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# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



*THE PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD AND  
THE PURIFICATION OF MARY*

**FEBRUARY 1–27, 2021**

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## The Calendar

February 2 (T) <i>The Presentation of our Lord (White)</i>	TLH 137
February 7 <i>Sexagesima</i>	TLH 500
February 9 (T) <i>St. Cyril of Alexandria (White)</i>	
February 14 <i>Quinquagesima</i>	TLH 375
February 17 (W) <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	TLH 152
February 18 (R) <i>Martin Luther, Confessor and Doctor (White)</i>	
February 21 <i>Lent 1—Invocavit</i>	TLH 559
February 24 (W) <i>St. Matthias, Apostle/Wednesday of Ember Week in Lent</i>	
February 26 (F) <i>Friday of Ember Week in Lent</i>	
February 27 (S) <i>Saturday of Ember Week in Lent</i>	
February 28 <i>Lent 2—Reminiscere</i>	TLH 329

*(All pastors and deacons of the diocese have received the Diocesan Calendar and Office Hymns for 2021 by the Festival of the Circumcision. If you would like a complete list, see your pastor, or contact the diocesan office via email at [info@eldona.org](mailto:info@eldona.org))*

**ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY** will conclude the Winter Quarter on February 19; the Spring Quarter will begin on March 2.

**2021 COLLOQUIUM AND SYNOD** is still scheduled to take place at Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, TX) the week of April 12–16; the current circumstances regarding the pandemic do not seem likely to lead to new actions by the Texas governor which would preclude meeting this year. The Colloquium begins with a Vespers on Monday the 12<sup>th</sup>; the Colloquium will continue through Tuesday and Wednesday, with the Synod scheduled for Thursday and Friday.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27: ECCLESIASTES 5:9-20**

**INVOCAVIT**

The devil's temptations always involve lies of some sort. One of his oldest lies is that material riches and abundance will make us happy. In today's reading, God unravels that lie.

Will you be happy if you get more money? No, you will find that, if you love money, you will never be satisfied, no matter how rich you become.

Will you be happy if you get more money? No, as your riches increase, so will your expenses.

Will you be happy if you get more money? No, as your riches increase, so will your anxiety over holding onto what you have acquired.

Will you be happy if you get more money? No, the more you hoard for yourself, the more susceptible you will be to misfortune and ruin.

Will you be happy if you get more money? No, no matter how much you acquire, you will leave this world with none of it, and then you will face the true Owner of all things, to give an account of your stewardship.

Will you be happy if you get more money? No, in obsessing over riches, you will end up making your life on earth miserable.

So shall we pray for poverty? No. Be content with what you have. Pray for the ability to enjoy what God has given you, so that you do not "dwell unduly on the days of this life," but "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The most dangerous temptation is not the one that appeals to our desires, but the one that appeals to our vanity. “I would never do that! I would never be deceived! I know better! I’m strong in my faith!”

No one should take temptation lightly, as did the Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt. They quickly grew so self-assured and entitled that they abandoned God and turned to open idolatry. Jesus, however, did not take temptation lightly. The sinless Son of Man, who had no sinful flesh to entice Him or lead Him astray, “suffered when He was tempted” (Heb. 2:18). Christ did not laugh at the devil in the wilderness; He stood resolutely on Holy Scripture. Nor did Christ adopt St. Peter’s haughty attitude on Maundy Thursday, as if nothing could lead Him to sin. Instead, Christ prayed earnestly in the garden of Gethsemane for His Father’s strength and help to drink the cup He had to drink.

In today’s reading, God stands on His own faithfulness and promises, through St. Paul, to provide, along with the temptation, a “way out” or the “outcome” of being able to bear it. He has not left us to fend for ourselves when tempted. He will be there, guarding our precious faith and giving us both the strength to resist and the power not to be crushed. Only flee to Him for help in the hour of temptation! And do not imagine you can handle it without Him.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Septuagesima Sunday

### CHAPTER XI. OF GOD’S ETERNAL FOREKNOWLEDGE [PREDESTINATION] AND ELECTION.

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

#### AFFIRMATIVE

The Pure and True Doctrine concerning this Article.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Therefore we should judge concerning this our election to eternal life neither

from reason nor from the Law of God, which would lead either into a dissipated, dissolute epicurean life, or into despair, and would excite in the heart of men pernicious thoughts (and such thoughts cannot be effectually guarded against as long as they follow their own reason), so that they think to themselves: "If God has elected me to salvation, I cannot be condemned, although I do whatever I will." And again: "If I am not elected to eternal life, it matters not what good I do; for my efforts are nevertheless all in vain."

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

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

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

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

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

What a temptation Daniel and his three friends faced! God had allowed Judah to be plundered by the Babylonians and these four young men to be taken into captivity. They had been deprived of their homes, of their Temple, and of a future in the land of their birth. But their Gentile captors were offering them "good" things—food and wine from the king's own table! But those things were unclean, according to God's Law. And even if they chose to obey God and refuse the food, their captors might become angry and punish them severely.

It is easy to see how the men might have been tempted in this situation to simply eat the food and to justify their eating of it with all kinds of arguments. But instead, they took the path of the Lord Christ, for whose coming they longed even more than they longed to return to their former life in Israel. They accepted the lot that had fallen to them. They feared God above men, they loved God more than they loved their own appetites, and they trusted in God even when all they had had been taken away. They determined not to sin against the Lord. And the Lord blessed them greatly.

We will face all kinds of temptations in this world. Let us learn from these godly men to trust in the Lord and to do what is right, even if it hurts. We, too, will be blessed in the end.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our first parents were given an earthly Paradise. There was no sin, no corruption. There would be no conflict, no scarcity, no pain. On the contrary, they would have God's fellowship and every need supplied in abundance. They were given everything a human being could desire. Only one "good" thing was forbidden them: to eat from the one tree.

It was a real challenge the devil faced, to convince Eve that God was evil and that she was deprived. He had to trick her into not believing her own eyes and ears and everything she knew to be true. Still, he was tragically successful. He did not face such a challenge with Jesus. Forty days without food is a real hardship. Suffering, scarcity, and death had filled the world for some 4,000 years. It wasn't so hard for the devil to paint a picture of a God who did not care, who was not trustworthy, or who did not deserve to be worshiped. But there Jesus stood, unmoved in His confidence in His Father's goodness. He knew it was the devil who introduced evil into the world, not God. He knew it was mankind's sin that brought God's curse upon the world, not some sadistic design on God's part.

See the goodness of God in Scripture! And see the marks of God's goodness, His Son's sacrifice, which earned your salvation, and Holy Baptism, where He makes you an heir of His heavenly Paradise.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The time came for Israel to enter into the promised land. The people had been filled with fear, and on account of their sin, their entrance into the promised land was delayed until the death of Moses.

Before his death, Moses laid hands on Joshua, "... so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses." (Deu. 34:9) And the day came for Joshua to fulfill his calling: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses."

The Lord didn't instruct Joshua at that time regarding military strategy or geopolitical tactics. Instead, the Lord admonished him to be courageous in his adherence to the divine Word: "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go." In the promised land, there would be a perpetual need for Israel to be admonished by the Law, even as there would then be a need for the chastened people to be comforted by the Gospel.

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

The Holy Spirit had made it known to Simeon that he would not die “before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” Simeon trusted in the Word, and he beheld the fulfillment of the Word in the day in which the Holy Family came to the Temple for the presentation of our Lord and the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It was the Lord’s will that Simeon would not receive this blessed revelation only for his personal consolation, but that he would proclaim the fulfillment of that which was first promised to our first parents in the Garden of Eden: the coming of the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. No doubt the words of Simeon’s Nunc Dimittis will be sung in Church to the day when the Christ returns in glory at the end of the age. The Presentation of our Lord, and the hymn which springs forth from that presentation, proclaim the fulfillment of the divine Word and the consolation of the saints which comes through that fulfillment.

Prayer: Almighty and Everliving God, we humbly beseech Thy Majesty, that as Thine Only-Begotten Son was this day presented in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto Thee with pure and clean hearts; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

All three temptations that Jesus endured have a pattern in common. The devil holds up something appealing, something that appears good and desirable. He then implies that God is evil for not giving Jesus that “good” thing. Finally, he offers a way for Jesus to get it by getting around God’s command and will.

This is no different than what the devil did in the Garden of Eden. He pointed our mother Eve to the fruit of that one tree in the garden that was forbidden to her and Adam, and made it seem appealing. He made God seem evil for not giving it to them. And then he implied that God’s Word and warning were invalid; they could go ahead and eat and not surely die.

The devil, of course, was lying. But where Adam and Eve gave in to the devil’s lies, Jesus, the Second Adam, stood firm. If He was deprived of some good thing, like food, it was for His good, because His Father is good. If He was deprived of the kingdoms of the world and their glory, it was fine, because God has the right to rule as He sees fit. If He was deprived of seeing God’s love and faithfulness toward Him, it was okay, because He trusted His Father fully, without demanding proof of His truthfulness. Jesus was right to trust and obey His Father. Flee to Him when you are tempted, both for forgiveness and for the strength to stand firm.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Yesterday's Gospel showed the Lord Christ fending off the devil's temptations in the wilderness. The third temptation (using Matthew's order) was the chance to possess all the kingdoms of the world, with all their wealth and glory. Jesus rejected such earthly greatness for Himself, choosing instead the path of the cross. But His disciples still craved it. Who should be considered the greatest? "Me!" "No, me!" "No, me!"

Jesus issued a mild rebuke to His squabbling disciples, comparing their selfish ambition to that of the Gentile kings. If they were to be His servants, then they had to think and behave like Him. Although He was greater than all, He became the servant of all. There is no place in His kingdom for snobbery or domination, no place for servants who wish to be glorified or exalted or waited upon. The one who is greatest is the one who serves the rest, with Christ Himself as both Substitute and Example.

But there will be a place for glory after this life for those who have humbly served, eating and drinking at Christ's table in His kingdom. At that heavenly table will be seated, not "great men" by the world's standards, but sinners, who fell often enough into Satan's temptations and were "sifted as wheat," like Simon Peter himself, but who returned to Christ with true repentance. For Christ's is a kingdom of forgiveness for the penitent and of glory for those who do not seek glory here, but hereafter.

Prayer: O Lord, mercifully hear our prayer and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to defend us from them that rise up against us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The saints of the Lord are called to walk before Him in repentance. The calling to be God's people is not something which arises from anything in man; that which is proclaimed here is, of course, entirely consistent with that which is proclaimed in John 1: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (1:11-13)

Good works are the fruit of faith; "But without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6). Anything which men might imagine about our works contributing anything to preparing us for salvation, or contributing to our salvation is all a lie of the flesh; before the Lord establishes faith in our hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit, anything which we think, say, or do is sin, "for whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23) That which the Word proclaims concerning those whom the Lord calls to faith through His means of grace ever endures; the saints remain "holy people to the Lord your God" according to His promise, for the sake of Christ Jesus, who made atonement for our sins and rose again from the grave.

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

Joshua was a faithful spiritual son to Moses and he left no doubt regarding the commitment which the people of Israel were making when they swore to hold to the Word of the Lord. The people came from a life among the heathen, and the promised land was filled with the heathen. In the midst of a world which hates the Lord, in the midst of nations who worship idols, the Church is surrounded on every side by the enemies of the faith. In this week when we have heard the Gospel of those who labored throughout the heat of the day, and those who labored for but an hour, we are taught again that the Lord perfectly fulfills His Word. Where there is apostasy from the truth and those who had been among the people of God turn aside to follow idols, the punishment is most severe: “If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.” The point Joshua sets before the people—“You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him.”—might well be spoken in the Church today, as often as men and women are tempted to turn from the pure confession of the truth and to be turned aside to false teaching.

True faith is solely the work of the Holy Spirit, who creates and sustains faith through the Word, and thus our hope of salvation is always outside ourselves, in Christ.

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

## 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



The text appointed for today speaks of the great value of humility coupled with words of kindness, guided by wise observation. God's children are solemnly warned against daring to bring frivolous accusations or charges against another, for such behavior can bring temporal and eternal consequences, leading to an unfavorable judgment being brought against the offender. Such actions can also lead to the destroying of a man's reputation with untrue words secretly spoken against him, which is a horrible thing that clearly violates the Commandments of God. A good name is one of life's most valuable possessions.

The Lord beautifully uses the author Solomon to present the divinely inspired lesson that wise words delivered with tact, humility, and faith will accomplish their purpose. The text also warns against excessiveness regarding all things, whether it be the delivery of praise or admonishment, as either delivered overabundantly will create trouble, rather than success. The verses of our assigned text also present the reality that this sage advice is as valuable when dealing with conflict as it is when handling contentment or peaceful relations. All relations are well served by moderation and discipline, guided by the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of true wisdom.

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. Amen.

The Lord knows the hearts of all people, and thus He proclaimed to Gideon concerning those who would make war against the Midianites: "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" It did not matter if they had known victory was beyond their reach; the victory over the Midianites had to be so unimaginably miraculous that the people could not find a way of crediting their victory to themselves.

In a sense, all of God's people think in this fashion. When times are easy for us, we imagine that spiritual victory—remaining in the faith—is something which human will and determination can accomplish. It is when the path is dark and victory seems utterly unattainable that the mercy of God shines forth. Each victory is an echo of that complete victory which Christ Jesus has won for us. The victory of the Christ upon the cross is reflected each time that the Lord sends forth His saints to conquer in the midst of this fallen world. It is not that the Church is always victorious in this world; rather, it is that when the Lord grants the victory, the saints of God see the miracle for what it is, and give thanks to the Lord of heaven and earth.

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

The life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah was one which was filled with tribulations. He faced persecution for proclaiming the truth regarding the sins of the people, and false prophets tried to counter him. It fell to him to proclaim the just judgment of the Lord even as the people were led away into the Babylonian Captivity.

When Jeremiah considered that which was his own strength, he knew he was not up to the task. But the Lord taught the prophet that it was not ‘about him.’ “‘Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you,’ says the Lord.” It is the Lord who works through the Word, and His Word accomplishes that for which He has sent it. Jeremiah was born for his time, even as we are born for our own time. And the will of the Triune God will be accomplished through His Word, condemning sin through the Law, and consoling the saints with the healing balm of the Gospel.

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

In the wisdom writings that compose the book of Proverbs we hear divine guidance in numerous aspects of daily life. We also see the godly pursuit of faithful living by God’s rules and statutes, graciously delivered to His children through the holy Scriptures. In the verses from this book appointed for this day we are introduced to the divine judgment meted out to those who engage in character assassination and who sow discord. We are also warned to avoid harming our fellow men in any way exemplified by seven offenses which are an abomination to the Lord. While there are seven items listed, the literary practice of using sequential numbers to present a listing in writings do not intend to imply that these seven compile the entire list of offenses the Lord finds abominable. What this readily recognized literary pattern or practice does demonstrate is that the Lord finds deceitfulness an unacceptable behavior among His chosen, for all the items listed represent some form of deceit. The message divinely delivered through this text is that deceit will be met with severe condemnation from the Lord Almighty’s righteous judgment.

Instead, let us cling to Christ Jesus, who is our truth and righteousness. In Him we love others and speak that which is good and right, so that He may be glorified in all our words and actions.

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. Amen.

Faith works through love when it observes God's Law—no matter how small the legal demand. If false teachers demand any compromise of Gospel freedom, they must be resisted for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul argues against any submission to the misapplied legal requirements of the Old Testament (the Law) for the goal of winning redemption or salvation in the tiniest way. Justification before God comes only through His promised Redeemer and faith in Him.

Gospel freedom leads one to live by the power and leading of the Spirit. It means struggling against the flesh and its desires in the power of the regenerate Spirit which moves on a level that the Law's threats and condemnation can no longer touch. The message of Christ's death becomes a reality in those who belong to Christ through faith. The Apostle drives home the danger of compromising this Gospel reality, as well as his contempt for such compromisers, with his brutal assessment of recommending they "would even cut themselves off" if they are so fond of circumcision. Our righteousness is in Christ and His Spirit, not in our works or the things of our flesh, so our faithful love for others does not come from us. It comes from our Savior.

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. Amen.

## Lesson from the Book of Concord Sexagesima Sunday

### Article VII.

Also, they [the Lutherans] teach, that One holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: "One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," etc. [Eph. 4:5, 6]

### Article VIII.

Although the Church properly is the Congregation of Saints and true believers, nevertheless, since, in this life, many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use the Sacraments, which are administered by evil men; according to the saying of Christ: "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat," etc. [Matt. 23:2]. Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists, and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

—The Augsburg Confession

### XII.

#### Of the Church.

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

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XII

The Book of Concord

For the Messiah, His Father's "morning call" meant giving His back to those who struck Him, His cheeks to those plucking His beard. Neither devil nor world could successfully contend with His perfect holiness. When they had no argument to offer but picking up stones to murder Him, He simply passed through them unharmed. He walked His path to the cross without wavering. Knowing that He would be vindicated, declared to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4) in the resurrection, He willingly laid down His life, so that all who trust in Him would be justified and have His life as their own.

For us, it means considering what sort of soil we may be, because yesterday's Gospel does not have us 'fated' to be one or the other, but is a call to repentance. Last Sunday, the Lord of the Vineyard was seen seeking us early in the morning, and then all the day of this world's existence. His vineyard will prosper regardless of the workers, but He desires everyone (1 Timothy 2:4) to have all they need for the Day coming soon. Now, we see the difference between the seed falling on good soil and bad that we may be made good soil by this Word being sown. Thus, the voice of God's Suffering Servant, our Lord Jesus, bids us follow the same wisdom that He has displayed: to hear and trust in the voice and plan of the Father. Trusting in this, we walk not in darkness and disgrace, but have "a word in season" for the weary!

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The text appointed for this holy occasion of Ash Wednesday is indeed very fitting for such a solemn day that starts the Church's season of repentance known as Lent. Through the prophetic words recorded in Joel we hear our gracious, merciful Lord calling us to repent and turn back to Him so that He might deliver us from sin, death, hell, and the devil. In chapter two the prophet Joel bids his people see in the horrendous locust swarms devastating the land the inception, or dawn, of God's approaching last visitation. This divine visitation bids men return to the Lord and find deliverance in Him.

The prophetic vision, no longer fixed on the present plague, also pierces into the future. Joel gives a full-scale depiction of the approaching Day of the Lord, the signs that herald its approach, the standard by which its divine decisions will be made, and the finality of these decisions for good or ill. Throughout this prophetic book we are shown that the only way home is faith that calls us to our Lord's precious Means of Grace. These blessings deliver, strengthen, guide, and fulfill the promise of faith, delivered purely through grace.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

This text is presenting the fact that all that is good comes through our knowing the Word of the Lord by faith and His grace. Only through a truly faithful knowing and understanding of God's inspired Scripture can we hope to live a life that is worth living. If you are not living a life of faith, striving to fulfill the Lord's commands for His elect, you are living without any true meaning or hope. The world clings to its own understanding and refuses to repent of its disregard for God's commands. Because it rejects His Word and wisdom, it rejects Him and the life He gives.

Jesus Christ is manifested to mankind through His precious Means of Grace, which deliver Him and all He offers for this life, and the eternal one to come. This is what the Lord's divine statements about coming to us and loving Him are presenting, for this is as true as His promise that all who love Christ and keep His Word will be loved by Him and the Father. He is with us in His Church, makes us part of His Body and His Bride in Baptism, and gives Himself to us in a tangible way in the Supper. In all these things His grace is manifest to us!

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. Amen.

Sexagesima is focused on how we receive God's Word. Our appointed reading bids us to do what we are called to do without regard to how things appear to our eyes. Both themes find flesh in today's celebration of St. Cyril.

Cyril became the patriarch (archbishop) of Alexandria, Egypt at about the age of 36 in AD 412 and served in that capacity for 32 years. In faithfulness to God's Word, Cyril was a central figure at the Council of Ephesus, where Nestorius had to be removed as patriarch of Constantinople because of his false teaching that Jesus was not truly God in the flesh. For Cyril's strong stand, the Nestorians condemned him as a "monster, born and educated for the destruction of the church."

Such remains the path of faithful pastors today, and of the lambs and sheep the Holy Spirit has given them to feed and oversee, as well. Our reading bids us all to such faithful confession of God's Word. We aren't to put our finger up to see which way the wind is blowing, or wait until everything seems just right to us. Even as ultrasound does not let us know perfectly how a child will turn out physically, we do not know what result our confession will produce—nor is that our concern. Instead, we are to get up each morning and live in our vocations in accord with God's Word, and trust that "the Lord who makes everything" will produce whatever is right.

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Twelve were sent out to proclaim Jesus, that in Him the Kingdom of God is present for them. Nothing else is necessary but His Word. They are not to provide for themselves, but He will provide by those who receive them. They are to bring no harm, but to understand the ways of those doing harm. Thus, they may freely preach and heal, bringing salvation to the downtrodden and showing the evildoers and the self-righteous that this message is of a different nature than that of those who are not sent by the Christ. In place of a watered-down version of God's Law, or one exchanged for the commandments of men, they carry God's demand of absolute holiness. And they provide the Absolutely Holy One who had been promised to meet that demand.

When the Word of Christ is not received, the Apostles are to give one final witness against that place: the shaking of its dust from their shoes. The Kingdom was preached clearly, with the Messiah even then walking about among them, but their judgment will be harder to bear than that of Sodom and Gomorrah: so close were they to the Kingdom, as the King and His servants came to them, yet they would not receive it!

How chilling it is that one being sent out would receive a similar verdict, as St. Luke lists, "Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him"! Yet, how comforting for us that our faith is not compromised, even if Judas baptized us or preached Christ to us, as the Word still remains true and God remains faithful!

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Gospel according to Saint Matthew (20:20-28) records this exchange taking place with Salome, the mother of the two disciples, pressing the Lord for the presentation of this great prestige upon her sons. Usually the disciples expected too little from Jesus, showing themselves as men of little faith. Here is a woman that seems to expect too much from Jesus. It appears that Salome and her sons, possibly to a lesser degree than she, regard Jesus like one of royal personage who is about to step out of the obscurity in which He has thus far lived and is to ascend His glorious throne. They seek glory from Him with inappropriate assumptions.

This demonstrates a faith in Jesus being the promised Messiah, but, as is common for humanity, this faith is misdirected by human reason and logic. Their request comes from a desire to be in the Lord's kingdom, but it is an imperfect faith that does not fully understand the things which it seeks. How often our requests of God must be met with a similar response of correction due to our horrible ignorance regarding spiritual and eternal things. This reality is driven home by Jesus' comparison of the earthly world and its order versus the kingdom of God. We must understand glory and service according to His holy cross, otherwise we ask for the wrong things.

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. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord Quinquagesima Sunday

## Chapter II, Article IV.

[B. What is Justifying Faith?]

The adversaries [Roman Catholics] feign that faith is only a knowledge of history, and, therefore, [they] teach that it can coexist with mortal sin. Hence, they say nothing concerning faith, by which Paul so frequently says that men are justified, because those who are accounted righteous before God do not live in mortal sin. But that faith which justifies, is not merely a knowledge of history, but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merit, the forgiveness of sins, grace and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And, that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and to receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. And the distinction between this faith and the righteousness of the Law, can be easily discerned. Faith is the divine service, which receives the benefits offered by God; the righteousness of the Law is the divine service which offers to God our merits. By faith, God wishes Himself so to be honored, that we may receive from Him those things which He promises and offers.

But that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of history, but the faith which assents to the promise, Paul openly testifies, when he says (Rom. 4:16): "Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure." For he judges, that the promise cannot be received, unless by faith. Wherefore, he compares them correlatively, and connects promise and faith. Although it will be easy to decide what faith is, if we consider the Creed, where this article certainly stands: "The forgiveness of sins." Therefore, it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, was raised again, unless we add also this article, which is the final cause of the history: "The forgiveness of sins." To this article, the rest must be referred, viz. that, for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of our merits, forgiveness of sins is given us. For what need would there be, that Christ be given for our sins, if for our sins our merits can give satisfaction?

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §48–52

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11: HEBREWS 11:32-40

SEXAGESIMA

This week's Collect confesses that we do not trust in our works, but look to God's mercy to defend us—both in the Judgment and in this world. A proper reading of the works of the saints and martyrs listed in Hebrews 11 teaches us that their confession was the same. Each one, serving in his own vocation through faith, was made to do what he could not on his own: they all "out of weakness were made strong." Only by such confidence would one not accept deliverance from cruel death to give God more glory by having Him raise to perfection a body that had been sawn in two, beaten to death with rocks, mauled by lions, or burned at the stake.

The writer of Hebrews gives a shocking reminder of our great privilege: those saints did not live after the Messiah walked the earth. They had faith that was never based on seeing the Christ in this life. They knew the previous great works of God and trusted in His promised Savior because of them, so that we might be surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. He reserved for our age, though, the incarnation of the Christ, Jesus' perfect life in our place and substitutionary atonement in dying for the sins of all. The promise of His coming having been fulfilled makes it easier to trust that we are forgiven and adopted, as Jesus said, and that should result in even bolder works—even in a martyrdom that is not over in a moment, but endures suffering from this world for years.

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“I am the LORD and there is no other.” Isaiah lists the evidence that He alone is truly God: that He is the One who created, that He has not hidden His Word but forthrightly said what He would do and then did it, and that when it was in the best interest of His people He subdued those mightier than them and had those nations come in service to them. Now, the Holy Spirit has Isaiah leave the word “God” out so that the sentence quoted makes a play on God’s name. It reminds us of His nature and, thus, of why we can be confident in His promise to save.

When we see “LORD” in capital letters the Hebrew Bible has God’s consonantal name, “YHWH,” to which Jewish scribes added the vowels for the title “Lord,” which led to the traditional English pronunciation, “Jehovah.” While more recent scholarship suggests a pronunciation of “Yahweh” instead (your pastor can tell you why), what is more important is what this name means.

As we see from His self-description to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14–15), “YHWH” indicates a completely self-dependent existence. That is, unlike us or any other created being, the true God depends on no one else for His existence: no one created Him and no one can end Him, so no one can take anyone from His hand, neither to save them from His wrath, nor to rob them of His mercy (Deuteronomy 32:39, John 10:28–30). Trusting in Him for salvation, then, “you shall never be ashamed or disgraced—forever and ever”!

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Bible translators often make decisions about how to translate a specific word in a specific context so that those who do not read the original languages of the Bible can get the essential meaning of a portion of Scripture and still read it smoothly. Generally, this is a great thing. Sometimes, though, a translator’s misunderstanding of Law and Gospel slips through.

One word often misused in this way is “obey.” In today’s reading, the word being translated this way is actually just the word “hear.” From the context, one might say, “to hear and to do what you are commanded is to ‘obey,’” and this is true. However, when we lose the word “hear,” we lose the “how” of God’s treaty with Israel at Mt. Sinai, as well as the fullness of what St. Paul writes about “hearing” in Romans 10:14–16.

“To hear” is a “pregnant” idea in the Bible: except for when it is negated (cf. Matthew 13:13–14), “to hear” means “to hear effectively.” That is, it indicates that you react appropriately to the thing that is heard: to a command, with obedience; to a promise, with faith; to a treaty/covenant/testament, with faith that leads you to live in accord with it. In this way, the LORD says that one who does not trust Him to be his God, as is shown by their refusal to do what He has commanded, is “cursed” because they have refused to hear. Jeremiah’s job, therefore, is to bring them back to hearing His voice—through which will come restoration to faith and, thereby, to obedience.

Prayer: O God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do, mercifully grant that by Thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.