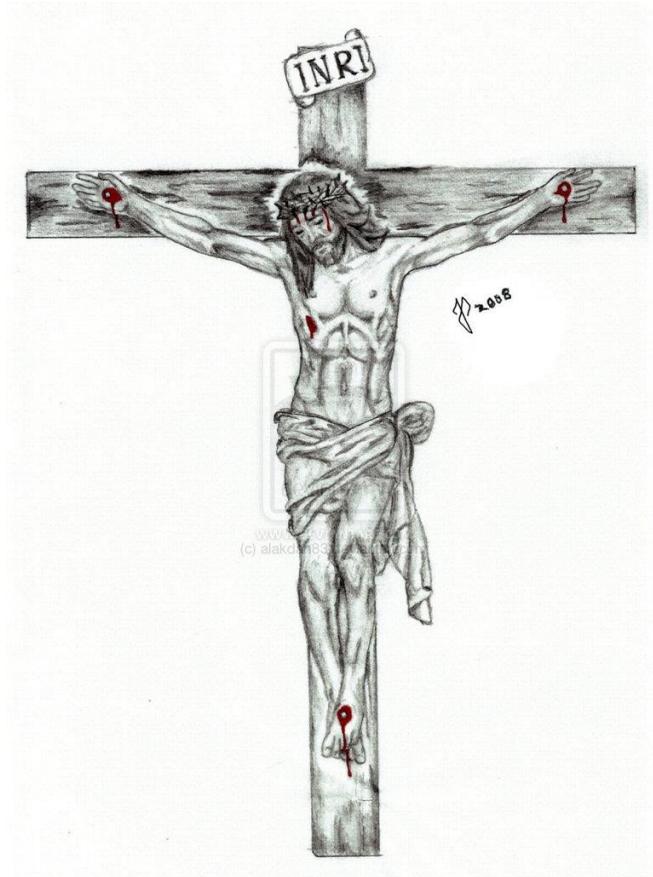


Let Us Fix Our Eyes on Jesus:

A Look at Jesus' Life through the Stained Glass Windows of
St. John's



A Devotional Journey

Instructions

Since the time of the Early Church, houses of worship have offered many things that serve to communicate the Gospel of Christ. Certainly the Word of God and the Sacraments are the primary vehicle which God uses to work faith in us. However, other items that engage our senses are also useful, such as statues and windows depicting the things of faith, incense which connects us to the resurrected life, paraments which, through the various colors, help guide us through the seasons of the Church Year, candles and vestments, and many of the other things you see in churches.

In the time of the Reformation, Luther wanted to emphasize that these other forms of communicating the Gospel were good, but they should not detract from the Gospel itself. We do not worship the items, but they are useful in bringing Christ to our ears, eyes, and other senses. Thus, Luther encouraged the use of these images, especially for the uneducated so that they would have the means by which to learn the things of the faith, especially the life of Christ.

This booklet is intended for use as a devotional tool to help guide you through the life of Christ as depicted in the beautiful windows of St. John's. If you would like, you may move around the sanctuary as you work your way through it, looking at each window, reading the Scriptures and considering them through the meditative piece, singing a hymn and praying. Take the time to look at the beauty of the windows, but also take the time to consider the Word and its meaning for you as a child of God. That, ultimately, is what these windows are here for – to connect us to Christ and his life, which he led so that we may be saved. All of these events, all of Jesus' teachings, and all of Jesus' promises are for you, that you would not be weighed down by your sin, but in the knowledge of forgiveness, be free from burden and filled with the hope of new life.

My prayer is that this devotional will be a blessing for you, and that your life may be filled with hope and joy as you hear again the sacred story of our salvation in Christ. *Therefore...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to 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* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Reverend Brian Noack
Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church
28 August A+D 2012

The Annunciation

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Meditation

Had she not believed, she could not have conceived. She held fast to the word of the angel because she had become a new creature. Even so must we be transformed and renewed in heart from day to day. Otherwise Christ is born in vain. This is the word of the prophet: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isaiah 9:6). This is for us the hardest point, not so much to believe that He is the son of the virgin and God himself, as to believe that this Son of God is ours. That is where we wilt, but he who does feel it has become another man. Truly it is marvelous in our eyes that God should place a little child in the lap of a virgin and that all our blessedness should lie in him. And this Child belongs to all mankind. God feeds the whole world through a Babe nursing at Mary's breast. This must be our daily exercise: to be transformed into Christ, being nourished by this food. Then will the heart be suffused with all joy and will be strong and confident against every assault. ~ Martin Luther

Hymn Stanza

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
“Most highly favored lady.” Gloria! (LSB #356, st. 4)

Collect

O Lord, as we have known the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the message of the angel to the virgin Mary, so by the message of His cross and passion bring us to the glory of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Nativity

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Meditation

It is Christmas. Have you found the way to Bethlehem? It is important to make straight the pathway of the Lord into your hearts. That duty is now done. Now take your pilgrim-staff and your gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. You will not have to stop off at Jerusalem to inquire the way. The altar is your Star. There you will find Bethlehem. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Indeed, “bread of life,” “staff of life.” You will come, then, as the shepherds came. You will kneel as they did in adoration. And if your vision of faith is clear enough, you will see at the Altar not merely bread and wine, but the Christ-Child, the Word made flesh. After Christmas? You will do the same as did the Wise Men. They went home by another way, not by way of Jerusalem. You will go another way, the way of the new life. And with the shepherds you will also make

known abroad all that you have seen and realized. The confession – “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man,” will be more than a vague truth, more than an historical event. Christmas will be an experience. You will truly understand the truth of the angelic words: “They shall call His Name Immanuel, which is being interpreted, God with us,” aye, Immanuel – at the Altar. ~ Berthold von Schenk

Hymn Stanza

Oh, that birth forever blessed,
When the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe, the world’s Redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face
Evermore and evermore. (LSB # 384, st. 2)

Collect

Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Flight into Egypt

Reading: 2:13-15

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Meditation

Was it Herod seeking the child, or the devil working through Herod? When Herod saw the magi for himself, he imagined in his fantasy that they had fled their governors. For Christ, though bound in swaddling clothes, though busy at his mother’s breast, though

keeping quiet, concealing his words, unable to walk, nevertheless transformed the magi (who had been standard-bearers of the devil) into his most faithful servants. The devil instantly realized what Christ could do when he came of age. So he spurred the Jews against him and, clever contriver that he was, impelled Herod that he might get the jump on Christ in his infancy. He hoped to deprive him of the coming emblem of his virtue, the cross, the banner of the greatest victory for us. The devil perceived that Christ would soon be restoring life to all the world with his teaching and his virtue. Even while still whimpering as a baby, Jesus was taking possession of this world from top to bottom. It was as the prophet said: “Before the child knows to cry to his father and mother he shall take the pride of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria.” The Jews themselves attest to this when they say, “You see how the whole world hastens after him.” ~ Peter Chrysologus

Hymn Stanza

All idols then shall perish
And Satan’s lying cease,
And Christ shall raise His scepter,
Decreeing endless peace.
Proclaim the Savior’s birth:
“To God on high be glory
And peace to all the earth!” (LSB #383, st. 5)

Collect

O God, our Maker and Redeemer, You wonderfully created us and in the incarnation of Your Son yet more wondrously restored our human nature. Grant that we may ever be alive in Him who made Himself to be like us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Reading: Luke 2:41-52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³ And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴ but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵ and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹ 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. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Meditation

How does he who is Wisdom receive understanding? "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men." This means not so much that the Son was instructed by the Father but that his human nature was instructed by his own divinity. There is the seer's prophecy of him who blossomed from the root of Jesse, "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and understanding." ~ Jerome

Hymn Stanza

Within the Father's house
The Son has found His home,
And to His temple suddenly
The Lord of life has come. (LSB #410, st. 1)

Collect

Almighty God, You have poured into our hearts the true Light of Your incarnate Word. Grant that this Light may shine forth in our lives; through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Baptism of Jesus

Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And 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; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Meditation

Many raise the question, What in fact was the nature of this baptism with which the Lord was baptized? What did it amount to, the baptism of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who, for the sake of the salvation of all, became human? As such he was to show himself to be the beginning of a certain paradoxical life on account of which he is called Adam, since for Adam's sake and for the rest of those who have arisen from Adam he becomes the beginning of everlasting life, in the same way that Adam was the original of this temporal and mortal life. This Jesus, I say, recapitulated in himself everything that pertains to our salvation. For just as he both died and rose again, we also shall do so, in the same way. Since necessarily we were to be symbolically transferred from this present life by baptism and settled in that life which is to come, he saw to it that this baptism should be fulfilled first of all in himself. In his providential dispensation of things, he had received, before all others, this baptism of adoption which is by water and the Spirit. He thereby showed this baptism to be great and honorable, in that he himself, first of all, truly accepted it. Moreover, he himself identified himself with that part of society that was outside the law of grace, in which we also take part. For it was fitting that the Lord, in humility of spirit, should become subject both to the prophet and Baptist, like a common person from among the people. He was baptized that he might hallow the waters and bestow upon us, through the basin, regeneration and adoption and remission of sins and all the other blessings that came to us through baptism, prefiguring them in himself. As God, however, he is the One “who takes away the sin of the world,” and as such he has no need of baptism. ~ Theodore of Mopsuesta

Hymn Stanza

Jesus once with sinners numbered,
Full obedience was Your path;
You, by death, have consecrated
Water in this saving bath:
Dying to the sin of Adam,
Rising to a life of grace;
We are counted with the righteous,
Over us the cross You trace. (LSB #404, st. 4)

Collect

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Wedding at Cana

Reading: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Meditation

Water into wine, and wine of the highest quality: it was a miracle. But when you come right down to it, this wasn't much of a miracle, as miracles go. Jesus certainly performed many other miracles that seem to have been more important. Running out of wine at a wedding party just doesn't seem to be the end of the world, after all. Yet there is comfort in the fact that Jesus chose to reveal his extraordinary power for the very first time in a very ordinary situation. There comes a time for each of us, after all, when the wine runs out. Our problems are not necessarily earth-shaking events or matters of life and death. Once in a while, as we juggle all of our responsibilities, life starts to unravel, and our neat little world starts coming unglued. Like the time the wine ran out at Cana. Mary knew what to do. She went to her son. What he was going to do, she had no idea. But he would do something; she was absolutely convinced. I wonder if we have that kind of confidence, to bring our most common and ordinary frustrations and lay them before the Lord in utter simplicity. What do you do when the wine runs out in your life? Complain? Fret? Or do you turn to the One who can do something about it? Mary told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." She knew Jesus well enough to know that whatever he commands is right. Whatever he says is true. It's no different today than it was in Cana. Jesus speaks his Word. And we do whatever he tells us. Come what may; in thick or thin; for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; he has pledged us his faithfulness. He will never part from us. His love surrounds us; his compassion supports us. Like the wine in Cana, his gift, his miracle, is the best. And he saves the best for last. On the Last Day, he will raise us all from our graves and give everyone who believes in him the life that has no end. And that will be the best of all! ~ Harold Senkbiel

Hymn Stanza

But Christ, the Word made flesh,
Bids water turn to wine.
He fills our empty cups again
With grace and truth divine. (LSB #408, st. 3)

Collect

We thank Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, that Thou didst hallow and adorn the holy estate of matrimony by Thy presence, and we humbly beseech Thee that Thou wouldst continually serve and bless this holy ordinance, protect us from impurity and offenses, and evermore dwell in all Christian homes, relieving all their necessities in Thine own good time, O Thou, true God and faithful Friend of men, who, having power over all things, livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Jesus Calls His Disciples

Reading: Matthew 4:18-22

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Meditation

I owned a little boat a while ago
And sailed a Morning Sea without fear,
And whither any breeze might fairly blow
I'd steer the little craft afar or near.
Mine was the boat, and mine the air, and mine the Sea,
not mine, a care...

One day there passed along the silent shore,
While my net was casting the Sea,
A man, who spoke as never man before;
I followed Him, - new life begun in me.
Mine was the boat, but His the voice, and His the call,
yet mine, the choice...

Once from His boat he taught the curious throng,
Then bade me let down nets out in the Sea;
I murmured, but obeyed, nor was it long
Before the catch amazed and humbled me.
His was the boat, and His the skill, and His the catch
and His, my will.

~ James A. Richards

Hymn Stanza

O Christ who called the Twelve
To rise and follow You,
Forsaking old, familiar ways
For ventures bold and new:
Grant us to hear Your call
To risk security
And, bound in heart and will to You,
Find perfect liberty. (LSB #856, st. 1)

Collect

Lord God, You have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus Blesses the Children

Reading: Mark 10:13-16

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Meditation

Why does he say that children are fit for the kingdom of heaven? Perhaps it is because they do not know spitefulness, have not learned to deceive, dare not strike back, neglect to search for wealth, and do not work after honor and ambition...Childhood is not meant, but rather goodness rivaling childlike simplicity. It is not a virtue to be unable to sin, but to be unwilling to do so and to retain perseverance of will, so that the will imitates childhood and the person imitates nature. ~ Ambrose

Hymn Stanza

Children of the heav'nly Father
Safely to his bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given. (LSB #725, st. 1)

Collect

Gracious Father, Your Son grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and all people. Bless, guide, and govern the children and young people of Your Church by Your Holy Spirit, that they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Your Word. Grant that they may serve You well and usefully, developing their talents not for their own sakes but to Your glory and for the welfare of the neighbor. Protect and defend them from all danger and harm, giving Your holy angels charge over them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Parable of the Sower

Reading: Matthew 1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear." ...¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³As for what was sown

on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Meditation

But why would it be reasonable to sow among thorns or on rocks or on the pathway? With regard to the seeds and the earth it cannot sound very reasonable. But in the case of human souls and their instructions, it is praiseworthy and greatly to be honored. For the farmer might be laughed at for doing this, since it is impossible for rock to bear fruit. It is not likely that the path will become anything but a path or the thorns anything but thorns. But with respect to the rational soul, this is not so predictable. For here there is such a thing as the rock changing and becoming rich land. Here it is possible that the wayside might no longer be trampled upon or lie open to all who pass by but that it may become a fertile field. In the case of the soul, the thorns may be destroyed and the seed enjoy full security. For had it been impossible, this sower would not have sown. And if the reversal did not take place in all, this is no fault of the sower but of the souls who are unwilling to be changed. He has done his part. If they betrayed what they received of him, he is blameless, the exhibitor of such love to humanity. ~ John Chrysotom

Hymn Stanza

Here Thy praise is gladly chanted;
Here Thy seed is duly sown.
Let my soul, where it is planted,
Bring forth precious sheaves alone,
So that all I hear may be
Fruitful unto life in me. (LSB #901, st. 3)

Collect

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Reading: Luke 10:25-37

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Meditation

Christian soul, brought to life again out of the heaviness of death, redeemed and set free from wretched servitude by the blood of God, rouse yourself and remember that you are risen, realize that you have been redeemed and set free. Consider again the strength of your salvation and where it is found. Meditate upon it, delight in the contemplation of it. Shake off your lethargy and set your mind to thinking over these things. Taste the goodness of your Redeemer, be on fire with love for your Saviour. Chew the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavor which is sweeter than sap, swallow their wholesome sweetness. Chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Be glad to chew, be thankful to suck, rejoice to swallow. What then is the strength and power of your salvation and where is it found? Christ has brought you back to life. He is the good Samaritan who healed you. He is the good friend who redeemed you and set you free by laying down his life for you. Christ did all this. So the strength of your salvation is the strength of Christ. ~ Anselm

Hymn Stanza

Ev'ry wound that pains or grieves me
By Your wounds, Lord, is made whole;
When I'm faint, your cross revives me,
Granting new life to my soul.
Yes, Your comfort renders sweet
Ev'ry bitter cup I meet
For Your all-atoning passion
Has procured my soul's salvation. (LSB #421, st. 4)

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

The Good Shepherd

Reading: John 10:1-18

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”
⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to

my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Meditation

Christ recognizes us as his sheep, and we recognize him as our shepherd. Now we have heard what a good shepherd is, and also who the weak sheep are. He knows us to be such sheep as are weak, sick and broken. That is: It does not make any difference in his regard for them that they are weak and sickly, and he does not despise and reject them on that account; but he pities and heals them, even though they be so diseased that the whole world concludes they are not his sheep. Such is the world’s knowledge, but that is not the way that Christ distinguishes them. He does not look upon their condition, but looks to see whether they are sheep, whether they may be designated sheep. He looks at the sheep, not at the wool...And thus [Christ says] I know my sheep and am known of them. They know that I am the good shepherd and know me; and therefore they come to me and abide with me, and they are not afraid because they are weak and sick, for they know that I will receive such sheep. ~ Martin Luther.

Hymn Stanza

The King of Love, my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And He is mine forever. (LSB #709, st. 1)

Collect

Almighty God, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know him who calls us each by name and follow where he leads; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

Reading: John 12:12-19

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

¹⁵ "Fear not, daughter of Zion;

behold, your king is coming,

sitting on a donkey's colt!"

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Meditation

O Savior, all came with palms on the occasion of Thy arrival, crying out, "Hosanna" to Thee, Now all of us bring hymns to Thee out of piteous mouths, As we wave the branches of our spirit and cry out: "O Thou, truly among those on high, save the world which Thou hast created, Lord, And blot out our sins, just as formerly Thou hast dried The tears of Mary and Martha." O Lover of man, the holy church holds a high festival, faithfully calling together her children; It meets Thee with palms and spreads out garments of joy So that with Thy disciples and with Thy friend, Thou mayest advance and legislate a deep peace for Thy servants, And release them from oppression, as formerly Thou hast checked The tears of Mary and Martha. Incline Thy ear, O God of the universe, and hear our prayers, and snatch us from the bonds of death...Let us who are dead because of our sins and who dwell in the tomb because of our knowledge of evil imitate The sisters of faithful Lazarus as we cry to Christ with tears, in faith and in love: "Save us, Thou who didst will to become man. And resurrect us from the tomb of our sins, Thou, alone immortal." ~ Romanus Melodus

Hymn Stanza

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow Thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, Thy pow'r and reign. (LSB #441, st. 5)

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

Reading: Luke 22:39-46

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Meditation

"If it is possible, let this chalice pass from me." He knew that he was going to rise on the third day, but he also knew in advance the scandal of his disciples, the denial of Simon, the suicide of Judas, the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel. "If it is possible, let the chalice pass from me," he said. He knew what he was saying to his Father and was well aware that this chalice could pass from him. He had come to drink it for everyone, in order to cancel, through this chalice, everyone's debt, a debt that the prophets and martyrs could not pay with their death. ~ Cyril of Alexandria

Hymn Stanza

Go to dark Gethsemane
All who feel the tempter's pow'r;
Your Redeemer's conflict see,
Watch with Him one single hour;
Turn not from His griefs away;
Learn from Jesus Christ to pray. (LSB #436, st. 1)

Collect

Almighty God, grant that in the midst of our failures and weaknesses we may be restored through the passion and intercession of Your only begotten Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Crucifixion (Good Friday)

Reading: John 19:16b-30

So they took Jesus,¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things,²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Meditation

From beginning to end and every step along the way, the work of atonement is the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even as he penetrates to the heart of darkness, Jesus is not abandoned by the light. He was always on a mission, from the Father to the Father. And his penetrating to the heart of darkness means that nobody, absolutely nobody, is alone in the heart of darkness. Christ has been there; Christ is there. From the cross point of history the word goes out that those who think they are abandoned by God are in fact not abandoned. We can despair of God, but he never despairs of us. We can turn our back on God, but he never turns his back upon us. Never! There is absolutely nobody seated on the long mourner’s bench of the eternal pity who is in a place where Jesus has not been before, where he is not now. This is what it means to find ourselves at the foot of the cross, which is the alternative to the muzzle of the gun and every other act of despair. Repeatedly Jesus says we are to take up our cross and follow him. However hesitatingly, we can dare to do so because his cross is our cross, our suffering is his suffering, his victory is our victory. We take up our cross and discover that he is already there, bearing it with us, bearing it for us. From before the foundation of the world to the end of time. Again, Julian of Norwich understood that when she said, “All shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of thing shall be well.” In the sacrifice of the cross, all is endured and all is redeemed. For all that ever was wrong, is wrong, and will be wrong, the price has been paid. Beyond our capacity to understand or explain, justice has been done, and justice was done by love, because the justice of God is love, and that is because God is love. At the foot of the cross, faith discerns, through our tears, that nothing is left unattended, nothing unknown, nothing unloved, nothing unredeemed. Atonement. The Great Thing, the thing that had to be done or else nothing could be done, has been done. On a certain Friday afternoon at about three o’clock, when the children were going home from school, when the Lamb of God cried, “It is finished.” Let me not love thee, if I love thee not now. Let me not trust thee, if I trust thee not in this. Atlas, foolish and failed, kneels to venerate the wood of the cross, on which hangs our every hope, by which all that we must and cannot do has been done. Let me not love thee, if I love thee not now. Let me not trust thee, if I trust thee not in this. How strange that in this end should be our beginning. *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, Miserere nobis* [Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy]. ~ Richard John Neuhaus

Hymn Stanza

Upon the cross extended
See, world, your Lord suspended.
Your Savior yields His breath.
The Prince of Life from heaven
Himself has freely given
To shame and blows and bitter death. (LSB #453, st. 1)

Collect

Almighty God, graciously behold this Your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of sinful men to suffer death upon the cross; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Resurrection of our Lord

Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he^[a] lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

Meditation

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:57). What does that mean? There Paul speaks of a wonderful war. This victory has come to us through Christ, and if we have the victory, we can win the war. The devil has sought to destroy Christ and has incited the Jews. They contrived by craft

to take the Lord. He had done many miracles, but on the cross he was weak. Others he had helped, himself he could not help. He became a sham and they mocked his words, saying, "He has made himself to be the Son of God." Then the people turned away from him. He had predicted that he would come again. For that reason the grave was securely guarded and his enemies supposed that Christ was entirely destroyed, but then arose the goodness of God and confounded the wiles of the devil, for the Divine majesty could not connive with all this. God summoned the devil. "Satan," he said, "you have done all the ill you could to me, but I am still alive." This is the miracle which God showed in the person of Christ. He was eternal life. Blessing and righteousness now fought against curse and death. Temporal death is now nothing against eternal life. It is as if you should try to contain the sea in a little vessel. Paul said not that Christ had overcome sin but that he had swallowed up sin (I Corinthians 15:57). Hosea said, "Death, I will be thy death" (Hosea 13:14). This is a fine word, to be the death of death. This victory is given through the gospel, as Paul said (I Corinthians 15:57). If only I believe that Christ won this victory not for himself but that we may be saved and may be lords of all creatures, not for our sakes, but for the Lord! Just as Christ won the victory only through struggle, so also must we. If his resurrection is to work in us, we too cannot escape the struggle with death. God has permitted the old man to be at hand. The resurrection lays hold and says that whatever is of us is nothing, and I believe that when the resurrection begins to work in me, then sin and the bad conscience are dead with Christ. But from this follows that the body must die. I feel sin and death in me. The body delights in sin and fears death, and this war we must carry on so long as we live. The Lord assails us with many sufferings. Death assaults me, but I have Christ who is risen from the dead, as I also shall rise. I will hold to this. The resurrection consists not in words, but in life and power. The heart should take inward delight in this and be joyful. Outwardly, I must die as Christ died, but the gospel is a jubilant word, which the flesh hears gladly. Yet, it has no effect unless we feel it both inwardly, as well as outwardly. ~ Martin Luther

Hymn Stanza

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home,
That I may die un-fearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend
And I will praise Thee without end. (LSB #708, st. 3)

Collect

Almighty God, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. We humbly pray that we may live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Ascension

Reading: Acts 1:6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Meditation

Today Jesus Christ our Lord went up to heaven: let our hearts go up with him. Listen to the words of St. Paul: “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.” Just as he ascended without leaving us, so too we are already with him in heaven, although his promises have not yet been fulfilled in our bodies. Christ is now raised above the heavens; but he still experiences on earth whatever sufferings we his members feel. He showed that this is true when he called out from heaven: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And: “I was thirsty and you gave me drink.” Why then do we not exert ourselves on earth so as to be happy with him already in heaven through the faith, hope and charity which unite us with him? Christ, while in heaven, is also with us; and we, while on earth, are also with him. He is with us in his godhead and his power and his love; and we, though we cannot be with him in godhead as he is with us, can be with him in our love, our love for him. He did not leave heaven when he came down to us from heaven; and he did not leave us when he ascended to heaven again. His own words show that he was in heaven while he was here: “No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” He said this because of the unity between us and himself, for he is our head and we are his body. The words “no one but he” are true, since we are Christ, in the sense that he is the Son of man because of us, and we are the children of God because of him. For this reason Saint Paul says: “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is also with Christ.” He does not say, “so it is with Christ,” but, “so it is also with Christ.” So Christ is many members, but one body. He came down from heaven, then, in mercy; and it is he alone who has ascended, since we are in him through grace. This is why no one has descended but Christ, and no one but Christ has ascended” not that the dignity of the head is fused with the body but that the body in its unity is not separated from its head. ~ Augustine

Hymn Stanza

Up through endless ranks of angels,
Cries of triumph in His ears,
To His heav'nly throne ascending,
Having vanquished all their fears,
Christ looks down upon His faithful,
Leaving them in happy tears. (LSB #491, st. 1)

Collect

Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Second Coming (The Rose Window)

Reading: Revelation 22:12-21

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

¹⁸ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Meditation

When I come before the judgment throne, I will plead the promise of God in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. I will not plead any work that I have done, although I will thank God that he has enabled me to do some good. I will plead no merits other than the merits of Christ, knowing that the merits of Mary and the saints are all from him; and for their company, their example, and their prayers throughout my earthly life I will give everlasting thanks. I will not plead that I had faith, for sometimes I was unsure of my faith, and in any event, that would be to turn faith into a meritorious work of my own. I will not plead that I held the correct understanding of “justification by faith alone,”

although I will thank God that he led me to know ever more fully the great truth that much misunderstood formulation was intended to protect. Whatever little growth in holiness I have experienced, whatever strength I have received from the company of saints, whatever understanding I have attained of God and his ways – these and all other gifts received I will bring gratefully to the throne. But in seeking entry to that heavenly kingdom, I will...look to Christ and Christ alone. ~ Richard John Neuhaus

Hymn Stanza

Now let all the heav'ns adore Thee,
Let saints and angels sing before Thee
With harp and cymbals' clearest tone.
Of one pearl each shining portal,
Where, joining with the choir immortal,
We gather round Thy radiant throne.
No eye has seen the light,
No ear has heard the might
Of Thy glory;
Therefore will we
Eternally
Sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee! (LSB #516, st. 3)

Collect

Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

