

SATURDAY, MARCH 2: EXODUS 20:1–23

SEXAGESIMA

These are the Ten Commandments. The First Commandment is the chief: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” For this reason, God repeats it again in verse 23: “You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves.”

Many believe that the function of religion is to impose a “moral code” on society. They think that the kind of religion does not matter so long as it helps people to behave well in society. In truth, religion is a matter of who or what is your god. The true Religion is that which has the one true God as its God. Christianity alone can claim this honor.

Who is this true God of Christianity? It is none other than the man Jesus Christ, who proved His godhood by rising from the dead (Acts 17:31). Before He became man He spoke to Moses on the mountain and gave the Law. He identifies Himself as the God who spoke to Moses and the patriarchs when He declares, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58), for the name “I AM” was the name God gave Himself when He spoke through the burning bush to Moses (Exodus 3:14). Though not yet become man, the God who spoke to Moses on the mountain is the same God whom the Christian Church worships today: the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit—three divine persons, yet one God.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD

FEBRUARY 3–MARCH 2, 2019

**A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

February 2 (Sa)	The Presentation of our Lord
February 3	Epiphany 4
February 10	Transfiguration
February 17	Septuagesima
February 24	Sexagesima/St. Matthias, Apostle

Fellowship Recognized with Iglesia Confesional de Colombia

Following years of discussions and a recent visit by Bishop Heiser and Pastor Paul Rydecki of the ELDoNA with Pastor Carlos Mario Marin of the Iglesia Confesional de Colombia in Medellin, Colombia, the diocese met by phone conference on January 27, recognizing fellowship between the ELDoNA and the Iglesia Confesional de Colombia.

Visitation Scheduled for Charity–Burluson

Bishop Heiser will conduct his visitation of Pastor Heimbigner and Charity Lutheran Church in Burluson, Texas on Transfiguration Sunday (February 10) at 4 P.M.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1: EXODUS 19:1–25

SEXAGESIMA

The people of Israel were not allowed to come into the presence of the Lord. This was for their own protection, since sinful man cannot stand in the presence of holy God and live. God commands that the people be consecrated, that they wash their clothes and refrain from sexual activity, also that the mountain be set aside by a boundary. These things taught the people of their own unworthiness to stand before the holy God. Only those few appointed by God—Moses and Aaron—were allowed to hear the words of the Lord directly. God chose them to pass His words on to the Israelites so that the Israelites would not be destroyed. Moses and Aaron were the mediators, the “in-betweens”, who pointed forward to the Christ’s office as the true Mediator between God and man.

Sin has left a gap between man and God so that man cannot approach God without judgement. We are not able to enter God’s heaven and live, for we are sinful and fallen. Therefore, God Himself took on human nature in the person of the Christ in order to mediate between sinful man and God. Being both man and God, the Christ is able to mediate between us and God the Father. Because He is the only man without sin, Jesus may stand in the presence of the Father on our behalf. This results in our reconciliation to God; those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Mediator are forgiven of their sins and are able to enter God’s heaven.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

It was out of faithfulness to God that Aaron and Hur supported the arms of Moses when he grew weary; they supported him in the task that God had given him. Even as God works through chosen, humble men, men also serve God by serving those whom God has chosen.

This also foreshadows the Christ. Even though He is God and has no need, Christ humbled Himself for a time as a weak man—though without sin—in order to accomplish His work of salvation. St. Paul writes about Him, “being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). For our sake, Jesus subjected Himself to human needs, hunger, fatigue, pain, etc. In this self-chosen humiliation Christ accepted support from His followers, for St. Matthew records that many women followed Him and ministered to Him (Matthew 27:55). By accepting the service of the saints, Christ taught us how to serve one another. “The poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always” (John 12:8).

Since Jesus has ascended to the Father, we now serve Him by serving one another, each in our own vocations. Especially should we support the called pastors of His Church in their duties, as Aaron and Hur did for Moses.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

VII.

Also they teach, that One holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc. [Eph. 4:5, 6]

VIII.

Although the Church properly is the Congregation of Saints and true believers, nevertheless, since, in this life, many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use the Sacraments, which are administered by evil men; according to the saying of Christ: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” etc. [Matt. 23:2]. But the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

—The Augsburg Confession

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4: GEN. 33:1-20 4TH SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

In the General Prayer of the Divine Service we pray, “May it please Thee also to turn the hearts of our enemies and adversaries that they may cease their enmity and be inclined to walk with us in meekness and in peace.” We can try to wrestle with God, but as He showed with Jacob, He is always in control of the match. We can also try to wrestle with the devil and others that want to overcome us with wickedness, but in the end only the Lord can bring victory to the conflict. Jacob was afraid that Esau was coming to destroy him out of hatred over past events. But it was not force or wrestling that brought the brothers a peaceful meeting, it was God’s grace.

Jacob prayed that the Lord would deliver him from the hand of Esau, and he tried to deal shrewdly with the situation, but it was God’s grace that preserved Jacob and his family. In spite of both Jacob’s and Esau’s sins, things were made to work together for the sake of God’s bigger picture of establishing the promised Savior of Israel.

We are sometimes hated for our sins, and other times we are hated for our faithfulness. Like Jacob, we are called to pray and act with wisdom and love. But our wrestling or efforts to manipulate the situation do not bring peace or victory; only the truth of Jesus Christ our Lord can do that.

We pray: Almighty God, who knowest 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 to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27: EXODUS 15:22–16:36 SEXAGESIMA

When the Israelites came to the place called “Marah,” they could not drink the water there because it was bitter—that is, undrinkable. But the Lord shows Moses a certain tree which makes the waters sweet to drink. This was a miraculous cleansing of the water and a lesson pointing forward to the work of the Christ.

Water, of itself, is good. God created it for the nourishment of plants and animals. But water is so easily made bitter by mixing it with something else. Mere salt renders good water undrinkable. This is to remind men of their fallen condition; human nature was also created pure and holy, but sin has rendered human nature bitter by introducing all kinds of evils. Sin is a disease which destroys what is good and makes life unbearable.

God demonstrates His saving power in this: that which sin has corrupted, He is able to make sweet again. By casting a tree into the water, God made the bitter water sweet. So also the Christ, by sharing the bitterness of our human lives—though without sin—and dying on the tree of the cross, restores sweetness to human life in His own person. “Because human nature through sin was depraved and lost so that it became the body of sin and death, therefore the Son of God in turn willed to condemn sin and to abolish death in the assumed human nature, and in His own person He willed to restore human nature to righteousness, life, and salvation.” (Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, p. 147).

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In the previous chapter God delivered the Israelites from Egypt, miraculously drowning Pharaoh and his entire army in the Red Sea. This deliverance points forward to Baptism, in which the sinner is forgiven of his sins through a miraculous use of water.

The Israelites react to God's deliverance with a song of praise and thanksgiving. Their song tells what God did for them in specific language: "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea." Through the use of song, the Israelites would always remember the day in which God saved them from the Egyptians through water. In the same way, the New Testament Church employs hymns for worship. The best of hymns recall the specific works which God has performed for His Church—for example, that the Son of God became flesh, that He was crucified and rose again, for the gift of Baptism, and for the promise of the Resurrection of the dead. God wants to be praised for the works He has done. Likewise, the saints who have died sing to God for His works done on earth; their song of praise is this: "You [Christ] were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

The Church of God has always employed song to retell the gracious acts of God. This recounting of God's works is the substance of Christian praise, for God desires to be praised for His works.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

These verses remind us that the one catholic Church is established by our Lord and has been consistent throughout history. Jacob was called and appointed to lead the people under his care. He taught them to turn from their other gods and trust in God above all things. They worshiped God, and their identity was known among the peoples around them. People lived and died; others were born, and still others were born again, such as when Jacob was renamed by the Lord. God taught them to abide in the blessings and promises that He gave them, and He abided with them.

It is always important that we remember the changing story of history as it progresses in this world; there are always valuable lessons to learn from it. And we should always remember that the Lord's Church is a holy and sublime institution through which He has worked great wonders in the world. But it is also important that we not forget that His Church and His blessings are with us through the common, ongoing simple realities as well. The Church is not about blips in history, or just one day a week. And our identity as His people is not just about bloodlines or corporate institutions. His Church is established throughout all times, before and after us, by His Word and His Spirit as people are made to walk faithfully through all aspects of life.

We pray: Almighty God, who knowest 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 to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Joseph's brothers hated him because his dream was a challenge to their presuppositions. They pridefully thought that the younger brother couldn't have authority over them. They seem to have forgotten the stories of their forefathers and the work of God's will. If they would have remembered the promises of God that had been taught to them, they would have been more likely to simply say, "His will be done." Instead, they let their vain resentment fester and build to the point that they were willing to treacherously destroy their own brother.

God's will is more important than our presuppositions. Our sinful hearts want our will to be done, and so they often come up with schemes and treachery to make it happen. Thankfully, God's will cannot be overthrown by the evil hearts of sinners. Wicked people can play foolish games and sow chaos, but the Lord can always take such things and bring about blessed ends.

As the sons of Israel sought to kill Joseph and keep him from having authority over them, the false teachers of Israel sought to kill our Lord Jesus. In spite of their treachery, Jesus was exalted in the greatest blessing mankind has ever received, Christ crucified for our forgiveness!

The wicked are not justified in their treachery against the Lord's will and authority, but they are still tools through which He can bring us great blessings.

We pray: Almighty God, who knowest 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 to 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 parting of the Red Sea became a defining moment in the lives of the Israelites. God would point them back to this event as a reminder that it was He who delivered them from slavery. The Israelites were to remember this event, generation after generation, so that all of Israel would know that their God is the true God, and that they are His people.

The parting of the Red Sea is a sign of Baptism. Before Baptism, man is a slave of sin and cannot free himself. He cannot help but sin. All his thoughts, words, and deeds are wicked because he does not know or trust in God. But, just as the Israelites were saved from Pharaoh through water, the sinner is saved from sin through the waters of Baptism. The baptized Christian still sins, but he is no longer a slave of sin. Because the Holy Spirit now lives in him, he begins to fear, love, and trust in God. The baptized Christian can perform good works, which are acts of faith. The sins which he still commits out of weakness and ignorance are forgiven, having been drowned in the waters of Baptism.

Baptism defines the Christian. God often reminded the Israelites of His deliverance from Egypt to remind them that He is their God and they are His people. Christians, likewise, remember their Baptism and teach their children about it. We are God's people and He is our God, because He has delivered us from the slavery of sin through Baptism.

We pray: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Since the Lord spared all the firstborn males of Israel, He claimed all their future firstborn males as His own. For common animals this meant giving them back to the Lord through sacrifice. For work animals it meant either killing them or redeeming them—buying them back from the Lord—through the sacrifice of a lamb. The firstborn sons of Israel also belonged to the Lord. They, too, had to be redeemed. The whole tribe of Levi eventually became part of the redemption price for the firstborn of Israel.

The firstborn Son of Mary was lawfully consecrated to God soon after He was born, in accordance with the words of Moses in today's reading (cf. Luke 2:22-24), but no mention is made in Luke's Gospel of a redemption price that was paid for Him. (The sacrifice Mary and Joseph offered was for Mary's purification.) This makes sense, because Jesus was wholly devoted to the Lord and never departed from the Lord's service. Indeed, He Himself was the fulfillment of the consecration of the firstborn.

The firstborn of Egypt and Israel represent all people. All should rightfully die for their sins. But Christ Jesus, the Firstborn over all creation, took the place of all men and was sacrificed as the redemption price, as the propitiation for the sins of the world. And now God, in His mercy, has promised to spare from death all who believe in Christ the Redeemer. Just as the Passover itself pointed ahead to Christ, so also the consecration of the firstborn was a shadow of the Savior.

We pray: O Lord, hear favorably the prayers of Your people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness, for the glory of Your Name; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior. Amen.

This chapter continues to show that God's will is greater than the vain treachery of sinners. Potiphar's wife was only concerned with her own desires, not the greater good that came to the entire household through Joseph. She, like Joseph's brothers, did not like what he had to say, so she wickedly sought to destroy him.

Sin blinds us to the big picture of God's good will. Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of mocking her and the whole household, even though the Lord had brought many blessings through him, which the master and others had recognized! Pride compels us to mock God and His blessings when He doesn't submit to our shortsighted carnal desires. But faith would teach us humility. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to submit to His will, not ours, and to run from the temptations of the devil, not lie or rationalize about them.

God's Word says He was with Joseph, even though he was betrayed by his brothers, slandered, and thrown in prison. God would continue to be with Joseph and work blessings through him for the sake of His will, even as those blessings would help those who plotted evil against him. The Lord is with us also, even though wickedness and pride tries to destroy us from within and from without. Thanks be to God that the "big picture" of His cross and forgiveness are greater than the brokenness of this world.

We pray: Almighty God, who knowest 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 to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

“Do not interpretations belong to God?”

False teachers and misguided people throughout the ages have sought to gain power and knowledge from interpreting dreams. While some dreams do mean things, and, as we see in God’s Word, He can use them to accomplish things in our midst, He attaches no command to rely on them, and no promise that it is always His truth that comes through them. Sinners and devils can influence our dreams too.

God does attach His commands and promises to the Word and Sacrament Ministry of His Church. He doesn’t promise to be with us in dreams, but He does promise to be with us always where His truth is taught, where His Gospel is preached, where His Baptism is placed on us in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and where His Body and Blood are received in bread and wine in remembrance of His crucifixion for our forgiveness. These things are clear and consistent, whereas dreams are not. Even the example from today’s reading shows that the dreams interpreted by Joseph were unclear, and the interpretation was revealed as accurate only because God was working through Joseph in these events. God’s greater blessings are revealed in His clear works of grace and mercy for all to see, above all in the Gospel of Christ crucified.

We pray: Almighty God, who knowest 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 to 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 Lord fulfilled His word. He passed over the blood-marked houses of the Israelites and brought no destruction there. The destruction He brought against the Egyptians finally purchased the Israelites’ release from slavery. On that single night God’s people were saved from death and released from slavery. And so it became known as the “night of the Lord.”

That night pointed ahead to the greater “night” of the Lord, which began on the night of Maundy Thursday and culminated in the night of Holy Saturday—the beginning of Easter Sunday by Jewish reckoning. At that time the true Paschal Lamb suffered, died, rested in the grave, and finally broke the bonds of death, delivering His faithful people from their slavery to sin and death.

The words from the traditional rite of the Vigil of Easter recall this connection:

“It is truly meet and right, always and everywhere, with our whole heart and mind and voice, to praise You, the invisible, almighty, and eternal God, and Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; for He is the true Paschal Lamb, who at the feast of the Passover paid for us the debt of Adam’s sin, and by His blood delivered Your faithful people. This is the night when You brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land. This is the night when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin and are restored to grace and holiness of life. This is the night when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell and rose victorious from the grave.”

We pray: O Father, we thank You, through Jesus Christ, our Paschal Lamb, for Your night of deliverance, for Israel and for us. Amen.

God's plan to strike Egypt with one more plague had been announced: all the firstborn in Egypt would die. The plague would have overtaken Israelite and Egyptian alike had the Lord not provided Israel with the remedy: the blood of the spotless lamb marking the doorways of their houses. The blood of the lamb would keep them safe from death.

The plague against the firstborn was certainly the most terrible of the ten plagues, and yet it was only a foretaste of the death that is coming upon all the families of mankind. All have sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Young, old, male, female—no one is exempt from the Law's pointing finger.

But God has provided the remedy: the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, has already been spilled. The Holy Spirit holds it out to sinners in the Gospel, urging us to take shelter under Christ's holy, precious blood, convincing us that there is safety here. It is a safety designed for us by God Himself, complete safety from death and destruction, from the accusations of the Law, and from the curse of sin.

The Passover's annual celebration was a perpetual invitation to Israel to trust in the Lamb of God whom the Lord would provide from the house of David. Now Easter, the true fulfillment of the Passover, serves the same purpose, calling out to all men to have the blood of Christ applied to their hearts by faith so that their sins may be forgiven, that they may live in God's presence without fear. For "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

We pray: O Father, we thank You for the precious blood of Your Son and for the faith which keeps us safe from sin and death. Amen.

The dreams of Pharaoh would have been no help at all if it was not for God's provision in Joseph. This is one of the key moments where we see that things were working together for good according to God's will. Proudful brothers or a deceitful woman might have brought widespread death to the whole land because of their petty attacks on Joseph, but the Lord's will prevailed.

This is one of the reasons that the Lord teaches us to endure trials and attacks, and to love our enemies. It is not up to us or our will to get revenge, manipulate people, or insist on our good intentions. We cannot see things the way God Almighty does, so our sinful efforts are worthless if they are not part of His holy workings. He gave us the most profound example of this in our Lord Jesus Christ. He came in humility and survived the murderous efforts of powerful villains. He lived humbly while false teachers taught twisted notions of glory and kingdoms. And He manifested love and forgiveness while treacherous men and cowardly followers gave Him up to death. Christ's story did not go the way that we would have written it, yet in the "foolishness" of the cross God atoned for the sins of the world. In Jesus Christ crucified grace and blessing is given so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!

We pray: Almighty God, who knowest 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 to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Transfiguration Sunday

Article III.

Also they teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20: EXODUS 11:1-10 SEPTUAGESIMA

Nine dreadful plagues had been unleashed against the Egyptians, and still Pharaoh would not bow to the LORD's word. Warning after warning was issued, making each plague avoidable. But each time Pharaoh subjected his people to death and destruction. Each time he hardened his heart. That is, he refused to allow the word of God to change his mind; he refused to believe the plain evidence of God's authority; he refused to allow the signs of God to change his resolve to keep Israel enslaved.

Did Pharaoh harden his own heart, or did God harden his heart? The answer is both/and, not either/or. The words of Moses in Exodus 7-11 indicate that God's terrible judgment of hardening Pharaoh's heart was perfectly in line with what Pharaoh himself also wanted. But just as Pharaoh was determined to oppose the God of Israel, so God was determined to work things out in such a way that His signs and wonders would be for all to see, that Pharaoh's wickedness would be manifest, and that Israel would be redeemed by God's mighty hand and sovereign force. He wanted everyone who witnessed these events, or who would hear of them later to know that nothing will stand in the way of the Lord keeping His solemn promises of redemption and rescue. When God is determined to save, none of His enemies can stand in His way.

How often has the Lord warned us against sin? Don't harden your heart to His warnings. Instead, in daily repentance, remember His determination to save you from sin, death, and the devil through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

We pray: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me, for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Israel's bondage in Egypt was difficult. It is also difficult for us to understand. Why did they have to suffer so long before God finally rescued them?

Their slavery to the Egyptians was a pattern of mankind's slavery to sin. Their suffering was a reflection of the temporal and eternal punishment we all deserve from God. But God had promised beforehand to rescue Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt, just as He promised beforehand to redeem the children of Adam and Eve and to make Abraham's Seed a blessing to all the families of the earth. And just as God's mighty deliverance of Israel depended entirely on His covenant and was carried out entirely by His own powerful deeds, so the Lord's deliverance of mankind is the work of God alone—the work of the Father who gave His Son into slavery and death so that the guilty slaves might go free through the Spirit's work of conversion.

God used Israel both to depict and to carry out the greater salvation that is proclaimed in the Gospel. Martin Luther points out in his commentary on 1 Peter that, while God continued to reveal Himself to Israel little by little, more and more (as He told Moses in today's reading, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them"), He has now, in these end times, given us the final revelation of Himself in the Gospel. Both Israel's bondage and Israel's redemption pointed ahead to our bondage and to our redemption through Christ!

We pray: Father, we praise You for all Your dealings with Israel and for pointing us in Your Word to the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus. Amen.

All of our reading of the Old Testament ought to be Christocentric. Nothing in the Old Testament is simply there for historical record-keeping. Here too in this story of Joseph and his rising to great importance in Egypt we find an image of Christ. Joseph is a type of Christ here, and it is in the most obvious way. In verse 54 it says: "The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread." There was bread in the land of Egypt because of Joseph. Joseph gave out life in a world of death.

Our world is starving spiritually. In our twenty-first century over-abundance, men are skin and bones spiritually. They try to eat the husks of rationalism, pluralism, or socialism, but find no sustenance. The spiritually starving turn to false religions and generic spirituality, but find them empty and not able to feed the soul. There is only one store house in this world where one can find the Bread of Life. The Church is the storehouse, and the Eucharist is the bread.

Joseph is a type of Christ. Jesus Christ gives out the Bread of Life from His inexhaustible stores, and the whole world is welcome. Christ is our Bread of Life, and He leads us on our pilgrimage. We, like Joseph, may not know how God is leading us through this world, but, like Joseph, we trust that our God will lead us to safety and blessing.

We pray: Lord God, help us to trust You through difficult times, and remind us always where our life is to be found. Amen.

Again, Joseph is our Christ figure. He stands as the all-powerful one of Egypt. He holds his brothers in his hands. And though they do not know it, this all-powerful Christ figure works for their benefit, not their destruction. Joseph will not only make them whole physically with grain, but, more importantly, he will bring healing to their souls. This is Christ-like. Though he is wronged, he forgives and restores the sinners.

Our Lord knows what our souls need, and the first step is repentance. Our Lord sees and remembers everything. No sin from the past can be buried and hidden. It must be brought into the light. Repentance must come first. God does not enjoy holding the Law before our face, but it must be done. Joseph “turned himself away from [his brothers] and wept.” He did not want to see them brought low, but it had to be so for their sake. Then he gives them the grain, and not only that, but gives it to them freely. They pay nothing. Their money is in their bags. They did not understand it, but Christ’s forgiveness is given freely. Jacob and his sons did not understand this lesson yet. They still believed that calamity has overtaken them. Joseph will complete the lesson when he has them all assembled together with him.

We must also remember that a life of integrity and uprightness requires repentance for sins and receiving God’s grace with empty hands.

We pray: Lord God, make us contrite and faithful people. Amen.

When God began His great work of redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt, things got worse before they got better. The Egyptians made life even harder for the enslaved Israelites after Moses spoke the Lord’s word to Pharaoh.

So it went also with Christ. He had to face temptation, persecution, suffering, and death before rising from the dead. So it went also for His earliest believers; for the first three hundred years after Pentecost they suffered terribly at the hands of the unbelieving world until eventually the worst of the persecutions ended.

So it goes for the whole world in these end times. Things have to get worse before they get better, before we enter the true Promised Land. The world’s hatred of Christians is getting worse. The society we live in is becoming harder for the godly to endure. And Christians have to bear a cross that the world will never know. Didn’t God promise to deliver us from all this?

He did. And He will deliver us from it in His time, even as He showed in His mighty deliverance of Israel. Indeed, He has already redeemed us from the power of sin, death, and the devil by the cross of His Son, bringing us into His holy Church. But He also warned us that things would get worse here before they get better, before the final deliverance takes place. For now, though the flesh would accuse the Lord of faithlessness or of slowness in keeping His promise, let us remember His dealings with Israel in Egypt, and let us consider the blessed outcome.

We pray: O Lord, sustain our faith when Your deliverance seems far off, that we may partake of the wondrous things You have promised, for the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Note that going to Egypt is portrayed as going “down” to Egypt. That is not because it is south of Canaan on our maps, but because it is less important than Canaan. Egypt is not the promised land. It is not the home of God’s people. By this language we know that this is not a permanent solution. Jacob and his household will go “down” into Egypt for awhile, but God promises to bring them “up” again to the promised land.

God will go “down” with them on their pilgrimage into Egypt. He will not leave them abandoned. Just so, our Lord does not leave us alone on our pilgrimage in this world. He came “down” to us in Bethlehem. He came “down” to us in His incarnation so that He would be with us on our earthly pilgrimage. This world is not our ultimate home either. He gives it to us for a time and we make good use of it. But we are always reminded that there is a promised land we must eventually go to.

In light of their move, Joseph tells his brothers they must remain shepherds. Pharaoh would have invited them to live with the Egyptians. This would soon lead to mixing families and religions with the Egyptians. If that were the case, the Israelites would have forgotten about the promised land. Being shepherds would keep them separated from the Egyptians in Goshen. It would maintain their identity as a people so that one day they might return to the land of Canaan.

We pray: Lord, help us remember that as Christians we are a special people devoted to You. Amen.

Our Lord desires the salvation of all. His patience endures until all those who are ordained for eternal life are gathered to His banquet.

Joseph does not stop only with the sons that arrive in Egypt. He wants them all gathered together. Benjamin must not be left out. Our Lord wants every one of us to be gathered in to His heavenly banquet. Of course, this is the major image of chapter 43. The powerful administrator of Egypt does not greet them with wrath, but with grace. He welcomes them, washes their feet, and makes sure they are not afraid. Most of all, he arranges the banquet for them. In a time of famine, he slaughters an animal and feasts with them.

These hungry men will have all they want. If they had needed more, Joseph probably would have slaughtered two animals. All of their needs would be met at this banquet. This is an image of the holy Eucharist. All our needs will be met there. Our souls will be filled. And again, it is entirely by grace. None of us deserve anything. Here, the youngest, Benjamin, is preferred above all others. He is the least, and yet is made first. One is reminded of Jesus’ words, “the last will be first” (Matthew 20:16). This banquet and this Lord await all of us who are in Christ; and we have the foretaste of it each Lord’s Day. Who would not yearn for this foretaste each week, if not each day?

We pray: Lord, make us yearn for Your heavenly banquet as well as the foretaste You provide. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14: GEN. 44:1-34 5TH SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

Joseph continued to conceal himself from his brothers, but we should not see this as strange. Our Lord concealed Himself for a time from His disciples on the Emmaus road. Joseph had a purpose. Joseph arranged one last test for his brothers. He does this to test their repentance and truthfulness. Also, he would test if they will sacrifice themselves for their brother the way they did not for him. Joseph set up Benjamin to be accused of profound ingratitude, recklessness, and theft. Such an act would be inconceivable by an honored guest. The brothers find the accusation inconceivable. They would never be so wicked. Upon the revealing of the cup, they tore their clothes in horror. Joseph was likely just pretending to use the cup for divination since that was common in Egypt. But it was highly prized and an immense insult to take it. When the punishment was pronounced, Judah steps in to sacrifice himself. How fitting! Is it not the Lion of the tribe of Judah that sacrifices Himself for us? As Judah was the guarantee for his brother Benjamin, so “Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” for us (Hebrews 7:22).

Our Lord came to this world willingly, gladly to substitute Himself for us. We may go free because He put Himself in our place. What joy we experience! What gratitude we should have for Him who gives Himself for us!

We pray: Lord God, help us to see clearly the depth of Your love and sacrifice for us, and strengthen the depth of our love for You. Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15: GEN. 45:1-28 5TH SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

“God sent me before you to preserve a posterity [remnant] for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Again, Joseph is our Christ figure. He goes before to save the children of Abraham. Christ goes before us to preserve for Himself a remnant out of this world. And our Lord tells us, “on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Again He says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Christ will preserve His Church. There will always be a remnant. He will make sure of it. The machinations of man cannot thwart the will of God. Joseph’s brothers meant to do him harm all those years ago, but God was still in control. As Joseph said in verse eight, “So now it was not you who sent me here, but God.” So, even in 2019, when men try to persecute and destroy Christ’s Church, we still know the One who controls the course of history. And the One we know knows us and loves us. He is working history for our ultimate good.

In the twentieth century the Soviet Union could not eliminate the Christians, no matter how hard they tried. Today’s China persecutes the Church, only to see it grow. The American government is becoming more and more hostile to Christians. A remnant will yet survive.

We pray: Lord, preserve Your Church in all ages. Amen.