



**Mission of the Cross
Lutheran Church-
LCMS**

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Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church is a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) serving people in the Brainerd Lakes area of Minnesota. We are a confessional and liturgical congregation called, gathered, and strengthened by Christ's Word and Sacraments. We are Biblical in doctrine and observe the historic liturgy of the Western Church which is notable for its dignity and reverence.



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The History and Origin of Epiphany and Its Season

The Epiphany of our Lord is celebrated by the Church on January 6th. The celebration is sometimes transferred to the following Sunday, as it is for us this year. However, the best practice is to celebrate it on its day just like we do with Christmas on December 25th. This highlights the importance of the feast and also leaves room for us to hear the readings assigned for the First Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord.

In the historic one-year lectionary of the Church the season of Epiphany may have up to six Sundays, concluding with the Transfiguration of our Lord. This year, because Easter is early, we will have a shorter Epiphany season and more Sundays after Trinity near the end of the church year.

Epiphany is one of the oldest days and seasons of the church year and immediately follows the Christmas season. The readings and hymns of the season emphasize themes of light and the appearance, manifestation, and revelation of God in the person of Jesus. In its oldest form the Epiphany was also called the Theophany of our Lord. A theophany is a visible manifestation of God to men like the burning bush (Exodus 3). The entire life of Christ is a theophany, but the readings throughout the season highlight some of the important events for our meditation.

Let's consider the shorter Epiphany season as it should be celebrated in 2024. First, at the feast of the Epiphany we hear about the Magi coming to worship Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12). The importance of this isn't just that they traveled so far or that they are powerful men in the eyes of the world, but that Jesus received their worship because he came to save not only the Jews, but the Gentiles as well. The Gospel lesson assigned for the First Sunday after the Epiphany shows us Jesus in the temple when he is 12 years old, learning and discussing the Scriptures (Luke 2:41-52). Mary and Joseph had been searching for him, but Jesus asked them, "Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?" On January 13th the Church celebrates the Baptism of Jesus and hears again the Father declare from heaven about Jesus, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:13-17). On the Second Sunday after Epiphany, we hear about Jesus' first miracle at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11). The miracle reveals not only the divinity of Jesus, but demonstrates his character, and the joy that sinners have in him. Then, the season of

Epiphany concludes with the Transfiguration of our Lord, where he shines bright on the mountain before turning his face to Jerusalem where he will go and die for the sins of the world (Matthew 17:1-9).

Liturgical Ceremonies for the Epiphany of our Lord

On pages 163-165 of his book, *Ceremony and Celebration*, Rev. Paul H. D. Lang writes about three additional ceremonies for the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord. In the Gospel reading we hear about the Magi coming to worship Jesus. At the words, “fell down and worshiped Him” a genuflection (bending of the knee) or a deep bow may be made.

Immediately after the Gospel reading an announcement of the moveable feasts and holy days for the year may be made. Most feasts are on the same date each year, but Easter isn't, so its date and others that move with it are announced. This helps orient us after Christmas for the rest of the church year and helps us begin to anticipate its feasts and plan for it. If we use the form provided by Rev. Lang and fill in the dates for 2024, the announcement reads, “Dearly beloved brethren, ye shall know that as we have rejoiced in the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, so there is announced to you by the mercy of God the joyous observance of the Resurrection of the same our Savior: January 28th is Septuagesima Sunday. On February 14th Ash Wednesday begins the most holy season of Lent. On March 31st we shall celebrate with great rejoicing the holy Easter Festival of our Lord Jesus Christ. May 9th is the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. May 19th is the Feast of Pentecost. December 1st is the First Sunday in the Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ to whom be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.”

The third ceremony detailed by Rev. Lang is the “Epiphany procession of the parish children to the manger or the altar, three of the children bearing gifts to the holy Child. These gifts, as those of the Magi, may be gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gift of gold might be gold jewelry or ornaments which can be sold or made into sacred vessels or it could be money to be given to foreign missions. Incense may be used in worship. Myrrh is sometimes used in hospitals for compounding medicine. This gift might be given to a local hospital as a work of mercy, or money for medical missions can be substituted.”

Silencing of the Alleluias

It seems too early with Christmas Day barely in the rear-view mirror, but the Church's preparation to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord will begin near the end of January with the silencing of the Alleluias. We might associate this with Lent, but historically the alleluias were silenced three Sundays before Ash Wednesday, which is January 28th this year. We will note this change the previous Sunday by singing the hymn *Alleluia, Song of Gladness* (LSB 417).

This hymn is perhaps the most bittersweet in our hymnal. When it is sung as the last hymn at the Transfiguration of our Lord it marks the end of the joyful Epiphany season and the turning of our faces towards Good Friday and the cross of our Lord. We will journey there with Jesus gradually in three steps. First, we have three Sundays sometimes called Pre-Lent or *Gesimatide*. These Sundays take on the character of Lent, but mildly. This season ends with Ash Wednesday, which is the beginning of Lent. The last two weeks of Lent are a sub-season called *Passiontide*.

The hymn *Alleluia, Song of Gladness* is bittersweet because it foreshadows the character of the coming seasons. The phrase “alleluia” is a joyous phrase that means, “Praise the Lord.” Yet, for a time, we will forgo the joyous character of alleluias in our Liturgy. This is because Gesimatide and Lent are seasons meant to order our hearts and minds upon not only the terrible cost of our Lord’s gracious sacrifice on our behalf, but also His willingness to be our Savior and to reconcile us to His Father. Thus, the third stanza teaches us,

“Alleluia cannot always
Be our song while here below;
Alleluia, our transgressions
Makes us for a while forgo;
For the solemn time is coming
When our tears for sin must flow.”

Our tears for sin flow as we begin a more intense focus on our sin and the cost Jesus paid to win our salvation. But the day is coming when alleluias will once again be songs upon our lips. Soon also is the day coming when our tears will be no more, sin will be no more, and death will be no more. Soon will come the day when we will sing, “*Alleluia, Jesus is Risen!*”

Gesimatide

The first stage of our liturgical preparation for Easter is called Gesimatide. These three Sundays before Lent are mainly focused on the grace of God and examine that grace from three perspectives:

Septuagesima (meaning “about 70 days”)—Grace is undeserved. The collect for this Sunday implores God to graciously hear us, who are justly punished for our sin, so that we may be delivered by His goodness. The goodness of God is emphasized in the parable of the vineyard workers in the day’s Gospel, Matthew 20:1-16. All the laborers receive the reward because of the goodness of the landowner and not because of their own labor or merit. We prepare for Easter by remembering that God is good and Christ has borne the heat and burden of the day for us so that we might have that goodness for free.

Sexagesima (meaning “about 60 days”)—Grace is passively received. In the collect for this Sunday we pray that God would see that we put not our trust in anything that we do and that He would mercifully defend us by His power. The parable of the sower is read as the Gospel from Luke 8:4-15. The seed of God’s Word is passively received. It transforms bad soil into good and noble hearts. We pray that this would happen also to and for us.

Quinquagesima (meaning “about 50 days”) —Grace is not easily understood. On the Sunday before Ash Wednesday we hear in the Gospel, Luke 18:34, Jesus predict His passion, death, and resurrection. We also hear that the disciples “understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.” We pray then that God would be gracious and patient with us and grant faith and understanding to us despite our many sins.

The three *Gesima* Sundays take on the character of Lent, but slightly. The “Alleluias” and Greater Gloria (Gloria in Excelsis) are dropped and the paraments and vestments are changed to violet. This grace-focused season provides a gradual progression and gentle easing into the more intense ceremonies and denials of Lent and Passiontide.

Schedule of Divine Liturgies for January

January 7	Epiphany of our Lord (observed)	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
January 14	Baptism of our Lord (observed)	9:30 p.m.	Divine Service
January 21	Transfiguration of our Lord	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
January 28	Septuagesima	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service

Birthdays, Baptisms, Confirmations, and Anniversaries

January 3	Bryson Berg	Birthday
January 4	Rhonda Trees	Birthday
January 7	Michael Berg	Baptism
January 13	Alyssa Blake	Birthday
January 13	Ruth Harmdierks	Birthday
January 14	Brady Bosaaen	Birthday
January 14	Elizabeth Erickson	Birthday
January 15	Rhonda Trees	Baptism
January 16	Phil Juracek	Birthday
January 18	Jeff Tobias	Birthday
January 19	Tiffany Bosaaen	Baptism
January 19	Mark Jabs	Birthday
January 23	Grace Werner	Baptism
January 23	Braxton Berg	Birthday
January 24	Miriam Traphagan	Birthday

35 for 35 Campaign

At our last voter's meeting we approved a \$35,000 fundraising campaign as we prepare to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church. The funds raised will be used to repair the parking lot and purchase new paraments, vestments, banners, communion vessels, a paschal candle, and processional crucifix that will match the large crucifix already in the sanctuary. We have already received \$12,500. You can see our progress and find more information on the bulletin board in the fellowship hall.

Family Game Night

The next family game night is on Friday, January 12th at 5:30 p.m. This is a good time to gather with people from Mission of the Cross around food and a game or two of your choice. It is also a good opportunity to introduce friends and neighbors to our church.

Installation of Officers and Voter's Meeting

On January 28th officers for Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church will be installed at the beginning of the Divine Service. Our regularly scheduled voter's meeting will follow the Divine Service at 11:00 a.m.