

Sunday, September 1st 2024

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost



Mailing Address:

**Epiphany Lutheran Church
489 Agnes
Suite 112, Box 117
Bastrop, TX 78602**

Physical Address:

**Epiphany Lutheran Church
(on the SDA campus)
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Bastrop, TX 78602**

**Rev. E. B. Holschuh – Pastor
(737) 332-1896 (Voicemail/Text)
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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.

OUR COMMUNION POLICY:

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod believes the biblical teaching that in communion we receive the true body and blood of Jesus Christ with the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins. If you are a baptized Christian who has been instructed in the biblical teaching of communion, and if you agree with our confession of faith, please feel free to commune with us. If you have any questions, please speak with our pastor.

SERVANTS DURING WORSHIP THIS MORNING:

Pastor – Rev. E. B. Holschuh
Musician – Susan Michael
Lay Reader – Carole Holschuh
Assisting Elder – Dave Layland

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.

AS WE PREPARE FOR WORSHIP THIS MORNING:

We Are Cleansed and Sustained by the Word of God

Wickedness and evil come “*from within, out of the heart,*” and that is what defiles a person (Mark 7:21–23). Hence, we cannot save ourselves, because we are sinful and unclean from the inside out. But as the Lord Jesus “*declared all foods clean*” (Mark 7:19), so He cleanses us by His Word, the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, “*listen to the statutes and the rules*” of the Lord, “*and do them, that you may live*” (Deut. 4:1). For His Word is righteous, and to live according to it is “*your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples*” (Deut. 4:6). Cling to His Word, and also teach it “*to your children and your children’s children*” (Deut. 4:9). Put on this “*armor of God*” by hearing and heeding what He speaks to you, that you may “*stand firm*” in the evil day (Eph. 6:11–13). Gird yourself with the righteousness of Christ, by faith in the “*gospel of peace,*” and take up “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*” by confessing Christ Jesus and “*praying at all times in the Spirit*” (Eph. 6:14–18).

DIVINE SERVICE SETTING FOUR

Prelude

Selected Music

Welcome and Greeting

Pastor

Announcements

Opening Hymn “*Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart*”

LSB 708

(stand)

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 Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

P If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

C But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. *Ps. 130:3-4*

P Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner. *[Luke 18:13]*

C Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. 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.

C Amen.

[John 20:19-23]

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Introit

Psalm 51:7, 10-12

P Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

**C Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

P Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

**C Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

*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.*

Kyrie

Mark 10:47



C Lord, have mer - cy; Christ, have mer - cy; Lord, have mer - cy.

Gloria in Excelsis

Luke 2:14; John 1:29



C 1 To God on high be glo - ry And peace to all the earth;
2 To You, O sole - be - got - ten, The Fa - ther's Son, we pray;
3 For You a - lone are ho - ly; You on - ly are the Lord.



Good-will from God in heav - en Pro - claimed at Je - sus' birth!
O Lamb of God, our Sav - ior, You take our sins a - way.
For - ev - er and for - ev - er, Be wor - shipped and a - dored;



We praise and bless You, Fa - ther; Your ho - ly name, we sing—
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus; Re - ceive our heart - felt cry,
You with the Ho - ly Spir - it A - lone are Lord Most High,



Our thanks for Your great glo - ry, Lord God, our heav'n - ly King.
Where You in pow'r are seat - ed At God's right hand on high—
In God the Fa - ther's glo - ry. "A - men!" our glad re - ply.

Salutation and Collect of the Day

P The Lord be with you.

2 Timothy 4:22

C And also with you.

P Let us pray.

O God, the source of all that is just and good, nourish in us every virtue and bring to completion every good intent that we may grow in grace and bring forth the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

(sit)

Old Testament Reading

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

¹“Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the just decrees that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ²You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. . .

⁶Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ ⁷For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? ⁸And what great nation is there, that has statutes and just decrees so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

⁹“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children.”

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Epistle Reading

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the

whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

A This is the Word of the Lord.


C Thanks be to God.

(stand)

Alleluia and Verse



C Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



C These things are writ - ten that you may be - lieve that



Je - sus is the Christ, the Son of God.

John 20:31



C Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

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

C **Glory to You, O Lord.**

¹⁴[Jesus] called the people to him again and said to them, “**Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.**” ¹⁷And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸And he said to them, “**Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?**” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰And he said, “**What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**”

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

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

(sit)

Hymn of the Day

“By Grace I’m Saved”

LSB 566

Sermon

“A Matter of the Heart”

Mark 7:14-23

(stand)

Apostles’ Creed

C **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.**

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.*

(sit)

Prayer of the Church

☐ Lord, in Your mercy
☑ hear our prayer.

Offering

Usher

Please sign the attendance books as they are passed.

*If you would like to transition to making your regular tithe or offering online,
you may do so at <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-ZKYH/home>*



SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

For those unfamiliar with our congregation’s practice regarding the Lord’s Supper, please refer to “Our Communion Policy” located at the beginning of the bulletin.

(stand)

Preface

☐ The Lord be with you.

2 Timothy 4:22

C And also with you.

P Lift up your hearts.

C We lift them to the Lord.

[Colossians 3:1]

P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

[Psalm 136]

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, having created all things, took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary. For our sake He died on the cross and rose from the dead to put an end to death, thus fulfilling Your will and gaining for You a holy people. 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 Sab - a - oth a - dored;



Heav'n and earth with full ac-claim shout the glo-ry of Your name.



Sing ho - san-na in the high-est, sing ho-san - na to the Lord;



Tru - ly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Prayer of Thanksgiving

- P** Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. By His death, He has redeemed us from bondage to sin and death, and by His resurrection, He has delivered us into new life in Him.

Grant us to keep the Feast in sincerity and truth, faithfully eating His body given into death and drinking His life's blood poured out for our salvation until we pass through death to the promised land of life eternal.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

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.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

The Words of Our Lord

*Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24
Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25*

- P** Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My **✠** body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."
- P** In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My **✠** blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Pax Domini

John 20:19

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C Amen.

Agnus Dei

John 1:29



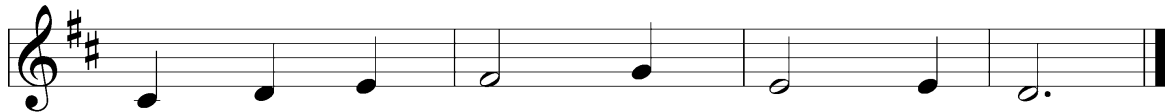
C 1 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
2 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,



You take the sin of the world a - way;
You take the sin of the world a - way;



O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus Christ,



Have mer - cy on us, Lord, we pray.
And grant us peace, O Lord, we pray.

(sit)

Distribution Hymn

“Lord of Our Life”

LSB 659

(stand)

Nunc Dimittis

Luke 2:29-32

C 1 O Lord, now let Your ser - vant De -
2 All glo - ry to the Fa - ther, All
part in heav'n - ly peace, For I have seen the
glo - ry to the Son, All glo - ry to the
glo - ry Of Your re - deem - ing grace:
Spir - it, For - ev - er Three in One;
A light to lead the Gen - tiles Un -
For as in the be - gin - ning, Is
to Your ho - ly hill, The glo - ry of Your
now, shall ev - er be, God's tri - une name re -
peo - ple, Your cho - sen Is - ra - el.
sound - ing Through all e - ter - ni - ty.

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 Amen.

Benedicamus and Benediction

P Let us bless the Lord.

[Psalm 103:1]

C Thanks be to God.

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.

Numbers 6:24-26

C Amen.

(sit)

Closing Hymn

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

LSB 656

P Go in Peace!

C Serve the Lord!

Postlude

Selected Music

SERMON NOTES

Mark 7:14-23 | *A Matter of the Heart*

1. A question to ponder: To what would _____ point and say, "You abandon the _____ of God and hold to _____ tradition?"
 2. Jesus identifies the human _____ as the true _____ of ritual _____.
 3. The Bible recognizes the _____ from creation and the _____ of God, but is utterly straightforward about the _____ and folly bound up within us, as well.
 4. The rules of _____ only _____ what _____ has said.
 5. _____ is not what we _____, it is what we _____.
 6. Through the Means of Grace, His _____ in its various forms, _____ gives us a new _____.
-

PRAYERS AT EPIPHANY

PRAYER REQUESTS: Please share any prayer request on the Prayer Requests sheet as you enter on Sunday. You may also email a prayer request, as well as a request to become a part of Epiphany's prayer chain, to secretary@epiphanybastrop.org.

Please continue to pray for...

- Becky Bartelt – missionary in Taiwan
- Pastor Holschuh's Mother, Betsy Holschuh
- Carole Holschuh
- Dave Layland's Brother

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.



Epiphany Lutheran Church has a podcast! Our ***Peace Be With You*** podcast is still very much a work in progress that we hope will help us reach those in our community and beyond with the Gospel message of hope and salvation in Christ. In the coming days it should be available on popular podcast apps, but you can always find it at peacebewithyou.podbean.com (or just scan the QR code).



THIS WEEK AT EPIPHANY:

Sunday, September 1st

- 10:00am – Children's Sunday School (Fellowship Area)
- 10:00am – Adult Sunday School (Sanctuary)
- 11:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 11:30am – Worship Service with Communion

Sunday, September 8th

- 10:00am – Children's Sunday School (Fellowship Area)
- 10:00am – Adult Sunday School (Sanctuary)
- 11:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 11:30am – Worship Service with Communion

Adult Sunday School: Join us at 10am for *Isaiah: A 12-Week Study* (started on June 23)... Isaiah's prophecy, which alternates between promises of judgment and restoration, reminds God's people of the magnitude of humanity's sin, the judgment that we all deserve, and how God displays his glory by saving sinners.

New Thursday video study via Zoom begins on September 19 at 6pm. Join us for Max Lucado's *God Never Gives Up On You*. In this 5-session we'll see how God used Jacob—the misbehaving patriarch who was strong on savvy but weak on conscience—simply because God *chose* to use Jacob, how God turns brokenness into blessings through His grace, mercy, and relentless love. Register: bit.ly/ELC-GodNeverGivesUp

Lutheran Hour: Next Sunday, September 8th – “Conditioned by the Unconditional” – Lutheran Hour Speaker: Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler. God's forgiving love for you in Christ is love that your accomplishments can't enhance and your failures can't diminish.

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 for a link to listen to the Lutheran Hour live.

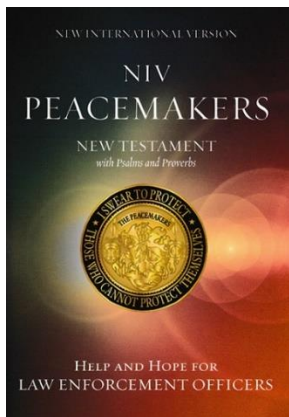
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CHRIST FOR YOU this week on KFUE.org: Continue studying Psalm 119 on Sharper Iron (weekdays at 8:00 a.m. CT), finish studying Amos on Thy Strong Word (weekdays at 11:00 a.m. CT), and Political Order in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession on Concord Matters (9/7 at 11:00 a.m. CT). Find your favorite programs on demand at kfuo.org or the KFUE Radio app!

Devotional at Argent Court: Every day counts! *Make Every Day Count*, a new, twice monthly Christian devotional and prayer gathering at Argent Court Assisted Living led by Pastor E.B. will begin this month (at 3pm on Thursday, September 5 and again on Thursday, September 26). Every day there is evidence of how much God loves us and every day there are people who need to hear how much he loves them too.

66 Books at the Bastrop Public Library: Pastor E.B. is looking for a handful of volunteers who would be willing to help expand the **66 Books** “project” beyond the Bastrop Public Library—the goal is to offer a simple introduction/overview of the Bible for those who are unchurched and/or have little to no familiarity with the Bible. If interested, please let Pastor E.B. know and then plan to attend the next 3rd-Tuesday instructional study at 6:30pm on September 17 at Bastrop Public Library (materials and simple instructions will be provided). *66 Books* is a single-session, beginner-level offering to provide a look at the origin, purpose, and relevance of the Bible with an accompanying invitation to continue learning in an “entry-level” Advent/Christmas Bible study (TBD).

RightNow Media: We’re excited to share that Epiphany Lutheran Church now has unlimited access to **RightNow Media**—the world’s largest streaming library of video Bible study resources. This extensive library has **more than 20,000 videos** that can be used as part of a group study or for personal devotions, and many series include **free discussion guides and handouts**. In addition to series on books of the Bible, RightNow Media has videos for everyone in the family on a variety of topics like marriage, parenting, personal finances, mental health, and more. There’s even a **library just for kids with over 2,000 safe, entertaining videos**. RightNow Media has a free app that’s available on all major streaming devices so you and your family can access content anywhere, anytime. For FREE access to RightNow Media, visit app.rightnowmedia.org/join/elcb or scan the QR code.



The NIV Peacemakers New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs Outreach Challenge starts September 8! This is a personal challenge from Pastor E.B. to give out a dozen of these little New Testaments to peace officers (local police, county sheriff, state trooper, etc.) before the deadline (September 22)—if you’re up to the challenge, you need only take a Bible on the way out of church and look for a law enforcement officer to thank for serving and reassure that they’re never alone (and that our church “backs the Blue”). This is a great way to share your faith with little to no risk of rejection!



FAITH LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL OF CENTRAL TEXAS

Faith Lutheran High School of Central Texas seeks to engage young adults in a Christ-centered environment where faith and knowledge grow as one.

HOME OF THE FALCONS!

September 2024

Great Start to the School Year

We have had a great start to the school year! We love having our students back on campus and pray that their education and faith may grow abundantly this year! Registration remains on-going. Call us today - (979) 242-2889!

Thank you!

There have been so many people, organizations, groups and churches who have contributed to the success and growth of FLHS - through donations of wish list items, monetary donations and so much more. Thank you, on behalf of the students who will be instilled with wisdom as they become faithful leaders tomorrow, for your generous support. THANK YOU!!

Transportation Fund Update

We have met our goal!! THANK YOU for your generous contributions to help us raise the funds necessary to begin moving forward with this project. We pray that the Lord will bless us with a wonderful vehicle in the near future, and that it would be a blessing for our ministry.

Follow Us On Facebook!

With a new school year underway, you may want to see the exciting things happening inside here on a daily basis! By "liking" our Facebook page and "sharing" our posts, you will be in the loop on all the great things happening and sharing Faith with your friends as well. If you're not on social media, head to our website (flstx.org) which is updated regularly as well.

Share the Gift of Love

Faith Lutheran High School has a unique role in combining knowledge and God's love in a student's high school experience. We are partnering with families at the intersection of education and faith development. If you would like to support our ministry through a one-time or enduring gift, memorial contribution, or a Thrivent Action Grant, please contact us.

Visit Day Opportunities

FLHS will be hosting Visit Day for 7th and 8th Grade students. This annual visit day is a great opportunity for future students to see what FLHS is all about and what high school might look like. Our area Lutheran schools will join us for this event and you are welcome to join us too! This event will begin with lunch and last through approximately 3pm. Dates will be coming soon, so watch our social media posts. Please RSVP if you plan to attend!!

Save the Date!

FLHS's annual Oktoberfest will be Saturday, October 28th. New this year will be **The Battle of the Vines**, in addition to **The Battle of the Brew** - both are home brew competitions, so start planning your brews now. Returning will be our traditional German meal, domino tournament, cornhole tournament, music, kids games, bounce house, and lots of fun!

Free Wednesday mornings!

Join us for our weekly Chapel Worship Service every Wednesday, beginning at 10:30 am.

Thrivent Action Team Grants

If you are a Thrivent member willing to submit an application for a \$250 grant to be used on projects at Faith, please contact Nikki Kueck by calling (979) 242-2889. Help us to be able to take advantage of these funds for the good of our school.



Answers to Sermon Notes:
1. A question to ponder: To what would *Jesus* point and say, "You abandon the *commandment* of God and hold to *human* tradition?"
2. Jesus identifies the human *heart* as the true *source* of ritual *uncleanliness*.
3. The Bible recognizes the *good* from Creation and the *grace* of God, but it is utterly straightforward about the *sin* and folly bound up within us, as well.
4. The rules of *men* only *obscure* what *God* has said.
5. *Sin* is not what we *do*, it is what we *are*.
6. Through the Means of Grace, His *Word* in its various forms, *God* gives us a new *heart*.

3-minute



Seminary

God in Worship

The presence of God in the Old Testament was often revealed—and concealed—in mysterious ways. It may have been in thunder and lightning, in a burning bush, in a pillar of cloud or one of fire, in smoke, in a fiery furnace, or even in a still, small voice. Regardless of its form, these occurrences let the people of Israel know that God was with them, protecting them, leading them in relationship.

Following the exodus from Egypt, the Ark of the Covenant held the Ten Commandments. The Ark was kept in the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting. According to Exodus 25:22, it was the place where God would speak to Moses. “There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel” (Exodus 25:22).

While God desired to dwell with His people as a nation of priests (see Exodus 19:5-6), their sin drove a wedge between them and God. God was present with His people but from a distance. Read 1 Kings 8:10-21. This passage takes place after Solomon builds the temple and brings the Ark into the temple.

In the birth of Jesus, God’s presence enters fully into our world. Foretold for centuries as coming by the prophets, the Messiah—both God and Man—came to seek and to save the lost. In fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the Christ Child was born to a virgin, born in a Bethlehem manger, born to bear our transgressions on a cross. The barrier between God’s presence and sinful mankind has been eliminated with the advent of Jesus. As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection guarantees salvation to all who believe on Him as their Lord and Savior.

God demonstrated the total access Jesus gives us to God’s presence in the dramatic tearing of the temple curtain on Good Friday. “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split” (Matthew 27:51). Now, because of Jesus, there is no separation: “we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh” (Hebrews 10:19b-20). The shedding of Jesus’ blood for our sins makes it possible for each of us to experience the fullness of God’s presence.

To celebrate God’s saving grace, early Christians gathered together and partook the Lord’s Supper, “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42b). In Holy Communion we are fed by God. We are nourished through the supreme sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. This Sacrament was as central to nurturing the faith of the first churches as it is for us today. In it, the presence of Jesus is among us, mysteriously yet visibly, in the bread and the wine, His body and blood given for our sins. “Do this,” Jesus tells us, “in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19b).

In church we worship in the presence of God as a community of believers. As the body of Christ on earth, God’s Holy Spirit works mightily among us, strengthening our faith, drawing us closer to God through Jesus’ presence in the Word and the Sacraments. No longer outsiders and unfit to be with God, He has graciously done all things possible to make us His own, to live with Him forever. This He has done in Jesus who told us, “In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

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