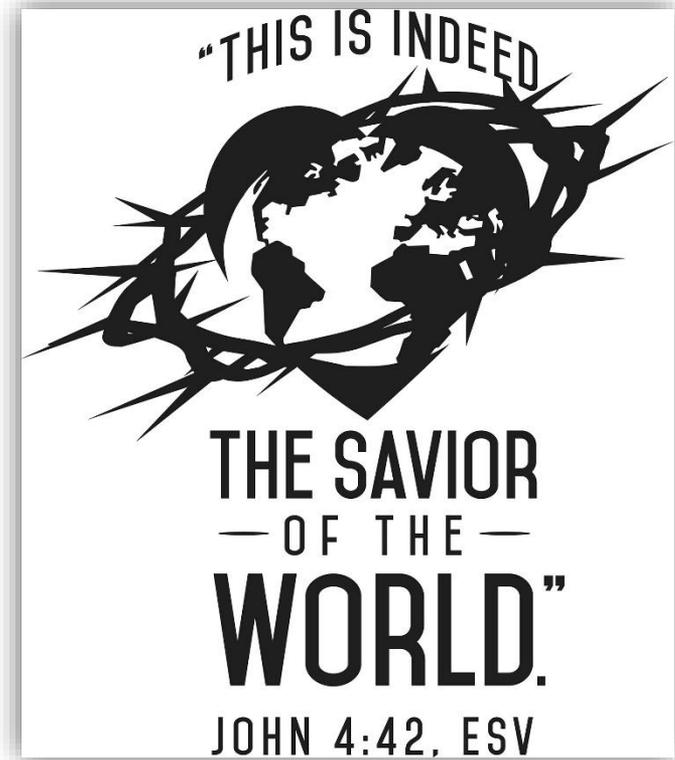


Messiah Lutheran Church

GATHER, EMPOWER, SERVE



✠ Holy Communion ✠

Third Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2026

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT



In today's gospel the Samaritan woman asks Jesus for water, an image of our thirst for God. Jesus offers living water, a sign of God's grace flowing from the waters of baptism. The early church used this gospel and those of the next two Sundays to deepen baptismal reflection during the final days of preparation before baptism at Easter. As we journey to the resurrection feast, Christ comes among us in word, bath, and meal—offering us the life-giving water of God's mercy and forgiveness.

GATHERING

PRELUDE

Stand

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who forgives all our sin,
whose mercy endures forever.

C: Amen

P: Let us confess our sin before God, who removes our guilt and blots out all offenses.

Kneel

P: Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For seeking worldly delights that deceive us and dishonor you:
Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For desiring self-reliance instead of hungering for your word:
Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For failing to recognize your coming reign, and for hindering the work of the Spirit: Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For drawing from the well of self-serving ambition, and for disdain
the living water Christ offers: Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For disregarding voices from the margin, and for distrusting signs of
your healing and hope in the world: Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: For dwelling in tombs of self-pity and discontent, and for disregarding
Christ's call to come forth to life: Gracious God,

C: have mercy on us according to your steadfast love.

P: God's steadfast love, grace, and forgiveness abound.
 Through faith, the free gift of God,
 you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ.
 In the name of † Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.
 The Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead
 dwells in you, pours God's love into your hearts,
 and gives you life and peace.

C: Amen

Stand

GATHERING HYMN *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty*



1 O - pen now thy gates of beau - ty, Zi - on, let me en - ter there,
 2 Gra - cious God, I come be - fore thee; come thou al - so un - to me;
 3 Here thy praise is glad - ly chant - ed, here thy seed is du - ly sown;
 4 Thou my faith in - crease and quick - en, let me keep thy gift di - vine;
 5 Speak, O God, and I will hear thee, let thy will be done in - deed;



where my soul in joy - ful du - ty waits for God who an - swers prayer.
 where we find thee and a - dore thee, there a heav'n on earth must be.
 let my soul, where it is plant - ed, bring forth pre - cious sheaves a - lone,
 how - so - e'er temp - ta - tions thick - en, may thy word still o'er me shine
 may I un - dis - turbed draw near thee while thou dost thy peo - ple feed.



Oh, how bless - ed is this place, filled with so - lace, light, and grace!
 To my heart, oh, en - ter thou, let it be thy tem - ple now!
 so that all I hear may be fruit - ful un - to life in me.
 as my guid - ing star through life, as my com - fort in all strife.
 Here of life the foun - tain flows; here is balm for all our woes.



APOSTOLIC GREETING

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

KYRIE



A In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.



A For the peace from a - bove, and for our sal - vation, let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



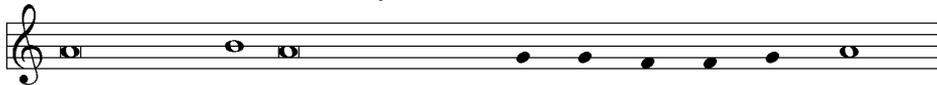
A For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,



and for the u - ni - ty of all, let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



A For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor - ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.



A Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord. **C** A - men

PRAYER OF THE DAY**P:** Let us pray.

Merciful God, the fountain of living water, you quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

Sit

WORD**FIRST READING: Exodus 17:1-7**

Because the thirsty Israelites quarreled with Moses and put God to the test, Moses cried out in desperation to God. God commanded Moses to strike the rock to provide water for the people. The doubt-filled question—"Is the LORD among us or not?"—received a very positive answer.

A: A Reading from Exodus:

¹ From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

A: The word of the Lord.**C:** Thanks be to God.

Psalm 95

The cantor sings the refrain; the congregation repeats it.



Let us shout for joy to the rock of our sal - va - tion.

Sung responsively between the cantor and congregation.



- 1 Come, let us sing | to the LORD;
let us shout for joy to the rock of | our salvation.
- 2 **Let us come before God's presence | with thanksgiving
and raise a loud shout to the | LORD with psalms.**
- 3 For you, LORD, | are a great God,
and a great ruler a- | bove all gods.
- 4 **In your hand are the caverns | of the earth;
the heights of the hills are | also yours.**
- 5 The sea is yours, | for you made it,
and your hands have molded | the dry land.
- 6 **Come, let us worship | and bow down,
let us kneel before the | LORD our maker. R**
- 7 For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the
sheep | of God's hand.
Oh, that today you would | hear God's voice!
- 8 **"Harden | not your hearts,
as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah | in the desert.**
- 9 There your ancestors | tested me,
they put me to the test, though they had | seen my works.
- 10 **Forty years I loathed that gener- | ation, saying,
'The heart of this people goes astray; they do not | know my ways.'**
- 11 Indeed I swore | in my anger,
'They shall never come | to my rest.'" **R**

SECOND READING: Romans 5:1-11

Though we often hear that God helps those who help themselves, here Paul tells us that through Jesus' death God helps utterly helpless sinners. Since we who had been enemies are reconciled to God in the cross, we now live in hope for our final salvation.

A: A Reading from Romans:

¹ Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

A: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Stand

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

☩ Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and mer - ci - ful,



slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

GOSPEL: John 4:5-42

Jesus defies convention to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. Her testimony, in turn, leads many others to faith.

P: The Holy Gospel according to St John, the fourth chapter.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

⁵ Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,'¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet."²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is

speaking to you.”

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” ³² But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³ So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” ³⁴ Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

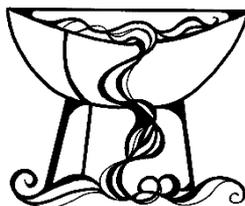
P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sit

SERMON..... Janet Stroble, ALWL

Stand



HYMN OF THE DAY***Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross***

1 Je - sus, keep me near the cross, there's a pre - cious foun - tain;
 2 Near the cross, a trem - bling soul, love and mer - cy found me;
 3 Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes be - fore me;
 4 Near the cross I'll watch and wait, hop - ing, trust - ing ev - er,

free to all, a heal - ing stream flows from Cal - v'ry's moun - tain.
 there the bright and morn - ing star sheds its beams a - round me.
 help me walk from day to day with its shad - ow o'er me.
 till I reach the gold - en strand just be - yond the riv - er.

Refrain

In the cross, in the cross be my glo - ry ev - er;

till my ran - somed soul shall find rest be - yond the riv - er.

Text: Fanny J. Crosby, 1820–1915

Music: NEAR THE CROSS, William H. Doane, 1832–1915

APOSTLES' CREED

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

**He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.**

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again 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

A brief silence is held after the introduction.

P: Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray
for the world and its needs.

After each petition:

P: Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

The prayers conclude:

P: Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and
salvation.

C: Amen

PEACE

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: And also with you.

The pastor and congregation greet one another in the name of the Lord.

Peace be with you. R: Peace be with you.

Sit

MEAL

OFFERING

The Offering is received as the Lord's table is prepared.

ANTHEM

Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley.....American Traditional

Stand

OFFERTORY

As the gifts are presented, the Offertory is sung

C Cre-ate in me a clean heart, O God, and re-new a right spir -
 it with-in me. Cast me not a-way from your pres-ence, and take
 not your Ho-ly Spir-it from me. Re-store to me the
 joy of your sal-va-tion, and up-hold me with your free Spir-it.

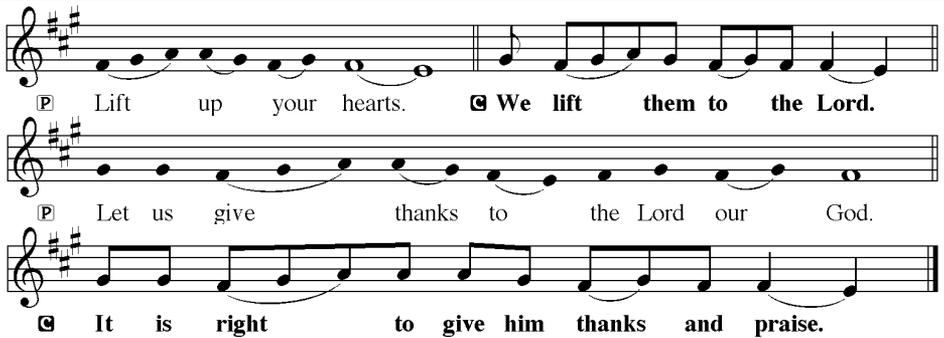
OFFERING PRAYER

A: Let us pray.

C: O God, maker of heaven and earth,
 your steadfast love embraces all creation.
 You send rain and sunshine to nourish the earth
 and bring forth its bounty.
 Through these gifts of bread and wine,
 draw us into the death and life of your Son,
 who calls us to bear witness to his saving work.
 We ask this in Jesus' name.
 Amen

GREAT THANKSGIVING

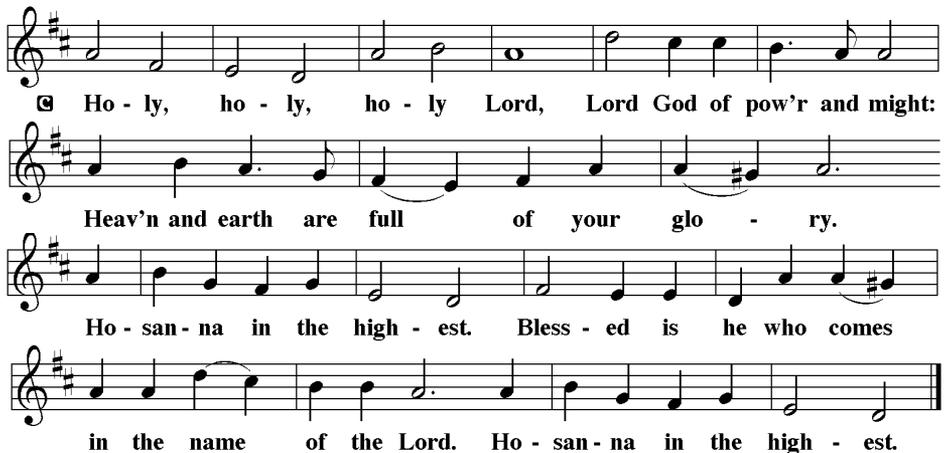
P The Lord be with you. **C** And al-so with you.



☐ Lift up your hearts. ☑ We lift them to the Lord.
 ☐ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
 ☑ It is right to give him thanks and praise.

PREFACE

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, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ; You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, 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.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

☐: Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord,
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.
 In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
 who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,
 who preached good news to the poor,
 and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

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 death, resurrection,
and ascension, we await his coming in glory.

Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord,
and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food,
the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord;
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honor and glory, now and forever.

C: Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P: Come to the table.

Feast on God’s goodness and mercy.

C: Thanks be to God.



C Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;



grant us peace, grant us peace.

Sit

COMMUNION

All baptized believers are invited to this holy meal. Those not communing are invited for a blessing. Please follow the instructions of the ushers to gather at the altar table. As the ministers give the bread and wine, they say these words to each communicant:

The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.

The communicant may say: Amen

COMMUNION HYMN

O Bread of Life from Heaven



1 O Bread of life from heav - en, O Food to pil-grims giv -
2 O Fount of grace re - deem - ing, O Riv - er ev - er stream -
3 We love you, Je - sus, ten - der, in all your hid - den splen -



en, O Man - na from a - bove: feed with the bless - ed sweet -
ing from Je - sus' wound - ed side: come now, your love be - stow -
dor with - in these means of grace. Oh, let the veil be riv -



ness of your di - vine com - plete - ness the souls that want and need your love.
 ing on thirst - ing souls, and flow - ing till all are ful - ly sat - is - fied.
 en, and our clear eye in heav - en be - hold your glo - ry face to face.

Text: Latin hymn, c. 1661; tr. Hugh T. Henry, 1862–1946, sts. 1, 3; Philip Schaff, 1819–1893, st. 2; alt.
 Music: O WELT, ICH MUSS DICH LASSEN, Heinrich Isaac, c. 1450–1517

Stand

P: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C: Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

A: Let us pray.

God of our salvation,
 we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls,
 reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey.
 Through the body and blood of your Son,
 may we become Christ’s body in the world,
 bearing witness to your love for all creation,
 through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: Amen

SENDING

BLESSING

P: Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity:
 God, who calls all things into existence,
 Jesus Christ, who redeems us,
 and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation,
 † bless you now and always.

C: Amen

SENDING HYMN *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me*

1 Rock of A - ges, cleft for me, let me hide my - self in thee;
 2 Not the la - bors of my hands can ful - fill thy law's de - mands;
 3 Noth - ing in my hand I bring; sim - ply to thy cross I cling.
 4 While I draw this fleet - ing breath, when mine eye - lids close in death,

let the wa - ter and the blood, from thy riv - en side which flowed,
 could my zeal no res - pite know, could my tears for - ev - er flow,
 Na - ked, come to thee for dress; help - less, look to thee for grace;
 when I soar to worlds un - known, see thee on thy judg - ment throne,

be of sin the dou - ble cure; cleanse me from its guilt and pow'r.
 all for sin could not a - tone; thou must save, and thou a - lone.
 foul, I to the foun - tain fly; wash me, Sav - ior, or I die.
 Rock of A - ges, cleft for me, let me hide my - self in thee.

Text: Augustus M. Toplady, 1740–1778
 Music: TOPLADY, Thomas Hastings, 1784–1872

DISMISSAL

A: Go in peace. Believe the good news.

C: Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

SERVICE ASSISTANTS

Ushers: Fred Harbaugh, Jean Nolan, Diana Rooker, Susan Christ, Greg Eckenrod; **Lay Asst:** Anita Bair; **Comm. Asst.:** Mary Schuhltz
Acolyte: Malory Klemick; **Altar Guild:** Vicki Bair, Doris Butt;
Greeters/Presenters: Kathy Stiber, Nicile Morris
Cantor: Carol Waltz; **Flower Delivery:** Paul Weaver

IN BLESSED MEMORY

The Altar Flowers are given to the Glory of God and in loving memory of loved ones.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome to Messiah Church! It is our joy to have you worship with us. If you are visiting, please make yourself known and leave your name & information to a congregation member. *We hope to see you again.*

This morning we welcome Janet Stroble, an Authorized Lay Worship Leader (ALWL) of the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Janet has received extensive training so as to provide worship leadership and preaching, and has been authorized by the bishop of the synod to preside at the Eucharist.

(continued)

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Mark your calendars! Saturday, March 14, from 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm, join us in Shaheen Hall for a **Meet and Greet**. This will give you an opportunity to meet with the candidate for Senior Pastor. Light refreshments will be served.

On Sunday, March 15, all members are invited to attend Worship and a special congregational meeting. A candidate for senior pastor will lead the worship service. **Your vote matters!** Immediately, following the service, we encourage all members to remain for a special congregational meeting to vote on extending an official call to this candidate. We look forward to seeing you on **Sunday, March 15, 2026**.

Saints in Song will lift our voices to sing praise to God during worship on Sunday, March 15th. If you like to sing, you are invited to join with the choir that day for an anthem that is easy to learn and is based on "Amazing Grace". Rehearsals will be after worship on March 8 and before worship on March 15 at 8:45. Please join us.

It's that time again ... time to kick off our annual Sew-a-Sack! We will gather in Shaheen Hall to sew the backpacks for the LWR School Kits on **Monday-Tuesday, March 16-17, 9 a.m.-2-ish p.m.** Lunch will be served. Don't sew? There are jobs for everyone – marking fabric, cutting, ironing seams, snipping off loose ends of thread, etc. You don't have to stay the whole time. **Come when you can ... leave when you must.** Please sign up in the narthex or call the office to let us know you are coming. **We hope you can join us!**

The Kids Lent Event will be held Saturday, March 21st from 9 - noon.

Registration forms can be found online or in the alleyway entrance. We are still in need of volunteers so if you are able and willing to help please contact me as soon as you can. Thank you in advance for your continued support of these wonderful outreach programs for the children in our communities.

Please join us Wednesday nights for our Lenten Vespers at 6:30 pm. We look forward to seeing you!

Copies of *Behold Your King!* a Lenten Devotional Booklet and Lenten Self-Denial Calendars & Banks are available in the Narthex,

Did you see the Sun-Gazette's front-page article about the art display at the THOMAS T. TABER MUSEUM to commemorate America's 250th Anniversary? Well, members and friends of Messiah have an opportunity to see these art-works and other exhibits on **SUNDAY, APRIL 26 (12:15-2:15 p.m.)** for just \$6.50 per person (instead of the usual \$9.50). Tickets will be available in the narthex on April 12 and 19.

Calling all pie makers!! If you like to bake, especially pies, please share your favorite pie with us at our **pie social**. The fellowship committee will be hosting a pie social on **March 29th**, immediately following worship and would love to see how many pies we can get. If you would be willing to make a pie for our social, please sign-up on the sheet in the Narthex. The fellowship committee will provide the beverages and cool whip; we just need the pies.

MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

JARED GIST, ORGANIST

324 South Howard Street | South Williamsport, PA 17702

(570) 326-9171 | www.messiahsouth.org

A New Thing Is Underway

“How can anyone be born after having grown old?” asks Nicodemus (John 3:4), articulating a question that we as the church continue to ask today. Change is hard. Transformation seems impossible. And yet, Jesus responds that in baptism we are made as new as if we had been born again, with a new heart able to perceive the reign of God. All things are possible with God!

Nicodemus is justifiably perplexed by this proclamation. We may resonate with his confusion as we look at the world around us and in the mirror before us, wondering if anything can ever truly change. Can the violence and suffering of war ever truly end? Can this broken relationship be mended? Can this illness be healed? Can hatred, oppression, and abuse be thwarted, transformed by the power of love? When we look around us, change may seem in short supply.

And yet, when we get curious, we may also become aware of signs of change, transformation, and rebirth emerging all around us. In northern regions, we can see the melting snow and first shoots of green from rousing plants, signaling the change from winter to spring. We can see mutual aid networks, community care efforts, and collective action emerge in response to social and political chaos. We can sense the tug of the Holy Spirit on our hearts, calling us toward deeper humility, compassion, and solidarity as we live in the hope of Christ.

The Lenten call—to set down what we can to attend more fully to God—draws us into a posture of curiosity that may deepen our awareness of the small but potent ways God’s kingdom is already breaking in all around us. “Do not be astonished,” says Jesus (v. 7); a new thing is underway.

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