

SATURDAY, APRIL 1: ROMANS 1-3

“Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

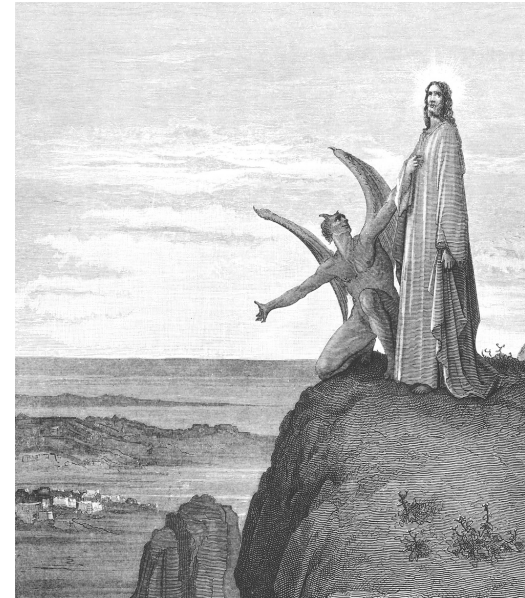
We cannot be justified before God through our keeping of the law. The law only brings knowledge that the law has not been kept. The law only leads to death, for that is the wages of breaking the law. That is, sin is death. This penalty is the same for all who transgress the law, whether they be Jews or Greeks, male or female, servants or free men. The wages of sin is death. We cannot be made right with God by our keeping of the law.

We are justified by faith in Christ. Or, more specifically, we are justified—made right with God—through our faith that the perfect obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ is credited to us freely by His grace and mercy. In this faith we believe that we have put on the righteousness of Christ.

This faith is freely given to us through the work of the Holy Ghost as we participate in the means of grace. The Holy Ghost creates, renews, and strengthens faith in those who hear the Word of God and receive the Sacraments. Through this faith we are justified before God and our sins are forgiven.

We pray: 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, Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



The Temptation of Christ

MARCH 6—APRIL 1, 2017

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NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

March 5	Lent 1—Invocavit
March 12	Lent 2—Reminiscere
March 19	Lent 3—Oculi
March 25 (Sa)	The Annunciation
March 26	Lent 4—Laetare

Teachers and Confessors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

March 25 (Sa) Jakob Andreae, Confessor

2017 Colloquium and 12th Annual Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

The Colloquium (Free Conference) and the Diocesan Synod will take place at Salem Lutheran Church in Malone, Texas from Tuesday, May 30th through Thursday, June 1st. The theme for the Colloquium will be this year's 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. As is our custom, all pastors and deacons of the diocese are expected to be in attendance; laymen of congregations served by the pastors and deacons of the diocese are welcome to attend the Colloquium and open sessions during the Synod, as are other visitors; however, visitors should be in contact with the bishop prior to attendance. For further information, please contact Bishop Heiser either by email (bishopheiser@mac.com) or by calling Salem Lutheran Church (254-533-2330).

FRIDAY, MARCH 31: LUKE 23-24

We rightly meditate on the Passion of Christ when we become terror-stricken with the realization that our sins are the reason He is punished and nailed to the cross. He suffered in our place. He took on our mantle—our flesh--and suffered our fate. Even though it is our sins that nailed Him to the tree, He gladly took our place. This is our Lord's mercy and grace. We do not deserve to be freed from the sentence of eternal wrath and condemnation, but on account of Christ God treats us as if we did no wrong.

Christ fulfilled the Law perfectly. He was obedient to His Father in all things. We disobey our Father continuously, yet Christ freely hands over to us His innocence. When we behold the crucifixion of our Lord, we cannot behold anything but the punishment that we deserved. His punishment was meant for us. In that image our sins are what He bears and for what He suffers.

Pilate released Barabbas, who represents you and me. He is the vilest of criminals—a murderer and someone who cared little about the law of God and man. He does not deserve to be set free. He is fully deserving of his sentence of death, yet he goes free. We go free, too, purely because of our Lord's mercy. He does not treat us as we deserve to be treated. He suffered and died. The debt of our sins is paid. Therefore, we now have been given, through faith in Him, eternal life in Heaven.

We pray: 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, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 30: LUKE 22

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, first gave His true Body under the bread and His true Blood under the wine to repentant sinners in need of His grace and mercy. Before our Lord instituted this meal He said, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” He “desired” to eat this meal with His disciples. He “desires” to eat this meal with all the faithful. We too should have a “fervent desire” to eat this meal.

We need to have two things in order to receive this meal worthily: we need to know what it is we receive, and why we receive it. It is the true and substantial Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given for us Christians to receive the forgiveness of sins. If we do not believe this with our hearts when we come before the altar, then our reception of it is, as Dr. Luther put it, “not much different than when you thrust it down the throat of a pig.” (From his sermon on the reception of the Holy Sacrament, 1525).

Therefore, let us not come to the altar to receive Holy Communion out of habit or custom, not paying attention to what we are doing or what we are receiving. But let us come with a fervent desire to have our sins cleansed and our faith renewed and strengthened, so that we may fully love God and our neighbor. Our Lord desires to give us this meal; let us fervently desire it.

We pray: 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, Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Invocavit Sunday

Article XXI.

Of the Worship of Saints, they teach, that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us Christ, as the only Mediator, Propitiation, High-Priest and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and hath promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon [1 John 2:1]: “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,” etc.

—the Augsburg Confession

MONDAY, MARCH 6: NUMBERS 31-33

God's judgment against sin is stern, and His punishment is severe. It is sometimes difficult for us to watch while God carries it out, as when we see the children of Israel wage war against the unbelieving Midianites, serving as God's own instrument of justice against His enemies. All of the men of Midian are killed in battle, and all of the women and children are captured. Yet, God's wrath against the Midianites' sin was not appeased. Judgment was levied for the Peor episode (Numbers 25), during which Midianite women committed idolatry and adultery, seducing many Israelite men to sin likewise; only the virgins of Midian, who had not taken part, were saved. Then, the Lord's judgment fell against all of the Midianite boys in a poignant depiction of God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:6).

Yes, it is stern and severe, but God's people trust that He rightly judges the hearts of all and administers what is just. God justly has shown His people mercy. For He rendered judgment and executed punishment against His only begotten Son in our stead. Jesus bore all sin against God and neighbor, and crucified it upon His cross. Christ's death was the sacrifice that atones for all sins. Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead declares the absolution to all who believe in Him, justifying the faithful and clothing them as virgins in His righteousness. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us so that we may willingly do according to His commandments.

We pray: O God, just and merciful Judge, teach us to fear, love, and trust in You above all things; through Jesus Christ, our Savior, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29: LUKE 20-21

Our Lord Jesus preached daily in the temple His last week on Earth, the week to which we refer as "Holy Week." However, just like it is today when men try to stifle the preaching of the Lord, the chief priests and scribes, together with the elders, confronted our Lord in order to trap Him in saying something they could use to discredit Him. These men were guilty of twisting the Word to suit their lies and deception, so they sought to turn the people against Jesus and have Him turned over to the authority of governor in order that they could be done with Him once and for all in His death.

The Lord Jesus, however, knew His path is to the cross. His death was necessary in order to purchase the vineyard of the Church from sin, death, and the devil. He bought back the fruit of the vineyard which was stolen—eternal life with Him through faith in His work of redemption.

The vineyard remains under attack, and the time draws near when the Son of Man will come with great glory and might in a cloud to judge both the quick and the dead. Men still try to destroy our Lord's Word with their lies and deception, but the Church must continue to teach the way of God in truth. He has sent us His Holy Ghost to give us the words that need to be spoken to open the eyes and ears of all those who would hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray: 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, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 28: LUKE 18-19

It is impossible for us to redeem ourselves from sin, death, and the devil; but it is possible for the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, He sets His path to Jerusalem to “be delivered to the Gentiles and...be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

He rides into Jerusalem on a colt while the “whole multitude of the disciples” shout out His praise. Yet He weeps over this city’s destruction, for it will reject Him and His Word. If they had but repented and listened to His Word, believed the promises of the prophets, then they would have had eternal peace with God. They would have been like Zacchaeus, whose heart was cleansed by the Lord’s preaching so that it was no longer filled with greed, but filled with faith and a desire to help his neighbor.

Like He cleansed Zacchaeus, Jesus cleansed the temple through His Word. The temple was to be a place where forgiveness was to be delivered to those who came in repentance, offering sacrifices and receiving the Lord’s mercy, not a place to do business. It was a place for preaching the Word of God, so He preached in the temple, proclaiming “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), so that all those who come to Him in contrition and faith would receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

We pray: 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, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 7: NUMBERS 34-36

Whatever the offense, the punishment for each and every sin against God is death. God Himself is the punisher of all transgressions against His commandments. He will require the blood of anyone who is adjudged guilty of sin. It is therefore God Himself who is depicted in Numbers 35 as the avenger who pursues the suspected murderer in order to seek justice.

Yet, God is merciful. He provides a place to which a sinner, even a murderer, may flee from His wrath. This city of refuge is a depiction of the Church. This is the place in which the accused will find fellow escapees, people who likewise have heeded the Lord’s command and invitation to find shelter in this safe space that He has established. In this community the priest offers the sacrifice that atones for the sins of all, and the sinner who believes that he is forgiven of his sin, even the murder of his brother, is spared from deliverance to the avenger. The believing sinner spends his remaining days among this assembly, for this is the only place in which God provides deliverance from His wrath and the blessings of His grace and mercy all the days of our life. It is only after the death of the High Priest that it becomes safe to leave the city of refuge.

One day we shall leave this refuge, for Christ Jesus our Great High Priest has died—and is risen. He shall come again one day to invite us to a place of everlasting refuge: the very city of God!

We pray: O God, we poor sinners flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Your grace, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8: DEUTERONOMY 1-3

History truly is His story. Human history, properly understood, is the story of God's engagement with man at every moment in time. The One True God is not the god of the Deists or Darwinians, who consider the creator as the one who fashioned the world, set it in motion, and stepped back to watch it run itself. While Almighty God truly created the heavens and the earth in six literal days, weaving into nature its operating laws and bestowing the power by which the universe continues to operate, He is not merely observing it all from His heavenly throne. He continues to intervene in His creation for Christ's sake.

This is the truth that is retold in the opening chapters of Moses' Book of Deuteronomy, as the children of Israel are approaching the end of the exodus and the start of life in the Promised Land. While they are preparing to close one chapter in their history and to open a new one, they—and we with them—are reminded that God always has been an integral part of their history.

Indeed, even before He created the universe and everything in it, knowing the end of human history from its beginning, He placed Himself in the story, centering the history of man in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, who would become man to redeem a humanity fallen by sin. Truly He is the story at any given moment of our lives, ever with His people, always working for our good.

We pray: Almighty God, continue Your gracious intervention at every moment of our lives to keep us in the true faith unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ, our Savior, Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 27: LUKE 16-17

We are justified by faith alone. Faith clings to something or someone outside of itself. For the unjust steward and the rich man their faith clung to their money, possessions, and their position in life. Their faith hung on to the wrong thing—an earthly thing that passes away. The unjust steward's use of his master's goods only lasted as long as his master did not find out about his wasting them. The rich man's riches only lasted for him while he was living.

However, there are also examples of faithful people in the reading. The Samaritan leper returned in faith to the only Priest who could declare him clean—the Lord Jesus Christ. And Lazarus, even though he had a poor, miserable life, hung on to a greater reality through faith in the Lord—an eternal life with his Lord and God in Heaven.

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that if we have faith as small as a mustard seed we can obtain forgiveness of our sins and be justified before God. This faith is a gift of God given by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace. And when we have received such faith that clings to the Almighty God, we are also moved to do the good works that faith produces, not because we expect a reward or better treatment, but because we learn through such faith the mercy of our Lord, and we are then able to be truly merciful to others.

We pray: 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, Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 25: LUKE 12-13

As you continue to reading the Gospel of Luke please note, the farther you read, the more hatred there is toward Jesus. The simple truth is, people hate the Gospel. People hate the idea that they are not good enough in and of themselves to be welcomed by God into eternal life. People hate the thought that God would reject their efforts, their trying.

You might be thinking, “But I don’t hate Jesus and the Gospel.” Thank God you don’t. It is only because He has opened your ears to hear the Gospel that you can love Jesus. God has given you eyes of faith to see all that He has done for you. He has given you the desire to “strive to enter through the narrow gate.” He has kept you watchful for His return. Indeed, He keeps reminding you that He is continually at work in you.

As we end this week and prepare to receive great and wondrous gifts from our Lord tomorrow, God bids us to remember all that He has done and is doing for us. That is what takes place on Sunday at the Divine Service. God brings you in, opens your ears to hear, speaks word of forgiveness to you, and reassures you that He is your Savior.

Indeed, many people hate the Gospel, and as a result of God’s mercy toward you, you, too, will be hated. But do not be afraid. “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Prayer: O Lord God, heavenly Father, I beg of You, let Your Holy Spirit dwell in me that He may enlighten and lead me into all truth and evermore defend me from all adversities. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 9: DEUTERONOMY 4-6

God does not give His commandments to us merely because He can. Since He is our Maker, He certainly can specify how we should live our lives. The One who has designed us according to His purposes certainly knows how we ought to function. Yet this is not the sole reason why God has written His commandments upon the heart of man, woven it into the law of nature, inscribed it upon tablets of stone, and inspired it to be recorded it in the Holy Scriptures.

God also has given His commandments to us because He is good. For a life lived in accordance with the commandments of God is a good life. It is *the* good life. It is the life of love, with love for God, love for neighbor, and love for self, expressed in words and in silence, in refraining from evil and in doing what is good. God commands this life for us because it is truly good for us.

Indeed, it is a life that is especially good for us because God has lived it for us. Every single command that God has ever given to man, none of which any person could ever keep since mankind’s fall into sin, has been kept by Jesus Christ. By faith and through faith, the Christian lives this life of love, trusting that we are perfect through Christ!

We pray: Lord Jesus, You have taken away my sin, and given to me Your righteousness. Grant to me Your Holy Spirit, that I may live the life of love, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 10: DEUTERONOMY 7-9

In today's chapters from the book of Deuteronomy God clearly speaks His commandments to His people through the prophet Moses. He sternly warns them about disobeying His holy law, reminding them of the chastening that He brings upon the children whom He loves, and the wrath that He pours out upon those idolaters who do not acknowledge Him as the Only True God. The Lord even points out their blind spots and highlights their human frailties, so that they might avoid sin and avert its consequences in their lives. He further promises earthly blessings on top of the eternal blessings of life in Paradise for all those who, through faith in Him, their True Messiah, are forgiven of their sins and credited with obedience to God's commandments. There is every reason, then, for God's chosen people to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things, and gladly do according to His commandments.

Yet, they are rebellious. And so are we. Despite our knowledge of good and evil from God's clear Word, we, like ancient Israel, are gripped in sin. But God is gracious and merciful. Despite Israel's rebellion, Moses is able to speak of them before God with these words: "Yet they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your mighty power and by Your outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 9:29). Paul echoes this for Himself, and for every Christian, when he proclaims, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25).

We pray: Merciful God, thank You for delivering me from my sin, from death, and from Hell through Jesus Christ, my Lord, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 24: LUKE 10-11

"And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" What follows is the parable we have come to know as The Parable of the Good Samaritan. What you may or may not have noticed in today's reading is a similar event immediately follows Jesus encounter with the lawyer. Martha, too, is caught up with doing.

Contrast the lawyer and Martha with Mary. Mary is content to listen to Jesus' every word. Though she was not at the Mount of Transfiguration, she did as the Father's voice had commanded Peter, James, and John, "Listen to Him."

We can so easily become distracted by living that we can lose sight of He Who is our Life and fail to "Listen to Him." Earlier Jesus said that a follower of Jesus must "take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Sadly, our sinful nature can oft times turn that cross into an idol. We can puff up with pride over the cross we bear rather than looking to the One Who bears us up on His shoulders and is carrying us.

We need to realize all the work that is involved in our salvation. We can easily stop at Good Friday and in hearing the words, "It is finished," think Jesus' work was done. Yes, the price for our sins has been paid, but the work of our salvation is carried out on a daily... hourly...second by second basis by our Loving God through the working of the Holy Spirit. He continually directs us to our forgiving Lord that we might "Listen to Him."

Listen...listen...listen..."Your sins are forgiven."

Prayer: Gracious Father, give me ears to hear Your blessed Word of forgiveness. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 23: LUKE 8-9

“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” Similar words of Christ were recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “take up your cross, and follow me.” But did you notice the absence of one word? Daily. Indeed, we are instructed to take up our cross and follow Christ. But that one little word, “daily,” helps bring into perspective the bearing of one’s cross.

The entirety of the Christian life is lived under a cross. “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Yet, such living takes place day by day. The stresses and strains of life, our crosses, are God’s design to keep us ever mindful of our total dependence on Him. He gives us the Holy Spirit to lead us to “daily contrition and repentance” so that the “new man” can and will do what the “old man” would never do: take up his cross, and follow Christ.

Forgiven of our sins, we find rest for our souls. Yes, even under the weight of the crosses we bear! The heavy burden of our sins has been taken by Christ, leaving us with the light burden of daily taking up the crosses He gives us. With our eyes set on Jesus, we need not look back on our sinful lives, wondering, “Can God really love me?” Through the eyes of faith we look to our Savior and live each day in the hope of life everlasting with Him.

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, give me patience to bear whatever crosses You have given me. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 11: DEUTERONOMY 10-12

“ . . . for the blood is the life . . . ” (Deuteronomy 12:23)

From Luther’s Small Catechism:

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

That is shown us in these words: “Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins;” namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

It is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does them, but the words which stand here, namely: “Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins.” Which words are, beside the bodily eating and drinking, as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation is, indeed, a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins. But he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words “For you” require altogether believing hearts.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, as we feast in faith upon Your life-giving flesh and blood in Your Holy Supper in Your Church, grant to each of us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Reminiscere Sunday

Article XIII. How Man is Justified before God, and of Good Works.

What I have hitherto and constantly taught concerning this I cannot in the least change, viz. that by faith (as St. Peter says) we acquire a new and clean heart, and God accounts, and will account us righteous and holy, for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. And although sin in the flesh has not been altogether removed and become dead, yet He will not punish or regard this.

For good works follow this faith, renewal and forgiveness of sins. And that in them which is still sinful and imperfect is not accounted as sin and defect, even for Christ's sake; but the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is and is called just and holy, from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and displayed in Christ. Wherefore we cannot boast of our many merits and works, if they be viewed apart from grace and mercy, but as it is written, (1 Cor. 1:31): "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," viz. that he has a gracious God. For thus all is well. We say besides that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22: LUKE 6-7

"And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'" Well, there He goes again! Jesus forgives sins. One might begin to think that forgiveness of sins is really important to Jesus. But then again, His name says it all: "... you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Jesus came to save sinners. Though Jesus did many miracles of healing, casting out demons, and raising the dead, that didn't address their cause. The real disease is sin and the only cure is forgiveness from Christ. Jesus came into the world to live a perfect life under the Law and to suffer a perfect death under the Law as the debt for the sins of the world was placed upon Him. He dies a death that is sufficient to cover the debt of the sins of the whole world.

Oft times we fail to realize just how bad sin is. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." In the sight of God, all people are equally guilty. So, when Jesus asked Simon, "Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" and "Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more,'" Jesus wasn't saying that some people have more sin to forgive than others. Rather, those who think their sin isn't such a big deal really don't find God and His forgiveness that big of a deal, either.

Only in Christ do we find the One Who can pay off sin's debt and wipe the slate clean.

Prayer: Most loving and gracious Lord God, turn away from me Your righteous wrath and forgive my sins for the sake of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 21: LUKE 4-5

Near the end of yesterday's reading we read: "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age." The "last Adam", Jesus, begins His ministry by going face-to-face with the one who tempted the "first man Adam" to sin. But Jesus does what Adam did not do. Jesus clings to the Word of God: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Jesus, true Man, was conceived by the Word of God. He was given life in the womb of His mother through the Word. And unlike Adam, He does not sin.

We are seeing the beginning of Jesus making "all things new." Adam was tempted in the lush garden of Eden. Jesus entered into a creation ravaged by sin and is tempted in the wilderness. As a result of sinning, Adam must leave the lush garden. As a result of God's grace toward Adam and us, Jesus enters the wilderness in order to restore what Adam and sin had destroyed.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He confronts the ravages of sin. He casts out demons. He heals people with all kinds of diseases. He even raises the dead. But more important than all the miracles He performed is the fact that Jesus calls sinners to repentance and forgives the repentant. The Pharisees were correct in this regard: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" What they failed to recognize was that God was standing there right before their very eyes. Such are the ravages of sin.

Thank be to God for showing us our Savior.

Prayer: "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Forgive my sins, dear Lord, and I will be clean. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 13: DEUTERONOMY 16-18

As the words of Moses are directives from the LORD, they are charged with a sense of crisis and finality. In these chapters Moses gives reviews of the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Obviously God is reminding His chosen people of His gracious care for them as He brings them to remember His working their escape from Egypt. Yet, through the other Feasts He reveals the inclusion of foreigners, who are also called upon to celebrate God's gracious provision.

In continuing to reveal Himself a jealous God, He forbids all forms of false worship, even as He provides for instruction in His truth. Fallen mankind, however, is by nature inclined to despise God's Word and rely on the ways of his own imagination.

Although our flesh will ever be taunted and desire to go its self-reliant ways as well, what a gracious blessing to be brought to repentant faith (and sustained in that faith through His Word and Sacraments); for God declares you justified by grace alone, because of the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus alone, through faith alone!

Prayer: O God, Who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14: DEUTERONOMY 19-21

Luther uniquely comments that there is a tie between the Second Table (Love) and all of the exhortations on murder. He writes, “On the other hand, it is the part of love also that the strictness of the laws be tempered with equity, to show mercy to one who perhaps seems like an evil person and yet is neither evil nor harmful...” (LW vol. 9, p. 193)

As with the rest of God’s Word, even in war, God makes it clear that He will sustain His own by means of His sure Word. Yes, He still exhorts utilizing weapons, but for a specific reason. Luther writes, “He wants it [Israel] to conquer, not through arms and equipment but under arms and equipment, that faith, which is of things not seen may thus have a place...” (LW vol. 9, p. 203)

Although allegorical, Luther’s comments on the concluding Christological words of chapter 21 are worth repeating: “Otherwise, unless this is preached and believed, there is nothing more evil, nothing more abominable than the cross and death. By this false assumption and scandal of the cross the whole world is defiled, since to the unclean nothing is clean, to the clean all things are clean (Titus 1:15). The one effect occurs through the Word; the other, without the Word.” (LW vol. 9, p. 216)

Rest assured, dear Christians, which is to say, rest IN Christ, by the grace of God, you believe, teach, and confess the Word!

Prayer: O God, Who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ.

MONDAY, MARCH 20: LUKE 2-3

Today’s reading ends with these words: “... Adam, the son of God.” In these two chapters from Luke we see God tying it all together with a big bow, so to speak. In Luke 2, we heard the familiar story of birth of Jesus, the very Son of God the Father. By the end of Luke 3, we are taken back to another son of God named Adam. Though Adam bore the image of God, he was not of His Father from all eternity. He was a created being, perfect in every way. But as we know, that perfect image of God was lost when Adam and Eve fell into sin.

Enter the “last Adam”, as St. Paul refers to Jesus in his letter to the Corinthians. The “last Adam” does not simply bear the perfect image of God, He is Very God of Very God. Just as the moon only reflects the light of the sun, when God created Adam out of the dust of the earth, Adam reflected the perfect light of the perfect Son Who created Him. Once Adam sinned, there was no way for Adam to restore that which he lost. Imperfection can never recreate perfection. But... BUT... Perfection, Jesus Christ, can... and He did! “Behold, I make all things new.”

There, in Christ, we find a our new beginning. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Prayer: Almighty and Ever-living God, Who has given to them that believe great and precious promises, grant me so perfectly and without all doubt to believe in Your Son Jesus Christ that my faith in Your sight may never be reproved. Hear me, O Lord, through the same Savior, Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17: DEUTERONOMY 31-34

Luther comments, “Moses is the minister of the Law, which does not lead to...righteousness, but shows sin and demands grace.... Therefore he dies and stays on this side of Jordan...that is, in the righteousness of works. Joshua succeeds him as leader; this is the ministry of grace. He leads the people into the Land of Promise, that is, to true righteousness in Christ.” (LW, Vol. 9, pg. 284)

Regarding the Song of Moses, Luther writes, “In it Moses carries out an office...worthy of the ministry of the Law... Here one can see, as in a mirror, the power and nature of the Law, that it works wrath and holds under the curse.” Then Luther comments, “Now compare the Song of Moses with these blessings, and you will see the contrast. There he condemns the whole people; here he blesses individuals.” (LW, Vol. 9, pg. 308)

The promises of Moses’ blessing point to the One “counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Heb. 3:3), namely Christ, because while Moses was, undoubtedly, a faithful servant of God who spoke God’s Word, Christ is the Son of God, Whom God appointed heir over all things. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

Thanks be to God that through Word and Sacrament ministry His Law and Gospel continue to be proclaimed; ultimately keeping our eyes fixed on the fully atoning merits of Jesus Christ crucified, bringing us to be perfectly justified through faith alone!

Prayer: O God, Who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15: DEUTERONOMY 22-24

Almighty God, through Moses, has been teaching love with regards to the 4th and 5th Commandments. In chapter 22, as Luther states, “Now he moves on to the rest, to teach that love should be shown to one’s neighbor also in matters of property...” (LW vol. 9, p. 219)

Chapter 23, undoubtedly, has some difficult statements (mentioning the crushing and cutting off of private parts). Luther simply comments on the spiritual cares of the soul. Hear how his comments on this text speak to the modern day heterodox practice of female pastors. He writes, “Hence they may be eunuchs in the assembly, but because of this fault of the body they may not hold office.... Then, too, such men are rather effeminate and womanish; but an office requires a man upright in administration...” (LW. vol. 9, pp. 229-230)

Chapter 24 continues with more commands. Luther’s comments give some understanding to the overwhelming amount of what is expected of God’s people. He writes, “Therefore one must distinguish among laws; there are some which command what is good, others which permit what is evil....If faith toward God demands it, charity is to be denied to one’s neighbor, because God, who is worshipped by faith, must be held higher than man, who is served by charity.” (LW. vol. 9, pp. 241)

Thanks be to God for the repentant faith that He creates and sustains in His people through His means of grace; ever keeping the focus on the author and perfecter of faith, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: O God, Who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ.

THURSDAY, MARCH 16: DEUTERONOMY 25-27

God's laws, given through Moses, beginning at chapter 25 reveal the order and protection that are needed in society. As Luther writes, "Therefore he wants punishments to be inflicted, not because of our passion or desire for vengeance, but by a rule of moderation and reason guided by uprightness." Love for others is clearly continuing to be exhorted, in payment for labor, and in care for widows. Even in the event of private parts being grabbed Luther rightly concludes, "Evil should not be done that good may come of it." (LW vol. 9, pp. 248)

In chapter 27, simply saying "Amen" to God's law is not enough. God demands perfect obedience. Law and Gospel are the ways of God with humankind.

As all laws do, these do as well, they open our eyes to the sin of how our flesh fails at them. But, nonetheless, they are delivered in God's mercy to show our need of a New Covenant. All who are brought to approach God with repentant hearts are received by Him, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Eph 2:13) As we sing in the Te Deum of Matins, Jesus "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers" and being justified through faith alone we are set free from concern for self and are brought to turn our attention to serving others (c.f. John 13:34). Good works necessarily follow faith.

Prayer: O God, Who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ.

FRIDAY, MARCH 17: DEUTERONOMY 28-30

"...we ought to consider with all our heart how dreadful a thing it is to be under the law. For a conscience enslaved to sin, which feels the cross and shame in everything, bears these curses or others like them. On the other hand, a clean and godly conscience, for which everything is pleasant and approving, enjoys these or equal blessings." (LW vol. 9, p. 267)

In chapter 29 the covenant is renewed at Moab. Yet, because of their former hardness of heart, God, through Moses, repeats the admonitions. This is done to make the point that even though eyes will see and ears will hear, spiritual things will ever be dependent only upon God's Spirit; the human heart has nothing to add. This is reiterated in all four Gospels as well. Luther comments, "Moses joins together the hope of repentance and the promise of the remission of sins if they repent, that those who repent through the teaching of trouble may have a place of refuge..." (LW vol. 9, p. 277)

What a blessing that we confess: "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in my Lord Jesus Christ 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." It is God's Word and Sacrament ministry of Law and Gospel that creates and sustains our repentance. To God alone be the glory!

Prayer: O God, Who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ.