

Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup> 2024

The First Sunday in Lent



Shining the light of Christ  
in the heart of the pines

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## **WELCOME TO EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH!**

“How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!” (Psalm 84:1) We are thankful that God has brought you here with us this morning to hear His Word and receive His gifts! You’ll find everything you need for the worship service in this bulletin and in *Lutheran Service Book*, our hymnal. If you have any questions about our worship service, our congregation, or what we believe, please ask our pastor or any of our members.

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## **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER?**

The first step to becoming a member of our congregation is to speak with our pastor.

We believe, teach, and confess that we are all broken sinners in need of God’s salvation, which He freely gives through His Word and Sacrament. Church is not a club for the sinless— it’s a hospital for sinners!

You may become a member of Epiphany Lutheran Church by transferring your membership from a sister congregation of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) or you may receive instruction from the pastor and become a communicant member of Epiphany and the LCMS through Adult Instruction Class or through a profession of faith.

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## **AS WE PREPARE FOR WORSHIP THIS MORNING:**

### ***Christ Jesus Defeats Our Temptation and Saves Us by His Faithfulness***

In faith and the fear of God, Abraham prepared to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. At the Word of the Lord, he *“took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son.”* And *“when they came to the place of which God had told him,”* Abraham bound Isaac *“and laid him on the altar”* (Gen. 22:6, 9). Then God stayed Abraham’s hand and provided *“for himself the lamb for a burnt offering”* (Gen. 22:8). That Lamb is God’s own beloved Son, Jesus, in whom *“all the nations of the earth”* are blessed (Gen. 22:18). As the Substitute for all the sons of men, Jesus is driven by the Spirit *“into the wilderness”* to be *“tempted by Satan”* (Mark 1:12–13) in order to endure and defeat all temptation. We are tempted by our own desire, which conceives and *“gives birth to sin”* (James 1:14–15). But this blessed Man, Christ Jesus, remained *“steadfast under trial,”* and He has received *“the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him”* (James 1:12). His faithfulness, His victory and His life are now given to us by His grace in the Gospel.

**DIVINE SERVICE  
SETTING ONE  
WITH COMMUNION**

**Prelude**

Selected Music

**Welcome and Greeting**

Pastor

**Announcements**

**Opening Hymn**

*“Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle”*

LSB 454

**CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

*The sign of the cross ✝ may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.*

**P** In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**C** Amen.

*Matthew 28:19b; (18:20)*

**P** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

**C** **But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

*1 John 1:8-9*

*Silence for reflection on God’s Word and for self-examination.*

**P** Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

**C** **Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

**P** Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

*(John 20:19-23)*

**C** Amen.

## SERVICE OF THE WORD

Introit

Read Together

*Psalm 91:9-13; antiphon: vv. 15-16*

When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation.

Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—  
the Most High, who is my refuge—  
no evil shall be allowed to befall you,  
no plague come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder;  
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;*

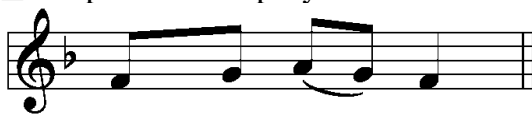
*as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation.

Kyrie

**P** In peace let us pray to the Lord.



**C** Lord, have mer - cy.

**P** For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.



**C** Lord, have mer - cy.

**P** For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.



**C** Lord, have mer - cy.

**P** For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.



**C** Lord, have mer - cy.

**P** Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord.



**C** A - men.

## Salutation and Collect of the Day

**P** The Lord be with you.

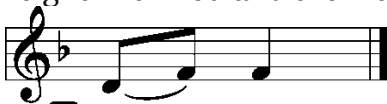
*2 Timothy 4:22*



**C** And al - so with you.

**P** Let us pray.

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of Your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



**C** A - men.

<sup>1</sup>After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” <sup>2</sup>He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” <sup>3</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. <sup>4</sup>On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. <sup>5</sup>Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” <sup>6</sup>And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. <sup>7</sup>And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” <sup>8</sup>Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

<sup>9</sup>When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. <sup>11</sup>But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.” <sup>12</sup>He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” <sup>13</sup>And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup>So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

<sup>15</sup>And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven <sup>16</sup>and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, <sup>18</sup>and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

**P** This is the Word of the Lord.

**C** Thanks be to God.

*Psalm 25:1-10; antiphon: v. 14*

**<sup>14</sup>The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,  
and he makes known to them his covenant.**

**<sup>1</sup>To you, O LORD,  
I lift up my soul.**

**<sup>2</sup>O my God, in you I trust;  
let me not be put to shame;  
let not my enemies exult over me.**

**<sup>3</sup>Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;  
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.**

**<sup>4</sup>Make me to know your ways, O LORD;  
teach me your paths.**

**<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all the day long.**

**<sup>6</sup>Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.**

**<sup>7</sup>Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!**

**<sup>8</sup>Good and upright is the LORD;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.**

**<sup>9</sup>He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.**

**<sup>10</sup>All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.**

***Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;***

*as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

**14**The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,  
and he makes known to them his covenant.

### Epistle Reading

James 1:12-18

<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup>But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup>Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.


<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

**P** This is the Word of the Lord.

**C** Thanks be to God.

### Verse

Joel 2:13



**C** Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for He is gra-cious and  
mer - ci - ful, slow to an - ger, and a-bound-ing in  
stead-fast love, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

### Holy Gospel Reading

Mark 1:9-15

**P** The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the first chapter.



**C** Glo - ry to You, O Lord.

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>12</sup>The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**”

**P** This is the Gospel of the Lord.



**C** Praise to You, O Christ.

**Hymn of the Day**

*“A Mighty Fortress”*

LSB 656

**Sermon**

*“The Binding”*  
*Genesis 22:1-18*

Rev. E. B. Holschuh

**Nicene Creed**

**C** I believe in one God,  
the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth  
and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of His Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
very God of very God,  
begotten, not made,  
being of one substance with the Father,

by whom all things were made;  
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary  
and was made man;  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.  
He suffered and was buried.  
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures  
and ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of the Father.  
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and  
the dead,  
whose kingdom will have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and  
glorified,  
who spoke by the prophets.  
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,  
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,  
and I look for the resurrection of the dead  
and the life ✠ of the world to come. Amen.

### **Passing of the Peace**

*When Jesus himself appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, he greeted them by saying, "Peace be with you" (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 26) – and so we do likewise.*

### **Reception of New Member**

- Alison Parker

### **Prayer of the Church**

**P** Lord, in Your mercy

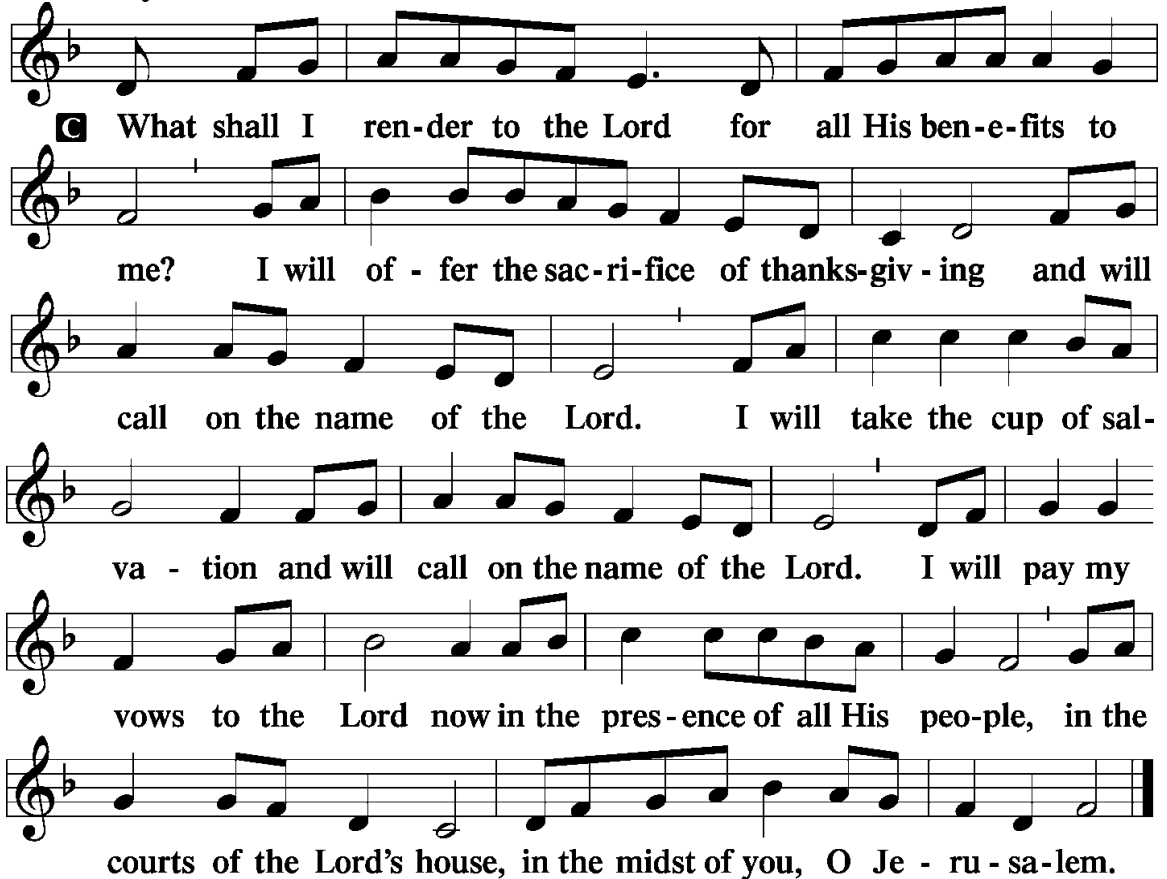
**C** hear our prayer.

### **Offering**

*Please sign the attendance books as they are passed.*

Usher

## Offertory



What shall I ren-der to the Lord for all His ben-e-fits to  
me? I will of - fer the sac-ri-fice of thanks-giv - ing and will  
call on the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of sal-  
va - tion and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my  
vows to the Lord now in the pres-ence of all His peo-ple, in the  
courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Je - ru - sa - lem.

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### *Important Information about Holy Communion Today*

Today, we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, in which our Lord Jesus Christ gives His true body and blood under the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins. This Sacrament is also a confession of the unity in faith, doctrine, and practice of those who receive it together.

If you are a confirmed member in good standing of Epiphany Lutheran Church or another congregation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, we welcome you to commune with us today. However, if this is not the case, we ask that you refrain from communing today. If you have questions, please speak to the pastor. He would be happy to meet with you to talk about the blessings of church membership and arrange for you to be a part of our instruction leading toward reception of Holy Communion at Epiphany.

# SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

## Preface

**P** The Lord be with you

*2 Timothy 4:22*



**C** And al - so with you.

**P** Lift up your hearts.

*(Colossians 3:1)*



**C** We lift them to the Lord.

**P** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*Psalm 136*



**C** It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

**P** It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who overcame the assaults of the devil and gave His life as a ransom for many that with cleansed hearts we might be prepared joyfully to celebrate the paschal feast in sincerity and truth. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

## Sanctus

*Isaiah 6:3; Matthew 21:9*



**C** Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and might:



Heav-en and earth are full of Your glo-ry. Ho - san-na. Ho -

san-na. Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is He who  
comes in the name of the Lord. Ho-san-na in the high - est.

## Prayer of Thanksgiving

**P** Blessed are You, Lord of heaven and earth, for You have had mercy on those whom You created and sent Your only-begotten Son into our flesh to bear our sin and be our Savior. With repentant joy we receive the salvation accomplished for us by the all-availing sacrifice of His body and His blood on the cross.

Gathered in the name and the remembrance of Jesus, we beg You, O Lord, to forgive, renew, and strengthen us with Your Word and Spirit. Grant us faithfully to eat His body and drink His blood as He bids us do in His own testament. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers; deliver and preserve us. To You alone, O Father, be all glory, honor, and worship, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C** Amen.

## The Lord's Prayer

**P** Lord, remember us in Your Kingdom and teach us to pray:

**C** **Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**



sin of the world; grant us peace.

**Distribution Hymn**    *“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”*    LSB 655

**Nunc Dimittis**

*Luke 2:29-32*

Lord, now You let Your ser-vant go in peace; Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the sal - va - tion which You have prepared in the sight of ev - 'ry peo - ple: A light to re - veal You to the na - tions and the glo - ry of Your peo - ple Is - ra - el. Glo - ry be to the Fa - ther and to the Son and to the Ho - ly Spir - it; as it was in the be - gin - ning, is now, and will be for - ev - er. A - men.

## Post-Communion Collect

**P** Let us pray.

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.



**C** A - men.

## Benediction

*Numbers 6:24-26*

**P** The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace.



**C** A - men.

## Closing Hymn

*“O Christ, You Walked the Road”*

LSB 424

## Postlude

Selected Music

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## SERVANTS DURING WORSHIP THIS MORNING:

Pastor – Rev. E. B. Holschuh

Musician – Gina Sanders

*Initial and ongoing funding for Epiphany Lutheran Church has been received through a grant made possible by the Roy D. and Ingaborg G. Randolph Memorial Endowment Fund.*

## PRAYERS AT EPIPHANY

**MEMBERS AND FRIENDS:** Please share any prayer requests that need to be added to this list by sending an email to [secretary@epiphanybastrop.org](mailto:secretary@epiphanybastrop.org). If you have confidential prayer requests for the pastors to know about, please send an email to [pastor@epiphanybastrop.org](mailto:pastor@epiphanybastrop.org).

- Kathy Achterberg
- David Goeke
- Nellie Gonzalez
- Tonya Hettler
- Deebo and Norma Kunze
- Karen McDougall
- Elaine Ottinger
- Fritz Pittman
- David Sager
- Dr. Charles Wukasch

### MISSIONARIES:

- **The Mantey Family (Africa, Kenya)** – Pray for the Mantey family as they serve their neighbors and their fellow missionaries in Africa. Ask God to give them wisdom and discernment in their work and their relationships with the churches and the local community. Pray that Mark and Megan would share Christ's love, mercy, and joy with others at all times, and that they can lead and collaborate in Christ-like ways. Let us give thanks that the Mantey family are serving God's people throughout Africa.
- **Rev. Gusavo and Ruth Maita (Latin America, Puerto Rico)** – Please pray for the Maitas as they serve in Puerto Rico. Pray that God would grant them steadfastness as He guides them in their service. Ask God to give them opportunities to connect students with the church. Pray also for their children, Mikhaela and Isaiah, who work alongside them and bring joy to many. Let us give thanks to God for Ruth and Gustavo's service to God's children in this part of the world.
- **The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church** – Pray for Bishop Lytkin and the pastors who serve in what is one of the poorest regions of Russia as they raise monetary support for its congregations and pastors, as well as its seminary, which is one of only two remaining Lutheran seminaries (out of eleven founded after the fall of the Soviet Union) in all of Russia.

## **THIS WEEK AT EPIPHANY:**

### **Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>**

- 10:00am – Bible Class
- 10:00am – Sunday School
- 11:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 11:30am – Worship Service with Communion

### **Thursday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>**

- 7:00pm – Midweek Lenten Service

### **Sunday, February 25<sup>th</sup>**

- 10:00am – Bible Class
- 10:00am – Sunday School
- 11:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 11:30am – Worship Service with Communion

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**Services During Lent and Holy Week:** We will have our midweek Lenten services at 7:00pm, with the final midweek service being on Thursday, March 21<sup>st</sup>. During Holy Week, make plans to join us for our Maundy Thursday service at 7:00pm, Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup> and our Good Friday service at 7:00pm on Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.

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**New Sunday school study begins at 10am on 2/25!** Join Pastor E.B. for *He Chose the Nails*, a five-session video Bible study from popular pastor and author Max Lucado which will examine the gifts that Christ gave at his crucifixion. These include not only the gift of the cross, but also the gift of the nails, and the empty tomb. The cross is rich with God's gifts of grace, and as we unwrap them, we will hear him whisper, "I did it just for you."

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**Lutheran Hour:** Next Sunday, February 25<sup>th</sup> – “When Winning Is Losing” – Guest Speaker: Rev. Dr. John Nunes. In Christ, losing is winning and winning is losing. Dr. John Nunes explains what that means. (Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Psalm 22:23-31, Romans 5:1-11, Mark 8:8-27)

Hear The Lutheran Hour each Sunday on station KBUK-FM 104.9 at 7:00 a.m. or on station KANJ-FM 91.5 at 12:30 p.m. or go to [lhm.org](http://lhm.org) for a link to listen to the Lutheran Hour live.

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**CHRIST FOR YOU this week on KFUE.org:** Hear stories about mental health, LCMS history, and the history of LCMS Black Ministry on The Coffee Hour (weekdays at 9:00 a.m. CT), continue studying Galatians 5-6 on Sharper Iron (weekdays at 8:00 a.m. CT), study Deuteronomy 9-12 on Thy Strong Word (weekdays at 11:00 a.m. CT), and enjoy a Lenten Organ Recital and Worship Service on 2/21 at 11:00 a.m. CT. Find your favorite programs on demand at [kfuo.org](http://kfuo.org) or the KFUE Radio app!

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**Sanctity of Life:** We are created, preserved, and protected by our Father. Christ Jesus died and rose to redeem every life and the Holy Spirit strengthens us to love every life as someone for whom Christ died. Viewing life as valuable shapes our worldview and guides Christians to uphold the lives of the vulnerable. Christians are faced with issues of abortion, euthanasia, and physician assisted suicide. We come to these and other issues with a theology of life – life for all. As the Body of Christ, we seek to preserve every life created by God and value every life, whether the world sees them as valuable or not. The value given to life comes not from the world, but from the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of the world, our Holy and gracious God. Resources have been created to aid in education of congregations and institutions, advocacy for those vulnerable to loss of life, and service to all God’s created people: <https://makingdisciples-resources.lcms.org/sanctity-of-life-issues/#resources>.

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These days, conducting class at the Lutheran Seminary in Novosibirsk, Siberia, is sometimes difficult as professors turn to online means to provide pastoral instruction to students, especially those close to the conflict in Ukraine and those who are seeking instruction in countries surrounding Russia. Please continue to pray for the seminary and the *Save the Seminary Campaign* efforts. Your prayers mean so much, and your financial support is a genuine encouragement for the campaign team as we continue to build an endowment for the seminary. Learn more on our website, [savetheseminary.org](http://savetheseminary.org).

**Please make your contribution at: [savetheseminary.org](http://savetheseminary.org), or use this QR Code.**

1-minute



Seminary

## Lent: A Time for Giving Up or Taking Up?

What are you giving up for Lent? Are you sure that's a good idea?

Giving up things for Lent is a long-standing tradition in the Western Church. Doing so is generally understood to help us prepare for observing and celebrating Easter through experiencing some kind of suffering through deprivation. While there is nothing wrong with giving up things for Lent and in some ways it can be a valuable spiritual discipline, for many people the practice has devolved into a work of personal suffering through which they expect to better understand the sufferings of Christ.

How silly of us to think that denying ourselves chocolate for forty days or going without our morning boost of caffeine for a season even begins to approach the least of Jesus' sufferings for us. We've moved far away from the purpose and substance of Lent by the insignificant things we're willing to give up.

While no one is certain about how the practice of giving up things for Lent began or what the motives were of those who first observed Lent in this way, we can certainly see how giving up things for Lent has come to be practiced in our culture.

Far from being a time of solemn reflection and repentance, the beginning of Lent has turned into another excuse for people to engage in excess. Now, without the disciplines of fasting, self-denial, and prayer that followed, people revel in consuming all the things that were once prohibited during Lent—and much, much more. Mardi Gras (and its various regional adaptations) has become a celebrated cultural event that shows more of what the American character has become than our half-hearted observances of Lent.

By giving up things for Lent in the ways that we do, we've made this holy season into one more instance of our self-absorption. Like the New Year's Resolutions that we made, our commitment to observing Lent sacrificially is momentary and fleeting. We have a sense of what is good for us and what we must do in order to improve ourselves or our circumstances, but we lack the resolve to see our way through the self-denial that it takes to make the needed change an effective part of our lives. What we give up for Lent is often as petty and insignificant as what we resolve for New Year's—and ends up just as broken and meaningless.

Isn't it time for us to put an end to our empty observances of Lent? Are we ready for a serious go at journeying through Lent in a way that brings us to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Christ's atoning work? If so, perhaps we should stop giving up things for Lent and use this sacred time to take up things instead. The things that we should aim to take up during Lent are those things that we've let fall by the wayside as we've lived our lives at the breakneck speed of our culture. It might include taking up a daily devotion or taking up the practice of meditative prayer. If we've been away from the gathering of God's people in worship, we could take up participating in the Divine Service on Sundays as well as the mid-week Lenten services.

What a difference Lent could be for us and make in us if we would take up reading God's Word daily, intentionally speaking the Gospel to one person a week, showing the love of Christ to the poor and needy through acts of mercy, or listening to recorded sermons or Bible studies.

Whatever we might take up for Lent, we should remember that, above all, taking up things for Lent in a meaningful way inevitably results in hearing the clear call of Jesus to take up our crosses daily. Taking up our crosses involves looking beyond our self-interests, desires, and pious actions (including giving up things for Lent) and finding joy, peace, security, and purpose—those things that are so glaringly absent in our culture—in the realization of what Jesus gave up and took up for us.

[From an article by Pastor Mark Wood, posted to [resources.lcms.org](http://resources.lcms.org) in 2016.]