

The people already knew that the Lord willed that they would not enter into the land until the generation of those who rejected the word spoken Joshua and Caleb were deceased. Moses also knew that not he, but Joshua, would lead the people into that promised land. But it was the will of the Lord that the census would be made of the people so that an apportionment of that land would be made, according to the size of each tribe. However, concerning the Levites, it was declared: “Now those who were numbered of them were twenty-three thousand, every male from a month old and above; for they were not numbered among the other children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given to them among the children of Israel.” (Num. 26:62) The Levites would be sustained by the rest of the tribes, according to the Word of the Lord in Deuteronomy 18:1–8, which declares, in part: “For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever. So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the Lord chooses, then he may serve in the name of the Lord his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before the Lord. They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance.” The Levites numbered, roughly, one twenty-fifth of the number of those counted among the rest of the tribes; it was the responsibility of the saints to sustain those who had been set apart for this work.

Jesus declared when He sent out the 70, “the laborer is worthy of his wages.” (Luke 10:7) St. Paul affirmed that this due support extends to all those whom the Lord calls to “labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



The Transfiguration

FEBRUARY 4–MARCH 4, 2017

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The Calendar

February 5	Transfiguration
February 12	Septuagesima
February 19	Sexagesima
February 24	St. Matthias, Apostle
February 26	Quinquagesima
March 1	Ash Wednesday

Teachers and Confessors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

February 16	Philipp Melanchthon, Confessor
February 26	David Chytraeus, Doctor and Confessor

Installation of New Pastor at Saints Peter and Paul



On January 15, Bishop Heiser installed Rev. Jerald Dulas as the new pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church (Greenville, South Carolina). Pastor Gilbert Eliason, the founding pastor of the congregation, is retiring.

FRIDAY, MARCH 3: NUMBERS 22–24

Balaam was tempted by Balak's gold, and it almost cost him his life. But after Balaam received a rebuke from the Lord through the mouth of a donkey, he repented (at least for a time). Balaam wanted to use his donkey to go and violate the will of the Lord. But then the Lord used the donkey to speak a word of caution to Balaam and spare his life. Balaam then went and proclaimed the Word of the Lord concerning Israel, which outraged Balak but gave a Word of consolation which would comfort God's people throughout the ages and which would be fulfilled in the coming of the Christ:

"I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult." (Num. 24:17)

Balak wanted to use Balaam in a way similar to the way that Balaam wanted to use his donkey: to overthrow the will of the Lord. One does not normally look for one's domesticated animal for a conversation partner any more than one would look to a Gentile in the Old Testament to be the one chosen to speak prophecy and a blessing to Israel. But the Lord willed both things because He is not bound by our expectations. He showed mercy to Balaam through the mouth of a beast; He showed mercy to all who trust in the Lord through the word of promise spoken by the mouth of Balaam.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Moses credited himself with that which the Lord was doing, and exceeded that which the Lord commanded: “And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’” Moses was to speak to the rock, not the people; Moses was to strike once, and he stroke twice.

Moses’ sin occurred in the context of the latest rebellion of the people against the Lord. It would seem easy to excuse Moses; after all, who wouldn’t have had enough of the complaining of the people by this point? But on account of this transgression, Moses was excluded from entering the promised land, and Aaron died on Mount Hor.

The Lord accomplishes that which He wills through His Word; the servant who brings that Word is only the instrument through which the Word is spoken. This reading is a powerful reminder both to the servants of the Word, and to those who hear the Word, that the Word—and all that is accomplished through that Word—is the Lord’s work.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Transfiguration Sunday

Article III.

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

—The Augsburg Confession

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6: EXODUS 16-18

How twisted perceptions can become for those whose hearts are devoid of gratitude toward God for His countless blessings. “Oh that the Lord had slain us back when we had all sorts of good things to eat. If only we had died with full bellies and [presumably] smiles on our faces.” How had they forgotten the brutality of their Egyptian masters and the killing of their male children? How had they forgotten how they had cried to the heavens for deliverance from the bitterness of their life in Egyptian bondage?

God was clearly with them in the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day, and yet they had the temerity to ask Moses with bitter sarcasm, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?” (14:11). God had stretched out His mighty hand to deliver them and they responded by complaining, whining about the fleshpots of Egypt. It makes as much sense as being delivered from the terror of addiction and then complaining that you have missed the “partying,” or being delivered from heterodoxy and then grumbling about certain fiscal benefits that came with your much larger former affiliation.

In the meantime, godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). Our greatest need, that of deliverance from sin and everlasting death, has been satisfied in Christ Jesus. Surely He will address our lesser needs as well.

We pray: Lord God, protect us from shallowness, from an “entitlement mindset,” and from hardness of heart, as You keep us in the one true faith with Jesus Christ, always ready to give thanks for Your blessings of life and salvation. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1: NUMBERS 16-18

Following their rebellion against the Word of the Lord, the people tried to enter the land by their own strength—and failed. Then, confirming their rebellion against the Lord, they lashed out against the Lord’s servants: “They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?’” God’s Word makes it clear that these men were “movers and shakers,” for the rebels were “men of renown” and “leaders of the congregation.” Of course, their argument is fundamentally flawed, imagining that they might seize the vocation which the Lord had granted to another. But after the Lord caused the earth to swallow up those who rebelled against Moses’ office, still the people “complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the Lord.’” The Lord’s response to such rebellion should not have been a surprise: “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” If Moses had not sent Aaron to stand between the living and the dead during the plague which followed, is there any doubt what would have happened?

The Lord’s servants intervene through prayer and supplication on behalf of those who have rebelled against the Word and the servant of the Word. That, too, is often a part of their calling. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Cor. 11) In all things, we look to the love of God in Christ: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28: NUMBERS 13–15

“But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: ‘The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, “a land which flows with milk and honey.” Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them.’ And all the congregation said to stone them with stones.”

After all that they had experienced in Egypt and in the wilderness, the people still did not trust in the Word of the Lord; instead, they took counsel of their fears and sought to kill the man who had the audacity to speak the truth to them. It only makes sense that when the Lord then spoke His judgment on the people—that is, that the generation which had rebelled against Him would die in the wilderness before their children could enter the promised land—that then they sought to take the land by their own strength, and failed utterly.

This is the character of sin in the hearts of those who should trust the Word which the Lord has spoken to them: they despair in the face of challenges and think only of what they can accomplish. In an age when it is readily apparent that the visible congregation of the faithful can seem quite small, the hearts of many grow afraid. But the Word remains: “But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.”

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7: EXODUS 19-21

I was blessed with the opportunity to climb Mount Sinai nearly 20 years ago. There are two routes to the top, the longer, gentler “camel path,” and the “Steps of Repentance,” a 3,750-step direct ascent from the mountain’s foot. It did not take me long to repent of the Steps of Repentance, but I was with a group of much younger men who, by their very nature, would always reject the softer, easier way. But I will never forget the beauty of the view from the top as the setting sun inflamed the reddish granite with glorious rosy golden hues.

There are people, spiritually speaking, who would attempt to scale Mount Sinai themselves. They think they can by their own diligence satisfy God’s holy commandments, that they can gain favor in the sight of God by their holiness and works. However, “... the Law is not kept without Christ. As He Himself has said, ‘Apart from Me you can do nothing.’ Likewise, ‘Without faith it is impossible to please God.’ For it is very certain that the doctrine of the Law is not intended to remove the Gospel and to remove Christ as the Atoning Sacrifice. Let the Pharisees be cursed. ... They say works are an atoning sacrifice, that they merit the forgiveness of sins. Works are always rightly praised in this way: they are pleasing because of faith” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article III: Love and Fulfilling the Law.).

We pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for climbing Mount Calvary on my behalf to satisfy the demands of God’s holy Law in order to give me the hope of everlasting life on Mount Zion. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8: EXODUS 22-24

There is much in this reading in keeping with what we might call “common sense”—responsibilities concerning property and “doing the right thing,” exercising justice toward widows, orphans, the poor, and aliens, and living in common decency. These seem to be reasonable directives to maintain and support a community living together in peace.

But as God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor our ways His (Isaiah 55:8), there are also things that were so because God said so, such as the three annual feasts. God is clearly not “man writ large.” Yet He who is immortal, invisible, God only wise, made a covenant with His people with the blood of oxen thrown both upon the altar and upon the people.

We, like the people of old, will often promise to obey God and to listen to the voice of His Angel, but between the idea and the act falls the shadow of sin. Indeed, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But we are spared the wrath of Almighty God because we have drunk of the blood of the New Covenant Jesus made on the night before He was betrayed. Jesus would have us do more than simply live together peacefully, but actually to dwell together in that love which is only made possible by the kindness and love of God our Savior, in whose own blood we are cleansed of all unrighteousness.

We pray: Lord, Help us never to forget that You alone are God, worthy of all praise, to whom we owe obedience because we have been purchased in the blood of Your Son Jesus. Let Your holy Angel be with us that the evil foe may have no power over us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27: NUMBERS 10–12

“When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the Lord your God.”

It is striking to consider how readily men and women misuse their voices to speak against the Lord and against His servant. Many from among the people complain about the gift of manna. Even Aaron and Miriam speak against their brother, Moses. The people pined for the food they had during the time of their captivity. The Lord strikes many of the people with a plague, as He gives them that which they sinfully demanded. Moved by their rejection of the wife of Moses, Aaron and Miriam complain, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” In all of these things, the servant of the Lord was afflicted by those who should have been his most faithful supporters.

But the Lord granted Moses that which he needed: He gave him the 70 elders to assist him, and their voices spoke forth the Word of the Lord so that Moses declared to Joshua, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!” The Word of the Lord comforts and consoles the saints of God in the day of affliction. Though even Miriam spoke against Moses for a time, still the Word of God spoke pardon and consolation, and the notes of the trumpets recalled to mind the promises of the Triune God.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25: NUMBERS 4-6

It takes only ten seconds at the end of the Divine Service to hear the benediction spoken upon God's holy people by His holy minister. It's like emptying a coffer of gold coins into a room, giving a person only ten seconds to pick up as many as possible. But if you let the words of the benediction ring in your ears throughout the week, then you will always have that treasure at your disposal.

It is not the minister's wish or desire that is spoken. It is the LORD who speaks the blessing, through His appointed servant. It is a blessing that conveys the very thing it proclaims.

"The LORD bless you and keep you." "To bless" is to confer abundant life and prosperity, to provide everything that is good for you. "To keep" is to exercise great care over someone, to watch over, to protect, to guard, to care for.

To "make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you" is to be favorably disposed to you, to hear your prayers, to be merciful to you in all your needs, to look on you according to His grace, for the sake of Christ, not according to your works.

To "lift up His countenance upon you" is to do good to you, not evil; to forgive you your sins, not hold them against you. To "give you peace" is to cover your whole life with His favor, so that, no matter what trials or afflictions you may face in this life, you can rest in the quiet assurance of God's fatherly, divine goodness and love.

God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9: EXODUS 25-27

Across our great nation stand many beautiful, classic church buildings with steeples stretching heavenward, lifting high the cross. Inside are found ornate altars, baptismal fonts, and pulpits bathed in the soft light shining through stained glass depicting well-loved scenes from the Bible. And on the altar one might see highly wrought candlesticks and communion ware crafted with precious metal. Our forebears arrived on these shores often with scarcely two nickels to rub together, and still they built and furnished these wonderful old churches.

The Israelites in their desert journey were commanded by God through His servant, Moses, to build a moveable, temporary sanctuary, that He might dwell among them. These wilderness wanderers were to make an offering willingly with their hearts for its construction. To be sure, the Israelites were not a small band of people. There were vast numbers of people with Moses. Even so, the specific instructions for the tabernacle required prodigious amounts of gold, silver, bronze, acacia wood, hides, expensive fabric and thread, and the like! And they provided it.

Assuredly, you and I are temples of the living God, living stones, a spiritual house, where God through Word and Sacrament has promised to dwell. Still, we need a place to be, a location for the worship of God. But even in the humblest surroundings designed for the most Spartan, unadorned functionality, where the Word is preached in purity and the Sacraments administered according to that Word, there God is present in all His power and glory.

We pray: Heavenly Father, as You did not withhold from us that which was most precious to You, Your Son, Jesus Christ, move us to remember that we are merely stewards of the worldly wealth we offer for the ongoing work of Your Church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, EXODUS 28-30

Many years ago a publication featured an article about a pastor who stood on a busy street corner near the church he served wearing alb and stole and holding up a sign in order to invite passers-by to attend worship services at his church. It is commendable for a pastor to wear a clergy shirt and collar while “on duty” and out and about. And while it is not for us a matter of “canon law,” it can be argued that trying to look like a “regular guy” is a rejection of the fact that one has been consecrated to serve in the Office of Holy Ministry.

The Lord warned Moses that the people were not to use the incense specifically blended for use in the tabernacle for themselves. While God has not spoken specifically to the use or misuse of albs and stoles--vestments bearing a similarity to those worn by Aaron and his sons in the service of God--it should be patently obvious they are not for street wear or for gimmicky purposes.

All of us, however, as members of the royal priesthood, are daily to put on the whole armor of God to defend ourselves against the wiles of Satan. What's more, wearing the robes of Christ's righteousness and not the foul rags of our own paltry efforts to please God, we have the confidence and courage to serve as His ambassadors. We implore others on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God, who for our sake made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

We pray: Heavenly Father, implant in our hearts the deepest reverence whenever You come to us in Word and Sacrament. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24: NUMBERS 1-3

The Book of Numbers is, appropriately, full of numbers. Those numbers represent God's faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He took the family of Jacob—seventy-five people—and multiplied them in Egypt, even when they were being oppressed by the Egyptians. Some 215 years later, the men of fighting age numbered 603,550, not counting the Levites. The meticulous care taken in the numbering of the children of Israel demonstrates the Lord's individual concern for each one of His children.

The Levites were numbered differently than the other tribes. All the males were counted from the age of one month. The reason is important. The Lord had claimed the life of the firstborn sons of Egypt during the Passover, but had spared the lives of the firstborn of Israel by the blood of the lambs. Therefore, the firstborn of Israel belonged to God on account of that Passover salvation. God could have required that those firstborn sons of each family be sanctified for the priestly office, but instead He allowed the Levites to serve on behalf of the other tribes. The Levite males represented the Lord's portion; they were to be sanctified for the holy service of the tabernacle.

The fulfillment of this consecration of the firstborn was Jesus Himself, the firstborn Son of Mary, who serves in God's House on behalf of His brethren. Indeed, “we have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:1-2).

O Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, have mercy upon us and help us in every need. By Your perfect obedience and holy service make our feeble service to be acceptable before our Father in heaven. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23: LEVITICUS 25-27

Can you imagine a whole year off of work every seven years? Can you imagine all the farmers in our country taking a year-long break from planting and harvesting? What a marvelous blessing God programmed into the calendar of the Israelites! The Old Testament was full of such promised blessings for obedience—not just spiritual blessings, but actual, physical abundance was guaranteed by the Word of God. Likewise, physical plague and punishment were also threatened for stubborn impenitence and refusal to follow God’s holy requirements.

But redemption was also foreshadowed—the cancellation of debts, the forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of one’s inheritance—all pictured in the Year of Jubilee and in the “redeeming relative.” Indeed, it was, again, the work of Christ, our Brother and Redeemer, that was depicted in all these statutes and ceremonies. As St. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross... So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Col. 2:13-14,16-17).

We live by faith in the great Jubilee of debts cancelled and sins forgiven. Let us rejoice in this great salvation, and let us remain in Christ and His Jubilee through daily contrition and repentance.

You, O Lord, are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, EXODUS 31-33

It is horrifying to see not only how quickly the Israelites assumed that Moses had perished or had gone off to parts unknown, but also how quickly they turned from the Lord who had brought them out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. They wanted a new god. Aaron accommodated their request for a new god, shiny and bright and of human manufacture. They traded in the Creator for the created.

They sang and danced around this thing, raising such a noise that Moses and Joshua could hear them from a distance. As Adam pointed the finger of blame at Eve after their rebellious eating of the forbidden fruit, so also Aaron put the blame on the Israelites, and then told the bald-faced lie that the golden calf just happened to form itself from the gold he threw into the fire.

This amply illustrates the assertion in the Smalcald Articles that “sin originated from one man, Adam. By his disobedience all people were made sinners and became subject to death and the devil. This is called original or the chief sin. The fruit of this sin are the evil deeds that are forbidden in the Ten Commandments. These include unbelief, false faith, idolatry, being without the fear of God, pride, despair, utter blindness, and, in short, not knowing or regarding God. Also lying, abusing God’s name, not praying, not calling on God, not regarding God’s Word, ... etc.” (Part III, Article I). But, as in Adam all die, so in Christ, the last Adam, all will be made alive.

We pray: Lord God, deliver us from our sin and unbelief. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Doctrine and Practice

The 'Gesima' Sundays

"The names Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima [The names literally mean "70," "60," and "50."] point forward to Easter, these Sundays falling within the seventh and the sixth decades and upon the fiftieth day before that great feast. The Propers of the three Sundays provide a transition from the joyousness of the Christmas and Epiphany cycles to the stern penitential season of Lent. Momentous historical events originally led to the choice of the Lessons and the composition of the Collects for these days. This accounts for the strongly individual character of these Sundays.

"In 568 Pope John III appointed these Sundays as days of supplication in view of the perils threatened by the invading Lombards. Fear of impending disaster and trust in God are alternately expressed in the Introits and Graduals and in the earnest petitions of the Collects for these Sundays. The prayers and other Propers were retained in the Liturgy after the long-continued threats of invasion had ended, and have now received a spiritual interpretation.

"... The Gospels for Septuagesima (the vineyard) and for Sexagesima (the sower) were originally chosen for early spring when the farmers prepared their vineyards and fields. The later extension of Lent pushed these selections back so that they now normally come at the end of winter.

"These Sundays have marked individuality and a Lenten-like intensity of spirit. This is announced thematically in the Introit for Septuagesima, which speaks of being 'mercifully delivered' and 'defended in all adversity.' The Epistle and the Gospel sound the warning that although many be called, few are chosen. The Gospel extols God's goodness but the Epistle exhorts us to self-discipline and endeavor; an intimation of the approaching Lententide. In keeping with this, the Hallelujahs of the Graduals are replaced, beginning with this Sunday, by 'tracts' which continue in use throughout Lent."

—Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 450–451

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22: LEVITICUS 22-24

The appointed feasts and holy days in the Old Testament served as annual (and weekly) pictures of the gifts Christ would bring in the New Testament.

The weekly Sabbath Day depicted salvation by faith, apart from works, the Sabbath rest of Christ in the tomb, and the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God (cf. Heb. 4). The Passover depicted Christ, our Passover Lamb, whose blood protects us from death. The Feast of Unleavened Bread that immediately followed the Passover depicted the bread that is the body of Christ, and also the new life of the Church, which is lived in sincerity and truth.

The Feast of Weeks depicted the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, who is "the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:14). The Day of Atonement depicted Christ as both our great High Priest, and as the sacrifice whose blood makes up for all our wrongs. The Feast of Tabernacles, which included the Feast of Harvest, depicted the temporary nature of our life on this earth and pointed to the permanent heavenly home into which God will lead us, even now providing for all our needs with great generosity and goodness.

The Feast of Trumpets is described very little in Scripture. But it surely pointed ahead to the "great sound of a trumpet" (Matt. 24:31) that will herald the Christ's arrival and the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day (1 Cor. 15:52).

O Lord God, we give You thanks for teaching Your ancient people about the coming Christ and His holy Christian Church through signs and symbols. Teach us to fix our eyes on Christ throughout each year, that we may be prepared for His second coming. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21: LEVITICUS 19-21

“You shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine” (Lev. 20:26). All the Levitical commands, statutes, ceremonies, and punishments were put in place to “sanctify” the Israelites—to keep them “set apart” from the unbelieving nations, because the LORD had already, in fact, set them apart to be His own special people.

True holiness meant obedience to all the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws included in Leviticus. Imagine the burden the devout Israelite must have felt, the weight he carried around every day, to be observant at all times, to avoid all uncleanness, and to perform the required rituals of cleansing when uncleanness couldn’t be avoided. St. Peter called it “a yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

The strict demands of holiness throughout the Old Testament were designed to be a burden to teach the people to yearn for the coming Christ, who would truly cleanse them of their sins against the moral law and release them from the heavy burden of the ceremonial laws. As St. Paul wrote, “Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:23-24).

By faith the status of “saints” has been conferred on us as a gift. By the Holy Spirit’s renewal let us also seek to live a life that is fitting for holy ones, for it is still God’s will that we Christians be “sanctified completely” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You! (Ps. 86:2). Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13: EXODUS 37-38

Dr. Luther writes: “A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. ...the trust of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. ...if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God... That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself really is your god. (Large Catechism, 1st Commandment).

In our readings for this week the Lord wants His people to know who He is, where He is to be found, how they are to worship Him, and how He will forgive their sin. The writer of Hebrews says, “God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

St. John writes, “And truly Jesus did many other signs... in His name” (John 20:30-31). God still wants His people to know who He is. So He brings us to the places where He reveals Himself: in His Church; in the Word; in the waters of Baptism; in the the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Thanks be to God for His undeserved grace! Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14: EXODUS 39-40

The Book of Exodus is the book of redemption. At its beginning God's chosen people are in hopeless bondage in Egypt, having no power to deliver themselves. But God says: "I have seen the affliction of My people, I have heard their cry, I know their sorrows; I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up into a good land" (Ex 3:7,8).

At the end of Exodus the Israelites still had many years to wander in the desert, but God still brought them to the Promised Land. In the Waters of Baptism we too have been called to be God's holy people. Now, however, we still are on our exodus to the Promised Land. St. Paul writes in Titus 3: "He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

In this life we should indeed by daily contrition and repentance drown and die with all sins and evil desires, and a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. God keeps His promises! He will take His people to be with Him forever in heaven.

Father, keep us in Baptismal grace as we travel to our Heavenly home. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20: LEVITICUS 16-18

Atonement is a major theme running through Leviticus. The inescapable lesson that was pounded into the Israelites was clear: every sin must be paid for. Every misdeed has its corresponding atonement price, and that price has to be blood. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood ... it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11).

The blood of innocent animals was accepted by God for a time as the atonement price for the guilt of men. Sacrifices were made throughout the year, with special emphasis on the annual Day of Atonement. On that day animals were sacrificed, incense was burned, blood was sprinkled, and a scapegoat was banished from the Israelite camp, bearing the sins of the people. "In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:3-4).

The blood of Christ, however, does take away sins. It was the price for every sin of every sinner. Christ is the innocent Victim. Christ is the sinless High Priest. He is the incense. He is the Mercy Seat. He is both the goat that was slain and the goat that was banished by the people of Israel, bearing their sins—a foreshadowing of Israel's rejection of their Sin-Bearer and the Father's own abandonment of His Son on the cross. All this was so that atonement could be made, once and for all. In Holy Baptism we were sprinkled with His blood. And now by faith we are clean.

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, for now, in Christ, You have provided atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake! Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18: LEVITICUS 10-12

The message that Jesus was the sin offering that atoned for the sins of the whole world has determined the shape and content of the Divine Service. No sin offering needed to be presented before the faithful could meet with the triune God. Instead, the Divine Service often began with the confession of sins and the absolution so that the people could serve the living God with a good conscience (Didache 4:14). They met to celebrate the sacrificial banquet of Christ in which they ate His sacrificed body and actually drank his cleansing blood.

To the present day, the orders of service based on the Latin Mass praise Christ as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29), for in his Holy Supper Jesus gives us the blood to drink for “the remission of sins” (Mt 26:28). The blood that atoned for our sin now frees us from the stain of sin and releases us from its grip. Jesus does not just sprinkle our bodies with his blood, but with it He also sprinkles our hearts, our conscience. He takes away our sin and gives us His purity. He makes us new people. We can therefore draw near to God the Father with a true heart in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:19).

Jesus, our great High Priest, You have atoned for our sins, making us fit to receive the blessings given through Your Divine Service to us. All thanks and praise to You. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15: LEVITICUS 1-3

In the last verses of Exodus the glory of the Lord left the top of Mount Sinai and settled over the Tabernacle. This indicated that the Lord had taken up residence there. His appearance in the Tabernacle showed that the sacrificial rituals did not summon or evoke God’s presence there. Rather, it presupposed that God was there and that He could be found there. God Himself set it up so the Israelites could know where He was, and they could seek His forgiveness there. But throughout their history as a nation they never seemed to seek the Lord there, where He could be found.

In the Church today things haven’t changed much. Most still wonder where God is. However, the Holy Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has given us a sure sign of His presence. In Matthew 28 He told His Church and her Pastors to go and make disciples by baptizing in His Name and by teaching them to observe all He has commanded. It is true that God is everywhere, and He does go with His people wherever they are, but He has given us a sure place to find Him—in His Word and Sacraments—and where those gifts are being given out He is present.

When we have sin that needs forgiveness, when we need strengthening, we need to go where He has promised to be—in the Divine Service where He comes to us in Word and Sacrament, with the forgiveness of sin, the strengthening of faith through His Word and the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Through these means you and I can be sure we are the children of the Heavenly Father now and into eternity.

Lord, grant that we always seek You where You can be found—in Word and Sacrament. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16: LEVITICUS 4-6

In the reading for today the Lord reveals that He is a God who is willing to forgive. The formula, "If a person sins... let him bring an offering to the Lord, to the priest, and he will make atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them." This formula certainly implies that 1) people will sin and 2) the Lord is willing to forgive. These acts of confession and the reparatory sin offering were, therefore, instituted by God to ease the guilty conscience of the negligent people. They were thereby freed from any penalty for actual or possible acts of sacrilege. They could approach God at the sanctuary without incurring His wrath for desecrating His holiness.

The New Testament teaches us that Jesus sacrificed Himself as the ultimate sin offering. St. Paul, in Romans 3:21-26, says it this way: "But now a righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." You and I have been called into this faith, and kept in faith by Word and Sacrament.

Gracious God, we thank You that You have made us Your people through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Friday, February 17: Leviticus 7-9

The ritual instructions in the first part of Leviticus deal with the meat for the meal that came from the sin, reparation, and peace offerings. These various offerings all find their fulfillment in the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He fulfilled all these functions perfectly. Since Christ has removed all impurity by His blood and has gained our acceptance by God the Father through the offering of His body, we no longer need to offer up sin offerings, reparation offerings, or burnt offerings for our justification before God. Instead, we are invited to participate in the sacrificial meal that Christ has established.

In it He is the Host. He gives us His Body and Blood. At our participation in the Holy Supper we both receive the gift of peace from God and thank Him for the gift of sonship. As we participate in the meal we offer our praise to Him through our Lord Jesus Christ. The heart of the Divine Service is our reception of the Lord's Supper. It strengthens our faith and moves us to thanksgiving and praise, for as often as we eat that meal we rejoice in God's grace and proclaim Christ's death for our redemption (1 Cor 1:26).

Christ, the Lamb of God, we thank and praise You that You have given us the sacrifice of Your Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sin and the strengthening of our faith. Keep us in Your grace until we kneel before You in heaven. Amen.