus' water, Word, and Supper promise you this.

So, you think it smarts when others hurt you? Guess what? It smarts God even more, because you are His dear child. He's got this. He's got you. And He will never let go. If others mean you harm, and God allows it, it's only because God is using it to accomplish a greater good for you, or for others, that you can't see right now (Genesis 50:20). Trust Him on that. If others refuse to live in peace with you, fine. You can do the honorable thing by leaving the whole business, and any vengeance, in God's hands and continuing on with the greatest work of all: love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

For how does good overcome evil? The Cross. That's how. That's always how. Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*We share our mutual woes, Our mutual burdens bear
And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear.
From sorrow, toil, and pain, And sin we shall be free
And perfect love and friendship reign Through all eternity*

("Blest Be the Tie That Binds" LSB 649, st.3,5)

Saturday of the Third Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 29, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
(Psalm 107:1, 8, 24-25; antiphon: v.28-29)

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 8:1-23; 2 Timothy 1:1-18

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. (From the Introit for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Tomorrow's Introit speaks of God's "steadfast love" (Psalm 107:1). That's what always holds and lasts. For while this world is constantly tossing us about like a stormy sea, filled with one upheaval after another, one thing remains constant: the promise God has forever tied to the death of Jesus on the Cross for you. You are forgiven. God declares you forever holy now in His judgment. You are an heir to eternal life.

God has not promised you your best life here and now. If anything, He has promised that our here-and-now will be filled with upheavals, trials, and troubles of every sort (Acts 14:22; Matthew 6:34b). It's why tomorrow's Introit, like a lighthouse, points the way for you by pointing to Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross for you. Many Christians may even be singing, "When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace; in ev'ry high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil. On Christ, the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand" ("My Hope is Built on Nothing Less" LSB 575, st.2).

Or, perhaps many will be singing, "Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies. Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me" ("Abide With Me" LSB 878, st.6).

Either way, by Jesus' presence for you on the Cross, and by His presence for you today with the promise of His Cross in His water, in His Word, and at His Supper, God remains constant and steadfast in His goodness and mercy toward you, as well as His forgiveness and love. For what He has promised with the Cross, He will never take back.

You may think, with all the upheavals all around you today like that stormy sea, nothing is solid, least of all the ground under your feet. But you'd be wrong. Today is just not that powerful. Nor is any upheaval or trial. God will not let that happen. Truth be told, Jesus be told, nothing is more powerful than the promise God has made with you on the Cross. It's a promise that still hushes the waves and calms the storm. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near With His cheer; Never will He leave me. Who can rob me of the heaven That God's Son For me won When His life was given? ("Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me" LSB 756, st.1)

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

JANUARY 30, 2022

Today's Reading: Matthew 8:23-27

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 9:1-17; 2 Timothy 2:1-26

And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. (Matthew 8:24)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Ever felt like Jesus is sleeping on the job? Something really bad happens to you. The storm is raging. The winds are howling. The sea is unleashing all its fury. Then this goes wrong. Then that goes wrong. Then everything goes wrong. And your boat is now taking on water. At such times you, too, are crying out, "Save me, Jesus; I'm perishing!" Does He hear? Or, is Jesus sound asleep on the job?

You're not the first to wonder. God's children have always struggled with fear and doubt. In the Book of Isaiah, God asks, "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God?'" God would speak to all our fears and doubts even then, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary" (Isaiah 40:27-28).

Sending His own Son to suffer and die for you and for all the evidence of your unbelief, washing you holy and blameless every day with the promise of Jesus' Cross in Baptism, sending pastors to speak His pardon over you, feeding you today with Jesus' Body and Blood, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins," guess what? There is no perishing, now, for you. It's gone. No matter how dark the skies get, no matter how tossed about you may be in this life, no matter how much of the sea gets into your boat, there is no perishing for you, now. That's been defeated for you by Jesus, when Jesus perished for you on the Cross.

I know there are times when it seems like Jesus is sleeping and not paying any attention. Today's Gospel promises that this is just your unbelief talking. Because the truth is, God sees you as holy now in His sight. His child. And as such, He loves you fiercely. Even in the storm. Especially in the storm. Because of Jesus. That's the truth. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; 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 after the Epiphany)

Monday of the Fourth Week after the Epiphany

JANUARY 31, 2022

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:1-17

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 10:1-11:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-17

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. (Jonah 1:4)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. It's easy to conclude, when all you see is the storm, that God hates you, doesn't care, forgive, or want to help you at all but is only interested in your pain and suffering. If that's what you have concluded about God because of the storm you're in, the Book of Jonah has good news for you. Your conclusion is as far from the truth as the east is from the west.

By tossing Jesus into the raging sea of His wrath and anger toward the sin of the whole world, God has promised that, while there may be storms all around you, there is no storm at all in His heart now when it comes to you. Your sin remains as far from you as the east does from the west. Since you are forgiven, God delights and rejoices in you. All the wrath and fury stirred by your sin has forever been silenced in Him, stilled by the blood Jesus shed for you on the Cross.

Listen to Zephaniah 3: "The LORD has taken away the judgments against you. . . Fear not. . . The LORD God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you by his love" (vv.15-17). And Isaiah 62:2-5: "You shall no longer be termed Forsaken. . . For the LORD delights in you. . . And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." And Romans 8:31: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

It's easy to conclude, when all you see is the storm, that God is against you. But you'd be wrong. Jesus died for you. And the blood Jesus shed on the Cross for you now promises that in every storm you face God remains your loving, rejoicing, caring, forgiving, saving heavenly Father. In fact, His water, His Word and His Supper still promise you, through every storm, that will never change. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way; When sorrows, like sea billows, roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well with my soul.
Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, Let this blest
assurance control, That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate And hath shed
His own blood for my soul. It is well with my soul, it is well with my soul.*

("When Peace, like a River" LSB 763, st.1,3)

Tuesday of the Fourth Week after the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 1, 2022

Today's Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 11:4-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-18

*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.
(Romans 13:10)*

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. Paul certainly doesn't set the bar very high, does he? "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Who does Paul think we are? Sinners who are always offending God, justly deserving His now and forever punishment? I think we know the answer. We confess it every Sunday.

The world, however, ignores this judgment. Convinced of its own righteousness, it looks to the Law for confirmation of its own righteousness in its own works and thinks it has found it there. Of course, to avoid the charge of being self-serving with the Law, the world talks about the Law as being a complex and sophisticated system of morality. How insulting to hear Paul say that it's not rocket science at all. It's just, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

The baptized know such love. For though we are lost and condemned in our own sin, Jesus comes to us every day with the promise of His Cross in Baptism, washing us, cleansing us, not at all harming but presenting us holy and blameless to His Father. He comes not to harm but to forgive in the Absolution and sermons we hear from our pastor. And Jesus comes not to harm but to save with His Body and Blood at His Supper, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Yes, Jesus knows exactly who we are.

While such love may not fix or solve everything that is wrong in this life, including ourselves, it is the love God has promised and given you and me in this life. No, He has not promised us our best life here and now. But He has promised us His redeeming, forgiving, saving love in Jesus. And that makes love the one thing, the only thing, the baptized now owe all others (Romans 13:8).

Fixing and solving is a God-thing, really. Even a Last Day sort of thing. A for now thing, a baptized-thing, is just to love: to forgive, to help, to pray for, to serve and point everyone, friend and foe, to Jesus and His Cross. There's no harm in that. Just love. Just more Jesus. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav'n, to earth come down! Fix in us Thy humble dwelling, All Thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, Thou art all compassion, Pure, unbounded love Thou art; Visit us with Thy salvation, Enter ev'ry trembling heart. ("Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" LSB 700, st.1)

The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord

FEBRUARY 2, 2022

Today's Reading: Luke 2:22-32

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 12:1-13:9; Titus 1:1-2:6

When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. (Luke 2:22)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The next time we will hear about Jesus is 12 years down the road when Mary and Joseph return to the temple with Him. Calling it His "Father's house" then, Jesus amazes everyone with "His understanding and His answers" (Luke 2:49, 47). Today, it is Simeon who is amazed.

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

In his own arms at that very moment was Simeon's God, placing Himself under His own Law (Exodus 13:1-2) to do for us what we could never do for ourselves: to keep His law perfectly, without sin. Simeon knows "a pair of doves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24; Leviticus 12) will be just fine for this One. For here, in this One, in Jesus, is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Simeon also knew, in that moment, that he was holding the One you and I now hold in the "arms of faith." For this is the same Jesus given to us in Baptism, in the Absolution, in the preaching of the Gospel, and at the Holy Supper. It's the same Jesus who placed Himself under His own Law and kept that Law perfectly. Who suffered and died for all our sins on the Cross. Who now presents you and me holy and blameless to His Father in heaven, without sin, justified, heirs to eternal life.

And that means, like Simeon, that you and I get to marvel now, too. For you and I, also, will die in peace now. Free from all our sins. Free from death. Free from wrath. Free from judgment. Free from hell. Free from having to save ourselves. For that is the salvation God has prepared for us, too, in the sight of all people, in Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty and ever-living God, as Your only begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh, grant that we may be presented to You with pure and clean hearts; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Collect for the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of our Lord)

Thursday of the Fourth Week after the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 3, 2022

Today's Reading: *Small Catechism*: Table of Duties, To Everyone

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 14:1-21; Titus 2:7-3:15

The commandments...are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Romans 13:9)

In the Name † of Jesus. Amen. You have probably heard it said that you can't love others until you first love yourself. That might sound cute and clever, but it's not all helpful and it certainly contradicts the conclusion of Calvary. The problem is not that we don't love ourselves. That's not why Jesus died on the Cross for us. The problem is just the opposite. We do love ourselves. More than anything. In fact, that's the very definition of sin.

The Good News is that God has all the love for you that you will ever need. Jesus died on the Cross for you. He died for every last one of your sins, for all the self-love you have now and will ever be guilty of indulging. And yes, that's a lot to die for, but Jesus did it anyway. For you.

And it gets better. For Jesus is there for you every day with the promise of His Cross in Baptism, now, washing you righteous in God's sight. He is there with the promise of His Cross in every Absolution and sermon you hear from your pastor. And He is at His Supper making sure the very definition of sin remains as far from you as the east is from the west. "For you, for the forgiveness of sins."

Do you know what this means? It means there is never a time when God is not delighting in you, calling you His own, even declaring all your works holy in His sight. Even your hitting that snooze button for the hundredth time. Or brushing your teeth. Or doing homework. Or eating lunch. Or laughing. Or crying. Or whatever. Doesn't matter. God is amazed by it all now, by you now, because of Jesus.

But, what about your sins? They are gone, died for, paid for, spoken away, washed away, fed away by Jesus as soon as they appear, and even sooner. Like I said, with Jesus God has all the love for you that you will ever need. That, then, is where you will find the courage, the strength, and the grace to turn to your neighbor with love. In fact, so overflowing is God's love for you, it can't help but spill over to others. That's what it's designed to do. And, yes, because of Jesus God is already smiling over it all. In the Name † of Jesus. Amen.

Lord, help us walk Your servant way Wherever love may lead And, bending low, forgetting self, Each serve the other's need.

("Lord, Help Us Walk Your Servant Way" LSB 857, st.1)

Friday of the Fourth Week after the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 4, 2022

Daily Lectionary: Job 1:1-22; John 1:1-18

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

(Job 1:21)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Job certainly endured more than his share of pain and grief in his life. Yet through it all Job never blamed chance or fate, the devil or evil people, Mother Nature, or even himself and his own sin. No. Job received it all as from the hand of Jesus. That’s what Job means when he says, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” God says, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”

Job repeats his confidence in chapter 2: “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” Again, God says, “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10). Rest assured, then, there is no sin in daring to trust in Jesus like that.

“Oh that my words were written!” Job cries out in chapter 19. “Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!” (Job 19:23-27)

Job trusted everything about Jesus. He trusted that whatever his sins had earned from God would be forever answered for, paid for, by Jesus’ death for him upon the Cross. He could live every day in the confidence that Jesus, his Redeemer, was in complete control. He could receive everything as coming from The Hand that was now forever holding on to him. So, he did.

You, too. For all that your sin deserves Jesus also paid for with His death for you upon the Cross. And with the promise of the Cross now in His Word, in His water, and at His Supper, Jesus is promising you that He means you no harm in anything He allows or sends. He’s got this. He’s got you. And, as with Job, Jesus promises to never let go. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

What God ordains is always good; His loving thought attends me; No poison can be in the cup That my physician sends me. My God is true; Each morning new I trust His grace unending, My life to Him commending.

(“What God Ordains is Always Good” LSB 760, st.3)

Saturday of the Fourth Week after the Epiphany

FEBRUARY 5, 2022

Today's Reading: Introit for the Transfiguration of Our Lord

(Psalm 84:1-2a, 4, 10-11; antiphon: Psalm 77:18b)

Daily Lectionary: Job 2:1-3:10; John 1:19-34

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise. (From the Introit for the Transfiguration of our Lord)

In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. Imagine being where the people around always sang into your ears the promise that by Jesus' death for you upon the Cross your sins are all forgiven, your works have all been declared righteous in God's sight, and your life completely holy. Imagine being where the liturgy always pointed you to the Gospel like that, where the words of Holy Absolution were constantly spoken and preached, and Jesus' Body and Blood were ever present to eat and to drink as He promises, "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Imagine that, and you'll understand what the psalmist is talking about in tomorrow's Introit.

The world, on the other hand, convinced of its own righteousness, gathers together by its strength and choice only to talk about itself and its own works and to sing its own praises. It's enough to suck the air out of any room, and the faith out of any believer.

It's why those who are in the house of the Lord are blessed.. Because no matter how broken and damaged we are by sin, how many times defeated by Satan, finding no refuge or help within, haunted by the past, frightened by the present, fearful of the future, in the house of the Lord we have in our ears again and again what calls us to faith, what gives and sustains and restores our faith: Jesus.

Come what may in the world, we know what God has spoken, and what He has promised by the death of His Son for us. It's why being even just "a doorkeeper" at church is better than a thousand days anywhere else (Psalm 84:10). Seeing through all the lies, through all the smoke and mirrors of false promises and false hopes (1 Corinthians 15:19; Ezekiel 37:11-14), we get to hear again and again the truth, the real story, the final Word that God has spoken over us. And it's not us. It's Jesus. In the Name ✠ of Jesus. Amen.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer's ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, And drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole And calms the heart's unrest; 'Tis manna to the hungry soul And to the weary, rest.

Dear name! The rock on which I build, My shield and hiding place; My never failing treasury filled With boundless stores of grace.

("How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" LSB 524, st.1-3)

Notes

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

Unless otherwise noted, Biblical quotations are from the ESV.

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