

SATURDAY, MAY 3: EXODUS 32:1–14

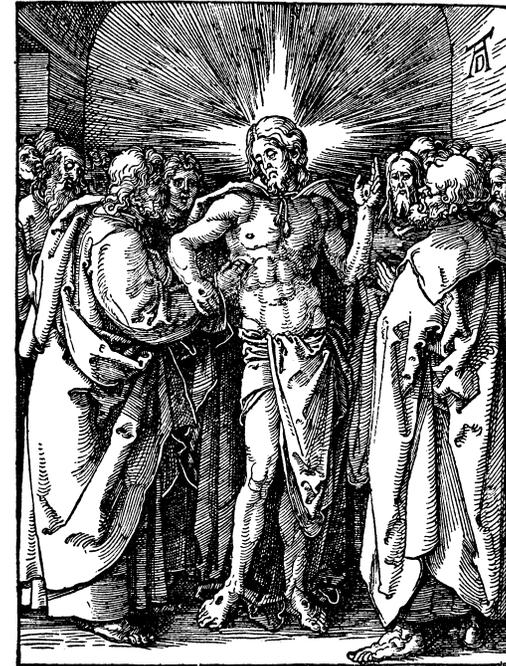
QUASIMODOGENITI

“So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has said we will do’” (Exodus 24:3). How quickly things can change. In a matters of days the solemn promise the Children of Israel made before the Lord is forgotten. Then there is Aaron. He saw God and ate and drank in His presence. Now, he listens to the voice of the people and fashions a golden calf that they could worship. After all that the Children of Israel had gone through up to this time, how could they so quickly abandon the True God?

Before we place ourselves on the judgment seat concerning the Children of Israel, maybe we ought to stop for a moment and examine our own lives. As Luther points out in the Large Catechism concerning the First Commandment, anything in which we put our trust is our god. How often do we misplace our trust? We do not want the God who says, “Take up your cross and follow Me.” We would rather have the god of health, wealth, success, and fame. Indeed, there are plenty of modern day “Aarons” who preach this kind of false gospel.

Thankfully, God does not leave our faith up to us. It is His work. We turn away, and He graciously turns us back unto Himself. Though the process of repentance hurts, the outcome is our being restored to our merciful God.

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**LAETARE—QUASIMODOGENITI**  
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**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. JOHN 6:1–15 (NKJV)**

After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near.

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, “There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?”

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

And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted.

So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.” Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

**THE COLLECT**

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of Thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” Our God is a personal God. He took time personally to explain His laws to Moses and personally inscribed His “Testimony” on “tablets of stone.” Yet, long before God’s Law was inscribed in stone, God inscribed His Law in the heart of man. Thus man “is without excuse,” as St. Paul wrote to the Romans. Though one cannot be saved by the Law, one cannot say before God, “I didn’t know it was wrong,” and in that way try to blame God for not telling him. The Law is “built in,” so to speak.

However, it does not work that way with the Gospel. When God created man He “built in” the Law. But all that changed when Adam and Eve sinned. They were now unable to keep the Law, and as a result of sinning they were going to die. Thankfully, God came and told them what they could not know on their own. He proclaimed the Gospel to them.

For countless generations God has continued to bring the Gospel of forgiveness of sins to people. This Good News is not inscribed in stone. Rather, it is inscribed upon a wooden cross with the Blood of Christ. In His own dear Son God has redeemed the world. With the water of Holy Baptism He inscribed His name upon you and placed you into Christ, giving you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

“O God, who declarest Thine almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity...” So begins the Collect for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity. Of all that can be said about the True God, “mercy and pity” show us what God is truly about. We hardly think of “almighty power” in terms of “mercy and pity.”

Over the past couple of decades we have been able to witness war firsthand while comfortably seated on our living room sofas in front of our TVs. We have seen the use of stealth aircraft and “smart bombs.” We have seen bunkers located deep under ground devastated by our nation’s military might. Such was the “shock and awe,” as it was called. Indeed, it almost looked like “almighty power.” But in the midst of all the destruction there was restraint on the part of our nation. Much more could have been destroyed.

Think then of God’s restraint. The power of our nation’s military pales in comparison to God’s “almighty power.” People’s opinions may differ about whether or our nation was justified in going to war. However, there is no doubt that God would be justified in destroying us for eternity because of our sins. Indeed, He has the power to do so. Instead, He chose to inflict the power of His wrath on His own Son, so that in Christ we would know the “almighty power” of His “mercy and pity.”

Most of us are very concerned about our security in this life. We want to know that we will always have all that we need to maintain a good quality of life. We think we have to make sure we will always have “enough.” Much of the Book of Genesis is a record of God watching over His people and providing for them. As we read how God watched and guarded His people of old, we are reminded that in His love He is watching over us too. Just as God provided for His people during the worldwide famine through an event that happened many years before the famine, God has promised that He is working all things for the good of His people.

As Dr. Luther reminds us in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

In yesterday's reading we were reminded that God is indeed providing for all our needs of body and soul. In today's reading we are once again reminded that not only does He provide once, but He always provides over and over again, just as He provided for Jacob's family. God used Joseph, the one whose brothers, out of jealousy, had sold him into slavery. Joseph, after going through much tribulation, was the one to provide for their survival. God also uses our Brother, the One born of a virgin, whom we had sold because of our slavery to sin, who was made to suffer much tribulation under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified, died and was buried in our place to provide for our eternal survival.

As Dr. Luther tells us in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

"So they saw God, and they ate and drank." Can you even imagine? They saw God! Years later, many other people saw God, but most did not recognize Him. Instead of the splendor of heaven, God came in the flesh, born in a cattle shed and laid in a manger. He looked quite ordinary. He lived among His people. Like the other boys of the village, He grew up to be a man, working along side His earthly father. In so many ways, God was quite ordinary. During His earthly ministry Jesus looked anything but godly. Instead, He looked like one of us. Such is the beginning of the Good News. In order to save us, God became one of us!

But that likeness of man was so marred, so disfigured, that people were appalled by Jesus' appearance as He hung on the Cross. Yet there on the Cross we see real beauty, the beauty of God saving His people. His Blood is now sprinkled upon us, cleansing us from our sins. It is the Blood of a New Covenant, a covenant made by God and fulfilled by Him. Through the Blood of Christ we have been given a new life.

And just like Moses and Aaron and the others, we too get to eat and drink in the presence of God every time we come to the Lord's Table.

Today's reading continues the details put forth by God concerning how the Children of Israel were to live as His chosen people. Three times during the year they were to keep a feast to God. By doing so they would be reminded of all that God had done for them. They would remember His rescuing them from bondage to the Egyptians and His continued care in blessing their lands and the fruits thereof. Their attention was always to God and His mercy.

Our reading then continues with yet another promise from God: "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared." This Angel would protect them and bless them.

We are no longer obligated to keep the feasts mandated by the Old Testament. Such are fulfilled in Christ. But the promise remains: "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11). Though we may wrestle "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12), it is God who sends His holy angels to protect and defend us. God's holy angels are not the innocent little cherubs that adorn greeting cards, nor are they the effeminate beings often thought of by people today. God's angels surround you and protect you from the assaults of the devil. Though the battle is fierce, they will protect you, and even when you die the promise still holds true that they will "bring you into the place which I have prepared."

In hindsight you and I can almost feel Joseph's desire to show his brothers the greatness of their sin against him. We can also hear the fear of his brothers when they realize that at least God has found out their iniquity and they are indeed deserving of punishment. They admit their sin and then begin to tell Joseph how to punish them.

Do we do that? Do we try to tell God how He should punish us when we sin? When we do that, are we truly repentant, or are we still trying to get away with our sin, to somehow excuse it? Until we realize that we are really sinful, lost and condemned people, and are ready to let God deal with our sin, we keep trying to justify ourselves.

In the Confession of sins in the Divine Service we admit to God that we are poor, miserable sinners. We confess all of our sins and iniquities with which we have ever offended God. We are guilty and deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment. But by faith, we are also heartily sorry for our sin and sincerely repent of them and pray for God's boundless mercy and for the sake of Christ's suffering and death we ask God to be gracious to us poor sinful beings.

And God is merciful! The Pastor says, "Upon this your confession...in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." God is merciful! We are forgiven! Our Brother sacrificed Himself for us! Amen.

As we read these chapters in Genesis it becomes apparent that you and I are a lot like Joseph's brothers. They didn't really understand how God had used their sinful actions to turn it to good for His people. As Joseph's brothers were clueless about what was going on, so we too in much of this life are clueless about what is really going on. And we are completely unaware as to how this is all working for our eternal life.

But, in Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed we confess: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."

As sure as God knew what He was doing for His people in Genesis, so also He knows what He is doing in our lives. And, as His believing children, we can rest assured in His promise that He is working *all* things together for our good. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Several years ago there was a popular song titled "From a Distance." The refrain was, "God is watching us ... from a Distance." Sadly, many Christians hummed along and chimed in on this refrain, all the while taking in a song that denies a fundamental truth of Christianity. It ignores the fact that God is intimately involved with His people; as Christ said, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

Our text for today shows just how involved God was with the Children of Israel. God went into great detail about how they were to live with each other and with those outside the House of Jacob. God is so concerned about His creation that He makes sure that even the oxen and donkeys could rest on the Sabbath. Every day of the lives of the Children of Israel was to begin and end with their eyes upon God, and never looking to any other gods. By doing so, they would then be able to fulfill their duties toward their neighbors. Luther wrote in the Large Catechism that perfectly keeping the First Commandment would result in a person keeping all the commandments.

The problem is, and always will be this side of heaven, that we, like the Children of Israel, do not keep the commandments. Fortunately, God does not operate "From a Distance." He has given us His Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism to work in us every day to bring us to repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. JOHN 20:19–31 (NKJV)**

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” So he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

**THE COLLECT**

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord’s resurrection may by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

On Monday our devotion was about the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed, and how God provides for us. In today’s reading we again see how God through Joseph provided for His father, brothers, and their families. Joseph’s brothers had sold him into slavery and in return, by the guiding of God’s hand, Joseph is able to provide for all their needs.

Our natural sinful reaction to this is that the brothers didn’t deserve to be treated so kindly by Joseph, whom they had so grievously wronged. Our first reaction, and perhaps even Joseph’s first sinful reaction, would be to refuse to provide any food for them. But then we remember what our Savior has done for us, even though we have sinfully ignored and mistreated Him.

In Ephesians 2 St. Paul makes a very similar statement when he writes, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...But God, who is rich in mercy...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Indeed, our loving God provides everything we need. In His Holy Church He feeds us with His Word, with Baptism, and with His Holy Supper and provides all we need to be and remain His holy people. Thanks be to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that today as always He keeps His people. Amen.

Throughout this week's readings and the whole story of Joseph and his brothers, it is glaringly apparent that God's loving hand was at work to save His people. Joseph often didn't understand what was happening, but he seemed to know that God was at work. His brothers never seemed to know what was going on, but they were always worried about their own welfare.

As you and I live out our lives in this sinful world, we, too, usually don't understand what is really going on. We have all kinds of concerns about earthly things. When we are young we worry about our looks and our pleasures. As we grow older we worry about our security and finances. And as we reach old age we worry about our retirement and our health. Because of the sinfulness of this world and our own sinful nature, it is impossible for us, without God's help, to rely on the Grace of God.

However, in His Word, and in the words of Martin Luther in his explanation of the Apostle's Creed, He teaches us that we can rely on Him for all that we need to support this body and life. He tells us that he has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has placed us in His Church. And in this Christian Church he daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers in Christ. And on the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. THIS IS MOST CERTAINLY TRUE. Thanks be to God! Amen.

We have in today's pericope a comparison between the giving of the Law of God on Mount Sinai and the giving of the Holy Ghost on Pentecost. Both of these events happen on the fiftieth day. Pentecost is fifty days after our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection. The giving of the Law happens fifty days after their departure from Egypt. On both days the people of Israel and of Jerusalem are made and called "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (See 1 Peter 2:9.)

By contrast, however, in today's reading at the Mount of Sinai the people are told to keep back. The Lord God's presence is too great for them to bear and they would be killed if they come in contact with Him. But at Pentecost the Apostles are told to stay in Jerusalem for the arrival of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, on Pentecost the Holy Ghost is poured out upon those who believe in the Gospel. The Lord God dwells with His people intimately through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Certainly in these means of grace the Lord makes His tabernacle—His dwelling place—with all those who receive these gifts from Him.

How stark the contrast is between the Law and Gospel! The Law separates people from the Lord God; on account of His purity and holiness we cannot approach Him for we will surely die because of our own failure in the Law. But on account of the Gospel—on account of our Lord Jesus Christ—we have access to the Father, so that the Holy Ghost can come and dwell within us, and create and sustain faith and life in us.

Moses gets a visit from his father-in-law. But, after observing Moses' daily routine, Jethro is not happy. Moses has established a form of government that will wear out him and the Israelites. Jethro's plan of correcting this problem is simple: appoint others to bear some of the load that Moses currently bears by himself.

This is a picture of the establishment of the ecclesiastical order. Our Lord Jesus Christ established the Office of the Holy Ministry by sending out His Apostles to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments and forgive those who repent. The Apostles in turn ordained others to be bishops, pastors and deacons who would also preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and absolve and retain sins according to our Lord's commands and institution.

Today, the need for ministers continues. Parishes need to identify men who are willing and able to go to seminary, so that these men might be trained and equipped to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments and forgive sinners. This need is great as the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. We need parishes to identify men to carry the mantle of those who have gone before. It is by this holy arrangement that the Church is strengthened, and people may always have someone to proclaim to them the promises of our Lord God that our sins have been paid for by the perfect obedience and the suffering and death of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ.

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. JOHN 8:46–59 (NKJV)**

“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”

Then the Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?”

Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

**THE COLLECT**

We beseech Thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon Thy people, that by Thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The parents of Miriam and Aaron knew that when the government commands sin, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29) The murderous command of Pharaoh (Exodus 1:22) to have every Israelite baby boy thrown into the Nile, must have been proclaimed after Aaron’s birth, but before Moses’. Hebrews 11:23 tells us of the great faith of Moses’ parents. “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”

Due to our limited understanding, we do not see that God was working through these parents in order that 80 years later He could send Moses to be His promised deliverer who would bring the Israelites out of Egypt. When Moses was 40 years old, his great faith in God and his love for the communion of Israelites, led him to stand up for “his brothers” against the Egyptian authorities. Though Moses became a stranger in a foreign land, this, too, was according to God’s plan to prepare a deliverer.

With even more foresight and love for His not-yet-created believers, God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” (Ephesians 1:4-5) At just the right time, our holy Jesus took up our reproach and became a stranger in our land of sin. (Psalm 69:7-9) Our Deliverer’s great zeal for us led to His death that we might be given new life.

The congregation of the Christian Church, having received Holy Baptism, preaching of the Word and Holy Communion, exists in the wilderness, facing temptation and the devil and his minions. Today’s pericope is a narrative reflecting the on-going battle between the children of God and the workers of evil.

The first battle that all Christians face is temptation; more specifically, they face the temptation to complain against how the Lord God is providing for them. The Israelites grumbled again that there was no water. Their desire was to return to Egypt where they had food and water abundantly. How soon they forget that that life in Egypt was a life of slavery and hardship. When we grumble against the Lord God we are also desiring a life apart from God’s will as He has revealed it. Such a life can only be the life of slavery under the will of the devil, where we were on account of our sin before the Lord God rescued us through the waters of Holy Baptism.

The second battle that we face is from the onslaught of the devil and his minions, which the Amalekites represent: “The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” The good news is that, like Moses who lifted up his arms to hold back the onslaught of the Amalekites, so too did our Lord Jesus Christ lift up His arms on the tree of the holy Cross. From the Cross He would drive back Satan and his army and defeat them so that we may continually hear the promise of our salvation on account of Him, our Savior and Banner.

Throughout the readings this week we have been provided with spiritual images of Holy Baptism and preaching. Today, we have a picture of the Sacrament of the Altar.

The Israelites were provided food in the wilderness. They were provided both quail and manna. That is to say, they were provided both flesh and bread. It is no coincidence that these images of our Lord's Supper are presented to the Israelites as their food during their forty year journey in the wilderness.

We too have been provided food for our journey through the wilderness—the wilderness of this world full of sin, death and works of the devil. Our food is the Lord's very real and substantial Body and Blood, given in bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink for our forgiveness, life and salvation. This meal is our sustenance in this life, for through it the Holy Ghost creates and strengthens faith and life in us. This meal is also our medicine, for through it our disease of sin is healed and we are made new creations, free from sin.

It is in this meal that we remember and proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ's death on the holy Cross for us poor, miserable sinners. Through His death our punishment is paid. And through His perfect obedience the Law--which we were unable to keep--has been fulfilled for us. Therefore, in this meal we remember and proclaim that it is on account of our Lord's passive and active obedience that we have forgiveness, life and salvation.

“...God remembered His covenant...” (v. 24) doesn't mean that He had forgotten them for a time. God had been preparing a deliverer long before they ever cried out. (ch.1-2) “Remembered” means that God is revealing Himself by His mighty acting to fulfill His covenant. Read Exodus 6:1-8. Exodus 6:3, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*), but by My name LORD (*Yahweh* = the great “I AM”) I was not known to them.” In His act of rescuing the Israelites, God will show forth what He began with the call of Abraham. They will now know the meaning of the covenantal Name—Yahweh. Exodus 6:7, “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

Even God's revelation to Moses in the midst of the fire of a burning bush, teaches us that, “Our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb. 12:29, also Ex. 24:17, Deut. 4:24) He does not act with partiality as we do, nor is He complicit in the sinful actions of others. When God gets involved there is going to be a judgment. (1 Cor. 3:11-15) For unbelievers this burning destroys everything sinful (Dt 9:3) leaving them nothing. (2 Thes 1:8) However, believers in Jesus will be saved through fire—a purifying of faith. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we become His Redeemed and He became our Yahweh, “who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14)

For 430 years God had not spoken to any man. “Suppose they say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you.’” God’s answer was three signs.

1. God takes an ordinary shepherd’s staff and sanctifies it to be “the rod of God.” (Ex 4:20; 17:9) This rod cast upon the ground became an accursed snake, just as God’s enslaved people thought they had been rejected by God. Jesus became our “cursed One who hung on a tree” so that like the bronze serpent we may look to him and not die but live. Our deliverer Jesus, defeated Satan, and in true faithful obedience He took up that snake once again by the tail, and to “shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock of Your heritage.” (Micah 7:14)

2. God’s people had been thrust into the bosom of Egypt only to become—like a leprous limb—a reproach to her neighbors. (Ps 31:11) When God’s love brought them forth from his bosom once again, they were His redeemed and restored people.

3. The turning of the water into blood was the defeating blow of the One true Lord God in defeat of the Egyptian’s idolatrous idol, Osiris, who was associated with the life-giving Nile water system.

God was with Moses, mightily working to supply him with a divine call and verifying signs. Nevertheless, Jesus “has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.” (Hebrews 3:3) Our Jesus did not beg His heavenly Father to send someone else. Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven. . . that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:38-40)

Yesterday we saw how the Lord God saved the Israelites by bringing them through the Red Sea on dry ground, thereby establishing an image of Holy Baptism, which is for us Christians to receive for our deliverance from sin, death and the devil.

In today’s reading the Israelites experience hunger and thirst in the wilderness. The Lord God relieves their thirst by cleansing the waters of Marah and leading them to the twelve wells of Elim, where there was also shade from the heat of the desert. He relieves their hunger by promising to provide bread from Heaven and meat to fill their bellies. This relief is a picture of how the Lord God relieves us in this wilderness ruled by the devil, the world and our flesh.

For what do we hunger and thirst? How does the Lord relieve this hunger and thirst? We hunger and thirst in this evil world for relief from the pain and misery from sin, death and the devil. We desire to be free from the consequences of our sin, our guilt, our shame, and our prideful thinking. The good news is that the Lord provides relief through His holy Word. In the preaching of the Gospel we are reminded once again of the promises that our Lord won for us on the holy Cross and were bestowed upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Therefore, on account of our hunger and thirst we come often to the Lord’s house to be reminded again and again that our sins have been washed away and the devil and his minions have no power over us.

The Lord “has triumphed gloriously.” “The horse and the rider He has thrown into the sea!” “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea.” His “captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.” These are the images of the devil’s power being destroyed in the waters of Holy Baptism. Pharaoh (the devil) is drowned in the Red Sea (the waters of Holy Baptism). His captains (the world and our sinful flesh) are drowned in the Red Sea (in Holy Baptism). The Lord, through the waters of Holy Baptism, has triumphed gloriously over sin, death and the devil, and has made us His children through the Holy Ghost creating faith and life in us.

Therefore, on this Easter Monday we can join our song to the song of the Israelites, for through the waters of Holy Baptism the Lord has safely carried us on to dry ground to His holy habitation. He has raised us up from the death of sin and made us alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Just as He has raised His Son, we too walk in newness of life. We are a new creation, redeemed from the power of the devil, and from sin and death.

Lord has brought us in and planted us in the mountain of His inheritance, in the place which He has made for His own dwelling, the sanctuary that His hands have established by His death on the holy Cross. In this sanctuary we rejoice daily that the Lord has washed away our sins in the waters of Holy Baptism.

We cannot have any hypocrites in the pastoral office. Moses was sent to Pharaoh with words that were to be obeyed, “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me.” The result of disobedience comes punishment. Moses further said, “But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.”

However, Moses himself had not kept the Lord’s command in regard to circumcision. Though he had circumcised the older son, the younger had not been circumcised. It was probably due to the negative reaction of his Midianite wife, Zipporah, following the first child’s circumcision. The words of God to Abraham were clearly without exception, “Every male child among you shall be circumcised.” (Gen 17:10) Disobedience to the covenant was also spelled out. “And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (Gen. 17:14) God sought first to kill the parent Moses as he was the responsible party.

Whether dealing with Pharaoh or Moses or God’s son (the Israelite nation), our God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim 2:4) His gracious actions are designed to save through faith in Jesus Christ. Pharaoh hardens his heart. Zipporah reluctantly circumcises her son, but for the wrong reason. The people of Israel believed and worshipped, but will soon show that their weak faith needs great strengthening. If some are not saved, we cannot blame God. If some are saved, all praise be to God.

God knew (4:21) that Pharaoh would refuse to set the Israelites free. Instead of seeking the complete emancipation of his people right from the start, He has Moses ask for only a three days' journey to sacrifice to the Lord our God. When even this small request is refused, you can understand why God's loving action, in continually seeking for Pharaoh to repent and do the Lord's will, only hardened his heart.

God let Moses know that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened, but imagine Moses surprise when the people God sought to rescue from slavery, turned against him. They asked God to punish Moses for his actions saying, "Let the Lord look on you and judge...." (Ex. 5:21) Thankfully, the Lord did not do the judging which they requested, because, instead of punishing Moses, the Lord should have punished the people for cursing the Prophet Moses, who was doing the Lord's will.

The Israelites responded in faith when Moses first arrived. (4:31) Yet, their reaction in 5:21, would lead me to erroneously determine that they were faithless. Thankfully, the Lord continued to work with them. Isaiah 42:3, "A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench." The increase in oppression and the sending of the ten plagues were used to strengthen the faith of the Israelites.

Let this be a warning to us, that we don't criticize our God when His Word causes us to experience persecution, as they did. Let us pray that our God continues to send out true pastors to speak His Law to condemn our sin and the Gospel message of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

**THE HOLY GOSPEL****ST. MARK 16:1–8 (NKJV)**

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away; for it was very large.

And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples; and Peter; that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."

So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**THE COLLECT**

Almighty God, who through Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life, we humbly beseech Thee that as Thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by Thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Heb. 13:5) Such words clearly proclaim God’s promise to the Israelites as they departed from Egypt following the Holy Passover. The Lord God remained with His Israelites every step of the wilderness journey, leading them to the promised land. He continued to provide for them with all that they needed.

Momentarily humbled Pharaoh soon regained his arrogance and pursued the freed Israelites in vindictive anger in order to slaughter many and enslave the rest for service to Egypt again. Like so many people today, Pharaoh failed to learn the lesson and thus thought he could outsmart God—but all to his and Egypt’s destruction.

The Hebrews followed the Lord in cloud and fire as He led them to what appeared a dead end. But a dead end it was not! Instead it would prove to be another test for His people—a test to lead them to trust in Him in all things. Indeed, the Egyptians would pursue them, but God was with them and would not forsake them as they in haste would cry out in despair, thinking all was lost.

God’s called and faithful servants continue to proclaim the Lord’s inscripturated truth to His people today, to remind us of His faithfulness throughout this wilderness journey, to assure us that He is with us always to lead us forward in faith in the freedom of the Gospel.

May we not waver in this one, true, and saving faith in our living Savior amidst our trials, but ever hold it dear in lip-service and life-service. The Lord is always with His people in Word and Sacrament.

The Large Catechism says, “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress.... I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.... That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.” (LC I, 2-3)

When Pharaoh was met by Moses and Aaron early in the morning on the bank of the Nile, Pharaoh wasn’t there for an early fishing expedition. Pharaoh was going to the daily worship of his Nile River god from whom he sought fruitfulness and every good. The first plague of turning the water of the Nile River into blood was done to strike at the heart of Egyptian idolatry. The Egyptians would learn about the LORD (Yahweh), Who quite easily turned their life-giving idol into a death-producing reprehensible water. The second plague of frogs is said to have come from the river (8:3), as well. Later, the Philistines understood this account to be a warning. “Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart? (1 Sam. 6:6)

We trust in the Lord our God, whose Son struck at our sinful heart’s desires, which cannot save. Jesus overcame the devil, who like Pharaoh accuses God’s people day and night. And our Jesus finally struck and defeated the last enemy, death (1 Cor. 15:26), when He died and rose again. All thanks be to God!

## THE HOLY GOSPEL

ST. MATTHEW 21:1–9 (NKJV)

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. “And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.” All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’” So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!”

## THE COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast sent Thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon Him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility, mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God world without end.

The Passover was observed as God had instructed—according to the letter. From death comes forth life. The death of the firstborn of all the Egyptians, and of their animals, finally momentarily humbled Pharaoh so as to call Moses and Aaron to his palace and order all the Israelites out of his empire. In the midst of death, the Hebrews walked forward in freedom from the shackles of slavery, heading to the promised land. No longer were they subjects of the Egyptian superpower. God had freed them and given them new life amidst the death of their enemies.

The Passover lamb typified the promised coming Messiah of Genesis 3:15—the very Lamb of God of Whom John the Baptist was the forerunner, preparing His way. The Sacramental Feast of Unleavened Bread was instituted by the Lord for His people to be observed regularly each year for their benefit, just as the Lord’s Supper is to be observed regularly in the Divine Service by His people for their benefit. To neglect or forsake God’s Means of Grace is neither wise nor prudent for the follower of God; such will only be to his detriment.

Additionally, the law of the firstborn is established by the Lord for His nation, and the rules for redemption are enunciated with the appropriate sacrifices—all pointing to the perfect redemption—full and free atonement in the coming Lamb of God.

As the Israelites of old looked forward in faith to the promised coming Messiah, so may we continue to remain focused on Him Who has already come to secure our redemption from sin, death, and the powers of hell. Praise God!

“You shall. . . .” This text is laden with these words. Certainly such words do not seem very user-friendly, tolerant, optional, etc. God is the One Who establishes and commands who, what, where, when, why, and how for His Passover, just as for His Supper. And since He establishes it, He alone has the right to institute the details; no man has the right to change or modernize it according to his circumstances or contemporary desires. What God says and does is perfect; anything else is destructive.

Upon the coming of the tenth plague in Egypt, the Israelites finally realized the strength of their God. They knew, as clearly manifested nine times in recent memory, that the Lord was not one to be manipulated or mocked. They realized that God said what He meant, and meant what He said.

The same is true today. Many churches and their pastors believe that they have the legitimate right to contemporize God’s teachings and instructions, His ordinances and mandates. They think they can improve upon God and make Him more relevant by their own manipulations of His inspired Word. This is evident in the acceptance of sexual immorality of all kinds, watering down of God’s Law, denying the pure Gospel as salvific, changing the Sacraments, raping the Office of the Holy Ministry, etc.

But all they are doing is perverting, twisting, and distorting God’s divine truth to the demise of self and the sheep (who are not testing the spirits as Scripturally instructed). God’s Word is not to be changed by sinful man, but submitted to and joyfully embraced by him for his own good. May it be so for you.

True and lasting strength is found only in the Lord God of Heaven and Earth. Forget the false gods of this world that purport to be the true God but are only appendages of Satan.

Pharaoh, who had not learned his history about his own nation and their savior-Israelites centuries earlier, was full of himself; he had no time for the true God of the Hebrews Whom Moses faithfully proclaimed. According to Egyptian religious belief, he was an emperor on his way to becoming a god (at his death) for his people; and he was also concerned about leaving a legacy of great might and success. He did not want to show any weakness or humility, for such would be considered a character flaw. Therefore he would not submit to God’s Word and His servant, Moses.

The same arrogant spirit today leads countless souls worldwide to rebel against the Lord God. People reject the truth that alone can set them free because they refuse to be humbled and walk according to the Lord’s commands. They choose the gods they can create and manipulate so as to please the depraved flesh. But such gods—no matter what is attached to them, only lead to everlasting damnation in hell.

The Christian does not find strength in self, nor is he concerned about a personal legacy. Instead, the Christian confesses that his strength is in the Lord God alone. And the only legacy with which he concerns himself is that of the Triune God—his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

As followers of the Lamb of God, we humbly submit to His Word and trustingly walk in His path.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 15: EXODUS 9:29–10:20**

**HOLY TUESDAY**

Amongst numerous things, this account provides a picture of false piety. Pharaoh had promised to let the people go if only the plague would be removed. But Pharaoh was lying, and the Lord knew it. The Egyptian ruler put on a good front with wonderful words, but it was all a false piety designed to deceive Moses and his God.

However, the Lord cannot be mocked; God will not fall for lies since He well knows the heart of man. Original sin makes the heart of each man filthy and rotten, and without sincere repentance the heart will only continue to harden in its rebellion against and ultimate rejection of God.

There are many pharaohs in the visible church today. They claim membership (and sometimes even a seat) in the local congregation, but their hearts are far from the Lord, even though at times they may speak as faithful sheep. Yet, such hypocrisy should never be the justification for any sinner to stay away from Christ's Bride and the divine meals of Word and Sacrament. His holy nourishment is essential for all souls if faith in the only true God is to endure.

Additionally, it is very important to ever pray that we not become a pharaoh—a hypocrite, giving only lip-service to God void of life-service. Due to sin, it is easy to become merely rote in our confession of faith not only in the Divine Service, but also in daily life.

Pray God that our trust in Him only continues to grow. Let not adversity and strife drive us away, but instead drive us to our knees, imploring Him for mercy and grace.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16: EXODUS 10:21–11:10** **HOLY WEDNESDAY**

The darkness of sin is so great that even though the mighty works of the Lord God prove Himself beyond any doubt, the insanity of sin in man continues to reject the manifest truth. Pharaoh knew his gods were of no worth in the presence of the true and living God, but sin refused to submit to the truth and thus led him into the damning abyss.

The ninth plague of three days of darkness for the Egyptians well depicts the dreaded darkness that sin brings upon each benighted soul. Peace and comfort, joy and bliss are all a fleeting thought, just as they were for the Jewish leadership upon Christ's death on Golgotha. Only the light of the living Christ can remove such fear and instill a lasting peace and joy in the heart and life of the penitent.

The tenth plague of death to all the first-born Egyptians was announced to Pharaoh and met with pure rebellion. The truth was denied; God was rejected yet again. The time of His grace was fast drawing to a close for Pharaoh and all of Egypt.

Such is true for all leaders and nations on this earth, as well as for each individual. The time of God's grace will ultimately come to an end for everyone. Arrogance will fall, military power will evaporate, wealth and riches will perish.

But those who trust in the Lord will be as Mount Zion. They shall not perish, but endure forever through faith in the Lord Jesus who alone is the Victor, and who alone provides the victory for His people, making them partakers with Him in triumphant glory.