



**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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An Overview of the Church's Liturgical Preparation for Easter

The Church's preparation to celebrate the high feast commemorating our Lord's resurrection has three stages, distinctions, and shifts in focus. The first phase is Pre-Lent or Gesimatide. During this time the alleluias are silenced, the Gloria in Excelsis is omitted, and the paraments are changed to violet. Liturgically everything starts to look and sound like Lent, but this brief season isn't Lent and differs thematically. The readings on these Sundays show us different aspects of God's grace.

The transition to Lent is signaled by the arrival of Ash Wednesday. The season of Lent that follows certainly has the crucifixion of our Lord in view, as does the entire church year, but it isn't an extension of Holy Week when the Church is singularly focused on it. Lent is more catechetical in nature. Originally, Lent was at least in part a time of final preparation for catechumens who would soon be baptized at the Easter Vigil.

It is not obvious, but there is a baptismal accent in Lent that fits well with the preparation of catechumens for their baptism into Christ. The careful hearer will notice that the readings for the first three Sundays in Lent include the attack of demons and even the devil himself who is conquered by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The connection to baptism comes into view when we hear these words from the Rite of Holy Baptism, "The Word of God also teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. Therefore, depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (*Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, 13)."

The fourth Sunday of Lent is *Laetare*. Like *Gaudete*, the third Sunday of Advent, this Latin name means "rejoice" and comes from the first word of the introit. These Sundays of joy give the Church a slight break from the more intense penitential character of Advent and Lent. This is noted by rose paraments on these two Sundays. Many congregations don't have rose, and when that is the case violet continues to be used.

Violet is the color of royal mourning, a mix of purple and black. Rose is a lighter shade of violet, the result of the black and blue hues being withdrawn. The lighter color and theme of *Laetare* are a nod to the Church's joy even while we remain in the world. It also signals that the Church is gathering her strength for the final and most intense stage as she prepares to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord.

The fifth Sunday of Lent is called *Judica*. It begins the last portion of the Church's preparation for Easter. In the Gospel lesson we already see the rejection of Christ and the desire of the Jews to put him to death even before we get to the reading of the passion during Holy Week. *Judica* is also called Passion Sunday, for which the last two weeks of Lent are called Passiontide. Some congregations have scarlet (not red) paraments to denote this shift within the season of Lent. The blood colored paraments point toward the blood Jesus shed on the

cross to atone for the sins of the world, which is the theme and focus of Passiontide. Many congregations don't have scarlet paraments, so violet continues to be used.

The Origin and Development of Lent

Lent, like other days and seasons in the church year, developed and went through some changes before taking on the shape and form that is familiar to us. Christians first commemorated our Lord's death with special devotions remembering the forty hours he laid in the tomb and later expanded that remembrance to two weeks (Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* 490). Even though the season of Lent is even longer now, these two weeks still maintain a liturgical distinction for us today called Passiontide.

In his book *Gathered Guests*, Timothy Maschke writes about some of the earliest known references to the longer Lenten season. The earliest is from the Council on Nicaea in 325 A.D. Only four years later Athanasius encouraged his congregation to fast during the forty days leading up to Easter. This demonstrates the length of the season being established relatively early, but perhaps even more interesting is the purpose and character of the season as taught by Pope Leo the Great: "Lent was appointed to prepare souls for a fruitful commemoration of the mystery of Easter; as a time of inner purification and sanctification, of penance for sins past, of breaking off of sinful habits, of the laying aside of enmity and hatred." (56)

The longer preparation for the commemoration of the resurrection of our Lord recognizes not only the forty hours of our Lord's entombment, but also calls to mind the forty days that Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. This is the Gospel lesson for the 1st Sunday in Lent (Matthew 4:1-11). This account highlights one main purpose of Lent for us—that we should intensify our own struggle against temptation and sin and learn from our Lord Jesus Christ to remain faithful in the midst of spiritual attacks, overcoming temptation and our sinful desires with the Word of God and prayer.

The forty days of Lent are also connected with the forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness because of their sin. God didn't permit that generation to enter into Israel, but he brought the next generation into the land he had promised them. Thus, throughout the forty days of Lent we are reminded to repent of the sins that would hinder us from rightly celebrating our Lord's resurrection from the dead and entering into heaven with him.

The forty days of Lent also have a link to baptism. In Noah's day God sent rain upon the earth for forty days and nights to cleanse the world of sin. Everything died in the waters of God's judgement, but in his mercy the Lord preserved Noah and his family on the ark. As we make our way through the forty days of Lent, let us heed the Lord's call to repent and remember the promise of the Lord in our baptism—to cleanse us of sin, save us in the ark of the holy Christian Church, and give us eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ash Wednesday

The imposition of ashes has been practiced in some places since at least the 6th century, but might be even older (*Gathered Guests*, Timothy Maschke 56). Traditionally, the ashes are made from the burning of palms from the previous Palm Sunday. As they are applied the pastor says, "Remember, O man, that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." These words were first spoken by God to Adam after he had sinned (Genesis 3:19). They call upon us to remember that we don't have life in ourselves. They call upon us to repent and remember that we were born in sin and that the wages of sin is death. These words teach us that we are mortal, so that we might return to God, confess our sins, and receive forgiveness, life, and salvation through Jesus Christ, our Lord. This why the ashes aren't merely put on our forehead but are put there in the shape of the cross, which hearkens back to the rite of holy baptism where we heard, "Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified." Thus on Ash Wednesday, remember not only that you are mortal, but also that Jesus has died for your sins and promised to raise you from the ashes and make your body immortal for eternal life.

Raising the Bar with First Communion

In the last several months we have begun discussing communing younger children in our parish when they are properly prepared to receive the sacrament in a worthy manner. A change of this sort must be considered very carefully because we care deeply both about the right administration of the Lord's Supper and the children of our parish.

It is worth noting that neither the Scriptures nor the Lutheran Confessions set forth an age or require a particular rite (e.g. confirmation) for admission to the sacrament. We must also remember that while it might be useful, the Rite of Confirmation is a practice that is not found in the Bible but was developed by men. As such, it doesn't have the institution or command of God. Pastors could have pious Christians in their congregation and faithfully admit them to the Sacrament of the Altar without the Rite of Confirmation. The LCMS has published a Rite for First Communion for the very purpose we have been discussing and it younger children may publicly confess the faith in a manner that is very similar to the Rite of Confirmation.

This raises the question: if the Rite of Confirmation isn't required for communion, then what is? The Scriptures require that one be baptized and instructed in the teachings of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20), that he confesses the faith in unity with us (Matthew 10:32-33, 1 Corinthians 11:18), and that he examines himself (1 Corinthians 11:28). The Scriptures also teach that pastors are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). For them to faithfully steward the Lord's Supper, they should examine souls before they commune them.

The Lutheran Confessions teach the same thing. Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confessions says, "No one is admitted to the Sacrament without first being examined. The people are also advised about the dignity and use of the Sacrament, about how it brings great consolation to anxious consciences, so that they too may learn to believe in God and expect and ask from Him all that is good. This worship pleases God. Such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God."

Article XXV of the Augsburg Confession adds, "The body of the Lord is not usually given to those who have not been examined and absolved." Luther's Small Catechism teaches, "Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.' But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe."

Pastor Traphagan and the elders have agreed that should we begin communing younger children in our parish, we need to have clear expectations that ensure our children are properly taught and prepared to receive the Sacrament. We have outlined a set of expectations below and believe that if such a practice was employed, we would in fact be raising the bar, not lowering it. The children would receive more teaching over a longer period of time including the instruction that typically leads to the Rite of Confirmation. In our first communion program before children would be admitted to the Lord's Supper they would:

- gladly hear and learn the Word of God by participating in the Divine Service and Sunday School or Bible Study at least 75% of Sundays
- pray, recite, and discuss Luther's Small Catechism
- learn a basic knowledge of the Scriptures, including, at a minimum, Bender's Old and New Testament Catechesis (64 Bible Stories)
- learn how to examine themselves
- be examined by the pastor using Luther's 20 Questions for those wishing to go to the Sacrament
- come to private confession and receive absolution
- pray at home with their families

Schedule of Divine Liturgies for February

February 4	Sexagesima	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
February 11	Quinquagesima	9:30 p.m.	Divine Service
February 14	Quadragesima (Ash Wednesday)	6:00 p.m.	Divine Service
February 18	Invocabit (Lent I)	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
February 21	Wednesday of Invocabit	6:00 p.m.	Vespers
February 25	Reminiscere (Lent II)	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service
February 28	Wednesday of Reminiscere	9:30 a.m.	Divine Service

Birthdays, Baptisms, Confirmations, and Anniversaries

February 1	Ardis Haglin	Birthday
February 2	Eli Berg	Baptism
February 2	Miriam Traphagan	Baptism
February 3	Sarah Traphagan	Birthday
February 9	Timothy Traphagan	Birthday
February 9	Sarah Traphagan	Baptism
February 12	Collen Marquardt	Baptism
February 14	John Porter	Birthday
February 14	Timothy Traphagan	Baptism
February 15	Brady Bosaaen	Baptism
February 17	Chloe Bosaaen	Birthday
February 17	Braxton Berg	Baptism
February 22	Jonathan Blake	Birthday

35 for 35 Campaign

Our congregation has decided to repair the parking lot, and purchase new paraments, vestments, banners, communion vessels, a paschal candle, and processional crucifix ahead of the celebration of the 35th anniversary of Mission of the Cross Lutheran Church in September. Due to your generosity we have already raised \$22,500 toward our goal of \$35,000.

Family Game Night

The next family game night is on Friday, March 8th 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.