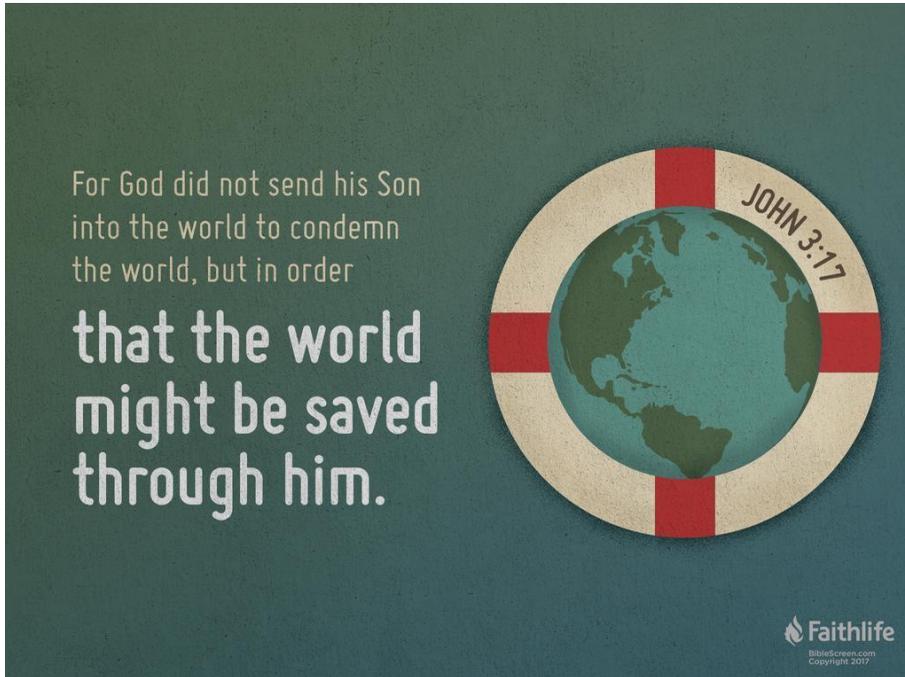


The Lutheran Church of the Covenant

“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



*Second Sunday in Lent
March 5, 2023*



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



We welcome you to worship here at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant! Here are a few notes to make you feel more at home as we praise this God of new life together!

- Bulletins and Communion (wheat or gluten-free wafers, wine or grape juice options) are available to be picked up at the back of the sanctuary. Portions marked with * are when we invite you to stand as you are able to do so.
- We encourage you to participate throughout the worship by speaking the **bold** print and singing along with the hymns!
- There will not be a separate time for an offering, so a basket is placed in the back for those who wish to support our local ministry as well as the wider church.
- We will commune from our respective seats, where the presiding minister will invite you to open your respective cups with the Communion elements. We believe this meal is for everyone who wishes to partake, regardless of church affiliation or lack thereof. This tangible gift of God's love is meant for the world to enjoy!

Our Worship Leaders & Staff

Ministers
Presiding Minister
Organist
Lector
Parish Administrator
Custodian

All People
The Rev. Bradley Ross
Aaron Carter-Enyi, CAGO

Jennifer Lasher-Dobush
Vince Besednjak

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First Sunday in Lent

In today's gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of water and Spirit. At the font, we are given a new birth as children of God. As God made a covenant with Abraham, in baptism, God promises to raise us up with Christ to new life. From worship, we are sent forth to proclaim God's love for all the world.

Prelude

Welcome & Greetings

*Confession and Forgiveness

As we take time to recognize our shortcomings before God, we forever cling to the grace and mercy that will always triumph in blessing us with hope and new life.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who journeys with us these forty days,
and sustains us with the gift of grace.

Amen!

Let us acknowledge before God and one another
our dependence on God's mercy.

Silence is kept for reflection.

**Holy God,
we confess to you our faults.
Too often we neglect and do not trust your loving word;
we take for ourselves instead of giving to others;
we spoil rather than steward your creation;
we cause hurt though you call us to heal;
we choose fear over compassion.
Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,
as we seek to follow in your way of new life.
Amen.**

Hear the good news:
God so loved the world that God gave the only Son,
so that all may receive life.
This promise is for you!
God embraces you with divine mercy,
✠ forgives you in Christ's name,
and revives you in the power of the Holy Spirit!
Amen!

*Gathering Hymn *Wash Oh God, Our Sons and Daughters*
ELW # 445

*Greeting

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! **And also with you.**

*Prayer of the Day

O God, our precious wisdom and steadfast guide, in the waters of baptism, you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your wonderful promises, that we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen!**

First Lesson

Genesis 12:1-4a

God's call of Abram and Sarai has a clear purpose—that through them all the families of the earth would gain a blessing. As they set out on their journey, they are accompanied by promises of land, nation, and a great reputation.

¹The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth

¹What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” ⁴Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

¹³For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Word of God, word of life! **Thanks be to God!**

*Gospel Acclamation *Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery*

ELW# 334

1 Tree of Life and awe - some mys - t'ry, in your
 death we are re - born; though you die in all of
 his - t'ry, still you rise with ev - 'ry morn, still you
 rise with ev - 'ry morn.

Lent 2

In our call to be a blessing,
may we be a blessing true;
may we live and die confessing
Christ as Lord of all we do.

(last line sung twice)

*Gospel

John 3:1-17

A curious Pharisee visits Jesus by night to learn from the teacher his friends reject. Jesus speaks to him about life in the Spirit and the kingdom of God.

The Gospel according to John, the 3rd chapter. **Glory to you, O Lord!**

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order

that the world might be saved through him.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord! **Praise to you, O Christ!**

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *God Loved the World*

ELW# 323

*Apostles Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ,
God’s 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 to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Prayers of Intercession

Sustained by God’s abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

O God, you so love your whole church. Raise up leaders who care for your people. Bless lay theologians, seminary and college professors, and all who are called to the ministry of teaching, that they form and inspire us for the work of the gospel. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your entire creation. Breathe new life into our planetary home. Guide the work of researchers, scientists, and activists who love your earth and who inspire us to care for the natural world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love the world. Uphold leaders who resist tyranny and oppression. Strengthen organizations that promote peace and harmony, including our local Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. Direct their work to alleviate human suffering and to address its root causes. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love all your people. Draw near to all who live with mental illness, depression, or addiction, and accompany them in healing and recovery. Hear the cries of those who look to you in their distress. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your saints. As our ancestors in the faith have been a blessing to us, so inspire us by their example of holy living to be a blessing to those who come after us. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen!**

*Sharing of the Peace

The peace of Christ be with you always!
And also with you.

Music Interlude

*Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. And al - so with you.

Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, loving and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ.

You call your people to renew their hearts
and prepare with joy for the victory of the tomb,
that, renewed in the gift of baptism,
we may come to the fullness of your grace.

And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might,
 heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.
 Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes
 in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

*Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy God, our living Water and our merciful Guide,
 together with rivers and seas, wells and springs
 we bless and magnify you!

You led your people Israel through the desert,
 and provided them water from the rock.
 We praise you for Christ, our Rock and our Water,
 who joined us in our desert,
 pouring out his life for the world.

In the night in which he was betrayed,
 our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
 broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
 Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
 Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore,
his life, death, and resurrection,
we await your fulfilled salvation for all this thirsty world.

Holy Spirit, pour out your strength on this holy food,
and on all gathered for this feast throughout the world:
wash away our sin,
that we may be revived for our journey by the love of Christ.

Through him all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,
both now and forever.

Amen!

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

*Invitation to Communion

Receive the gift of Christ for us all: life in abundance!
Thanks be to God!

Communion

Music Interlude

Prayer after Communion

Embodied God,
at your table, we have tasted the goodness of Jesus.
With the eyes of our hearts open to your promise,
empower us to hear the needs of our neighbors
and respond in the world with your boundless love.
Amen!

*Blessing

God, the giver of love,
✠ Christ, the resurrection and the life,
and the Holy Spirit of rebirth
bless you in this Lenten journey and forevermore!
Amen!

*Sending Hymn *How Firm a Foundation*
ELW #796

*Dismissal

Go in peace. Serve in love!
Thanks be to God!

Postlude

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Sheena Cameron, Joan Clarke, Christina Copeland, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Donna Franz, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Jane Gradert, Clare Hanusz, Alex Hohenstein, Dylan King, Elaine Knerem, Jason Lanese, Sara Mendes, Debbie Morris, Phyllis Nemeth, Gary Smith, Arlene Stoltz, Marie Storms, Tom Susaneck, Phyllis Welker, Maud Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family.

General Fund receipts for week ending 2/19/2023: \$1477



For all Wednesdays in March, at 6pm, you are invited to join us for soup suppers concluding with a short service, both downstairs in our fellowship hall. The worship will be based on a midweek Lent series of "Making Change," as a reminder of all the changes made in our lives (some beyond our control), the constant not only remains God, but God's steadfast love and grace. So, you are invited to join us for soup as well as the ultimate soul-soothing Gospel!

Lectionary Blog: A Light for the Journey

In the Northern Hemisphere, the days are getting longer, thank God! I drive all around the Midwest for the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, and my mornings are now brighter and, therefore, safer. In January and February, I often can't see where I'm driving without the brights on, especially in snow. But, in the words of one of my favorite hymns: "When morning gilds the sky ... may Jesus Christ be praised!"

Being able to see where we are going is safer and, when the view is nice, delightful. But that's not always our experience, is it? Especially in the wilderness places/experiences of our lives, we may not see where God is leading us. This week's lectionary passages have a couple examples of God, at least partially, illuminating the path forward.

In Genesis 12, God speaks in verse to Abra[ha]m (see "Note" below), telling him, "Get going!" (the verb "go" is geminated for intensity of the command) to a land that God would show him. There God would make of Abraham a great nation and a source of blessings and curses. Abraham, his wife, nephew and all those in their household set out for a new place. But what did they really know about their destination? What could they see of the road ahead?

This was, of course, not the first time that Abraham had been called to set out for a new land. His father, Terah, had set out for Canaan years prior, bringing his family with him for the journey. They made it as far as Haran, where they settled (Genesis 11:31). So Abraham has had a relatively recent experience in leaving all that he knows and setting out for Canaan. He's also had some recent experiences of getting sidetracked, which happens again. After a brief sojourn in the land, he, Sarah and their entourage traveled down to Egypt, with disastrous consequences.

The point of Abraham's journey by steps is that he didn't clearly see the way forward. Abraham knew he was going to be blessed by God and that he would be taken to a land not his own. But even Abraham had many questions along the way about how that would work out (Genesis 15:2-3; 17:17-18; 21:9-11). God showed him a little bit—a light at the end of the tunnel, if you will—and that was what Abraham pressed toward (Hebrews 11:8-10).

The writer of John's Gospel intentionally juxtaposes light and darkness, and their effects on human sight, to signal to the reader/hearer about the dynamics of the scene being described. Here, when Nicodemus meets Jesus, it is night. We are being told, if we have ears to hear, that the narrative which follows will concern hidden and difficult to see things. Later Nicodemus will defend Jesus (John 7:50-51) during the day (37). When Nicodemus came to prepare Jesus' crucified body for burial, John notes that he first came at night (John 19:39) but now comes during the day (31, 42). But this first meeting occurs in darkness, and it's difficult for Nicodemus to see the path forward (see "Another word" below).

Jesus points out that a person must be born again of water and of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus doesn't see how someone can be born again, much less born of the Spirit. Then Jesus hints at his own death. Just as Moses lifted up the Nehushtan in the wilderness, so the Human One must be lifted up—on a Roman cross. God's love for the world and desire to save people from our bondage to sin and death, rather than judge folks as we deserve, will accomplish salvation that Nicodemus just can't see fully, at least not yet.

Just beyond the lectionary reading, Jesus insists that he is the Light that has come to reveal all things (John 3:19-21). This is the main argument of John's Gospel: That in abiding with Jesus, we will see the true Light and be able to see all other things and people clearly by Jesus' light. The way forward in this life isn't always clear. We may never truly know where we are going. But the good news is that God is faithful on the journey, and Jesus himself, as the Word of God, is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105).

Note: When someone undergoes a major life transition, of the sort that Abraham and Sarah face in Genesis 17 and after, they frequently change names to mark their new bodily experience. The text of Genesis 12 uses "Abram" and "Sarai," but God insists that they will be called Abraham and Sarah, noting explicitly that Sarah "will no longer be called Sarai" (17:4, 15). I want to follow God and use the names that they came to be known by after they experienced embodied miracles that allowed them to be who God called them to be.

Another word: We must resist the racist association/mapping of folks with paler skin with “light” and folks with rich Black and Brown skin with “darkness.” If anything, simple biology and/or a little bit of travel shows that folks who live, or whose ancestors lived, in the presence of more sunlight have more melanin and browner skin tones, and those who live, or whose ancestors lived, in the presence of less sunlight/more darkness have paler skin, hair and eyes. Light and darkness in John have nothing to do with skin color but with perception of truth/relationship to Jesus. We should say so explicitly.

This Lectionary Blog, and other resources for the journey of faith, are available on LivingLutheran.org.



*Cory Driver is the assistant to the bishop for emerging ministers and ministries for the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. His book on wilderness spirituality, *Life Unsettled*, is available from Fortress Press.*

Images in the Readings

John’s language of “being born again” suggests the image of the **mother**. Historically, the church described itself as this mother and the font as the womb from which birth in God arises. Recently, also God is described as the mother who births a new creation. But birth is not easy, and Lent allows us forty days to re-envision that birth.

Abram’s immigration to the land of promise offers the image of the **journey**. Lent provides forty days for the annual journey back to the mystery of the resurrection and the new life to which we are called.

Paul’s language of justification assumes that God is a **judge** who requires of us a life of righteousness. That justification comes via faith does not eliminate the necessity for such a radical reorientation of the self before God. It is instructive to hold the image of judge next to that of the mother: each image nuances the other.

Born Again!

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3 (NIV)

Based on John 3:1-17 (NIV)

*New Life in
Christ*



U J O W H I D P E K A V N D Z
G K U T D L O V E D S N I T D
E N R R I B V A T C A A C E Z
T I F F N S A G R A H Y O A G
B D T L K H D A U B T L D C M
V H J G E I D I T V V W E H H
N K Q Y D S N N H Y G P M E M
B V N L H F H G B D S N U R H
B O R N O Q M R D R J L S S R
M O F S O N A Q C O A P I A A
W A T E R P N H H N M W J M B
F X S L I F E I R G E H C O B
J P H A R I S E E J S T I M I
M J E S U S T N I G H T I W B
F A I C Y E S P I R I T K P G

BIRTH	TRUTH	SPIRIT	NIGHT	JEWISH
PHARISEE	AGAIN	ETERNAL	MAN	RABBI
BORN	WORLD	KINGDOM	NICODEMUS	FLESH
JESUS	LOVED	TEACHER	LIFE	WATER