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THE APOSTLES' CREED FOR LENT

VOLUME ONE

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Created to be Redeemed & Sanctified:
The Apostles' Creed for Lent

Written by:

Rev. Marcus Baikie, Rev. Travis Berg, Rev. Derrick Brown, Rev. Paul Cain,
Rev. Darrel Debowey, Rev. Andy Richard, and Rev. Joshua Scheer

Editor: Rev. Joshua Scheer

Design and Layout: Kris Brown

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"The Ascension of Jesus" — Leaving his disciples below, Jesus is taken up into heaven to sit at the right hand of God.

Ascended Lord Jesus, continue to dispel our enemies, be present with us in Word and Sacrament, and bestow upon us Your grace and blessing until You come again in glory. Amen.

Saturday of Lent 3

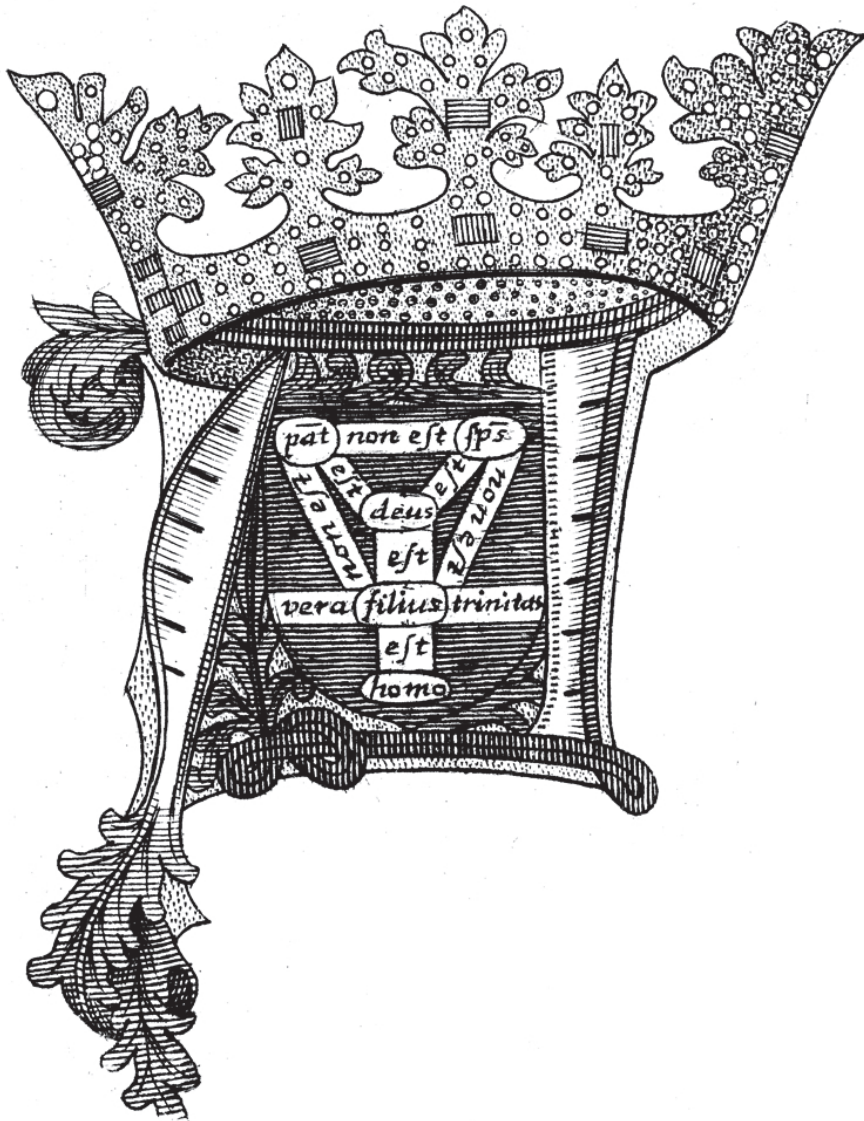
“So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.” — Mark 16:19

“I believe... [Jesus Christ] ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.” — Apostles’ Creed

This article of faith is threefold in substance, presenting us with the historical event, the present reality, and the future guarantee. First, the history: having accomplished the redemption of all mankind, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven and took up His rightful place at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. In the fullness of time, the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of the Father took on flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. Both as God and man, Christ Jesus lived and died upon the earth for man. Then, He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, returning to His rightful place beside the Father, all the while wearing and bearing our flesh. Now, the present reality: Christ Jesus, as both God and man, rules and reigns at the right hand of God — the position of all power, authority, and activity of God — over all things. From thence: He sends the Spirit to work through the preached Word to engender and strengthen our faith; He authorizes His called and sent ones to baptize in His name, to announce the forgiveness He won upon the Cross, and to dispense—in the Sacrament of the Altar—the medicine of immortality. What’s more, He is ever before His Father interceding on our behalf. The scars and wounds He now, and forever, bears in His exalted and glorified body are an ever-present reminder to the Father that we have been redeemed by His Son. Finally, the future guarantee: He will come again, in glory, to judge the living and the dead. He shall return to publicly proclaim to all of creation that He is, indeed, King of kings and Lord of lords. And He shall justly judge the world. And lastly, He shall, forever, do away with all evil, while, at the same time, He shall establish His new creation — filled with us and all who believe in Him.

*For the
Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she may be found*

And for the Glory of God



“Shield of the Trinity” by William of Newburgh, 1136-1201 — A version of the Shield of the Trinity or Latin Scutum Fidei (Shield of Faith) set on a shield or coat of arms and topped with a jeweled crown. This traditional Christian visual symbol is a compact diagram of the Athanasian Creed and Doctrine of the Trinity. The Latin reads: “The Father is God, The Son is God, The Holy Spirit is God; God is the Father, God is the Son, God is the Holy Spirit; The Father is not the Son, The Son is not the Father, The Father is not the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit is not the Father, The Son is not the Holy Spirit, The Holy Spirit is not the Son.” In this version, the Latin words vera (true), trinitas (Trinity), and homo (man) are added to the diagram to form the shape of the cross.



“Resurrected Christ” — The resurrected Christ is shown victorious over death.

Almighty God, we thank and praise You for sending Your Son, Christ Jesus, to die for our sins and rise from the dead for our justification. Continue to send Your Spirit with this life-changing news. Amen.

Friday of Lent 3

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”
— 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

“I believe... The third day, [Jesus Christ] rose again from the dead.”
— Apostles’ Creed

Unlike the previous article of faith, Holy Scripture has much to say regarding our Lord’s resurrection. Indeed, this event is recorded in all four of the Gospel accounts, not to mention the many times that St. Paul refers to it. This is because Christ’s resurrection proclaims to us the victory that He won for us upon the Cross. More than that, in Christ’s resurrection, we get a glimpse of what that victory means for us, namely our own resurrection from the dead. Death has lost its sting and hold over us. Baptized in the Triune name of God and trusting in Christ Jesus’ atoning death for all of our sins, heaven and life everlasting are ours. So also, Christ’s resurrection from the dead informs us that the payment Christ made for our sins upon the Cross, namely His very life, has been accepted by the Father. Christ has reconciled us to the Father; we know this because He rose from the dead. Just as the Father was well pleased with His Son, so too He is now well pleased with us. This is not because of anything we have — or could have — done; it is because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, which He imputes to our account. In addition to this, Christ’s resurrection is the public proclamation that the Spirit uses to enlighten us in the Gospel. Redeemed by Christ and reconciled to the Father, we are now a new creation — a creation free from the punishment for not keeping the Law; a creation free to live as Almighty God would have us live, holy and blameless. Redeemed, sanctified, and re-created: all of this is because our dear Lord Jesus, on the third day, rose from the dead.

Beloved Baptized Saints of God,

This is the next devotion in our series to go through the Small Catechism during the Lenten Season. The Ten Commandments come first because by them God tells us what we must do and so forth. The Creed is the natural follow up to this as it teaches us about this God we are commanded to fear, love, and trust in above all things. The Holy Trinity is a mystery, and yet it has been revealed through Holy Scripture. You have been given to know this mystery by faith, even if your understanding or logic fail to grasp it. The Ecumenical Creeds (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian) help summarize the teachings of the Scripture. They are of the same intent as the Catechism itself, taking the teaching of Scripture and putting it into a simple, clear, and concise confession of what Scripture teaches and what we ourselves believe. We are blessed to have both the Catechism and the Creeds.

The title for this devotion (*Created to be Redeemed and Sanctified*) comes from the Large Catechism, where Dr. Luther lays out for the Church what sort of God we have, what we know from Scripture, and what we confess before the world around us.

For here in all three articles God has revealed Himself and opened the deepest abyss of His fatherly heart and His pure, inexpressible love [Ephesians 3:18–19]. He has created us for this very reason, that He might redeem and sanctify us. (Large Catechism, Apostles Creed, par 64).

During this Lent, please use these devotions within your household to grow in faith and knowledge of our Triune God, the Father who created us to be redeemed by the Son and sanctified by the Spirit. The Lord bless your time in His Word.

Rev. Joshua Scheer
Editor-in-Chief
Steadfast Lutherans



“Christ Breaks the Gates of Hell” — Christ uses the staff of the Christian banner to break the wooden gates of hell. This woodcut was created by Lukas Cranach the Elder.

Dearest Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit You have made known to us that You descended into hell; let us always believe this and bid our reasoning, as to the particulars, cease. Amen.

Thursday of Lent 3

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,”
— 1 Peter 3:18–19

“I believe... Jesus Christ... descended into hell.” — Apostles’ Creed

Holy Scripture has very little to say regarding this article of faith. As such, there have been many, throughout history, who have asked themselves when and how did Christ descend into hell. There have even been some, more recently, who have challenged if this did, indeed, happen at all. Naysayers will point to the relatively later inclusion of this particular article in the history of the Apostles’ Creed, among other things. Others will pick at and probe the pages of sacred Scripture, in an attempt to plumb from its depths answers that will satisfy reason. But to reject this article of faith only serves to diminish our Lord Christ’s victory over the devil in our stead. Without the salvation which Christ purchased and won for us, mankind would, forever, dwell in the domain of the devil, ultimately ending up in hell with him. Yet, Christ intercedes on our behalf. The devil was soundly and utterly defeated at the Cross. After His death, Christ Jesus descends into hell to announce to the devil the victory He has won for us; He announces that salvation has been purchased for mankind. Still, the questions as to precisely when and exactly how He did this remain unanswered. Scripture is relatively silent regarding them, and human reason cannot deduce them. But sacred Scripture is not some technical manual, detailing every proverbial nut and bolt of the various articles of faith; it is the living, active word of God. Through this Word, God’s Spirit works faith. While, on this side of the grave, we will never know the answer as to precisely when did Christ descend into hell, nor the answer as to exactly how He did so. The Spirit works faith in us to simply believe that our Lord, Jesus Christ descended into hell. In confessing this article of faith, we have the consolation that neither hell nor the devil can take us captive or injure us, for we believe that Christ has won the victory over them for us.

The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.

From thence He will come
to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life ✠ everlasting.

Amen.



*On my heart imprint Your image,
 Blessed Jesus, King of grace,
 That life's riches, cares, and pleasures
 never may Your work erase;
 Let the clear inscription be:
 Jesus, crucified for me,
 Is my life, my hope's foundation,
 And my glory and salvation*

LSB 422

Wednesday of Lent 3

"Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." — Luke 24:44-53

When the Lord Jesus had accomplished everything necessary for the salvation of mankind, He ascended into heaven, where He now reigns and rules from the position of all power and authority: the right hand of God the Father Almighty. High and lifted up, the foremost in His rule is the sending out of His disciples with the message of reconciliation: God is at peace with man through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. He charges His disciples to set before the nations everything that they had witnessed: His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the message of the Cross, we learn of the enormous price Christ Jesus paid for our sins. In the message of the empty Tomb, we learn that the price He paid has been accepted. Trusting in the message of both Cross and Tomb, delivered to us by Christ Jesus' appointed messengers, let us then turn from our sins and receive the boon of Cross and Tomb: the forgiveness of sins, life, and everlasting salvation.

Once crucified and now risen and ascended Lord, by Your Word, preached and heard, bring us to repentance and the knowledge of sins forgiven. Amen.



*O my God, my rock and tower,
Grant that in Your death I trust,
Knowing death has lost its power
Since You crushed it in the dust.*

*Savior, let Your agony
Ever help and comfort me;
When I die be my protection,
Light and life and resurrection.*

LSB 421:5

Ash Wednesday

““And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

—Matthew 6:16-18

Today's Gospel lesson reminds us of the practice of fasting. This is a good and salutary practice for Christians and Lent is often the time set aside for it. How does our God help us in this? Jesus, the Son, teaches about fasting here in words that the Holy Spirit inspired to be written. Besides this, the ancient practice of fasting, which is a denial of the desires of the body and disciplining of the body is a work that the Holy Spirit works through us to mortify the flesh and its desires. Your Father sees in secret. Not just “the” Father but “your” Father. How is God your Father? Since the Father has created all creatures there is a relation there, but the possessive pronoun “your” helps our faith see that God is our Father through the work of the Son. The forgiveness of sins earned by Christ and given out through His chosen means as the Spirit uses them makes God your Father.

The mortification of the flesh that occurs through faithful fasting is good for you. The early Christians also fasted because they knew that being a Christian may require physical training to go without food, as the persecutions of the early Church demonstrated. During your fasting this Lent use the time normally spent eating instead with God's Word, reading and praying – for man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Your Son that we may call you Father as Your dear children and giving us Your Spirit by whom we call upon you. Bless our devotions this Lent and help us to trust You, the only true God who has created us to be redeemed and sanctified. Amen.

Thursday *after* Ash Wednesday

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.”... “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” — Genesis 1:1-3, 26-27

In the third word of the Old Testament in Hebrew our Triune God already begins revealing Himself. Not only do you have the creation of all things begun by the Word, but you also get a clue in the Hebrew word used for God, Elohim. This is a strangely constructed Hebrew word which hints at a single God and yet plural. Almost like we teach our children rather illogically, three in one. Here God’s Word starts the revelation of the God we have – three persons, the Father (God), the Son (word/said), and the Spirit.

Further in this first chapter God reveals an internal conversation between the persons of the Holy Trinity when considering the creation of man. “Us” and “our” are used. God’s not talking to angels here, but at the very start of the Scriptures God is revealing the mystery of Trinity. And the actions God does in creation teach us about Him as well as He creates, orders, and blesses. May this devotion continue to use the Holy Word to reveal more and more about this Triune God that has created heaven and earth and all that is in it.

O blessed Holy Trinity, grant to us Your creatures the revelation of rightly understanding Your Word. Amen.

Tuesday of Lent 3

“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”— Hebrews 2:9-15

The only begotten Son of God took on flesh, and, for a time, laid aside His divine attributes. Fully God and fully man, He went the way of the Cross. There, He suffered the shame and the curse of sin and tasted death for everyone. Yet His suffering and death reframe our death. Death and the devil are now powerless over the brothers and sisters of Christ Jesus. Baptized into His holy Name, that is what He has made us: His brothers and sisters, by grace through faith. Because He has overthrown the dominion of death and the devil, we are no longer under their tyranny. We share in our Lord’s victory -- the victory He announced to the devil in the depths of hell, the victory he proclaimed in rising from the tomb on Easter Sunday. Death has now become, for us, a portal leading to life everlasting; the devil’s accusations against us are now empty. O thanks be to God!

Lord Jesus Christ, you have won for us the victory over death and the devil. Continue to assure us of this victory through Your Word and Spirit. Amen.

Monday of Lent 3

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” — Ephesians 5:1-8

In His death and resurrection, Christ Jesus has freed us from slavery to sin. But what does this freedom mean? Does it mean that we may now do whatever we want, or live any way we choose? Does it mean that we are now at liberty to indulge in any and all earthly and fleshly desires? In other words, does our freedom from sin mean that we are free to return to sin? No. Freedom from sin is not license to sin. Christ Jesus has freed us so that we may lead lives of righteousness and holiness. That is to say: we are to live lives in steadfast faith towards God and in selfless service to our neighbor. Such lives are pleasing to God. How is this done? The death and resurrection of our Lord, Christ Jesus, and the gifts which He won for us there, embolden, enliven, and enlighten us. We are made anew and sustained throughout by His righteousness and holiness, which He imparts and imputes to us. Sin and Satan are no longer our masters; the crucified and risen Jesus is our Lord.

Almighty God and Father, continue to teach us to turn from evil, to live lives that are pleasing to You, and to cling, evermore, to Christ Jesus, who won, for us, our freedom from sin. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” —Psalm 33:6

This verse is a beautiful confession of the Holy Trinity. The Psalms are filled with confessions of doctrine, as the teachings of the Christian Church always find their way into songs. The Holy Spirit confirms that here. Now, how does this verse teach the Holy Trinity?

The three persons are there in the text. The Father is confessed by “LORD”. The Son is confessed by “word”. The Holy Spirit is confessed by the “breath of His mouth”. The picture of course paints creation of heaven and the heavenly host as a glorious working of our Triune God.

How is the Father confessed by “LORD”? The capital letters in our Bibles mean this is “Yahweh”. This word applies to all three, but when we consider “word of the LORD” we see that the LORD is in this case the Father of the only begotten Son.

How is the Son confessed by “word”? John 1 teaches about how Christ Jesus is the “Word”. In Genesis chapter 1 we see that God speaks and things are created out of nothing. This is a glorious comfort when we consider how we have our lives by God’s Word. When His Word speaks, we can trust not only what it says, but that it is doing what it says. Baptism is not just plain water. Absolution becomes just as valid in heaven as on earth. The Body and Blood of Jesus become present with the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

How is the Spirit confessed by “breath”? In both Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the Old and New Testaments, the word can mean either Spirit or breath. This linguistic trait is used in Scripture to remind us of the Holy Spirit being the Lord and Giver of Life. In the extended account of the creation of man on the sixth day in Genesis 2 we see this. Also, our Lord Jesus Christ breathes on His disciples in John 20 and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father bless us by the hearing of the Word of the Son by the power of Your Spirit. Amen.

Saturday *after* Ash Wednesday

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”” — Matthew 3:16-17

When we think of Trinity verses in Scripture it is natural to run to the institution of Holy Baptism in Matthew 28, but here in the account of the baptism of Jesus we see the Trinity already. In fact, a lot of places in Scripture where baptism is spoken of or taught there are descriptions of the Trinity. The Triune God is tied up with baptism, even here at the baptism of Jesus.

The beauty of this account is to see the plan of salvation working out. Christ Jesus, taking on the baptism of repentance is a confession of His vicarious satisfaction. He stands in that water in our place. John the Baptizer objected, but Christ had to fulfill all righteousness in our place for us. As this great work occurs, the Spirit is visibly given and the Father’s voice sounds from heaven.

Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father. More than that, as He begins His public ministry by taking on the baptism of repentance from John, He pleases the Father. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all in this picture of how God is at work for our salvation. The Son becomes our substitute. The Spirit comes to Him and the Father is pleased with Him. The Triune God not only was involved in Creation, but also in Redemption.

Remember this the next time you say the invocation whether in the morning when you rise, at night when you go to bed, when you pray the Lord’s Prayer, or attend services at your Church. The Triune God’s name was placed upon you at Baptism. As the Father was pleased with the Son’s work for you, as a baptized child of God, the Father is pleased with you because of the Son.

Heavenly Father, help us to live as Your baptized children, trusting solely in Your Son Jesus’ for our salvation. Amen.

Sunday of Lent 3

[Jesus said:] “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.” — Luke 11:17b-22.

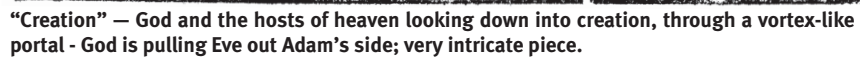
Shortly after creation, Satan, our strong foe, established himself as prince over this fallen world and enslaved mankind in sin. Over the many years, Satan has kept a tight rein in his kingdom, even up to this day. Never divided against itself, his kingdom stands. As such, he believes his goods are safe. But he is greatly mistaken. For from before the foundation of the world, from the very beginning, Almighty God knew the outcome: Satan, that strong foe of old, would be overcome by One stronger than he — the Lord Jesus, the eternal, only begotten Son of the Father. Mankind has a champion, a Savior. Upon His death, Christ Jesus descended into hell, Satan’s palace, and proclaimed His victory over our old foe; By His resurrection, He wrests away the devil’s spoils. Satan may have an undivided kingdom, but that kingdom now stands in utter ruin. Satan lost; the Lord of Life lives and reigns at the right hand of His Father. Sinners, once captive to Satan, now have access to Almighty God through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, His Son. The victory is ours; Christ descended into hell to announce it to Satan and rose from the dead to proclaim it to us.

Almighty God, direct and fix our eyes ever toward our Lord Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen.



Reflections

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Saturday of Lent 2

“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” — Psalm 16:10

Psalms 16:10 is about the end of Christ’s humiliation and the beginning of His exaltation. Christ truly died. His was not a normal termination of life. His was a violent death. His was also a voluntary death, since no one can take His life from Him but He must lay it down. There was a true separation of body and soul.

Christ’s body was laid in Joseph’s tomb. Christ’s Soul was in paradise with the repentant thief. Sheol here means death. The Apostles use the Greek version of Hades in Acts 2. Both Sheol and Hades mean death in this context. They cannot mean hell. Christ went to hell in triumph to proclaim His victory. That’s the beginning of His exaltation.

The point is this: God would not abandon Jesus to death. God would not let rot consume the sinless Son of God. To remain in the clutches of death and decay would mean that Christ was not sinless. It would mean that He was not the perfect Substitute for the sins of the world. It would mean that we are still in our sins and therefore damned. This is why St. Peter declares that *“God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”*

Why didn’t Jesus raise Himself? Well, the Scriptures say that the Father raised Jesus and that Jesus raised Jesus. If the Father raised Jesus from the dead, then by this glorious resurrection, He declared that the sins of the whole world are fully atoned for. All mankind is now regarded as righteous before His tribunal.

Jesus was justified. His whole life, all His words, and all of His acts were declared right and perfect by the resurrection. Here, Jesus is declared righteous and innocent. By Jesus’ resurrection, we are declared righteous. All of our sins have been paid for. It is accomplished and finished for all time.

Dear Jesus, Your resurrection is our justification. Let us cling even more fervently to Your resurrection, that we may be comforted when we die. Amen.

Sunday of Lent 1

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. — Matthew 4:1

Sometime during creation week, God created the angels. They were created to be ministering spirits, to serve God and to serve the pinnacle of God’s creation, man.

But one angel rebelled against his Creator and took a host of other angels with him. In his demonic rage, the devil does the exact opposite of what he was created to do: he hates God and desires to destroy man. Jesus called him a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

The devil is an effective liar, and his lies about God are especially insidious. You could call the devil the “father of false doctrine.” False doctrine is lying about God, and all false doctrine comes from the devil, and its purpose is to destroy faith and hope in the true and living God.

But God promised to send the Seed of the Woman to crush Satan’s head. In the wilderness, the devil twisted God’s Word to tempt Jesus to sin. But Christ used the Word of God against the devil; He unmasked his deceit and defeated the father of lies. There in the wilderness, you could hear the skull of the devil begin to crack under the heel of the Savior.

False teachers twist God’s Word today. They do so to entice Christians away from God the Father and God the Son. Just as Jesus used the Word of God in the wilderness to crush the devil’s lies, so Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit and His Word that we may be equipped for the good work of revealing the lies of Satan. This guards our faith and the faith of those entrusted to our care.

Lord God, give us Your Holy Spirit, that we would fear, love, and trust in You alone; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Monday of Lent 1

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. — Psalm 139:13

Scripture reveals that mankind is God's special creation. God continues to knit each of us in the wombs of our mothers. Everything God created, He created for a purpose, and that includes mankind. In his explanation to the First Article of the Creed, Martin Luther highlights that purpose: For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

Evolution, on the other hand, declares that everything came into being by the mindless act of chance. You're here because of some cosmic roll of the dice. Since evolution is "creation" without purpose, it cannot answer the question, "Why am I here?" So, not only does the lie of evolution rob God of the glory of creation, it robs man of his purpose and value.

To a point. When I was at the University of Michigan studying evolutionary biology, there was a debate about the purpose of life. It was decided that the purpose of life was to put your genes into the next generation. That's it. You're here to reproduce. Apart from that, existence is absurd.

The Bible says: "*You knitted me together in my mother's womb.*" That says a lot. It says that God made you, and He loves what He created. Even after the Fall into sin, God loves what He created and in divine love, gave us His Son for our salvation.

Contrary to the lie of evolution, we are fearfully and wonderfully made by the hand of a wise and loving God. Out of divine love God made humanity; He made us to love Him, and to love Him by serving our neighbor. That's a wonderful purpose, and a purpose that gives our lives meaning and value.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us the gift of earthly life from our mother's womb, and for the new life You've given us in baptism. Use us and the gifts you've given to serve our neighbor and reflect Your love in this world. And where we have done wrong, forgive us and help us to do better, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Friday of Lent 2

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" — Matthew 27:46

From the cross, Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1. But this was not merely a pious prayer. Jesus revealed in these words that He was being forsaken by God.

What does it mean to be forsaken by God? We can only begin to understand if we accept that Christ is our Substitute. He was no sinner. He loved His Father and His Father loved Him. Jesus is the Father's Beloved Son. The Father is well pleased with Jesus. But God made Him, who was sinless, to be sin for us. And God is wrathful over sin. Therefore, Christ, forsaken by God, felt divine wrath on account of the sins attributed to Him.

Christ is truly forsaken. He truly feels God's wrath. He feels all of it. And that feeling includes an eternity of hell. Christ felt all of it. He endured all of it. That's why every sin is paid for. If Christ was not truly forsaken, then there is no salvation. Sin and lawlessness must be dealt with. The debt must be paid. That spiritual debt which we owed was nothing but punishment, here in time and there in eternity. That's why Christ had to suffer, not only physically but also spiritually. He not only had to die, but He also had to be damned or forsaken for our sake.

Christ did not despair upon the cross. His cry is not the cry of the hopeless. That would be a sin. No, Christ, even as He is being forsaken, remains the true and obedient Son. He says, "*My God.*" His trust in His Father remained unshaken. Even as He suffered, Jesus remained steadfast and feared, loved, and trusted in His Father above all things.

This gives us comfort and strength in times when we must bear our cross. We learn that Christ has suffered divine forsakenness for our sake. Therefore, we can confidently trust that the trials we endure are for our eternal good.

Dear Jesus, You were forsaken for our sake. Remind us of Your merits so that we might patiently endure our crosses. Amen.

Thursday of Lent 2

“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.”
— John 14:30-31

After instituting the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gave a part of His valedictory address at the table. He continued to teach His disciples before crossing the brook Kidron and before entering into the garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. We see that Jesus left the table when He said, *“Rise, let us go from here.”*

Jesus is going to His death. He will be betrayed, captured, beaten, wrongfully tried, and finally crucified. The driving power behind these actions is the evil one, the devil. He is the ruler of this world. He is coming to destroy Jesus. The Jews, the Sanhedrin, and the Romans were his instruments in this decide.

The devil had no power over Christ. That’s because Christ wasn’t a sinner. We see this in the garden, when Christ speaks, and the mob falls to the ground. Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels to rescue Him. Instead, Jesus allows Himself to be bound, beaten, and brutalized. He does this because He loves His Father in heaven. The Father desired that all men be saved. He loved the world. That’s why He sent His only begotten Son.

Jesus loves the Father and wanted to do what He commanded. The Father’s commands are light and life for the world. Because of Christ’s love, we now love the Father. And we too want to do what the Father commands. It may be difficult and dangerous. But let us take comfort that Christ cheerfully followed His Father’s will to the end and was glorified.

Lord Jesus, You did as Your Father commanded because You love Him. Give us new and loving hearts so that we might also love Your Father and gladly do what He commands. Amen.

Tuesday of Lent 1

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. — Genesis 2:3

God the Father didn’t need to rest from His labors in the way we think of rest. As almighty God, He never tires, and He never stops His work of preserving creation. When God rested, it was because He was finished with the work of creation. Creation was just as He wanted it to be. It was perfect in beauty and order, providing all that mankind needed to live in peace and joy before God. The first Sin changed all that. Sin corrupted the beauty and order of creation. Even the Sabbath, a day made for man to rest from his labors and to rest in God, sin turned into another day for humans to indulge in godless leisure or the pursuit of mammon.

Into this world, corrupted by sin and death, God sent His Son to begin the work of restoring creation to the perfection of that first Sabbath day. During His earthly ministry, Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, restored sight to the blind, calmed storms, and raised the dead. The Sabbath restoration that Jesus began during His earthly ministry He will complete when He returns to give His people a new heaven and a new earth, when sin and death will be no more. Until then, God sends His Church throughout this fallen world to proclaim the Gospel and bring souls into His Kingdom. In Holy Baptism, God the Father began this good work of Sabbath restoration in us, a work He will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

Heavenly Father, we thank You for our baptismal regeneration in which You began a good work in us. As ones who has been baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity, give us Your Holy Spirit that we may honor the Lord’s Day by gladly hearing and learning Your Word. In the Name of Jesus, who has given us the promise of Sabbath rest in You. Amen.

Wednesday of Lent 1

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? — Matthew 6:25

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus rebuked worry. Worry is a form of unbelief, a sign that we don't trust our heavenly Father to care for us and provide for our earthly needs. All sin is unbelief, but worry can become idolatry as we put our trust in earthly providers and provisions such as jobs and governments rather than in the Lord. In response to worry, Jesus pointed the disciples to nature as evidence of God's providential care. Our heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field--how much more does He care for those whom He has created in His own image?

We worry about bodily things, and yet the body is only part of our existence before God. Our souls need care too. God provides that care in His Word and Sacraments, and through His pastors and churches. While we clamor for better paying jobs and bigger houses and nicer clothes, we give little thought to the care of our souls. A Lutheran pastor once said that it is better to have a lower paying job in a community with a faithful Lutheran church than to have a higher paying job in a community with no faithful churches. No matter how hard we work to provide for our bodies, they will one day end up in the grave. Our souls live forever. May God help us see that our souls need Jesus because life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.

Heavenly Father, the apostle Paul writes, "[God] who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" When we worry, lift our eyes from these earthly concerns and put them on the cross of Jesus Christ, for there we see that You love us and care for all our needs of body and soul. In His Name. Amen.



"Christ's Humility" — Jesus humbles himself by taking the likeness of men.

Wednesday of Lent 2

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” — Philippians 2:5-7

Jesus is God. He is the Second Person of the Trinity. Paul writes (Philippians 2:1-11) that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. Jesus did not have to strive for godhood; He was already equal to God because He is God. Jesus is God, but He didn’t flaunt His deity. He didn’t make a show of it.

Jesus is God and yet He humbled Himself to save us. The text says He emptied Himself. There are two phrases which describe what this means. First, Jesus took on the form of a slave. Jesus is Lord but He became a slave by not using His divine power and glory. He became not just God’s servant, but our servant, since He came to serve.

Secondly, Jesus was born in the likeness of men. This doesn’t mean that Jesus wasn’t a man. He was a man. This means that Jesus presented Himself, not as the God Man, but as an ordinary man. With the exception of the Transfiguration, Jesus looked like an ordinary man to everyone, even to those closest to Him. The public regarded Jesus as a great prophet, but still just a man.

The climax of Christ’s emptying is on the cross, where He became obedient to a slave’s death upon the cross. Even though He did not deserve shame but praise and honor, Christ still willingly suffered to save us.

St. Paul, in this text, points to Christ as an example. Even though He deserved every honor, He humbled Himself for the good of His neighbor. Christians should also emulate the mind of Christ. Christians look after the interests of others because Christ looked after their interests first. We act, not from ambition, but from a humility which springs from the humility of our Lord.

Lord, You emptied Yourself for our good. Empty us of all pride and vanity so that we might be more like You. Amen.



*I will praise Your great compassion,
Faithful Father, God of grace,
That with all our fallen race
In our depth of degradation
You had mercy so that we
Might be saved eternally.*

LSB 559:5

Thursday of Lent 1

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. — Exodus 20:11

In creation there are three naturally occurring periods of time that we humans can observe: there is the *day*, which is one complete rotation of the earth on its axis; there is the *month*, which is the time it takes for the moon to revolve around the earth; and there is the *year*, the time it takes for the earth to revolve around the sun.

But the seven-day week isn't a naturally occurring event in the cosmos. The week was established by the creative activity of God revealed in Genesis and given to mankind. The seven-day week is evidence of creation. Throughout history and from culture to culture people have observed a seven-day week. However, some societies tried to change the week, such as the Soviets who tried five- and six-day weeks in an effort to destroy Christianity by eliminating Sunday. But such attempts were a failure - for the Word of God endures.

Yet some Christians question what is meant by "day" in the Genesis account. They want it to mean something else like a massive period of time so they can have both God and evolution. But the Lord makes it quite clear in Exodus what is meant by "day" in Genesis: the period of time it takes for the earth to rotate once, an evening and a morning, a natural day. Otherwise the notion of the week being seven natural days becomes rather absurd. God created the universe in six natural days and rested on the seventh because His Word says so. Nature points to that truth every day of the week.

Heavenly Father, in this dying world help us always to confess and believe that by the power of Your Word You brought the cosmos into existence in six natural days, and by the power of Your Word You still preserve all that You created. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

*Keep us from the evil one;
Uphold our faith most holy,
And let us trust Thee solely
With humble hearts and lowly,
Let us put God's armor on,
With all true Christians running
Our heav'nly race and shunning
The devil's wiles and cunning.
Amen, amen! This be done;
O Lord, have mercy on us.*

LSB 505:2



*Jesus Christ, be Thou our stay;
 O let us perish never!
 cleanse us from our sins, we pray,
 And grant us life forever.*

Friday of Lent 1

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. — Ephesians 3:14-15

The Explanation of *Luther's Small Catechism* wasn't written by Luther, but by later Lutheran theologians. In that section the question is asked, "Why is the First Person of the Trinity called 'the Father'?" The answer given is two-fold: A. God is the Father of my Lord Jesus Christ and also my Father through faith in Christ; and B. He is the Father of all people because He created them. (1991 Catechism with Explanation, question 96)

God is a spirit, He has no body, which means He is neither male or female. But God reveals Himself to us in Holy Scripture as *Father*. God is our Father because He has created us, He provides for us and protects us from evil, and because He sacrifices for us. The earthly vocation of fatherhood reflects God the Father in much the same way. Fathers are the God-ordained head of the household. They beget their children, protect and care for their families, and provide for their children's Christian education. Much of the tribulation in our world today finds its root in divorce and fatherless homes. This is what happens when fathers—and all people for that matter—seek to serve themselves, and not the people God has given them.

Loving fathers make sacrifices for the wellbeing of their families. Yet their sacrifices don't compare to the sacrifice God the Father gave for His creation. He gave His only begotten Son into death on the cross to save us from sin, death, and the power of the devil — that we may live with Him in heavenly peace and joy. The greatest gift that a father can give his children is the Word of God that they may believe in Jesus Christ and be part of God's eternal family forever.

Heavenly Father, raising Christian children is hard work in this age of sport and leisure. Help parents to resist the temptation to put the things of this world above Your things. Help parents to see the eternal good in Sunday worship with our families, and to set a good example of faithfulness to Your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Saturday of Lent 1

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
— James 1:17

With these words, James reminds us that God the Father continues to care for His creation. He rains down goodness upon us from His heavenly throne on a daily basis. As Luther wisely teaches in his explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, God showers His blessings even upon evil people: *"God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving."*

The heart of natural man denies the blessings of its Creator, looking instead to the creation for good things. In the Large Catechism Martin Luther says of the heart: *"It seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints or devils. It neither cares for God, nor looks to Him for anything better than to believe that he is willing to help. The heart does not believe that whatever good it experiences comes from God"*. By nature, our hearts are opposed to God, desire only to sin, and lead us to eternal death.

But one of the good things that comes from the Father of lights is a regenerated heart. St. Paul calls baptism, *"a washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit"* (Titus 3:5). By the power of His Word, God created the heavens and the earth. By that same Word, the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart in Holy Baptism, where we are made a new creation in Christ. Not only does this new heart look to God for all good things, it responds with thanksgiving — not just in what we say, but in what we do. We glorify God even without bodies.

Heavenly Father, the Old Adam in us looks for comfort and security in worldly things. Through repentance and faith, strengthen the New Man in us to always look to You, the Father of lights, the author of our salvation, who has given us the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ, our Lord. In His Name. Amen.

Tuesday of Lent 2

"Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." — Isaiah 53:

Christ's whole life was a passion story, a history of suffering. We see this very clearly in the gospel given to us through Isaiah (read especially 52:13-53:12). Jesus is God, perfect and beautiful beyond compare. And yet, Isaiah writes that He *"had no form or majesty . . . and no beauty."* Jesus, at Whose right hand are pleasures forevermore, was *"a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* You never see Jesus laugh in the gospels; He cries and is angry, but He never laughs.

Jesus was despised, even though He was a King. His hometown hated Him. His family thought He was crazy. The crowds left Him after a hard sermon. His disciples abandoned Him. Soldiers mocked and beat Him. Even in His death He was despised.

This was the Lord's will. God did this. Jesus felt all of God's wrath. He was forsaken by God. All of our sin was placed on Him. Christ felt in His very soul all of our guilt and all of our sin. He suffered it as if it were His own. On the cross, Christ suffered the torments of hell.

This is what it means that Christ is the sin offering. By bearing our iniquity, Christ, God's servant, accounts many righteous. These were transgressors, but Christ has borne their sin and makes intercession continuously for them.

Christ's spiritual suffering upon the cross is the deepest humiliation. This is the anguish of His soul. The physical sufferings, while great, are nothing compared to the hell on earth which was the cross. There are no words to describe it. No one can understand it. We nevertheless trust in Christ's anguish of soul, for it is the core and foundation of our salvation.

Lord Jesus, out of the anguish of Your soul You saw and were satisfied. Comfort us with Your anguish, so that we might truly believe that our sins are forgiven. Amen.

Monday of Lent 2

**“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”
— Luke 2:51-52**

To educate is not only to inform, but also to shape or mold. Jesus did not need education. He did not need to be molded or formed. He did not have any vices or flaws which needed to be curbed, like we do. Why did Jesus need to learn?

This is part of Jesus' humiliation. Jesus did actually learn, study, and increase in wisdom, as far as His human nature was concerned. His omniscience was quiescent, not used. We see this later in the gospels when Christ declares that no one, even Him, knew the day or the hour of the end. Christ's redemptive office made this non-use necessary. Christ became like us in every way, save in sin. Seeing how the All-knowing One learned, we also ought not be too proud to repeat our catechisms every day and to listen to our pastor's preaching and teaching.

Jesus also showed His humility by submitting to His mother and guardian. When Mary and Joseph disagreed with Him, Jesus was in the right (Luke 2:48-49) and yet we see that Jesus was submissive to them. Even though His mother and guardian were flawed and sinful, He submitted to their authority. Even though He was their Maker, He deferred to them so that He might actively and perfectly obey God's law on our behalf.

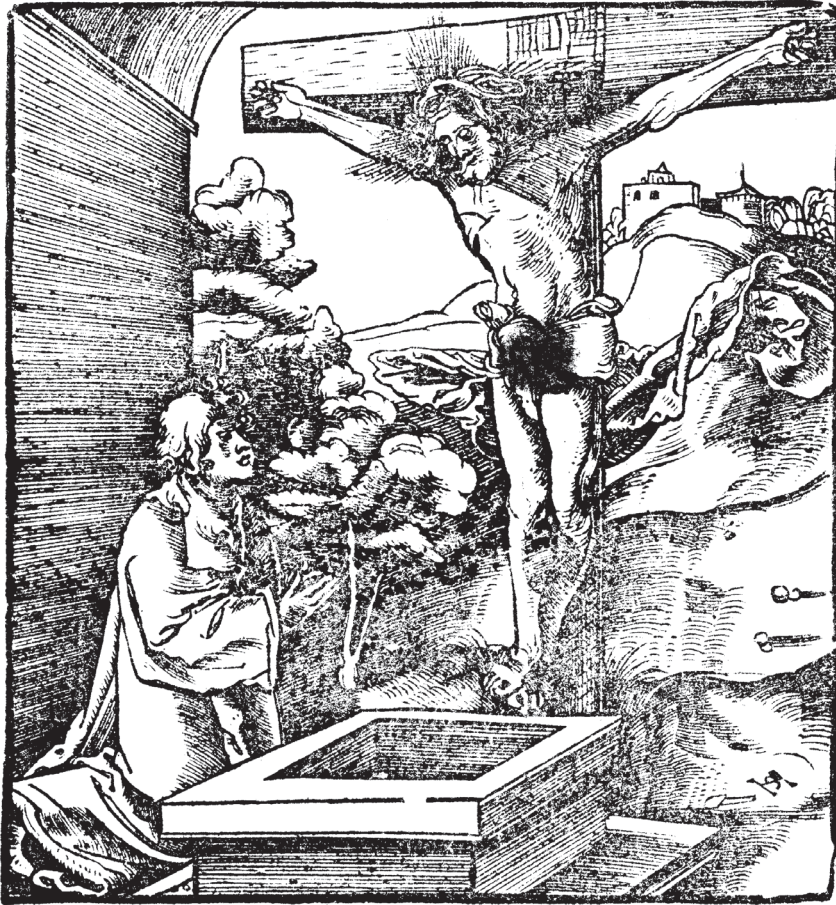
Seeing how Christ submitted to His mother and guardian, we also ought to submit in love and fear to our parents and other authorities. Christ was obedient, even when the authorities over Him erred and sinned. Likewise, we ought to obey our parents, no matter how weak or strange they are, because it is pleasing to our Heavenly Father and to our Lord Christ.

Lord Jesus, You grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. Teach us by Your holy Word so that we too might become mature in the Christian Faith. Amen.

Reflections

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines, and the paper is completely blank except for the lines.

God the Son



"The Crucifixion of Jesus" — Taken from a sermon by Martin Luther on the suffering of Christ, this woodcut shows Jesus on the cross with his tomb before him and (perhaps) the Apostle John (or another disciple) kneeling in prayer or worship before him.

Sunday of Lent 2

"And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.' But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' And he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly." — Matthew 15:21-28

Christ's humiliation reveals to us the depth of His love for His Father and His love for fallen sinners. But today's Gospel lesson seems to challenge Christ's universal love. First, Christ is silent to this woman's plea. Then, He speaks cold words: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And again, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Why does Christ act in such a manner?

Our Lord in love teaches us to cling to His promises alone. Christ teaches us that outward circumstances do not reveal His favor. Our Lord wants to be caught in His promises. He wants us to wrestle with Him through His Words. He, in love, lowers Himself by allowing this woman to use His own words. And so, she prevails by faith.

This text ought to drive us on to greater and more fervent prayer. Jesus wants to be caught by you. He wants you to bind Him with His words. Always pray and don't lose heart, for Jesus loves you dearly.

Lord Jesus, You commended the Canaanite woman for her great faith in Your words. Increase our faith by Your Word so that we may cling to Your promises alone. Amen.