

**Clergy of the ELDoNA,
affiliated congregations and missions**

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Church, Brandon, WI

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, FL

Rev. Douglas Handrich (Emeritus)

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Benjamin Henson

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Martin Jackson

Lamb of God Ev. Lutheran Church, Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Jacob Henson

St. Henry Lutheran Mission (WI and MI), especially Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; St. James Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



FEBRUARY 2—MARCH 1, 2025

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

The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

February 2	Epiphany 4/Presentation of our Lord	ASBH 13/ ASBH 77
February 9	Transfiguration/St. Cyril	ASBH 15/ ASBH 79 (Workbook)
February 16	Septuagesima	ASBH 16
February 18 (T)	Martin Luther, Confessor & Doctor	ASBH 80
February 23	Sexagesima	ASBH 17
February 24 (M)	St. Matthias, Apostle	ASBH 81 (Workbook)

St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary classes continue

Winter 2024/2025 Quarter continues until Friday, **February 21**.

Classes for the Winter Quarter are:

E000—Greek (3 hrs.)

S001—Lutheran Confessions 1 (3 hrs.)

E001—Hermeneutics/Law & Gospel (3 hrs.)

(Liturgics Practicum 1 is being deferred until Summer.)

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuys (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore).

Final Draft of ASBH to be Sent to all Clergy

Distribution of the final draft of ASBH was delayed by Bishop Heiser's recent illness. The draft will be sent on USB flash drives. Obviously, this will delay the approval process. Pastors and Deacons will have three weeks for commentary after the drives are sent out.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1: JEREMIAH 11:1-7

SEXAGESIMA

“Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God.”

Jeremiah confronted Israel with their faithlessness and their idolatries. He called on them to come back to the Lord and obey His voice. It is easy for us to hear that “obey” word strictly as Law. It actually comes to us from *ob audire*, to “listen up.” By all means we are to “listen up” to the Law, and strive with all our might to keep it. But we misunderstand Jeremiah if we imagine (as many Jews did) that the only problem here was that they were breaking too many rules.

That rampant breaking of rules was just the symptom. The real problem was that they did not love the Lord, that they had forsaken the faith. Jeremiah reminds them of the love of God, that He had brought their forebears out of bondage in Egypt, and so He calls them to return.

We have been delivered from a far greater bondage, from enslavement to sin, death, and the devil. So “listen up” also to the Gospel: Jesus truly has atoned for the sin of the world, including all of yours. From your heart, by the power that comes only from His Holy Spirit, love Him, trust Him, have faith in Him. Then, out of the gratitude of that faith, strive to please Him in all that you say and do.

Collect: O Lord 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever.”

Yesterday’s devotion invited us to look to Old Testament people of faith, who died trusting in the promises of the Lord, even though the promises were not all fulfilled in their lifetimes. Today, our text gives us one of those promises. “Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” It is a promise given to a people doomed to go into exile because of their faithlessness. The Lord will save them from exile, and from a whole lot more.

The Lord became true man, lived the holy life that we fail to live, and sacrificed Himself on the cross to atone for the sin of the world. He rose again on the third day, and on Pentecost the Gospel of salvation was publicly proclaimed with power and glory. Many in Israel failed to believe in Christ, and so are no longer truly God’s Israel. Yet a great many Gentiles did believe in Christ, and so were grafted into Israel. But for all who believe in Christ, we are the Israel of God and we have indeed been gifted by the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

Collect: O Lord 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. 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

The people of Malta were not believers in Christ, but rather believers in “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.” They believed in an over-arching justice that would ensure good behavior was rewarded and bad was punished. But even though they knew Paul was a prisoner, they showed him and the other survivors of the shipwreck great kindness. Perhaps it was the Maltese view that Paul may be innocent after all, since he survived both the storm and the shipwreck. Their thinking changed when Paul was bitten by a viper that was driven out from the burning wood. “So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.’”

When Paul did not die or show any ill effects, they changed direction again and declared him to be a god. Providentially for the Maltese, in the months that followed they would learn far more about Paul and his calling from the true God. May we always shun our human tendency to construct a theology of our own making, and follow what God Himself declares to be true.

Collect: 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, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise...”

The letter to the Hebrews is encouraging converted Jews not to forsake the holy Christian Faith. In this section, the writer is explaining to his readers that in the Old Testament people were saved not by works or all the sacrifices, but by faith alone; faith in the promises of God. They died with those promises unfulfilled, because Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises.

Nevertheless, they trusted God’s promises, and so they died in a state of saving faith. And they are now used as examples to those who have come to faith in the New Testament. What those people faithfully longed for and trusted in, we have! Christ has come! And so we are encouraged to take to heart the example of the faithful men and women of the Old Testament, and trust. We are to trust that, as Christ has come in fulfillment of God’s promises, so too Christ will come again in glory, and we will receive the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come.

They had less, but they stood fast. We now have more. Therefore, may God grant us grace, through their example and the example of many saints down through the ages, to stand fast our whole life in the confidence that God will deliver on everything He has promised in Christ.

Collect: O Lord 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

The Lord is sending out His Twelve, but not to all nations; not here. Here, He commands them to go exclusively to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yet, while He calls them “sheep”, He warns the Twelve that they will be sheep in the midst of wolves! There are those who are simply lost, and then there are those who oppose Christ and exert effort—whether by way of false teaching or physical persecution, or both—to stifle and silence the Gospel message.

Jesus therefore admonishes them to be both “wise” and “harmless” or innocent. They, and we, are not to use coercion, manipulation, or subterfuge. The Word of God is living and active. The Church is sent to speak it. But Christian kindness, mercy, and innocence are ever vulnerable to manipulation and subversion, so we must at the same time be wise to the non-innocence of those who oppose the Gospel message. In this way, the good news may continue to be announced that the Kingdom of God has come; the sin of the world has been atoned for.

Collect: O Lord 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It is important to stay in the Divine Word and be attached to a church that emphasizes this practice. Only in this way can you truly be fed and able to shun voices that are foreign. No person is immune to such voices outside the Church, and no church body is immune to the possibility of said voices infiltrating a congregation. Such is Peter’s warning in today’s text, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them..”

As we adhere to God’s truth, we should always be on guard against demonic voices that seek to distort that truth. It can be easy to recognize and reject the alien voices in the world. It is quite difficult to do the same against people from our own congregation. It seems that Voters’ Meetings and Church Council Meetings are ripe venues for such action. We should be thankful if we attend a church where all the members work in unison to protect what they have in Christ Jesus, and together guard against the demonic forces that inevitably seek to subvert and destroy it.

Collect: 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, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5: MAT. 14:22–33 4TH S. A. EPIPHANY

Storms on the Sea of Galilee are fierce and arrive with little or no warning. The seasoned fishermen among the disciples were of course aware of this, but that doesn't mean they didn't get frightened when their lives hung in the balance. Their journey across the sea started in the evening, and it was now the fourth watch (3 a.m. to 6 a.m.). They had been out a long time and the wind was against them, so they had little human resource left. In the stormy darkness they saw a shape, but assumed it to be a ghost (a common ancient superstition). But when they recognize the figure as Jesus, they know they are safe. Peter even becomes so bold as to leave the boat and meet Jesus on the water. But he soon succumbs to doubt as he enters the domain of the stormy sea. Jesus rebukes his weak faith as well as the wind, and all is calm once again.

In this miracle we see the helplessness of man when faced with storms from without. More importantly, we see the lack of man's trust in his deliverance, even when the Deliverer is at hand. Dangers are inevitable in this sin-wracked world, and doubts will continue to haunt us as Satan uses such events to his advantage. May we never drift from our Savior. Let us feed our faith often, that our doubts may starve to death.

Collect: 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, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25: ECCLESIASTES 11:1–6 SEXAGESIMA

“As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.”

The dogma upon which all false religions, and all corruptions of Christianity, are built is the doctrine that “you get what you deserve.” Some people believe this so tenaciously that, when they see no evidence of this, they appeal to “karma”. They say that somehow what you do will come back on you.

Ecclesiastes gives us the wiser perspective. “You do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.” We do not do good so that “karma” will pay us back. That would be selfish, and therefore, not a good work at all! We are to do good whether we get anything back from it or not, simply out of loving devotion to God. God can do with that as He pleases.

Of course, we no more say that and immediately we know how short we have come. This leads us to repent, and to rejoice in Christ, who truly did lead a selfless life of total devotion to God. As we are in Him, we get what *He* deserved, because He took the punishment we deserved when He died on the cross for us.

Collect: O Lord 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

The Gospel according to St. Matthew in particular makes it clear that Jesus is Israel reduced down to one. In calling the Twelve, Jesus was revealing and establishing the ministry of the New Israel. That New Israel is the one holy Christian, catholic, and Apostolic Church. To be built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), is to receive what the Holy Spirit led them to entrust to us in Holy Scripture.

Oddly, we never hear of Matthias again in Holy Scripture! He is added to the Eleven to make Twelve again, and that's it. No further mention in Acts, no letters to churches or accounts of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit worked these things through others. Matthias' vocation was to be the Twelfth Apostle, and he was. He is remembered that we may rejoice to be the Israel of God, as are all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

Collect: O Almighty God, who by Thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to Thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts and commandest them earnestly to feed Thy flock, make, we beseech Thee, all pastors diligently to preach Thy holy Word and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

How many times have you heard the expression “Nobody's perfect!” It's usually said in reference to mistakes, willing or otherwise. It's meant to buffer criticism or excuse behavior. Although there are times when using the phrase is appropriate, we dare not use it to shield our sin. In today's text, St. Paul openly confesses his struggles against sin. He realizes his guilt, not only by the evil he does (sins of commission), but also by not doing the good he knows he should (sins of omission). Even though he's now a Christian, his life is still often governed by the Old Adam that fuels sins of thought, word, and deed.

Original sin, which dwells in each of us, will not go away this side of eternity. Satan knows this all too well as he exploits our inbred weakness. Although we often cave into sin, we should despise such behavior and realize God will not be appeased with the excuse “Nobody's perfect.” “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3).

But we who are far from perfect are saved by the One who is. Through faith in Jesus' work of redemption, we are forgiven children of God. In His mercy, God gives us that faith through His Means of Grace. By the new man established within us, we are not only granted forgiveness, but empowered to fight and defeat the wiles of Satan.

Collect: 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, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

After Daniel survived the ordeal of the lions, King Darius made the following decree: “I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.”

At this point, you would think King Darius would have been an avid disciple of the true God. But it is not always enough to say what you believe; you must also renounce what you do not. It would seem that Darius’ idea of God would be simply putting Him in the number one slot. But the First Commandment is clear and concise: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” The Triune God is not to be first among many, but the one and only. Our Lutheran Confessions excel in that they follow the format of “we believe/ we reject.” In this way, our beliefs are clarified explicitly, leaving no doubt as to what our faith is and is not.

Collect: 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, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Sexagesima Sunday

Article VII.

Also, they [the Lutherans] 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]

Article 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]. Both 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

XII.

Of the Church.

We do not acknowledge them [the Roman Catholics] as the Church, and they are not; we also will not listen to those things which, under the name of Church, they either enjoin or forbid. For, thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the Church is, viz. saints, believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children repeat: “I believe in one holy Christian Church.” This holiness does not consist in an alb, a tonsure, a long gown and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but consists in the Word of God and true faith.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII

The Book of Concord

This calling and consecrating of the prophet Jeremiah strengthens our understanding of our Lord's calling. Jeremiah had a vocation to carry out in his time and place, and he did so faithfully. But since all the Scriptures speak to us of Christ, we must also see Christ here in this passage as well. Jeremiah serves as a type of Christ. His calling foreshadows the ministry of Jesus Christ.

As God, the Father, knew Jeremiah before he was born, so the Father was in fellowship with the eternal Son before He was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Just as God's Words were in the mouth of the youth Jeremiah, even as a youth, Jesus speaks the Words of His Father. Our Lord was the ultimate "prophet to the nations." It was He that was truly set "over the nations and over the kingdoms."

Jesus throws down the kingdoms of this world and builds and plants His eternal kingdom, the Church. Ancient Israel does not exist for its own sake, but serves as the type, the foreshadowing of the Church. All of the Prophets show us Jesus. All of the history of Israel points us to Christ. Isn't it interesting that Jeremiah is not just called to Israel, but "over the nations and over the kingdoms." The Word of God is meant for the world.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Many are familiar with the narrative of today's reading. A part we don't often remember precedes the text. After the Israelites saw the Egyptians in pursuit, they grumbled against Moses for taking them away from Egypt. Note the tone of God's reply: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.'" It would be the first of many times that the people would lose faith, rebel, and then get bailed out by God.

At times, His current children behave no differently from the Hebrews over 3000 years ago. Each of us has been enslaved in our sin, needing deliverance by God. But no sooner are we delivered than we desire to go back. "As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11). God has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. We should daily drown the old Adam, as God literally did to the Egyptians, and live as His delivered people.

Collect: 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, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. 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

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21: JUDGES 7:1-8

SEPTUAGESIMA

God knows that we are frightened. We are frightened of death. We are frightened of the unknown. We are frightened of being alone. Because our connection to God was severed in the fall, we are in many ways in the dark. We are lost, alone, and frightened. Part of what God does for His children is He gives us comfort and assurance. He lets us know that we are safe, even though we cannot see our way forward.

Yes, when God reduced Gideon's army down to three hundred He was displaying His power. Yes, when God dramatically reduced the army He was showing that success was really from Him, not the might of the army. But He was also demonstrating that He is in control. God's plans cannot be thwarted. God's promises cannot fail. If we trust His Word, we cannot fall.

Even though we cannot see yet, even though we are frightened, we are in God's hands. The unknown to us is not unknown to Him. The death we fear is conquered by our Lord. The loneliness we experience here will be as nothing to the love and fellowship we will know in His kingdom. There is good reason why our Lord Jesus Christ so often says to us, "be not afraid."

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20: JOSHUA 24:14–25 SEPTUAGESIMA

The Israelites make strong promises here. They are adamant that they will follow the Lord who brought them out of Egypt. God told the Israelites when they entered the land of Canaan not to have anything to do with the false gods of the land, nor with the people who worshiped those false gods. God said to the Israelites, “...you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’” (Judges 2:2-3)

If there is a clear teaching in both the Old and New Testaments, it is God’s demand for exclusive worship. The First Commandment is clear. God will not tolerate syncretism. We are not to worship different gods and we are not to call God by different names. Modern interfaith worship is incompatible with Christianity. Both the Scriptures and all of Church history become incoherent if interfaith worship is allowed. This is why the faithful Church makes a clear confession against any syncretism.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10: GENESIS 11:1–9 TRANSFIGURATION

The Lord told the people to spread out and fill the earth. Instead, they obstinately gathered together in one place. Rather than praise the name of the Lord, they sought to “make a name for themselves” by their deliberate disobedience. The comparison is striking. God has to stoop down to see the greatest accomplishments of man. God laughs at what man thinks is impressive. Man is unable to effectively mount a rebellion against God.

Our world can fall apart when God lifts up his little finger. Natural disasters destroy our homes and possessions. Financial losses can bring irreparable harm. Hate, jealousy, and unfaithfulness tear apart loving homes. The things that seemed important, and by which we “make a name for ourselves,” aren’t.

God’s plan did involve a gathering of His people into one city with one language. However, those things could not be achieved by man’s merit or strength. Jesus Christ would provide atonement for the sins of all mankind. He would use the preaching of the one language of the Gospel in order to gather His sin-sick people into His Church—the city, called the New Jerusalem. The day of Pentecost was a visible picture of the restoration of the one language by which the Apostles would preach the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the end of the world.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the Fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

By the pure preaching of the Word of Law and Gospel, God gives us faith in His Son so that believers are produced in the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, by the adulterated propaganda of the devil, tares (weeds!) are also being produced in the Kingdom of God. The grain produced by the good seed grows side-by-side with the tares sown by the wicked one. The Lord will not work a separation of the believers from the unbelievers until the harvest at the end of the age. When that day comes—and it will surely come—all things will be set right. The devil and his tares will be thrown into hell and the righteous “will shine forth” in heavenly bliss.

But in our vanity we don't want to wait for God to work the separation in His own way and time frame. We want God's Church and our congregation to have the victory and experience success now! Nevertheless, these mysteries of the faith have been confirmed. We have been adopted as co-heirs of the heavenly kingdom. Set aside your own ideas, and live as sons in the Kingdom of God. Turn aside from falsehood and give your ears to hear the pure Word of God. Repent and believe in Christ, and practice the good works in accordance with the Law. Leave everything else to God's direction.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the Fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

If we compare today's reading to yesterday's, the two seem contradictory. Here in Deuteronomy we hear about God's commands to “observe” His statutes, “keep” His statutes, and “obey” His voice. It seems to be a *quid pro quo*: if you obey, God will make you His people. In yesterday's reading, St. Paul cites Moses in Leviticus 18:5: “The man who does those things shall live by them.”

But what happened to “believe” in your heart? We know from St. Paul “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). For the Christian, the two Testaments would seem totally incoherent without reference to Jesus Christ. The Old Testament would be a closed and dark book without the light of Christ. Jesus Christ is the One who “observes” and “keeps” the statutes. He is the One who “obeys” the Father's voice. We know it wasn't the Israelites after they received the Law. They spectacularly failed. Israel was the shadow. The Christian Church was the fulfillment, and Christ is the righteous Man. The Church is set “high above all nations.” The Church is a “holy people to the Lord.” Christ gives us His righteous status as a gift, not payment for service.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Paul uses the word “believe” three times in our reading. Of course, he is emphasizing the instrumentality of faith with regard to obtaining righteousness before God. He here contrasts the dependence on the Law for righteousness versus the dependence on faith for righteousness.

The absolute dependence on faith for righteousness had, at times, been obscured in the teaching of the Church. Martin Luther is such an important theologian in the history of the Church because he so clearly and forcefully emphasized faith once again. Luther says of this passage: “We obtain the true righteousness by believing sincerely the promises of God, as we read in [Romans] 4:3: ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.’” (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans)

Note that belief in the heart is expressed by confession with the mouth and calling upon the Lord. This is worship and prayer. The faith-life of the Christian is expressed in worship. To “call upon” is to invoke Jesus in prayer. To confess is to exclaim His grace. We receive the promises of God in faith. We believe that what God gives us in the Gospel saves us. We are given permission to trust, in spite of our unworthiness. To disbelieve God’s promise would be to call Him a liar. “Let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4).

Collect: O God, who didst give Martin Luther as a faithful teacher of the saving truth in a time of great trial, grant to Thy people zeal for Thy Word and faithful teachers for Thy Church, that they may stand steadfast against all error; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Scriptures clearly condemn the wide gate of works-righteousness, by which man’s merit earns any part of salvation. Every single non-Christian religion teaches works-righteousness. The narrow gate is the way taught only by Christianity—that a man is saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ’s atoning work.

When the Scriptures speak of good works, they are simply describing the God-pleasing acts which flow from the faith of believers. Those adopted as sons should also love and trust in Him, and willingly do according to His Commandments. Similarly, when the Scriptures speak of “workers of iniquity” (today’s reading) or “those who practice lawlessness” (yesterday’s reading), it is describing unbelievers transgressing the Commandments. Those who hate Him work iniquity. Though the wicked hung out with God’s adopted sons, Jesus declares that He does not know the unbelievers, nor the false way in which they entered His kingdom.

Moses and Elijah confirm that the way of salvation proclaimed by Jesus is none other than the narrow gate of justification by grace through faith. Let us enter into that God-ordained Church. And then let us love Him and keep His Commandments.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the Fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

There are a host of parables which teach about the various aspects of the Kingdom of God, that is, the Church. None of them teach it all, but each one teaches different aspects of the properties of the holy Christian Church.

The parable of the mustard seed tells about the relative smallness of Christianity. In the book of Acts, her enemies seek to discredit the Church by calling her a small "sect" of Judaism. (We know that Christianity is, in fact, the true continuance and fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophets.) Despite the Church's small beginnings, she eventually grows so that the sun never sets on the Kingdom of God.

The parable of the bread-making woman and the working of the leaven teaches about the pervasiveness of Christian teachings. The teaching that Jesus is the Christ is not found in only a few passages of Isaiah, but it is the teaching of all the Law and the Prophets. The way of salvation through repentance and faith in Christ is not limited to conversion, but is the way of life for the Christian. Those who are baptized into Christ daily die to their sins and daily rise to live new lives with Christ.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the Fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The promised land is a type of paradise. Crossing over the Jordan river is the way of entrance to the promised land. Crossing through the waters of baptism is our way of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. How could this promised land, described here in chapter one, be a type of something pointing beyond itself? Did Israel ever conquer all the lands here described? Even at its height, under the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel never reached so far.

The history of Israel was always a temporary or partial victory. Often Israel would be less than faithful and her enemies would triumph over her. The truly expansive kingdom, the ever-victorious people, was the Church. God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven through the Church. The believers come through the waters of baptism into the Church. Eventually, not only will Lebanon and the Euphrates river belong to God's people, but so shall all heaven and earth. In the meantime, we must be very courageous and live in the promise of our baptism. The Lord will not abandon us in the midst of this hostile world. We shall hold fast to God's Word and "meditate in it day and night." He is in His Word.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

neither from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: “If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will.” And again: “If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain.”

9. But the true judgment concerning predestination must be learned alone from the Holy Gospel concerning Christ, in which it is clearly testified that “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all,” and that “He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (Rom. 11:32; Ez. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2).

10. To him, therefore, who is really concerned about the revealed will of God, and proceeds according to the order which St. Paul has observed in the Epistle to the Romans, who first directs men to repentance, knowledge of sins, to faith in Christ, to divine obedience, before he speaks of the mystery of the eternal election of God, this doctrine is useful and consolatory.

11. That, however, “many are called, few are chosen,” does not mean that God is unwilling that all should be saved, but the reason is that they either do not at all hear God’s Word, but wilfully despise it, close their ears and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that He cannot effect His work in them, or when it is heard, they consider it of no account, and do not heed it. For this [that they perish] not God or His election, but their wickedness is responsible (2 Pet. 2:1 sqq.; Luke 11:49, 52; Heb. 12:25 sq.).

12. Moreover, a Christian should apply himself to the article concerning the eternal election of God, so far as it has been revealed in God’s Word, which presents Christ to us as the Book of Life, which, by the preaching of the holy Gospel, He opens and spreads out to us, as it is written (Rom. 8:30): “Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” In Him, therefore, we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who, in His eternal divine counsel, determined that He would save no one except those who acknowledge His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him. Other thoughts are to be entirely banished, as they proceed not from God, but from the suggestion of Satan, whereby he attempts to weaken or to entirely remove from us the glorious consolation which we have in this salutary doctrine, viz. that we know that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand; as He has promised this gracious election not only with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath, and sealed it with the holy sacraments, where we can call to mind in our most severe temptations, and from them comfort ourselves, and thereby quench the fiery darts of the devil.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome, §1–13

The parable of the treasure hidden in a field lets us know that, as the early Church Fathers taught, there is no salvation outside the Christian Church. Jesus Christ entrusted baptizing and teaching to His Church when He said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them...” (Matthew 28:19-20). The prophetic and apostolic message is preached in Christ’s Church. Apart from the Scriptural revelation in Christ’s Church the great treasure of salvation remains hidden.

The parable of the one pearl of great price teaches us that there is nothing more important in all the world than to be saved from your sins by Jesus Christ. At our confirmation we acknowledge the gift given to us in our baptism and profess that we would “suffer all things, even death, rather than fall away from the faith.”

The parable of the dragnet acknowledges that there will be hypocrites who get caught in the dragnet of the preaching of Christ’s Church. Nevertheless, on the Last Day they will be separated from the true believers and cast away.

The parable of the householder explains that faithful pastors in Christ’s Church will show forth the teaching of Jesus Christ from both the Old and the New Testaments.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the Fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

First, there is the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, which accurately teaches the promise of the Father to forgive sins through His Son, Jesus Christ. This truth was preached by St. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, as well as by every faithful pastor in Christ's Church.

Second, there is the testimony of God within us. This testimony is given by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Having worked faith in us by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, we do not doubt, neither are we unsure of our salvation. We know that we are saved. Our baptism also offers to us another assurance. We have been sealed, belonging to God, by His promise connected with our baptism.

Third, St. Paul speaks of the testimony of the conscience regarding a believer's actions. What a wonderful thing when our God has worked in us a godly simplicity so that we cease to be duplicitous in our devotions. We are wholly devoted to pleasing our God. Our actions are not sneaky or merit-seeking. In a godly sincerity, we desire to thank and praise God for his free gift of salvation in Christ.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the Faith by the testimony of the Fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Septuagesima Sunday

CHAPTER XI. OF GOD'S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PRE-DESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

Concerning this article no public dissension has occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. But since it is a consolatory article, if treated properly, and by this means the introduction in the future of a controversy likely to cause offence may be avoided, it is also explained in this writing.

AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

1. First of all, the distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, that is, between God's foreknowledge and His eternal election, ought to be accurately observed.

2. For the foreknowledge of God is nothing else than that God knows all things before they happen, as it is written (Dan. 2:28): "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

3. This foreknowledge is occupied alike with the godly and the wicked; but it is not the cause of evil or of sin, so that men do what is wrong (which originally arises from the devil and the wicked, perverse will of man); nor the cause of their ruin, for which they themselves are responsible; but only regulates it, and fixes to it a limit how long it should last, and that everything, notwithstanding that in itself it is evil, should serve His elect for their salvation.

4. The predestination or eternal election of God, however, is occupied only with the godly, beloved children of God, and this is a cause of their salvation, which He also provides as well as disposes what belongs thereto. Upon this [predestination of God] our salvation is founded so firmly that the gates of hell cannot overcome it (John 10:28; Matt. 16:18).

5. This is not to be investigated in the secret counsel of God, but to be sought in the Word of God, where it is also revealed.

6. But the Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the Book of Life, in whom all are written and elected that are to be saved, as it is written (Eph. 1:4): "He hath chosen us in Him" [Christ] "before the foundation of the world."

7. Thus Christ calls to Himself all sinners and promises them rest, and He is anxious that all men should come to Him and permit Him to help them. To them He offers Himself in His Word, and wishes them to hear it, and not to stop their ears or despise the Word. He promises besides the power and efficiency of the Holy Ghost, and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation.

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life