

Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup> 2026

Sixth Sunday of Easter



**Mailing Address:**

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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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### OUR COMMUNION POLICY:

The Lord’s Supper is celebrated at this congregation by baptized believers in the confession and glad confidence that, as he says, our Lord gives into our mouths not only bread and wine but his very body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our union with him and with one another. Our Lord invites to his table those who trust his words, repent of all sin, and set aside any refusal to forgive and love as he forgives and loves us, that they may show forth his death until he comes.

Because those who eat and drink our Lord’s body and blood unworthily do so to their great harm and because Holy Communion is a confession of the faith which is confessed at this altar, any who are not yet instructed, in doubt, or who hold a confession differing from that of this congregation and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and yet desire to receive the sacrament, are asked first to speak with the pastor.

For further study, see Matthew 5:23; 10:32; 18:15-35; 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

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### SERVANTS DURING WORSHIP THIS MORNING:

Pastor – Rev. E.B. Holschuh  
Lay Reader – Dave Layland  
Assisting Elder – Dave Layland  
Usher – Harlan Robb  
Acolyte – Calvin Monroe

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We are using the Church Music Solutions Church Organist Service, an iPad application that provides us with accompaniment for our church service. **There is a brief introduction to the musical parts of liturgy unless otherwise noted.**

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

### ***The Lord Jesus Comforts Us with the Preaching of His Resurrection***

*“The God who ... gives to all mankind life and breath and everything”* (Acts 17:24–25) wants all people to seek Him that they might *“feel their way toward him and find him”* (Acts 17:27). But in our sinful ignorance, we humans turn instead to idols *“formed by the art and imagination of man”* (Acts 17:29). Therefore, God appointed the Man of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, and *“has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31). Because He lives, we also live (John 14:19) in His forgiveness, and thus we love Him and keep His commandments (John 14:15). While the risen Lord prepares us for His ascension, He will not leave us *“as orphans”* (John 14:18), but He gives *“another Helper,”* the Holy Spirit, to be with us forever (John 14:16) through the preaching of *“Jesus and the resurrection”* (Acts 17:18). Because He *“suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous”* (1 Peter 3:18), we *“honor Christ the Lord as holy”* and are always *“prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks”* for the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). Our Baptism *“now saves”* us *“as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 3:21).

## **DIVINE SERVICE SETTING FOUR**

<b>Prelude</b>		Selected Music
<b>Welcome and Greeting</b>		Pastor
<b>Announcements</b>		
<b>Opening Hymn</b>	<i>“Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ”</i>	LSB 769
<i>(stand)</i>		

## **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 119:89-93*

**P** Forever, O LORD, your word  
is firmly fixed in the heavens.

**C** **Your faithfulness endures to all generations;  
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.**

**P** By your appointment they stand this day,  
for all things are your servants.

**C** **If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction.**

**P** I will never forget your precepts,  
for by them you have given me life.

**C** **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 (no intro)**

*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 giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; 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)*

## First Reading

Acts 17:16-31

<sup>16</sup>While Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup>So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup>Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. <sup>19</sup>And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup>For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” <sup>21</sup>Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

<sup>22</sup>So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup>For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup>And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, <sup>27</sup>that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup>for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;  
as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.’

<sup>29</sup>Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. <sup>30</sup>The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

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

**C** Thanks be to God.

### Epistle Reading

1 Peter 3:13-22

<sup>13</sup>Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup>yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

<sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup>Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

**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.

## Holy Gospel Reading

John 14:15-21

**P** The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the fourteenth chapter.

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

<sup>15</sup>[Jesus said:] “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, <sup>17</sup>even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup>Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

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

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

*(sit)*

**Hymn of the Day**

*“Holy Spirit, Light Divine”*

LSB 496

**Sermon**

*We Are Not Alone*

John 14:15-21

*(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**

*(sit)*

## Prayer of the Church

**P** Lord, in Your mercy  
**C** hear our prayer.

**Offering**

Usher

*(stand)*

## SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

### Preface

**P** 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. And most especially are we bound to praise You on this day for the glorious resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, the very Paschal Lamb, who was sacrificed for us and bore the sins of the world. By His dying He has destroyed death, and by His rising again He has restored to us everlasting life. Therefore with Mary Magdalene, Peter and John, and with all the witnesses of the resurrection, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

### Sanctus (no intro)

*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:

**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 covenant 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



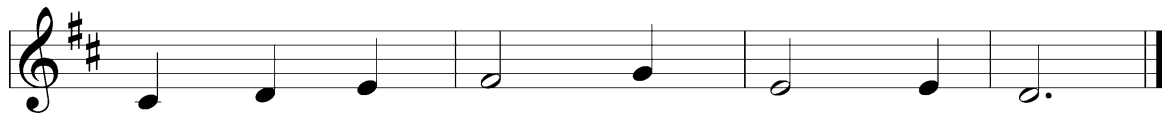
1 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,  
2 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,



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**     *“Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice”*     LSB 556

*(stand)*

# Nunc Dimittis

Luke 2:29-32

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**

*“Alleluia! Sing to Jesus”*

LSB 821

## Easter Acclamation

**P** Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**C** He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

**P** Go in Peace!

**C** Serve the Lord!

**Postlude**

Selected Music

*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.*



**CATECHISM CORNER | *Bite-sized teachings from Luther's Small Catechism***

Written in 1529 in Q&A format, the Small Catechism explores the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

**CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

3. *Are you also sorry for your sins?*

Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God.

4. *What have you deserved from God by your sins?*

His wrath and displeasure, temporal death and eternal damnation. Romans 6:21 and 23.

**SERMON NOTES: John 14:15-21**

***We Are Not Alone***

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is what we do when we intentionally or unintentionally \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves from God's Word, from church, from our church family, from our neighbor.

2. It's \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ all disciples to \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Jesus is counting on \_\_\_\_\_ and me and all the other parts of the Body of Christ to do the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church...but not \_\_\_\_\_!

4. Love \_\_\_\_\_. Love your \_\_\_\_\_. That's how \_\_\_\_\_ are to express our love for our Savior.

5. Not only does \_\_\_\_\_ tell his disciples that they will have a \_\_\_\_\_ when he is gone, he tells them "I will not leave you as \_\_\_\_\_; I will come to you."

6. The Holy Spirit is not an \_\_\_\_\_—He is \_\_\_\_\_ with you, in you, \_\_\_\_\_ through you.

## 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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**Epiphany Events Calendar:** Our congregation calendar is on our website ([epiphanybastrop.org](http://epiphanybastrop.org)); to add an event, please email [secretary@epiphanybastrop.org](mailto:secretary@epiphanybastrop.org).

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**Offering:** Should you wish to make your regular tithe or offering online, you may do so at <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-ZKYH/home> or scan this QR code.



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**9am Adult Sunday School:** Join us as we continue the video study, *Drive Thru History: Ends of the Earth*. We're following host Dave Stotts as he travels the globe to tell the 2,000-year story of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ reached the Ends of the Earth.

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**Join us on Zoom at 6pm on Thursday** for *You Were Made for This Moment*, the 4th session of a 5-week series based on the book of Esther. Register now: [bit.ly/ELC-ThisMoment](http://bit.ly/ELC-ThisMoment)

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**Lutheran Radio:** 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. You can also listen to The Lutheran Hour on the local Austin station KLBj (590 AM or 99.7 FM) at 7am on Sunday.

**KFUO Radio**, the broadcast voice of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, shares Christ for you anytime, anywhere on **KFUO.org** via worship services, Bible and theology studies, practical talk programs, and sacred music. Find programs on demand at [kfu.org](http://kfu.org) and wherever you get your podcasts! Find us on social: [@KFUORadio](https://www.facebook.com/KFUORadio) on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/KFUORadio), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/KFUORadio), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/KFUORadio).

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**RightNow Media:** Every person in our Epiphany family has (and can share) free access to over 25,000 biblical video series for adults, youth, and kids—**RightNow Media** has a free app that’s available on all major streaming devices so you and your family can access content anywhere, anytime. Visit [app.rightnowmedia.org/join/elcb](http://app.rightnowmedia.org/join/elcb) or scan the QR code.



**ChristianBook Giveback Program:** Did you know that your purchases at Christianbook can help fund our congregation? Just visit [christianbook.com/apps/giveback](http://christianbook.com/apps/giveback) and enter the Giveback ID for Epiphany Lutheran Church: JQWHTN. After this one-time signup, we’ll be eligible to receive 4% cashback on your purchases.



Epiphany Lutheran Church has a podcast! Our **Peace Be With You** podcast is available on popular podcast apps, but you can always find it at [peacebewithyou.podbean.com](http://peacebewithyou.podbean.com) (or just scan the QR code).



Answers to Sermon Notes:

1. **Spiritual distancing** is what we do when we intentionally or unintentionally **separate** ourselves from God's Word, from church, from our church family, from our neighbor.
2. It's **love** that **binds** all disciples to **Jesus**.
3. Jesus is counting on **you** and me and all the other parts of the Body of Christ to do the **work** of the church...but not **alone**.
4. Love your **neighbor**. That's how **we** are to express our love for our Savior.
5. Not only does **Jesus** tell his disciples that they will have a **Helper** when he is gone, he tells them "I will not leave you as **orphans**. I will come to you."
6. The Holy Spirit is not an **idea**—he is **God** with you, in you, **working** through you.

## 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](mailto:secretary@epiphanybastrop.org).

Please continue to pray for...

- Rev. Chris and Dr. Jenny Yang – missionaries in Taiwan
  - Fey Betak, Francis Eschberger, Jim Haynes, Anita Hickman, Ranita Murphy, Elaine Ottinger, Sally Potthast, Gert Schriner, and all the residents at Argent Court Assisted Living in Bastrop
  - Lester Rainer – Deb and Dave Layland's Brother-in-Law
  - Carl Guetersloh – Deana's Father
  - Linda Osborn – Rosie Cabrera's Friend
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### THIS WEEK AT EPIPHANY:

#### Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup>

- 9:00am – Children's Sunday School
- 9:00am – Adult Sunday School
- 10:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 10:30am – Worship Service with Communion

#### Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>

- 6:20pm – Elders Meeting

#### Sunday, May 17<sup>th</sup>

- 9:00am – Children's Sunday School
  - 9:00am – Adult Sunday School
  - 10:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
  - 10:30am – Worship Service with Communion
-

3-minute



## Private Confession

One of the quieter treasures of Lutheran Christianity is the practice of private confession and absolution. For many Christians today, the very idea sounds intimidating or unnecessary. “Why confess to a pastor,” some ask, “when I can confess directly to God?” Lutherans gladly affirm that we *can* and *should* confess our sins directly to God in daily prayer. Yet private confession offers something deeply personal and comforting: the certainty of hearing Christ’s forgiveness spoken directly into our ears.

In John 20, the risen Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.” Christ gave His Church the authority not merely to *talk about* forgiveness, but to actually deliver it in His name. In private confession, the pastor is not acting on his own authority or curiosity. He stands as a servant of Christ, speaking the Gospel personally to a burdened sinner: “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

There is great spiritual benefit in that moment. Sin thrives in secrecy, denial, and excuses. Confession brings sin into the light where Christ deals with it honestly and completely. Many Christians carry hidden guilt, shame, or spiritual anxiety for years, wondering if God could really forgive *that* sin. Private absolution answers those fears not with vague feelings, but with Christ’s concrete promise.

Martin Luther once wrote that when he heard absolution, he heard it “as from God Himself.” That is the heart of the practice. Private confession is not about embarrassment or punishment; it is about freedom. The pastor is also bound by strict confidentiality, never revealing confessed sins. The focus is not on the greatness of the sin, but on the greatness of the Savior.

Sadly, many misconceptions surround private confession. Some imagine it as a harsh interrogation, a relic of medieval legalism, or something reserved only for “serious” sinners. But in Lutheran practice, private confession is entirely Gospel-centered. No Christian is forced into it, no price is paid for forgiveness, and no list of works must be completed to earn God’s mercy. Instead, it is a voluntary gift for troubled consciences—a personal opportunity to hear Christ’s forgiveness spoken clearly and individually.

Far from competing with the Gospel, private confession is one of the most beautiful ways the Gospel is delivered: sinner to Savior, burden to peace, death to life!