

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. Jacob Henson

Apologia Lutheran Church, Deer Park, WI

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. 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



BUT WHEN THE COMFORTER IS COME, WHOM I WILL SEND UNTO YOU FROM THE FATHER, EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, WHICH PROCEEDETH FROM THE FATHER, HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME: AND YE ALSO SHALL BEAR WITNESS, BECAUSE YE HAVE BEEN WITH ME FROM THE BEGINNING. (JOHN 15:26-27)

MAY 4-30, 2026

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)

Please note that hymn numbers for Festival Days reflect the enumeration of drafts of ASBH supplied at the most recent synods.

May 3	Cantate (Easter 4)	ASBH 33
May 10	Rogate (Easter 5)	ASBH 34
May 11–13	Rogation Days	
May 14 (R)	The Ascension of our Lord	ASBH 35
May 17	Exaudi	ASBH 36
May 24	Pentecost	ASBH 37

St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary

Spring Quarter began March 9. May 29 will be the last day of the Spring Quarter. The classes offered in the Spring Quarter are as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 3 (1 hr.)

S005—Creation and Redemption (3 hrs.)

H004—Reformation (3 hrs.)

E004—Isaiah (3 hrs.)

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

Doctrine and Practice

The Salutation

#86

“Regarding the salutation, which, if accepted in faith, holds the power of a blessing. The Savior speaks about the salutation of His disciples in Matthew 10. If they pray for peace upon a house or city, that peace will come upon it, provided that the house or city accepts and receives that salutation in faith. Hence, there is a devout custom for preachers to begin their sermons using almost the same formula, saying: “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” And when descending from the pulpit, they repeat either the same words or another of Paul’s blessings: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.” Or: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” [2 Corinthians 13]; and finally, they dismiss the congregation with that solemn blessing with which the Priests of the Old Testament were instructed to dismiss their congregation: “The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6). ...

“The same salutation teaches us what are the most excellent gifts and blessings of God that we should rightly pray for and desire for ourselves and others from God, namely the grace and mercy of God, bringing with them an infinite abundance not only of earthly goods, but much more of heavenly and eternal ones. This grace of God, and His favor, also makes the human heart peaceful. Indeed, this is the primary source and origin of our election, justification, and salvation. Therefore, let us strive to have a merciful and propitious God. For if He is for us, who can be against us? (Isaiah 51, Romans 8).”

Aegidius Hunnius (1550–1613),
Annotations on Titus (1587)

2026 SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM OF THE ELDoNA—As has been our custom, we will be at Salem Lutheran Church, beginning with Vespers on **Tuesday, June 2nd**, and concluding on **Sunday, June 7th**.

June 2nd Vespers will begin at **5:30 P.M.** Wednesday and part of Thursday will be dedicated to our annual Colloquium with many excellent presentations scheduled for this year. The Diocesan Synod will make up the rest of the Thursday and Friday Schedule.

The diocese will celebrate its 20th anniversary in the Divine Service on **Sunday, June 7th**. The diocese will also join in Salem's celebration of its 140th anniversary with two services on Saturday, June 6th.

2026 DIOCESAN FAMILY CAMP—Charity-Burleson is graciously hosting this year's family camp. The family camp will immediately follow the Synod, beginning Monday morning, **June 8th**, and continuing through Wednesday, **June 10th**. Please contact Pr. Heimbigner directly for more details.

AUGUSTANA SERVICE BOOK AND HYMNAL UPDATE—In keeping with the determinations of last year's synod, all hymns have now been updated. (Liturgical corrections were made over the past two synods.) The ASBH is now undergoing final editorial work and will soon be ready to send to the printers. We will update with final delivery dates, etc. as more information becomes available.

REMAINING HUMAN: ANTHROPOLOGY IN AN AGE OF ORACLES is Bishop Heiser's new book addressing one of the defining questions of our time: *What is man?* In an age marked by artificial intelligence, technocracy, cultural fragmentation, and civilizational fragility, this work offers a clear and pastoral Christian response grounded in Scripture and the Book of Concord. The book argues that the crisis before us is not merely technological, but anthropological: unless we recover the truth about man as God's creature—embodied, relational, fallen in Adam, and restored only in Christ—we will not rightly navigate the pressures of the age. *Remaining Human* is written as a compass, not a compendium: a guide for Christians seeking to remain faithful, thoughtful, and truly human in an increasingly dehumanizing world. 220 pages • ISBN 979-8253304891 • \$14.95

CHARITY LUTHERAN CHURCH (BURLESON, TEXAS) will observe its 50th anniversary as a congregation on **Sunday, May 17**, in the **Divine Service at 10 A.M.** Pastor Kent Heimbigner has served as Charity's fifth pastor since October 1997. The congregation's first Sunday as a formal congregation was on May 16, 1976 and the congregation was affiliated with the LC—MS. In January 2009, the congregation recognized that the LC—MS had fallen into error in doctrine and practice and became an independent congregation, whose pastor soon joined the ELDoNA. Bishop Heiser will preach for the anniversary service.

SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH (MALONE, TEXAS) will observe its 140th congregational anniversary on **Saturday, June 6**, with a **Matins service at 11 A.M.** and **Vespers at 5 P.M.** A catered lunch will be served at noon (the cost per person is \$14). There will be an auction in the afternoon to raise funds for a congregational support fund.

Salem was an independent congregation when it was organized in 1886. It eventually joined the LC—MS in the 1920s. In July 2004, the congregation recognized that the LC—MS had fallen into error in doctrine and practice and became an independent congregation; Pastor Heiser was removed from the roster of the LC—MS for refusing to resign his call to Salem. In June 2006, in conjunction with the congregation's 120th anniversary, Salem hosted the meeting of pastors which formed the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America. Salem's 140th anniversary is being celebrated in conjunction with the annual synod and colloquium. (More information on the synod and colloquium is provided near the end of this issue of *The Lutheran Herald*.)

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Cantate Sunday

Chapter V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Statement of the Controversy.

Whether the preaching of the Holy Gospel be properly not only a preaching of grace, which announces the forgiveness of sins, but also a preaching of repentance and censure, rebuking unbelief, which is rebuked not in the Law, but alone through the Gospel.

Affirmative.

Pure Doctrine of God's Word.

1. We believe, teach and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church as an especially brilliant light, whereby, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God may be rightly divided.

2. We believe, teach and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God, and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will.

3. Therefore everything that reproves sin is and belongs to the preaching of the Law.

4. But the Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, should believe, viz. that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and, without any merit of theirs [no merit of the sinner intervening], has obtained and acquired forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life.

5. But since the term "Gospel" is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach and confess that if by the term "Gospel" the entire doctrine of Christ be understood, which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins.

6. But if the Law and the Gospel be contrasted with one another, as Moses himself is called a teacher of the Law, and Christ a preacher of the Gospel, we believe, teach and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching

SATURDAY, MAY 30: JOEL 2:28–32

EMBER SATURDAY

After promising physical restoration in the previous verses, the Lord declares an even greater wonder: the pouring out of His Holy Spirit upon all flesh. The Spirit comes upon sons and daughters, old and young, free and slave alike. This is not earned by status or merit, but given freely by the gracious God who restores what locusts have devoured.

The apostle Peter, filled with that same Spirit on Pentecost, declares: "This is what was uttered by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). The last days have begun. The crucified and risen Jesus, exalted at the Father's right hand, has poured out this promised gift. Wonders in heaven and signs on earth point to the great and awesome day of the Lord, yet the comfort remains: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

This promise is ours in Holy Baptism. There the Spirit is poured out upon us—regardless of age, gender, or station—creating faith, forgiving sins, and uniting us to Christ. The same Spirit who fell on Cornelius and the Gentiles now rests upon us, enabling us to confess Jesus as Lord and to live as His people. When darkness seems to cover the earth or judgment looms, cling to this: the Lord has poured out His Spirit for you. Call upon His name. He saves. He is in your midst.

Collect: O Lord, we beseech Thee, deign to pour forth into our minds the Holy Ghost, by whose wisdom we were created and by whose providence we are guided; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

After devastating judgment by locusts—God’s own “great army”—the prophet brings Gospel. The people had nothing left. Their fields were stripped bare, their future devoured. Yet the Lord does not leave them in despair. He promises vindication through rain, restoration of wasted years, overflowing threshing floors, vats bursting with wine and oil, and satisfaction that leads to praise.

This is not reward for their faithfulness, but unmerited mercy. The same God who sent the plague now restores what was lost—freely, wondrously. Twice He declares, “My people shall never again be put to shame,” and seals it with the greatest comfort: “Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God And there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.”

We hear Christ here. The locust years picture our own devastation by sin, the old Adam’s ruin. Yet in Baptism, the exalted Lord pours out His Spirit like abundant rain. He restores the years the devil has stolen, feeds us with His body and blood, and clothes us with righteousness so that we are never put to shame. Guilt and condemnation are swallowed up in His forgiveness through Holy Absolution.

Dear Christian, rejoice today. The Lord is in your midst—in Word and Sacrament, truly present. He has dealt wondrously with you. Eat, be satisfied, and praise His name. No shame remains for those who trust in Him.

Collect: O merciful God, we beseech Thee that Thy Church, which was gathered together by the Holy Ghost, may nowise be troubled by hostile attack; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but against the terrors of the Law consoles consciences, points alone to the merits of Christ, and again comforts them by the precious preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ’s merit.

7. As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair as did Judas; Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually (Matt. 5:21 sqq.; Rom. 7:14). And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners (Rom. 1:18), how great it is; by this means they are instructed in the Law, and then from it first learn to know aright their sins—a knowledge to which Moses never could coerce them.

Therefore, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God’s wrath, whereby men are for the first time led aright to the Law, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, nothing of which we can observe, and therefore should seek all our righteousness in Christ—

8. Yet, as long as all this (namely, Christ’s suffering and death) proclaims God’s wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a “strange work” of Christ, whereby He attains His proper office, i.e. to preach grace, console and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel.

Negative.

Contrary Doctrine which is Rejected.

Therefore we reject and regard incorrect and injurious the dogma that the Gospel is properly a preaching of repentance or reproof, and not alone a preaching of grace. For thereby the Gospel is again converted into a law, the merit of Christ and the Holy Scriptures obscured, Christians robbed of true consolation, and the door opened again to the Papacy.

—The Formula of Concord, Epitome

The Old Testament nation of Israel certainly did not deserve mercy. In fact, its captivity in Babylon was a direct result of its rebellion against God, and its repeated failure to repent of its sin and do what God commanded it to do. Yet mercy is exactly what God promises them. In our reading for today, not only is Israel told that it will return to its own land—surprising enough, for a nation removed from its own borders—but that also it will take their captors captive and will rule over their oppressors.

Ancient captive Israel might have been tempted to think that this was because of their own strength, or their own cleverness. Today, we might like to think that our victories and the good things we experience in this life are because of our might or our wisdom. But in truth, good things, especially our daily bread, are given to us by God. We should therefore be patient when things are not going our way, and humble when they are, because we know that in either case God is in control and knows what is best for us.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, feared God and prayed continually. Yet his devotion could not save him. What he needed was not more sincerity, but the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. God sent Peter—not to commend human goodness, but to preach the objective Gospel: “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the Word. The circumcised believers were amazed that the gift of the Spirit was poured out even on Gentiles. Tongues and praise confirmed what God had already declared: the same salvation given to Israel now belongs to all nations without distinction.

This text powerfully confesses that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Baptism is no Jewish ceremony for insiders; it is God’s universal means of grace. It gives the circumcision done without hands.

The same impartial Gospel reaches us today. No race, nation, or moral record qualifies us. Christ died and rose for all. In Baptism the Holy Spirit creates faith, forgives every sin, and makes us heirs of the promise through faith bestowed. Rejoice, then, that God shows no partiality. The crucified and risen Lord is your Lord through faith. The Spirit is your Spirit. The forgiveness is yours—freely, fully, forever by grace.

Collect: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus speaks hard, yet comforting truth in verse 44. Our fallen will cannot choose Him; the Father must draw us. This drawing is not coercion, but powerful grace—through the Word that creates faith where there was none.

The Jews grumbled, just as many still do: “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Their offense is our own natural offense. We want a manageable Jesus, a teacher of morals, not the One who says, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” This is no metaphor. Jesus gives us His true body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar for the forgiveness of sins. The same flesh given on the cross is now given to us under bread and wine, so that whoever eats this bread with faith will live forever.

We do not come by our own reason or strength. The Father draws us to the Son through the Word purely preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. There the Spirit creates faith that receives this astonishing gift: Christ for us, Christ in us, Christ raising us on the last day.

Collect: O Lord, may the Comforter, who proceedeth from Thee, enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, and guide us into all truth, even as Thy Son hath promised; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

When our faith lays hold of Christ we become new creatures. When we are in Christ, God does not see our trespasses; that is, He does not condemn us for our sins and our failings. This does not deny that we all have our sins. Instead, it clearly lays out that the guilt that is ours has been paid for by the only one who truly can pay that price, the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Because the Holy Spirit lives within us who believe this, He also helps to teach us how to live according to God’s Law. Thus, we do not live for ourselves, but we are followers of Christ, who paid this debt for us. As St. Paul said to the Romans (6:1–10), we died to sin; how could we live in it any more?

This new holiness is only possible because of the help of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us and strengthens us in this faith through Word and Sacrament. That is why the ministry of reconciliation is so vital—it is the means by which God’s grace comes to us.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through 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 many tragic dialogs in Scripture, but the extended conversation in John 8 seems like one of the worst. Imagine how blind the Jews were, who thought that our Lord was going to commit suicide when He said, “Where I am going you cannot come.” Many of them persist in this blindness to the end of the chapter, where it is clear that they intend to kill Him.

Yet, Jesus’ message is all about love. Even when He says that they will die in their sin, He says this out of love. This is because the faith that God requires of us trusts not in our own righteousness and works, but rather in Christ’s righteousness. It is only through Christ that we can have righteousness or any hope of salvation. There are only two paths—either our works and our qualities are good enough, or they are not. Since they are not, we must trust in the merits of the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the truth that sets us free from the bondage of sin and the Law, and sets us free to follow that Law out of love and thankfulness.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The words of verse 16 are the Gospel in ‘miniature’. God does not love a worthy world—He loves a perishing, rebellious one. In love He gives His only Son into death on the cross, not to condemn, but to save. The Father’s verdict upon sinners is reversed in the Son’s atoning sacrifice. Whoever believes in Him—trusts in Him alone—possesses eternal life.

Yet the text does not stop with comfort. “...but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Unbelief is not neutral; it is rejection of the only remedy. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. The natural heart flees the light that exposes sin.

But the light has come. Jesus is the Light of the world. Those who do what is true come to the light, not to boast in their works, but so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been carried out by God’s power. This means faith alone receives the gift, yet true faith is never alone—it comes by God’s grace, works in His love, and lives in the light of Christ.

Collect: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Peter's Pentecost sermon speaks with Law and Gospel. The very Jesus nailed to the cross is now risen, ascended, and seated at God's right hand. From that throne He pours out the Holy Spirit in visible power. The crowd is cut to the heart: "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter's answer is powerful grace: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.'" This is no empty ritual. Baptism is God's mighty act, uniting us with Christ's death and resurrection, washing away sin, and bestowing the Holy Spirit. Repentance is the "turning" the Spirit works in us, turning away from self and toward the crucified and risen Lord.

That same promise still stands. In the waters of Baptism, the exalted Christ gives Himself to sinners today. He calls us out of our crooked generation into His Church, where forgiveness, life, and salvation are freely given.

Collect: O God, who didst give Thy Holy Spirit to Thine Apostles: Grant unto Thy people the performance of their petitions, so that on us to whom Thou hast given faith Thou mayest also bestow peace; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The entire Christian life is defined by forgiveness and mercy. First, God showed us grace and mercy by forgiving our sins, because we certainly did nothing to earn His favor. And in return, we too should show mercy and forgiveness to each other. Surely none of the things we have done or may do to each other are worse or less forgivable than the things that we have done to God. And since God can and did forgive us, we too should be able to forgive each other.

This forgiveness brings peace where there was conflict. It can be difficult for us to forgive as Christ forgave us, but to what other standard should we aspire? And where there is peace, there should also be joy and thankfulness, because we recognize our previous condition, and appreciate our new one. This is not something that we experience for one or two hours a week, but something we experience through our whole lives as Christians. May God grant us this through His Holy Spirit.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

When God does what He said He would do, His people have cause to rejoice. In our reading for today, God has redeemed Jerusalem, which has been the object of scorn and ridicule among the nations after seeing how they were oppressed by the Egyptians and the Assyrians in turn. In addition, they were in the midst of the Babylonian captivity, which brought more suffering.

But that suffering is temporary. God would return a remnant to Judah in His own time. The nations may be mighty, but God is mightier still, and He has made bare His arm, so that all the nations can see just how mighty He is. Just as in all His dealings with sinful men, it is God's strength, and not ours, in which Jerusalem (and we) should rejoice. His timing may not be our timing, but His promises are sure, and we can rely on them. Because we know that God is on our side, we will go in confidence, not in haste; we should behave honorably and uprightly as befits the children of God.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; 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 Pentecost Sunday

THE THIRD ARTICLE.

Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; the Resurrection of the body; and the Life everlasting. Amen.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian Church He daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

—The Small Catechism, Part II

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

Our Lord's Ascension testifies that He is true God. We confess that He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. That means He is in the highest position of authority, power, and glory, which also affirms that He is one with the Father Almighty.

Those who reject Jesus Christ but still claim to love and honor the Father are wrong and dishonest. There is no reason to reject Jesus, especially if one claims to worship God. Jesus never taught anything that is contrary to the will and Word of God. He kept the Commandments and fulfilled the Scriptures. He honored the Father in all things, and He loved all people faithfully. The only reason that people reject Him as the true Lord and Christ is because they despise correction. They hate being called to humble accountability and submission, so they say they love God, even though they hate His Word.

Judgment has its right place and time. Jesus came to teach love and mercy, but sometimes love also requires correction and discipline. Man is not called to judge God. Our Lord is in the highest authority over all. And from that authority He has taught us with all of His Words and deeds what our faithful service and vocations should look like as we strive to love others as He has loved us. This all comes back to the theme of this week, which focuses on the unity we have in Jesus Christ as our Lord. He is one with the Father, and brings all the faithful into that unity in His heavenly kingdom!

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

This reading in Acts could have been the original “Get out of jail free” card. Paul and Silas had been thrown in prison for casting out a spirit from a slave-girl, so that certain men could not make money from her fortune-telling anymore.

Being thus unjustly imprisoned, their jailer was prepared to take his own life out of shame for not keeping the prisoners secure under his care. An earthquake opened the doors and loosed the chains; surely the prisoners would flee! Most people probably would, but Paul and Silas did not. They were still in the prison. This was not expected behavior.

So the jailer gladly heard the Word of the Lord from Paul and Silas, who would tell the man of his sin, and what Christ had done to pay the debt that sin owed. The jailer believed them, trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of his sin, and he and his whole household were baptized and saved. The jailer's new faith soon bore fruit as he then provided Paul and Silas with medical care and with food.

Collect: O God, who makest the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest, and desire what Thou dost promise; that, among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; 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

Rogate Sunday

Chapter IX.

Article XXI. Of the Invocation of Saints.

The twenty-first article they [the Roman Catholics] absolutely condemn, because we do not require the invocation of saints. Nor on any topic do they rhetoricate with more prolixity. Nevertheless they do not effect anything else than that the saints should be honored; likewise that the saints who live should pray for others; as though indeed the invocation of dead saints were in addition necessary. They cite Cyprian, because he asked Cornelius while yet alive to pray for his brothers when departing. By this example they approve the invocation of the dead. They quote also Jerome against Vigilantius: “On this field,” they say, “eleven hundred years ago, Jerome overcame Vigilantius.” Thus the adversaries triumph, as though the war were already ended. Nor do they, in their stupidity, see that in Jerome against Vigilantius there is not a syllable concerning invocation. He speaks concerning honors to the saints, not concerning the invocation. Neither have the rest of the ancient writers before Gregory made mention of invocation. Certainly this invocation, with these opinions which the adversaries now teach concerning the application of merits, has not the testimony of the ancient writers.

Our Confession [the Augsburg Confession] approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the Church. And these gifts, as they are the greatest, should be amplified, and the saints themselves should be praised, who have faithfully used these gifts, just as Christ praises faithful business-men (Matt. 25:21, 23). The second service is the strengthening of our faith; when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly superabounds over sin (Rom. 5:20). The third honor is the imitation first of faith, then of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require. They dispute only concerning invocation, which, even though it would have no danger, nevertheless is not necessary.

Besides, we also grant that the angels pray for us. For there is a testimony in Zach. 1:12: “O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem?” Although concerning the saints we concede that just as when alive they pray for the Church universal in general, so in heaven they pray for the Church in general, albeit no testimony concerning the dead praying is extant in the Scriptures,

FRIDAY, MAY 22: LUKE 11:5–13

EXAUDI

Our sinful nature wants to make God conform to our image. The faithless want to call Him “father” on their own terms, even as they refuse to respect Him or submit to Him. Our Lord Jesus makes it clear that the Heavenly Father is more righteous—and more gracious—than any man or woman.

The verses that teach us to “ask... seek... knock” have sometimes been twisted and abused by false teachers. They misapply the words to assert that man has the power and will to “invite Jesus into his heart” or *decide* to believe and follow Him. But our Lord is teaching His disciples what faithful dependency looks like! He is elaborating on the Lord’s Prayer, and showing us how a faithful child should think and pray to our Heavenly Father.

Prayer does not force God to submit to our will. Faithful prayer is the fruit that shows the Holy Spirit is working in us, shaping our thoughts and words. Our Lord wants to help us and bless us, but that doesn’t mean He only wants to give us stuff. He wants us to grow stronger and more mature in our faith, and prayer is one of the exercises for that. We are to depend on Him for all our help and comfort, but we are also to give Him praise and thanks for all such things. Faithful prayer and meditation are how the Spirit helps us focus on our Heavenly Father’s grace toward us, especially in relation to His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Heaven is not just some vague spiritual realm up in the clouds with harps and pretty people with wings. Heaven is where our Lord is in the fullness of His glory! That is why we talk about “going to heaven” now, but when we look forward to the “life of the world to come” we are to remember that God has promised the resurrection of the dead, the new heaven, and the new earth! (See Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-5.)

In the meantime, this earth and our bodies are corrupted with sin. As St. Paul teaches and reminds us, the faithful do not long to be dead, or to just be disembodied spirits. We wish to be where the glory of our Lord is, and to enjoy the fullness of His peace and blessings! But the faithful also understand that there is work to which we are called in this present life. We must endure, suffer, serve, and love by the power of Christ and His Holy Spirit, even as we long for the full rest and joy of His glorious presence.

One day this present earth will end and we will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. His will is that we bear our crosses, serve our brothers, sisters, and neighbors, and love our enemies until that day, so He may gather as many people to Himself as possible, so we may all be one in Him!

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

except the dream taken from the second book of Maccabees (15:14).

Moreover, even supposing that the saints certainly pray for the Church, yet it does not follow that they are to be invoked. Although our Confession affirms only this, that Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints, or that we are to ask the saints for aid. But since neither a command, nor a promise, nor an example can be produced from the Scriptures concerning the invocation of saints, it follows that conscience can have nothing concerning this invocation that is certain. And since prayer ought to be made from faith, how do we know that God approves this invocation? Whence do we know without the testimony of Scripture that the saints perceive the prayers of each one? Some plainly ascribe divinity to the saints, viz. that they discern the silent thoughts of the minds in us. They dispute concerning morning and evening knowledge, perhaps because they doubt whether they hear us in the morning or the evening. They invent these things not in order to treat the saints with honor, but to defend lucrative services. Nothing can be produced by the adversaries against this reasoning, that, since invocation does not have a testimony from God's Word, it cannot be affirmed that the saints perceive our invocation, or that they especially perceive that God approves it. Wherefore the adversaries ought not to force us to an uncertain matter, because a prayer without faith is not prayer. For as they cite the example of the Church, it is evident that this is a new custom in the Church; for although the old prayers make mention of the saints, yet they do not invoke the saints. Although also this new invocation in the Church is dissimilar to the invocation of individuals.

Again, the adversaries not only require invocation in the worship of the saints, but also apply the merits of the saints for others, and make of the saints not only intercessors, but also propitiators. This is in no way to be endured. For here the honor belonging only to Christ is altogether transferred to the saints. For they make them mediators and propitiators, and although they make a distinction between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, yet they plainly make out of the saints mediators of redemption.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §1–14

Today begins what the Church calls Rogationtide. These are the three days leading up to the Festival of the Ascension of our Lord. These are days marked by prayer and fasting. Historically, these prayers focused on asking our Lord for His blessing upon the planting and harvesting of crops. In farming communities these prayers for the Lord to bless their crops are especially needful, but even in non-farming communities, prayers to bless our crops serve to remind us that all of our “daily bread,” as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, is a gift of the Lord God.

St. Paul in his first Epistle to St. Timothy commends us to pray for another “daily bread.” For our daily bread includes all that we need to support this body and life, both physically and spiritually. Part of our “daily bread” is to pray for good government. St. Paul gives the reason: “we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence.” One may recognize this petition from the General Prayer prayed in the Divine Service. When we pray this petition, we are asking our Lord to make things favorable in our land so that all men may come to the knowledge of the truth of salvation in the Lord Jesus alone. For He is the one Mediator between God and men, who also grants us all of our “daily bread.” May our prayers during this Rogationtide reflect this truth.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that we, who in our affliction put our trust in Thy mercy, may ever be defended by Thy protection against all adversity; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord works through all sorts of circumstances, the good and the bad. When conquered and scattered among the Gentiles, His people were still called to be faithful. They were to abide in Him as “a little sanctuary” wherever they were. God would use these events to proclaim His grace, power, and glory among those other nations. The Scriptures show that other nations would indeed learn His truth from these scattered people, and sooner or later, people from those nations would believe and be saved by His Word.

The Lord says, “I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them...” The Scriptures consistently teach us that our Lord works to bring us together as one community, one kingdom, that is not defined by geography or politics, but by faith! The Lord says this community will “walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.” If a nation rejects God’s Word, they are not His people.

Now, especially in the time of the New Testament Church, God’s people are scattered among the unbelieving nations. But we are still called together in Jesus Christ, to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to always learn and observe His Word. He is our true Sanctuary. He continues to teach and call others through us who are scattered throughout this world which still needs to hear and believe His Gospel.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

These verses are an example of God's unchanging message that is proclaimed throughout His Word, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. As the prophet declares the actions and words of the Lord, he points forward to the unity of nations that will be fulfilled in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His kingdom. Egypt and Assyria were often the unfaithful 'bad guys' in the story of Israel. But other times in Scripture, Israel would be the unfaithful villains, and Egypt and Assyria would be not-so-bad. It always comes back to the Word and work of God.

Any virtue or status Israel had was because they were lifted up by the power of God's Spirit. They were not the center of all things. The Lord is the center and focus, and Israel was called to serve in His gracious work through them. Other nations did wicked things to God's chosen people, but they were not wicked simply because they were "Egypt" or "Assyria". They were wicked because they rejected God's Word and work. When people of Egypt and Assyria repented and submitted to the Word of God, then they would be "a blessing in the midst of the land."

In the true and faithful Christian Church now, people from all nations, including Egypt, Assyria, and Israel, are made part of God's people; not because of who they are or where they came from, but because the Holy Spirit has created faith in them, and they trust in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior who makes us one with God the Father.

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

In the Collect for the Day appointed for Rogationtide, we pray that our Lord God would grant us mercy in all our afflictions. Moreover, we pray that we should trust in His mercy in times of adversity. When we are afflicted with the woes of this life: family strife, sickness and death of loved ones, financial woes, etc., in faith we turn to the Lord God for comfort. We may not always have the right words, or know exactly for what we should pray, but St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans teaches us that the Holy Ghost "makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

This is because "He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is." That is, the Lord Jesus knows the mind of the Spirit. He is our Intercessor. He and the Holy Ghost are one. The Lord Jesus and the Holy Ghost are both persons in the Holy Trinity. It is for this reason that our Triune Lord God knows our wants and needs even before we pray for them. We can take comfort in our afflictions, and when we do not know the right words to pray, our Lord God already knows that we have need of relief from them. We can simply trust in His mercy, for He works all things to our good, who love the Lord God, "who are the called according to His purpose."

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that we, who in our affliction put our trust in Thy mercy, may ever be defended by Thy protection against all adversity; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

We call our Lord Jesus our “Intercessor.” Today St. John shares with us the prayer of our Lord Jesus for us, and the Apostles, on the night of His arrest. His prayer is that through His death and resurrection all men might believe on Him as the true Messiah. For when we have faith in Him, we are granted eternal life. Our faith in Him stems from what He earned for us on the cross. He won for us the forgiveness of all our sins. We cling in faith to the promise of redemption from our sins, that our Lord Jesus intercedes on our behalf to the heavenly Father.

He has ascended to the right hand of the heavenly Father, and pleads on our behalf, even as He does here in this High Priestly prayer recorded in our reading. He prays that none of us may fall away from His loving protection. If the Lord Jesus is interceding on our behalf, if He is praying for us, as we pray daily to Him by the work of the Holy Ghost, through the means of grace our faith in Him is strengthened. No power of hell, or this evil world, or our sinful flesh, can tear us away from our Lord’s loving intercession for us to the heavenly Father. Let us pray with all confidence in our Lord Jesus, knowing that He pleads for us to the Father.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that we, who in our affliction put our trust in Thy mercy, may ever be defended by Thy protection against all adversity; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

It is an unfortunate misconception that having faith or “getting saved” is simply about “me and Jesus being in heaven.” If our faith is just focused on “me”, then we miss what He is teaching us with His prayer. The kingdom of God, the Church, is about the community of His faithful people thinking, walking, and loving according to His will and Word, here in time *and* eternally in the life of the world to come.

Jesus Christ is the center and focus, not “me”. As He works and prays to make us one in Him and the Father, His life and ministry on earth showed us what that should look like. He submitted to others in His vocations, He fulfilled day to day responsibilities, He loved His adversaries as He still interacted with them, He helped His friends and loved ones, and He suffered the cross with patience and diligence.

Being faithful does not mean insulating ourselves from the present life while we focus on our own sense of piety and desire for heaven. It means letting Jesus Christ continue to work through us. The will of the Father and the power of the Spirit still are focused on our Savior working, loving, correcting, helping, and bearing crosses in this world, through us.

Eternal life isn’t just sitting around in heaven. His Word teaches us to confess that the communion of saints and the company of heaven will abide, worship, and walk in the new heaven and new earth in the life of the world to come, as we are all focused on the Lamb who has taken away our sin and gives us that life!

Collect: Almighty, everlasting God, make us to have always a devout will toward Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty with a pure heart; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Exaudi Sunday

IX. Of Excommunication.

The greater excommunication [i.e., execution or banishment], as the Pope calls it, we regard only as a civil penalty, and not pertaining to us ministers of the Church. But the less [i.e., the so-called 'lesser excommunication'] is true Christian excommunication, which prohibits manifest and obstinate sinners from the sacrament and other communion of the Church until they are reformed and avoid sin. And ministers ought not to confound this ecclesiastical punishment or excommunication with civil penalties.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

The selections from the Book of Concord for the Sundays of the Church Year are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church. (The table of appropriate lessons was originally found in Pipping's Christliches Concordienbuch [Leipzig, 1734].)

THURSDAY, MAY 14: ACTS 1:1–11

ASCENSION

The Apostles asked our Lord Jesus, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” They were eager for the consummation of all things to come to pass. We also wait eagerly for that Last Day. The signs of the end times are all around us every day. They are constant reminders to us that our Lord Jesus is coming again, and He is coming soon. The strife in this world, as it groans under the weight of mankind’s sin, makes us cry out daily in prayer in similar words as the Apostles’ petition to our Lord. Only our prayer is, “Come, Lord Jesus, quickly!”

As our Lord Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, the Apostles “looked steadfastly toward heaven.” It was as if they expected the Lord Jesus to come back down almost immediately. They had to be reminded by two angels that now was not the time. But that time was coming! That time *is* coming. The Last Day quickly approaches. The signs of the end times are constant reminders to us that our Lord Jesus comes quickly. Until then, our Lord intercedes for us poor, miserable sinners. Let us continue to petition our Lord that our hearts may be ready when He comes; that we may eagerly remain in humble repentance until His return so that we may be with Him eternally.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Through the waters of Holy Baptism we are buried in Christ. We are clothed with Christ. His blood covers us and washes us. We are in Christ, and He is in us. It is faith that does this; the faith that was created and implanted in us by the work of the Holy Ghost through baptism. It is His blessing that He has placed upon us through the Word connected to baptism, by which we receive “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” To be in Christ, and for Him to be in us through faith, we are “adopted as sons.” This our Lord has determined “before the foundation of the world.” And it all begins in baptism, in which we are forgiven by the blood shed for us on the cross.

What was begun in baptism is sustained and strengthened through the Lord’s Body and Blood given in bread and wine. As we hear in the Divine Service, in the Exhortation, “whoso eateth of this bread, and drinketh of this cup, firmly believing the words of Christ, dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in him, and hath eternal life.” By this meal, that which was begun in baptism is kept alive. The faith we were given is sustained, so that we may continue to cling to the promises of our Lord Jesus. He continues to bless us with “every spiritual blessing,” especially forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

At the Ascension of our Lord the Apostles were eager for the Lord Jesus to restore the kingdom to Israel. They looked forward to when the Lord Jesus would reign on earth. They had their minds set on spiritual things, on eternal things. St. Paul in his Epistle the Church at Philippi exhorts the Philippians to also set their minds on spiritual things, for our citizenship is in heaven.

The earthly minded people make their belly their god. They are consumed with the things of this life. Where to build a house? Here on earth. Where to establish fame and power? Here on earth. Where to establish a business? Here on earth. Where to get glory, or be rich? Again, here on earth. Their whole energy is focused on this life, never giving thought to the life of the world to come. They have forgotten that our citizenship is in heaven.

Our Lord Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father, to sit upon His throne in order that He might rule an eternal kingdom. This is why we, like the Apostles, eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus, to come again. We wait eagerly for Him to restore the kingdom to the true Israel, all those who cling to Him in faith. This will not be an earthly, temporal kingdom, but will be an eternal kingdom where we will be joined with all the citizens of heaven forever in the new heaven and new earth.

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thine Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens, so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.