



Tiny Talks with Jesus

Christian devotions for children

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Illustrations by Katelyn Ristau

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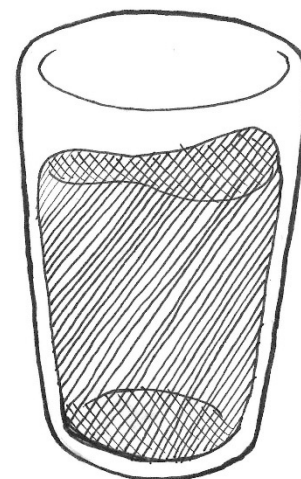
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The great Christian reformer, Martin Luther, once advised that when we are preaching to children we must also talk like them. It is with those words in mind that I commend this new children's devotional book *Tiny Talks with Jesus* by Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau. Based on the Sundays and festivals of the church year, it should serve as an excellent resource for parents to do that of which the psalmist declares, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom...Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children" (Psalm 90:12, 16).

*Rev. Timothy Teuscher, President
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Advent 1: Stir up Our Hearts, O Lord!

***"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."
(1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)***



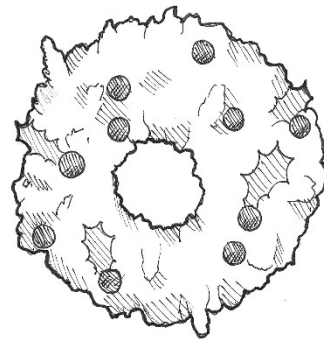
If you want to make chocolate milk, you need to stir chocolate syrup into a glass of milk. If you do not mix the milk, the chocolate stays at the bottom. It is the same thing with our hearts. The love in our hearts, given to us in Holy Baptism, needs to be constantly stirred up before it can accomplish its purpose. We don't want it to sit at the bottom, but pray that it overflows towards God and others. Yet we often think of ourselves before we think of God or others. We repent of all the sins that prevent us from loving and serving. It's not easy. Sometimes it's even impossible. But the Holy Spirit is our helper because He shows us how great God's love is towards us. We are assured that God forgives us of all of our selfishness and sin because Jesus died for us. By showing us Jesus' love, the Holy Spirit helps us to improve our behaviour, and to live more like our Saviour towards other people. The Holy Spirit stirs up the love in our hearts, intended for God and our neighbour, so that it becomes useful to others. It's also a good way of getting ready for the coming of Jesus. Our theme for the season of Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is love for God and service of others. Jesus, who is the living embodiment of love, was Himself "stirred up" for us when He poured all of our sins into His own Body on the cross. By filling Himself up with our sin, He was able to transfer His love to us. Because His heart was stirred up, so are ours. When we turn away from ourselves and towards Him and His cross, the power of love no longer lies still at the bottom but is put into motion so that we love others as He has first loved us. The cup of our spirit overflows with the love of His Spirit.

Let us pray: Stir up our hearts, Oh Lord, to prepare the path of your only-begotten Son in our lives; and so that we may serve you better, purify our spirits by the coming of Him who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Advent 2 : A King Crowned With Thorns

***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
(Hebrews 13 :8)***

Have you ever seen one of these wreaths hanging on a door or displayed in the window of a store? We see them at Advent, which marks the church's new year—which doesn't begin in January but, rather, four weeks before Christma—as we prepare for the coming of Jesus. This round wreath, often woven out of evergreen branches, represents peace.



You've all heard war stories. Well, as all good soldiers will tell you—at least the ones who defend the safety of others—peace is never free. Its costs a lot, often the sacrifice of their very lives. This wreath, shaped like a royal crown, represents the price paid for spiritual peace with God. From the beginning of history, humankind waged war with God, rebelling against His good rule and kindness. We were in the wrong and did not deserve to be restored back into God's kingdom. Thankfully, God is full of mercy. He is love. But the damage was still done, we made a mess of His creation by making ourselves His enemies. To make matters worse, the only way to fix the problem was if the King Himself sent His one and only innocent Son to sacrifice His life for us! And that's exactly what He did. Thus, Jesus is called "the Prince of Peace." Each prickly needle on the advent wreath reminds us of our Lord's crown of thorns He wore when He died on the cross to pay for all the bad stuff we do, say and think against others and God. The cost of all this sin—our punishment, or "debt"—was paid for by His blood so we could have peace with our Almighty King. Because the judgement we deserve for our rebellion has been carried away by King Jesus through His cross, we no longer have any reason to fear God as a frightful judge or distant creator. Instead, He has become our heavenly Father. His holy book, the Bible, even describes Him as our friend.

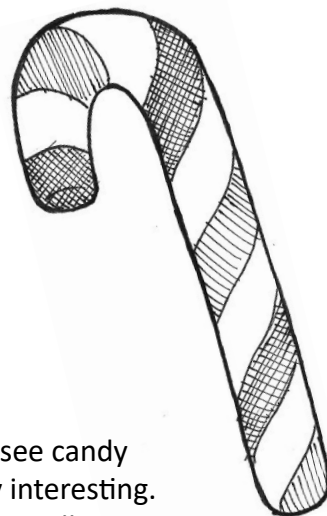
What colour is this Christmas wreath? You may notice that it is normally green. The colour of the wreath reminds us of the eternal life won for us by Jesus when He hung on the tree of His cross. The leaves of the tree from which the wreath is made do not change colour, even during the cold and dark winter months. This tree stays green all the time. The same is true of God's promises. They, too, never change, even during the dark difficult times of life. Even on the bad days, when we feel cold in our hearts, God is there with us as His love never changes. His grace, the gift of His undeserved kindness and mercy through Jesus His Son, is always there for us.

The wreath or crown is sometimes adorned with red berries. These should remind us of the precious droplets of Jesus' blood, spilled for us to secure peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins. Like the four candles we sometimes find on Advent wreaths, that lie on a kitchen table or hang from the ceiling of a church or are fixed to a stand, Jesus is our light and joy in the midst of the darkness of any sadness, sin or strife that we experience throughout the rest of the year. For this reason new Christians often receive a candle at their baptism, when they are made children of God, and the promise that God will never leave or forsake them, is given especially to him or her. Jesus Christ, the only Lord and Saviour, is our light.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, You are the light of the world. Visit us with Your grace and the light of Your presence, through Your Word and Your water of Holy Baptism, which shines brightly in the darkness of our hearts, offering us peace and joy now and forever. For You live and reign with the Father and Holy Spirit, one God now and forevermore, Amen.

Advent 3: The Story of the Candy Cane

***“But He was pierced for our transgressions;
He was crushed for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with His wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)***



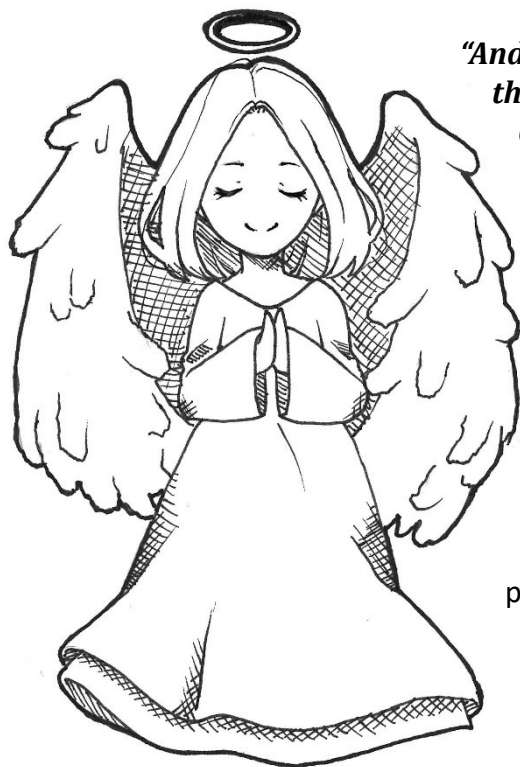
With the coming of the holiday season of Christmas, you may begin to see candy canes in the stores or markets. The history of this seasonal treat is very interesting. Legend holds that it was a Christian who made the very first candy cane to illustrate the Gospel message.

What's the Gospel? The Gospel is Jesus, who is our Saviour by His death for us on the cross. So, the candy canes are in the shape of a 'J' to remind us of the first letter of 'Jesus.' Now when I flip it upside down, what do you see? It's a shepherd's staff. What's a shepherd? A shepherd is someone who takes care of sheep of all shapes, sizes and colours. He uses his staff to guide the sheep and care for them. Jesus is our good and gentle Shepherd and we are His sheep. Our Shepherd has demonstrated His faithfulness to us, His sheep, by shedding His blood for our sins and dying to save us from death. The red stripe on the candy represents the wounds Jesus suffered because of our sins, when His blessed body hung on the cross. The white is a colour of purity, and reminds us that Jesus is pure and perfect, the Son of God. It also reminds us that by His death our Good Shepherd has cleansed and purified our souls from the dirt of sin.

Sometimes, candy canes have a green stripe. What does green represent? When you look around a forest, you find lots green living things like leaves, grass, and plants. Green makes us think of life. The green on the candy cane represents the eternal life Jesus gives us because of all His loving deeds. The promises of God are like the Christmas tree, a fir tree, that always stays green, even in the winter. During the ups and downs of life God always welcomes us with grace and love.

Let us pray: God our Father, we thank you for the birth of your only Son, Jesus. Through His wounds, we are saved from death and we receive eternal life. Help us to trust in Him daily for all of our needs, never doubting His promises or questioning His love. Amen.

Advent 4: Angels



“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:8-11).

What do angels do? God sent them to protect His people. They are also God’s messengers. They preach His Word, like the angels who announced to the shepherds the coming of our Lord Jesus as Saviour of the nations. Like angels, pastors who are faithful to the Word of God are the messengers of the Good News: that God our Father loved us so much that He sent us Jesus, the Messiah. This “Anointed One” is God’s gift to us since, by His death on the cross, we are given new life with God. The angels glorify God through their songs and their words and would have us do the same. Although we do not pray to the angels, we do thank God for giving us these helpers to protect us from danger. We also thank God for pastors who prepare us today for the coming of Jesus by their service and sermons.

Let us pray: O God, Creator of all things, by Your Son Jesus Christ You have won for us the victory over death! Lord, may Your holy angels defend us at all times and protect us on our journeys. May we be defended against any sort of misfortune and against every evil force which threatens to harm us. We praise You for the work of Your Son and His messengers. For, by their service, we enter into Your heavenly Kingdom, where with cherubim, seraphim, angels, archangels, and all the company of the heavenly host, we sing for joy, proclaiming Your glory; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Saviour, who with You and the Holy Spirit, live and reign as one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Christmas Eve: The Gift From God

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)



When you look around the world, it is easy to see how most people are lost in darkness and death. Each of us human beings has chosen to walk away from God by our thoughts, words and deeds which are filled with meanness, greed and selfishness. Yet God had mercy on us. God became human to save us from all this sin that separates us from Him. We are saved by grace. This means we have full access to God's fatherly heart even though we do not deserve it. It is not by our own goodness or kind deeds that we have been drawn near to God through Jesus. The word 'grace' means 'gift.' A gift is always free for the recipient, but not for the giver. The one who gives the gift must pay for it. In the case of our salvation the price was very high: Jesus' death on the cross. But God loves us so much that He considered us worth it.

Presents are often wrapped and decorated with a ribbon in the shape of a cross. Jesus is the greatest gift that comes from Our Heavenly Father. Jesus gave His life on the cross for us. God our Father, through the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, wrapped His gift. God wrapped His only Son in human flesh. The Son of God became man. He became a real baby, the real son of Mary. But He also remained the true divine Son of God. Kids are the same nature as their parents, right? The baby of a human being is a human, the baby of a mother dog is a dog, the baby of a mother cat is a cat! Well, the Son of God is truly God, and the son of the Virgin Mary is truly human too.

Through Jesus, God is as close to us as He could possibly get! This is precisely because, though He remained God, He also became fully human. He became one of us. You could even think of Him as our big brother. He is committed to us and our wellbeing, out of the greatest love imaginable. The gift of the forgiveness of sins and new life both now and forevermore, cost Him His life on the cross, but He has no regrets.

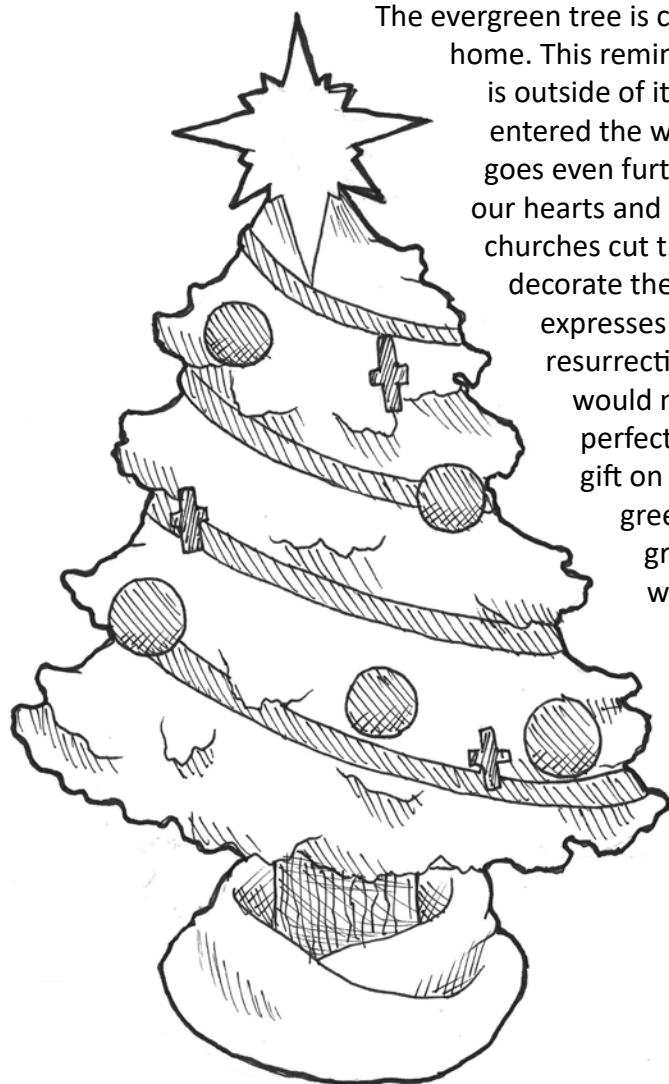
In His work of Holy Baptism, you have been connected and joined to both the holy cross and the happy resurrection of your Lord Jesus forever. It is there that God gave you, as if you were the only person on earth, new life and salvation from all evil. So, every time you think of your Baptism, remember this free gift of God which no one can take from you: eternal life with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray: God our Father, You love us so much that You freely gave us Your best present, a priceless gift. You sent us Jesus, Your only begotten Son as the Saviour of all nations. Give us faith to believe Your promises and help us to never reject this precious present, but to treasure it forever. Amen.

Christmas Day: Jesus' Christmas Tree

"And this is the promise that He made to us—eternal life." (1 John 2:25)

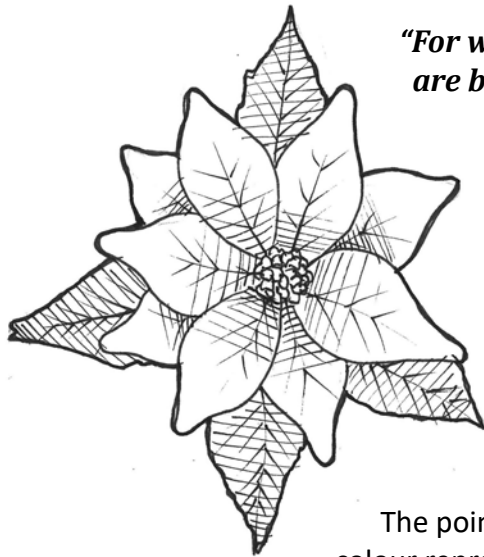
In many countries around the world, Christians decorate evergreen trees at Christmas time. Legend holds that Martin Luther invented the tradition of the Christmas tree to better explain the Gospel during this time of year. The tree represents the cross of Jesus, which is sometimes described as a tree. Lights are put on the tree because Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness of sin, evil, and sadness. Ornaments, such as tiny trumpets adorn the tree to remind us of the angels who announced the good news of the birth of the Saviour. Round and white "hosts"—similar to the wafers of bread that you may see at the Lord's Supper—or cookies are hung on the trees branches. They represent the Bread of Life, the true Body of Jesus which nourishes our hungry souls. The tree points upwards towards the sky because the Son of God descended from heaven to earth and became a little baby, our Saviour. The Child Jesus is the gift of God, symbolized by the gifts laid under the tree.



The evergreen tree is cut down in a forest, and brought into a Christian home. This reminds us that God who created the universe and is outside of it, became man, descended from heaven, and entered the world of His creation. God's desire to be near us goes even further than that! Jesus enters into the home of our hearts and He illuminates them with the Holy Spirit. Some churches cut the evergreen tree in half and form a cross to decorate the sanctuary during the time of Lent. This act expresses the connection between the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The joys and blessings of Christmas would not have been possible unless Jesus lived a perfect life for us imperfect sinners and gave His life as a gift on the cross. His love has no limits, and that's what green represents: the leaves of a fir tree remain green all through the year, just like God's promises which last forever and never change.

Let us pray: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for music, art and symbols like the Christmas tree which helps us to appreciate the rich teachings of our Christian Faith. Amen.

Christmas 1: The Flower of God



"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing..." (2 Corinthians 2:15)

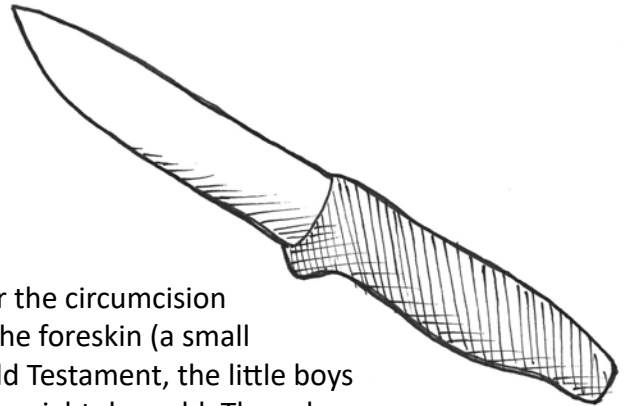
What do we call this lovely "Christmas flower" with these pointy red leaves? A poinsettia. It's pretty, isn't it? This Christmas flower is not known for its smell, though other flowers have delightful smells. Have you ever smelled a fragrant flower before?

The poinsettia reminds us of the Gospel of the Lord. The red colour represents the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away all of our sins, and the five points of the leaves represent the five wounds that Jesus suffered on the cross in paying the ransom for our sins. Do you find it strange that a Christmas plant is also an image of the death and crucifixion of Jesus? These are normally subjects reserved for the church season of Lent and Good Friday. Yet we must never forget that the Baby Jesus was born for one purpose: to die for us all. After all, Christmas celebrates the coming of Christ to save us by His death and resurrection. The symbols of Christmas must always turn our eyes towards the cross, which is our hope for today, tomorrow, and forevermore. For us, this message is the good news, the best news, because it comes from God Himself. Hearing the Gospel "smells" better to our ears than the most fragrant flower could possibly smell to our nose. And when we believe this good news, we rejoice in it and share it with our friends. Then we ourselves are a pleasing aroma to both God and humanity.

Let us pray: Lord God, help us to never forget everything you did for us through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Give us the courage to share this message with those around us, so they can be a "pleasing aroma" also. Amen.

New Year's (January 1st): The Circumcision of Jesus

“and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.” (Colossians 1:20)



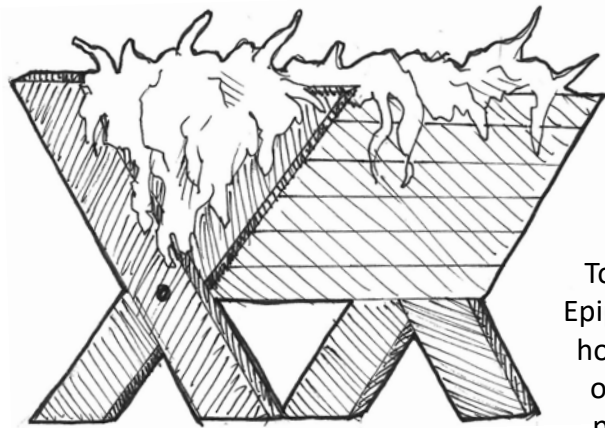
In the liturgical calendar, we celebrate and remember the circumcision of our Saviour, Jesus. Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin (a small piece of skin) at the end of the baby's penis. In the Old Testament, the little boys of Israel were marked by circumcision when they were eight days old. They always cried because it hurt and it bled when the rabbi cut the foreskin with a knife. There was always a cost for becoming a child of God: the shedding of blood. But once it stopped bleeding everyone was happy because circumcision symbolized that the little boy was a child of God, and had become a part of His people, Israel. Why did it have to happen on the eighth day? Because there are seven days every week. If we continue to count, the eighth day is the start of the new week. The little eight-day-old circumcised boy began a new life with God and His people. Today, circumcision is not mandatory for Christians. Why is that?

The Bible tells us that in the new covenant, or the New Testament, circumcision is replaced with Holy Baptism (Colossians 2:11-15). Today we become children of God and become a part of His people, the new Israel through Baptism: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16). What is Baptism? It is the water of salvation, attached to the Word of God. Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).. When we receive the divine gift of Baptism, God binds His promises to our hearts. He makes a covenant with us and He promises to give us the forgiveness of our sins. He delivers us from death and the devil. He gives us eternal salvation. All of these wonderful blessings stay with us when we continue to believe and trust Him, His Word, and His promises (Titus 3:5-8).

When Jesus was circumcised, he bled like the other little boys. The circumcision of Jesus reminds us that Jesus shed His blood for us. This was the necessary cost to create our eternal bond with God. Whether we are a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, God has become our heavenly Father through the new covenant in the blood of His one and only Son. Jesus Christ offered the ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross. He suffered all the pain for us so we would not need to! His sacrifice is perfect, which means we no longer need to shed blood to be saved. The blood of circumcision has been replaced by the joyous washing of Baptism and faith in what Jesus did for us by His death and resurrection. When Christians talk about being washed in the blood of their Saviour, this is what they mean, and this is why it is such good news.

Let us pray: Saviour Jesus, today we celebrate Your circumcision. You became a little baby and a grew into a man in order to give us eternal life through Your divine power. But for that to happen, You had to shed Your precious blood on the cross. Help us to thank You every day for the gift You have given us through the washing waters of Holy Baptism and to always believe in the promises You have given to us there. Amen.

Epiphany: God manifested in the flesh



"we walk by faith, not by sight"
(2 Cor 5:7)

Today is a special day in the calendar of the Church: Epiphany. During the season of Christmas, we hear how the Son of God became man by being born of the Virgin Mary. He came into our world to participate in our earthly lives, and to share His divine life with us. The word "Epiphany" means "to manifest." All of the glory of God, including His beautiful attributes and wonderful qualities, are manifested in Jesus. But the fullness of this glory was mostly hidden from the people's eyes while Jesus lived on earth. With their eyes, people only saw a baby in a manger, and, later, a man executed for crimes He never committed.

But the wisemen who were led to the baby Jesus by a star in the sky, saw something there that was revealed mostly to their hearts: our God and Saviour. The wisemen were considered to be the smartest people of society, and yet they knelt in worship of this tiny infant Jesus who would one day open the door to heaven by His innocent death on the cross. They believed the word of God instead of what they saw. After all, Christians walk by faith and not by sight.

The wisest people today are those who believe the glory of God is hidden in Jesus Christ. Although you cannot see it, it is revealed in the sermons preached from your pastor's lips in church, the water sprinkled over a baby's brow at a baptism, and the bread and wine offered to God's faithful children in the Lord's Supper. Just because you cannot see something, doesn't mean it is not there.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, faithful friend, help us to believe with our hearts in the things of your Kingdom that we cannot see with our eyes. We rejoice that even though we do not see You, we do hear You, as Your heavenly presence continues to be revealed among us by Your extraordinary holy word and hidden within our ordinary earthly lives. Amen.

Epiphany 1 : The *Wisdom of God*

“And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...” (1 Corinthians 1:30)



We all love playing with the gifts we receive at Christmas time. During the season of Epiphany, we remember the “magi” or wisemen who offered their gifts to Jesus, their King. They were thanking God for His gift to the world: His only Son, Jesus. This is the best news ever. God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus, who shed His blood for us on the cross to forgive our sins and so we could have free, full and easy access to Him, His heaven and His love. A gift without comparison!

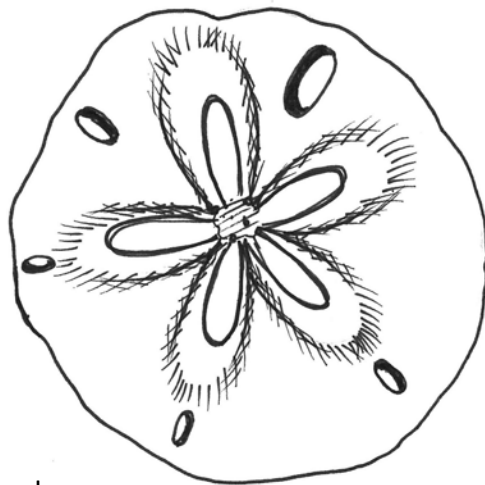
The wisemen came to worship Jesus, the *Wisdom of God* manifested in this tiny infant—the Saviour of the world. Many manger scenes depict this

saving child in the animals’ feeding trough with His arms spread wide open in welcome. Yet the arms of that same baby also form the shape of a cross, pointing us towards His coming crucifixion. The wisest men in the world knelt before an infant king who was born in a stable and would one day be adorned with a crown of thorns. And still they offered Him the finest gold, the sweetest incense and the purest myrrh. With these gifts they acknowledged the baby’s identity and purpose. Gold is a gift fit for a king. After all, Jesus is the king of the universe! Incense is a gift used in the worship of God. Myrrh, a traditional burial spice, is a gift intended for the tomb of this innocent child who would be, crucified, die and be buried, for us. Yet Jesus has no regrets for He calls us his precious gifts, held in the palm of His mighty hands and embraced between His sacred, wounded arms, which lift us up to heaven every time we bow our knee at the altar of His manger and cross. It is there that He feeds us with the Life that He Himself is.

Let us pray: Lord, give us wisdom today like the wisemen of old. May we follow You from our homes to Your home and confess You as King of kings and Lord of lords. For You deserve worship forever and ever for all You have done for us at Your cross and empty tomb. Amen.

Epiphany 2: A Christmas Shell

***"And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"** (Luke 19:39-40)*



Sometimes you can find shells, called "sand dollars," on the beaches of North and South America. Christians have used them as a simple explanation of the Christmas message. For instance, on the face of the shell, there is a star like the ones that led the magi to baby Jesus. On the back of the shell, you can see a carving that looks like a poinsettia, the Christmas flower that celebrates the birth of Jesus. There are also five holes on the shell reminding us of the five places where the Body of Jesus was pierced to save us. The soldiers nailed His two feet and His two hands to the cross where He would be executed for us, and they made a hole in His side with a spear to make sure that He was really dead. When we break open the sand dollar, we find seven little shells inside. They resemble tiny doves, an image of God's perfect peace delivered to us by the Holy Spirit. Thanks to Him, who gives us faith in Christ as our Saviour, we receive the peace of forgiveness for our souls. In church, shells are often used to symbolize Baptism. Sometimes the pastor will use a shell when he scoops water from the font or the bowl. The Holy Spirit unites newly baptized believers to the cross of Jesus. For it is there where they receive the eternal salvation He has so graciously won for them. When Jesus' enemies tried to silence His disciples from proclaiming Him as Lord, He said "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). Even a shell can proclaim Jesus' love for us.

Let us pray: Thank you Heavenly Father for Your creation and the creative ways that it, too, can proclaim Your Gospel, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Epiphany 3: Preach the Good News

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’” (Mark 16:15)



Do you like honey? It's delicious, especially when you spread it on bread! Think of bread as the world and honey as the Gospel. Jesus gave His life for the whole world. God loves us and offers us the gift of paradise. Our sins are forgiven! That's the Good News. That's the Gospel. We want the whole world to hear it. When you share this good news with others, you become like the knife or finger that spreads the honey. In talking about the love of God in Jesus you spread the Good News! Honey is best when its spread, because then everyone gets a bite. So, too, God wants everybody to taste the goodness of the Gospel. And He uses us to spread the news by proclaiming it to others. He wants every single person in all of creation to hear the good news that God loves them in Jesus. The Bible says that the Word of God is delicious for the soul and body, even "sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103).

Let us pray: Holy Spirit, give us the courage to talk about Jesus so His message of love and grace is proclaimed throughout the entire world, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Epiphany 4: Real Miracles

Your way, O God, is holy.

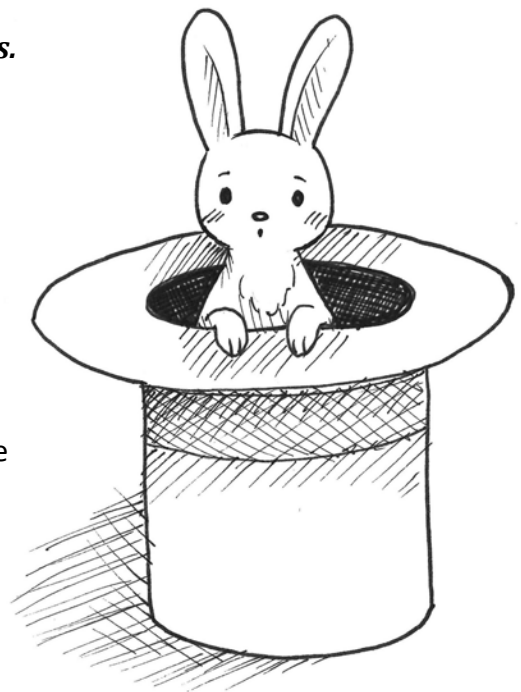
What god is great like our God?

You are the God who works wonders;

*you have made known your might among the peoples.
(Psalm 77:13-14)*

Can you think of any miracles Jesus did? What are some of the big ones?

There is a huge difference between a miracle and a magic trick. A miracle is not an illusion. It's a supernatural event because it breaks the normal laws of nature. Magic tricks are explainable by science, while miracles are not. No ordinary human being can make a miracle. Only God can perform miracles because He is the creator of all things including the laws of nature. Yet, though the Creator comes from outside of our world, He chooses to intervene in our lives in miraculous ways. When Jesus lived on the earth, before His ascension, He performed many miracles. He wasn't an ordinary person, He is God. The main reason He performed miracles was to demonstrate that He is the Son of God, the Messiah and the Saviour. His miracles helped make people listen to and believe His message. Although God still does miracles today, Jesus talks about us to His disciples when He says, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). After all, the greatest miracle is that God became flesh and lived among us, died for us, and rose Himself from the dead. And there is another miracle which is also astounding: God made us His beloved children through Holy Baptism and His Word of promise, which promises that "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Instead of looking for miracles, we walk by confident faith in Jesus our Saviour. We pray that His will be done in our world and lives, and we entrust ourselves into His powerful hands, whether we ever "experience a miracle"—one that is so clearly supernatural—or not. God knows what we need in life. He knows best. So here we have another miracle: He cares for us so much that He never stops providing for all of our deepest needs.



Let us pray: We thank You, O God, Creator of the heavens and the earth and of everything that exists. Help us to walk in faith and not by sight. Teach us to place all of our trust in You for our bodies and souls. Amen.

Transfiguration: Jesus Reveals His True Identity

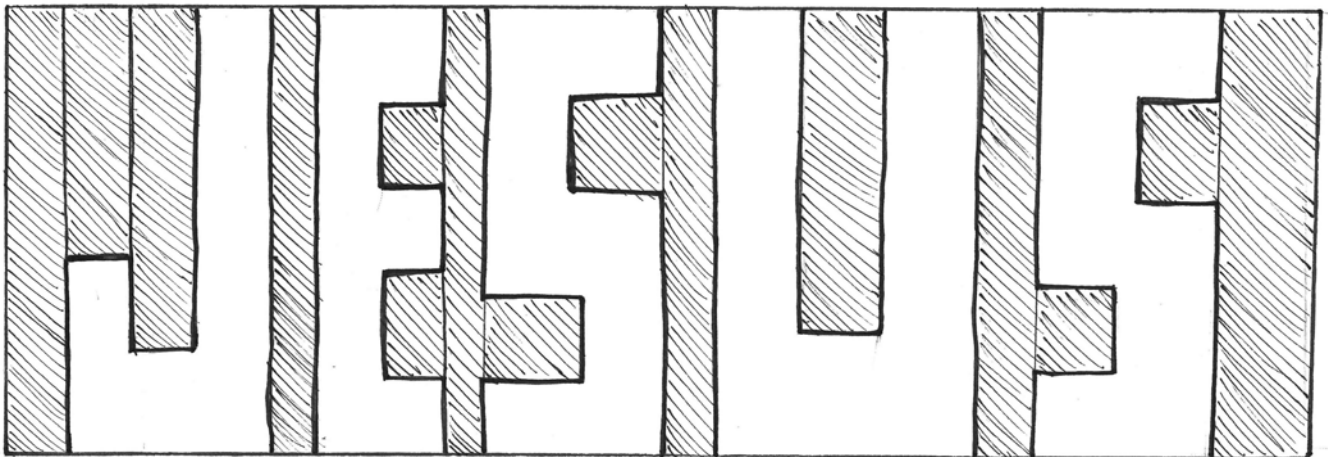
“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)

What do you see in the picture at the bottom of the page? At first sight, it looks like the words of a foreign language, doesn't it? We don't understand it the first time we look at it, but after staring at it for a while, we see a hidden word: “Jesus.” This image symbolizes our Christian life because the presence of Jesus in our life isn't always evident. When life is going well, it's easy for us to pray, to listen to the Word of God and to believe in Him: to see Jesus. But when difficult moments or hardships occur in our lives, we find it hard to see Jesus.

Yet Jesus is always there for us, with His reassurance and His forgiveness—in short, with His cross. Jesus made a promise to us, to all of us baptized believers, to be with us every day, until the end of time.

Think about the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. The reason Jesus came to earth was to die for the world. Naturally the disciples were disappointed and very sad. So what does Jesus do? He reveals His true identity to them, which He had, for the most part, hidden from them. Except for His miracles and His teaching, Jesus appeared as an ordinary man. But in this glimpse at His “transfiguration,” the disciples see their hidden God for one short majestic moment. Jesus showed them that He was both the Son of Man and the Son of God, to encourage them and prepare them for future hardships. Then, after they descended the mountain, Jesus appeared again as a “normal” man. Later, as they witnessed His mission on another mountain—the mount of Calvary—they never forgot their Lord's true identity. Jesus does the same thing for us. He is hidden from our eyes but revealed in His Word. That's where we get to see Jesus. The Bible's message of salvation in Him gives us courage and strength in the midst of our own hardships.

Let us pray: Thank you, God Almighty, for the promise of the presence of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, in our lives during the good times and the bad. We thank you for the Holy Bible, so that we can always clearly “see” Jesus by listening to Your Word; in the name of our glorious Jesus, Amen.



Ash Wednesday: We Are Forgiven!

***But He was pierced for our transgressions;
He was crushed for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with His wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)***

Ask the children to name the sins they have committed and write them down in the middle of the heart with a pencil. Erase them all at the end of the lesson.

What do your parents do when you do bad things? They punish you. Do you like to be punished? No. But do you deserve it sometimes? Absolutely! We all deserve punishment when we misbehave. Punishment teaches us how serious the crime is. It is not okay to do or say bad things about our neighbour or God, or even think them. That's not love. That's not good. By our sin, we make the world a worse place to live and we make ourselves unfit for a beautiful and perfect heaven. Punishment is the rightful consequence for all our sin, which is spiritual ugliness and imperfection.

Because of our sinful thoughts, words and deeds, we are guilty before God and we deserve to be punished. We deserve not only a minor punishment but death. We also deserve to be separated from God for all of eternity. In fact, we have chosen to separate ourselves from God by our sin. The whole wide world, including each one of us sinners, have rejected His wonderful righteousness and love. That's a pretty heavy message isn't it? But there is good news too! Look at this drawing of a heart, our heart: the bad things, the sins, make our hearts black with guilt, and that's not acceptable before God. But God loves us. He gave us His one and only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to erase all of our guilt. The very death that we deserved, the just punishment for our sins, fell upon Jesus who was executed on the cross. Yet through His death, He destroyed it all! His resurrection from the dead is the best proof. Because Jesus satisfied the demands of justice in our place, justice treats us as if we never sinned at all. It is as if we are perfectly holy and have never done, said or thought anything wrong in our lives. God, our Judge, declares us as perfectly righteous in His sight because all of the badness in our hearts has been erased away by Jesus. We are now victors over sin, death, and hell with Him, and God remains our friend forever.



Let us pray: Almighty God and creator, thank you for Your justice that shows us all of Your goodness. We are sorry for rebelling against it every day in our thoughts, words and deeds. We ask that You forgive us for the sake of our precious Saviour Jesus who has suffered the punishment we deserve. Thanks to Him, our sins are erased, and You are our friend forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Lent 1: Jesus Became Poor For Us

“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour[a] of taking part in the relief of the saints—” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4)

In most of the world, people live in poverty. Believe it or not, God Himself knows what it is like to be poor. In fact, God the king of the universe became poor, so we who are spiritually poor could become rich citizens in His heavenly kingdom.



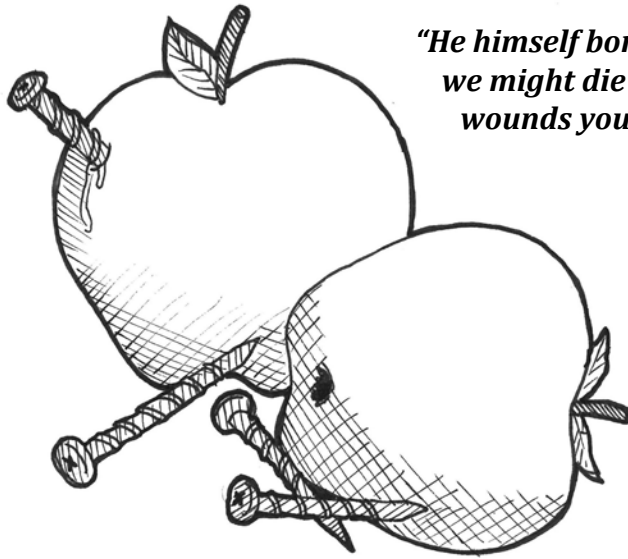
At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and mission to save the whole world from their sin and bring them to heaven, Jesus choose to fast and pray in the desert for 40 days. In other words, He didn’t eat for a very long time and spent His time and energy thinking about and praying for us. You can read about it in the Gospel according to St. Matthew 4: 1-11. There you will hear how Jesus defeated all the temptations of the devil. He did it for us. Believers are put inside of Jesus, so to speak, in Holy Baptism which means that we, in Him, have also defeated the devil and all evil also. That’s good news! Through faith in Jesus—trusting His promises—His victory is yours as well. But this wonderful gift would not have been possible unless God gave Himself up for others.

During the season of Lent—which we means “forty” in Latin—many Christians also choose to fast. We can, for example, take more time to read the Bible or listen to what God tells us in His holy Word about how to trust Him more and better serve our neighbours. We can take more time to pray for others, which means a little less time playing with our toys. As Christians, we should share our physical blessings with others in need. We can sell some of our belongings and give this money to those who have more need of it than ourselves. We could also eat less food, which also helps our neighbour because it reminds us of how people feel when they are hungry. Fasting makes us want to help take their hunger away, it makes us more generous in lots of different ways. It also helps us to remember that pleasures do not last forever, but that Jesus’ commitment to us as the one who answers all of our prayers and satisfies all of our needs, does.

There are lots of ways we can give things up for others, as Jesus has given Himself up for us. Can you think of some others?

Let us pray: Thank you Jesus, for giving Your life on the cross for us, for enriching us with Your grace and satisfying all of our needs with Your love. Help us to help others by finding ways of serving them in the spiritual and physical poverty in which so many abide. Amen.

Lent 2: Jesus Exchanges Hearts With Us



"He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)

Pretend this fruit is your heart and these metal nails are bad things that cause you pain. Sometimes, other people are mean towards you, aren't they? They hurt you by saying unkind or cruel things about you or to you. Sometimes even a friend may say a nasty joke to make you feel bad. The feeling is like a nail being driven into your heart (penetrate the flesh of the fruit with a nail). A person makes fun

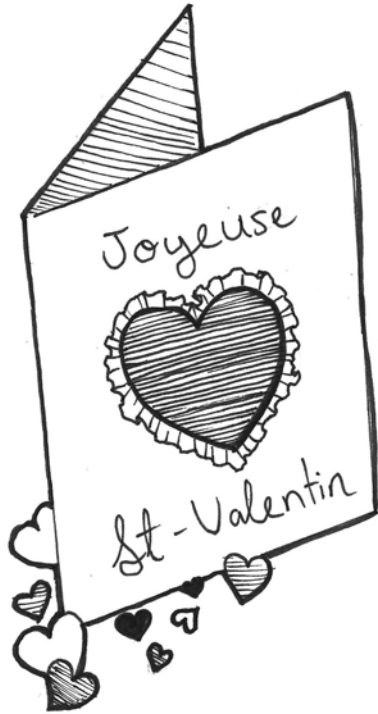
of you (put another nail in the fruit) or tells lies about you (stick in a third nail). Or perhaps you have hurt someone else, and you are the cause of their pain!

In each and every case, Jesus takes this wounded and torn heart and replaces it with a new one (now show the children a second undamaged fruit). You could even think of Him exchanging your impure and wounded heart with His wholesome and perfect heart. After all, your wounds are the result of the sin of the world. To effectively dress and heal those wounds, Jesus needs to deal with the source of the problem. So, He does something radical. He takes all that horrible sin into Himself, which includes all of your pains. To destroy it all, He needed to allow it all to destroy Him. When Jesus died on the cross for you, He removed your suffering and sadness so they would no longer cause you any more grief or turmoil. What a comfort! Through this blessed exchange, in which He switches your nail-pierced heart with His pure and healthy heart, He gives you a fresh start and the restored ability to share Jesus' love. This love flows from this new heart, by nice deeds and kind words. Despite all of this world's wickedness, we have daily forgiveness of our sins and healing of our wounds with Jesus and Him crucified.

Let us pray: Thank you Jesus for switching hearts with me through Your death on the cross, even though I don't deserve it. Forgive me for the pain I cause others and forgive others for the pain they cause me. Help us all to be good and kind to one another, just like You are so good and kind to us. Amen.

Lent 3 : A Love Letter

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10)



St. Valentine's day sometimes falls during the season of Lent. Often on February 14 we only think about chocolate and heart-shaped cards, but do you know the history of Saint Valentine?

He was a Christian pastor, imprisoned by the government for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ during a time when it was illegal. But even though he was thrown into prison, it didn't crush his zeal for sharing the Good News. He wanted everyone to know that God loved the world so much He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him has eternal life. Saint Valentine wrote short messages to encourage other imprisoned Christians. He distributed them within the prison to encourage their faith during difficult times. He eventually gave up his life for the Lord who gave up His life for us all.

The inspiring message of love wasn't based on feelings of the heart, but on the solid historical truth that Jesus saves us from death, darkness and the power of the devil. These messages were the first "Valentine's Day cards"! In a way, the entire Bible is a love letter from God to us, because Jesus is its message...which is way better than chocolate!

Let us pray: Lord God, Heavenly Father, thank you for encouraging us with the Gospel whenever we feel sad, down or persecuted for our faith. Unite us with our suffering brothers and sisters around the world by our actions, words and prayers, just as You have united Yourself with us. In the name of the one who is Your love letter to us, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Lent 4: Rich in Christ



“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

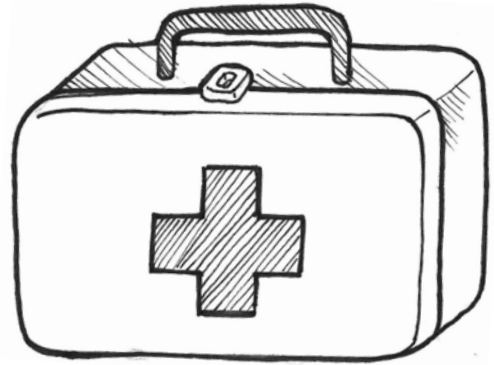
Some Christians are rich. Others are poor. And some are in between. But no matter how much money you have, Jesus said that we are all rich in Him. All who believe in Jesus Christ are spiritually wealthy. Unlike the money in this wallet, this wealth is presently hidden from our eyes. All financial wealth is temporary, but our spiritual wealth lasts forever. The King of heaven and of earth exchanged our spiritual poverty with His heavenly wealth, which we enjoy by faith now, and will experience after we die. By dying on the cross, He took away the darkness and poverty of our sins and gave us a place in His heavenly home. Our poverty was crucified on His cross. This is why our King doesn't wear a gold crown, but one of thorns. For this gift to us—the forgiveness of our sin—cost Him His life. All we need to do is to happily receive it, by believing and trusting Him. We have good reason to trust Him. For He also says that He sees you as His riches and wealth, a priceless family, for whom He paid a very high price, and treats you accordingly, both now and forevermore. We rejoice that God became a poor beggar, a human being just like us, to make us royal heavenly children, with a special place of our very own reserved for us in His Kingdom. That happened to you when a pastor baptized you with water, in the name of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even though we may not feel very rich, God says that are you already rich in Jesus Christ, your king. May His Kingdom come!

Let us pray: We thank you, King of heaven and earth, for the spiritual wealth that You give us freely in Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of our sins; through Him who made us His very own children, born into His Kingdom when He baptized us, Amen.

Lent 5: God's First Aid Kit

***"Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all His benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases..." (Psalm 103:2-3)***

"Help! Emergency!" When we hear these cries, what do we do? We call an ambulance and we grab a First Aid Kit. Interestingly, they are marked with a red cross. When we see this cross, we are relieved because that signifies that help is here.



What is true for our bodies is also true for our souls. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to save us from our spiritual illness. We are sick and dying due to our sins and our great physician, Jesus Christ, alone can save us. When we place our entire trust in the words of Jesus, we are forgiven and our souls are healed. Jesus promises us "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). His Word is a divine medicine. In Holy Baptism He carried us into His hospital and began offering us the medicine of His Body and Blood. Through these means of grace, His Holy Spirit strengthens us and keeps us healthy in faith. We are no longer in a state of emergency when we have our Triune God at our side.

Let us pray: Thank-You, Lord, for giving us everything we need for body and soul, through the body and soul of Jesus, our Great Physician, delivered to death for all of us. To You who "heals the broken hearted," and who "binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3), be all glory forever and ever. Amen.

Palm Sunday: Jesus, Our Protector

***“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...”
(Colossians 1:13)***

Have you ever been camping or travelling in the bush where there were lots of mosquitoes and other insects around? Sometimes our parents or caretakers have “bug repellent” that they can spray on us in order to protect us from the biting insects.



The Ten Commandments show us that we are in danger of being bitten by sins that surround us like harmful insects. Have you ever lied to or disobeyed your parents or teachers? Have you ever wished for bad things to happen to someone you don't like? If we are honest, we will all admit such sins. Each sin is like a mosquito bite injecting the poison of guilt into us. It hurts us. It makes us sad. It makes us sick. Yet through His death, Jesus offers us protection from the consequences of our sins, even death. He keeps the bad stuff away. He even rescues us from death. So, Jesus is a little like bug repellent. When we are sad and we feel guilty, we can turn towards Him to receive the forgiveness of all our sins. He sprays us with His Gospel from His holy cross. This is what happens when Christians are baptized with water in the name of our Triune God. Now, covered with Jesus, they can walk through the forest of life without the heavy burden of guilt. That's why God's holy book, the Bible, announces that the peace of God is given to us through Him. Even the most poisonous insect imaginable, death itself, has been destroyed because Jesus has triumphed over the grave by His glorious resurrection from the tomb. Let us cheerfully praise Jesus, our victorious protector, with the crowd who celebrated Him with palm branches on that very first Palm Sunday!

Let us pray: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for Your promise to never abandon us, and for killing all of our sins and exterminating all of our guilt by these words: "I forgive you." Amen.

Good Friday: We Are All Purified

***“And when [Jesus] saw their faith, He said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you.’”
(Luke 5:20)***

What do I have in front of me? Two glasses. The first is full of ordinary water and represents our hearts. The second is full of bleach for cleaning. It represents the heart of Christ. Now let's name a few sins that we all commit daily; ways in which we rebel against God's good will for humankind. For each sin we can think of, and confess out loud, I will add a drop of food colouring in the first glass. What happens? The water becomes polluted and impure. Our hearts, too, get dirty because of our sins. Now, when I pour the clean bleach into the dirty glass, it purifies the water, doesn't it? The water returns to its pure and clean appearance.

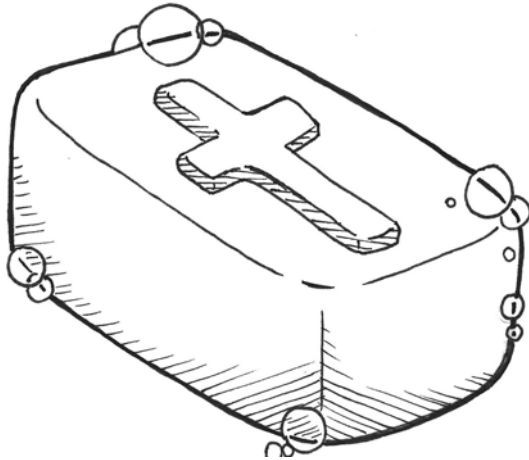
The bleach represents the forgiveness and the presence of Jesus. He pours His pure blood into our hearts and cleanses them from all of our sin making us holy in God's sight. Thanks to Him, we are no longer dirty before God but are pure and beautiful. Our holy God doesn't tolerate dirty glasses in His house. But He takes them into His hands, the human, nail-pierced hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was nailed to a cross and gave up His life so that we can enter into the house of Heavenly Father pure and clean!

Let us pray: Have mercy on me, Jesus, and cleanse me from all of my sins! My heart rejoices in Your forgiveness. May the Holy Spirit give me the will to live a new and holy life pleasing in the sight of the Heavenly Father. Amen.



Easter: Jesus Lives!

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25-26)



When I try to sink certain soaps like this one, it doesn't work. Watch me put this one in the water. It floats. It does not want to stay under the water. Now look at the other side: a cross. Like the soap, it is impossible for Jesus to remain dead, trapped under the water, or under the earth, so to speak. Why? Because He is not only man but He is also God. He is life! Therefore, after His death, He came back to life. As God, He can not remain dead.

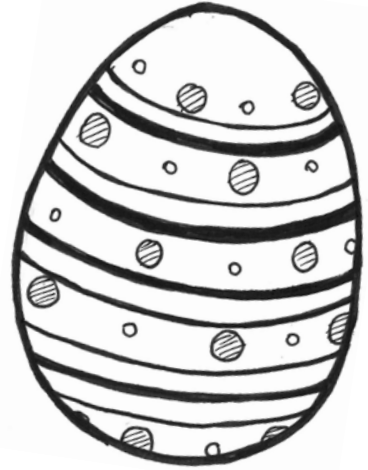
Jesus willingly gave up His life on the cross and knew He would be resurrected three days later. Why did He choose to die? Because He loves us. It was the only way He could bring us to heaven with Him. One day each of us will die. Without the saving grace of God, we are destined to sink to the bottom of our grave and stay there. But God promises that everyone who believes in Jesus and is baptized will share in the resurrection of Jesus (Mark 16:16). They don't stay dead! God will resurrect them in the same way Jesus was resurrected. Jesus' disciples baptized adults and children with water, and sometimes they even plunged them completely under water. The person did not stay underneath the water but arose while the words "In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" were spoken. After the word "Amen" they were "born again" as a new Christian. Baptizing in this way was a symbol of our death and our resurrection. Through Baptism and the faith in the promises of God, our sinful nature is drowned. You can think of our sins staying under the water, while a new person, a Christian, is resurrected to live a new life of Easter joy.

Let us pray: Jesus, our King and Saviour! You gave us the sacrament of Holy Baptism by which You unite us to Your bloody sacrifice on the cross and join us to Your powerful resurrection from the grave! Thank you for preparing for us a way to Heaven where we will live with You and our Christian family forever! Happy Easter! Amen.

Easter 2: The New Birth

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” (1 Peter 1:3)

An egg reminds us of new life because a new creature, a chick, will eventually hatch from its broken shell. This popular little tradition during the season of Easter reminds us of the resurrection of Jesus. He burst from the shell of His grave, offering eternal life to everybody. Because of His death and His resurrection, we have access to a new life here on earth as well. Through the gift of Holy Baptism, we, who are dead in sin, are resurrected with Jesus, to new life. Even though you feel nothing but water splashed on your body, God achieves a miracle for you. He promises that He has made you “a new creation.” And new people do new things. In our case, we are recreated to do good works and thereby bring new life to others in lots of creative ways. It’s a beautiful message, and the reason for which we decorate eggs with pretty creative colours and designs!



Let us pray: Good Saviour, thank you for making us a new creation by Your wonderful and amazing resurrection. Through the washing away of our sins You have offered us eternal life with You and the Holy Spirit, who helps us live a new life to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Easter 3: A Crown of Thorns

***“He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.
(Matthew 28:6)***

Have you ever poked your hand or foot on a thorn, like this one? The Son of God knew what that felt like, and even worse. After all, what adorned the head of Jesus while He hung on the cross? A crown of many long and hard thorns. Imagine the pain! And this is just a small part of what Jesus suffered for us and for our salvation. Each of our sins penetrated the body of Jesus with a pain exceeding that of a thousand thorns. Yet Jesus was willing to suffer all the pains of Hell rather than enter Heaven without you and me, His beloved children. That is why His death on the cross is the greatest expression of love imaginable. He who is innocent of all crimes against God and man, suffers the punishment the rest of us deserve for ours.



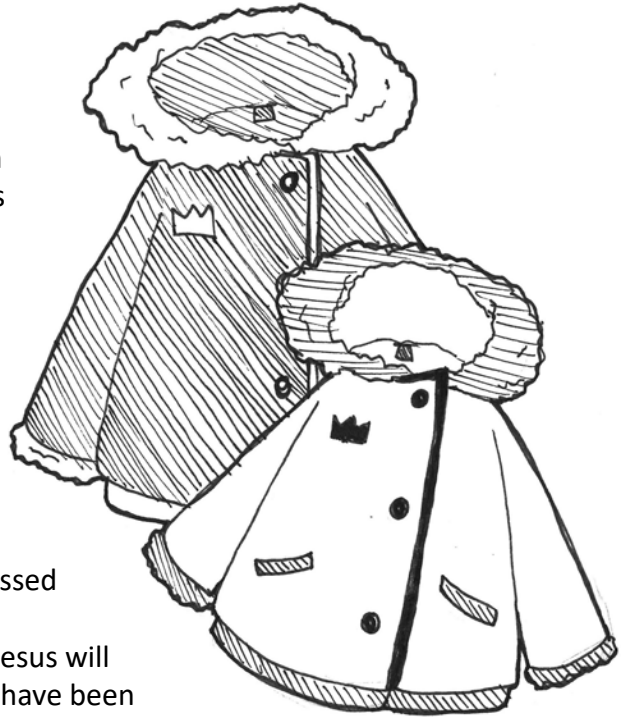
Often you will see crucifixes in churches: crosses with an image or statue of the body of Jesus on them. Do these crucifixes suggest that Jesus is still dead? Not at all! Every Christian knows that Jesus is risen and only our sins are buried forever. His resurrection is proof He is mightier than our sins, and stronger than even death and the devil. Instead, His crucifixion reminds us of the cost He paid in gaining that victory for us. It also reminds us how God's sacrificial and merciful presence is hidden among us in some unlikely places; not only on a simple wooden cross and a woven crown of thorns, but also in the simple bread, water and wine that are used in the services of the Church. For with His presence in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, forevermore.

Let us pray: Almighty God, thank You for destroying sin and death by the sacrifice of Your only begotten Son, and offering us new life by raising Him from death on the third day. You did all this so that we are delivered from Satan and live with You forever in Your kingdom. Thank you Lord! Amen.

Easter 4: A Great Exchange

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

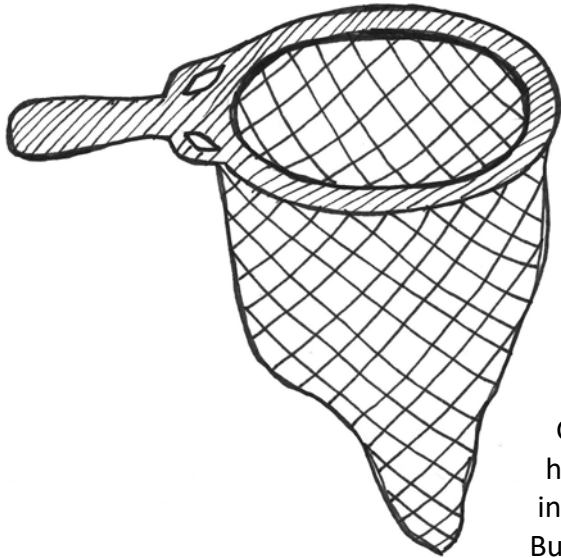
Here are two coats. The black one represents sin (the coat of death) and the white one represents holiness (the coat of life). Each represents our spiritual state. Because we have all broken the Ten Commandments we are sinners who wear the coat of death! But Jesus never sinned. And because of His wondrous love for us, He gave us His coat of life in exchange for our coat of death. By wearing our coat, Jesus carried all the sins of the world to the cross and defeated death by His resurrection. Because we wear Jesus' clothes, we are now dressed appropriately for fellowship with God. After all, everyone who receives this coat exchange with Jesus will live with Him forever in His Heavenly home. You have been wrapped in Jesus' coat of righteousness in Holy Baptism. What a wonderful outfit to wear!



Let us pray: Thank You Lord Jesus for giving us Your holiness in exchange for our sins so that could be justified and forgiven before God. Teach us to confess our sins daily and to receive Your forgiveness. Amen.

Ascension Day: Caught by God

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind...” (Matthew 13:47)



What's the purpose of a net? It is used to catch fish.

Normally, a net is used to catch fish, so that we can take them out of the water and eat them.

But sometimes, a net is used to help the fish and save them. For example, there was a school of fish swimming in a river enroute to a very polluted lake. Some volunteers wanted to help the fish and save them. They threw a net into the river to catch the fish. Then, they transferred them with the net to a cleaner lake. These volunteers saved the fish from their death!

God did something similar for us by becoming human and entering our world. We were wallowing in the river of sin, en route towards the lake of Hell.

But by means of His cross, Jesus tossed His divine net of salvation into our polluted lives in order to

transfer us to the clean ocean of His kingdom. Through

the sacrament of Baptism, He directed us to the peaceful waters of heaven and eternal life. Can you think of a kinder fisherman than that? And He calls us to do the same, to be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19) by sharing with them the Good News of Jesus’ salvation net.

Let us pray: Almighty God, we don’t deserve the sacrifice of Jesus who caught us through the gospel in Baptism to save our souls. Thank You for Your love and Your limitless mercy; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, Amen.

The Day of Pentecost: The Coming of the Holy Spirit

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

Pentecost happened fifty days after Easter, when our Lord rose from the dead after being crucified for our sins. In order to help us believe in Jesus, God sent His Holy Spirit to His people at Pentecost. He descended in the form of a flame which rested on the head of each apostle. The presence of God is often symbolized by a flame or fire; for example, at Mount Sinai, when God spoke to Moses. I wonder why? Perhaps it is because of the importance of fire for our survival. For instance, fire gives us light and heat on a dark cold of night. When our spirits are chilled because of our sins, they are warmed and illuminated by the presence of Jesus, the Son of God and His Spirit. The presence of God warms us up by burning away our sins because of His sacrifice for us on the cross. The Holy Spirit guides us towards Jesus and gives us faith in Jesus as the Light of the world. Fire also purifies precious metals from all blemishes and imperfections. So too, the Holy Spirit purifies our souls and our spirits by the fire of our heavenly Father’s eternal love, and our precious Lord Jesus’ grace and forgiveness. The fire of God is Good News for us!



Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Son of God, teach us Your word and change our hearts with Your Spirit, so that it might enlighten, sanctify, comfort, and lead us in the will of God our Father. Amen.

Trinity Sunday

***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19-20)***

The three-leaf clover, a plant you find in many countries in the Northern Hemisphere, reminds us of the story of Saint Patrick, the first missionary of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Ireland. He abandoned his comfortable life to teach about Jesus to a lost people in a foreign land: that the Father sent us His only begotten Son to die on the cross. The Holy Spirit creates faith in this message, in our hearts, since we cannot by our own reasoning or strength believe in Jesus Christ and come to Him. That is how one of the Church’s best “catechisms,” or “teaching books,” puts it. In other words, through the Holy Bible, the Holy Spirit changes our unbelief and doubt into a faith that trusts in Jesus’ saving love for us. In this way, God the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, as He directs us to God the Son who is the Way to God the Father. God is the Holy Trinity. He is three in one, like the three lines of a triangle, or even a bit like a three-leaf clover!

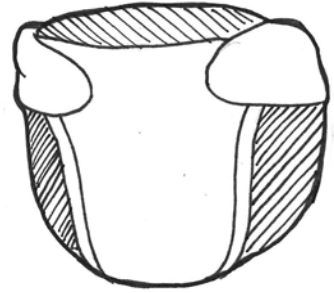


Let us pray: We give thanks to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the blessed Holy Trinity, for all of the devoted missionaries who have spread the Gospel to those in need. Please send more and help us to share the message with those in our own communities. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Pentecost 2: Our Good Works?

“all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment...” (Isaiah 64:6)

Are dirty diapers something people like having around? By no means! But babies have no idea how terrible and disgusting they sometimes smell. People are often unaware of gross things about themselves that are obvious to others. For instance, we often think that our good deeds are really special. If a rich man donates lots of money to a good cause, everyone is very impressed. Yet God thinks differently.



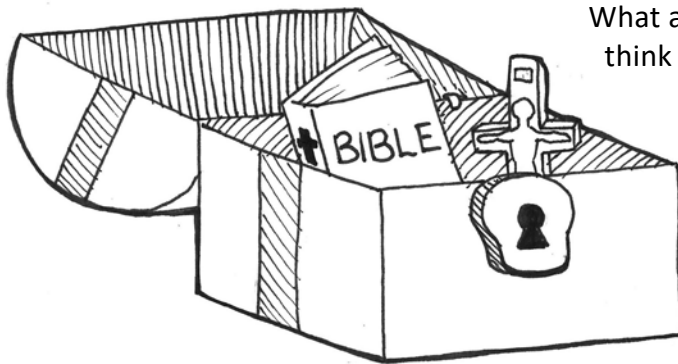
God says that our attempts at doing good deeds are “filthy rags.” They are like a dirty diaper, and it smells awful! We are born with an inclination to sin. In fact, despite our greatest efforts, all our actions are completely soiled with sin. Our thoughts, words and deeds are about as acceptable before God as a dirty diaper is pleasing to you.

But let us not despair! Because Jesus, truly man and truly God, has cleaned us from that spiritual filth and taken away the bad smell. Motivated by His boundless love, He shed His blood for our forgiveness and made us perfectly clean and innocent before God Almighty. He removed the dirtiness of our sins and all that is flawed in our efforts to please Him. Our filthy rags have been turned into beautiful garments, truly good and holy works as God’s Spirit produces them in and through our lives. Thanks to Jesus and His holiness, our good works now are “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.” (Philippians 4:18b)

Let us pray: We praise you God our gracious Father for cleansing our hearts of their filth, and producing good works of holiness in our lives, through the blood of Jesus and His good work for us on the cross. Amen.

Pentecost 3: The Biggest Treasures

***“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”
(Matthew 13:44)***



What are some examples of objects that you think are valuable (like games, money, jewellery, gold, etc.)? Here is a box full of treasures.

And in this box is something more valuable than all of those things we have just listed! Let's open the box and look inside. Surprise! It's a Bible! But it's only a book, isn't it? Why would a book have so much value? It has the greatest of value because of the special message it contains;

a message from God. Let's open up it. What's inside? A cross! The Bible tells us about Jesus who saved us from sin, death and hell through His life, passion and cross! Through His resurrection, Jesus defeated all of our spiritual enemies and gave us eternal life with Him. Our life on earth is short. But the life Jesus won for us at His cross, is for eternity. That is why the Bible is our greatest treasure! And because of its great worth, no one could afford to purchase it. It is priceless, and, therefore, a free gift to us from God. It is pure grace.

Let us pray: Thank you Jesus for being our precious treasure! Thank you for cherishing us as Your little treasures, whom You have purchased with Your very own life. Amen.

Pentecost 4: Children of God

***“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 18:4)***

Why does our Lord ask us to become like little children in order to enter into His kingdom? Well, take a look at this little baby. A young infant always needs others to take care of him or her. Even when babies are very little, they trust in their mothers and have faith in her to provide for all of their needs, such as feeding, dressing, changing, and nursing. A committed and kind mother always has her baby's best interests in mind. Jesus wants us to have the same trust in Him. We have been made His children in Holy Baptism. God is now our heavenly Father. Yet unlike our earthly parents, who aren't perfect and make mistakes, God, our parent, is perfectly trustworthy and always good. When we trust God like the child that we are, we realize we have nothing at all to worry about in life. We are held in the strong and loving arms of Jesus that were outstretched for us on the cross. He will never drop us or hurt us. He promises this in His Word and He cannot lie. He will always feed us with His Body and clothe us with His Blood. There is no better place to be held between the tender and mighty arms of our heavenly Father.



Let us pray: Thank you, Jesus, for calling us your little children and embracing us in Your holy arms. Help us to believe with all our heart and to keep faith in Your grace and your unconditional love. Amen.

Pentecost 5: A Difficult Path



***"Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
His understanding is unsearchable."
(Isaiah 40:28)***

Have you ever been walking with your parents and, after a while, became too tired to walk? And, so, your father or mother carried you on their back with a baby carrier or strapped you to their back with a blanket? You were not as strong as your parents because you were younger. Your muscles were less developed and your legs were not as long. The walk would have been too long and hard to walk on your own. But when you were carried, it did

not matter how hard or steep the path was because you were strapped to your parent's back. They did all the work for you and you got to relax.

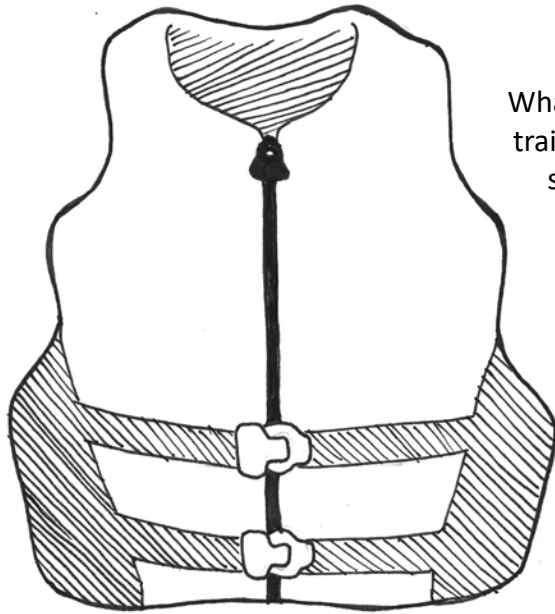
It's the same thing with Jesus. Jesus takes His baptized believers and straps them onto His back. He stays strong even when we are weak and when we think we are no longer able to continue. He did all the work for us when He carried our sins to the cross and died. And now He never leaves us nor forsakes us for "He will not grow tired or weary" (Isaiah 40:28). It's good news because our path isn't always easy. He stays with us and bears us no matter what difficulties we face.

And it will never change, even the day we die! He will carry us into heaven where we will join Him to rejoice in His love, peace, and light. He died and came back to life to open the way to heaven.

Let us pray: Thank you Lord for our union with You. Thank you for carrying us every day on the rough road of our lives and leading us to heaven, to find in Your death and resurrection the joy, peace, and eternal light of Your love! Amen.

Pentecost 6: Jesus Saves Us

“Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 3:21)



What's the point of a life jacket? If someone is a trained lifeguard, they can throw this life jacket at someone drowning because they want to save them.

Spiritually, the Gospel is our life jacket. We are sinking in the sea of our sins, but God has tossed us a life jacket to rescue us from certain death:

it's His only begotten Son, our Saviour. The death of Jesus and His resurrection is our life jacket.

When your parents brought you to the font or bowl where you were baptized with water as the pastor spoke God's Word "in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," they saved your life. This message is worth rejoicing over for the rest of your life. You celebrate that salvation and

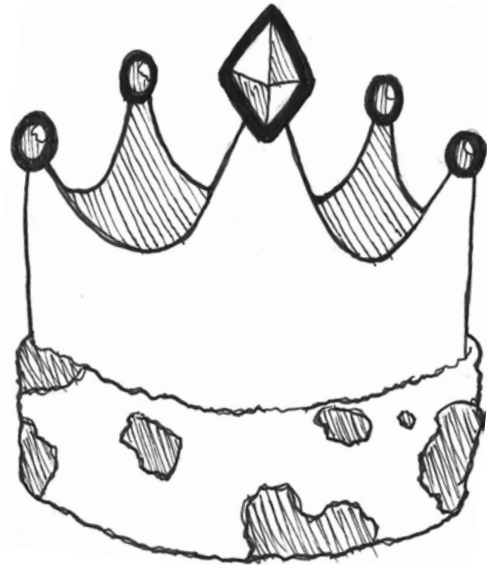
keep clinging to that life jacket, when you continue to study God's Word of your salvation and attend church, just

like a shipwrecked sailor clings with confidence to a life jacket and refuses to let go of the hand of his saviour. Jesus is our Saviour and He holds onto us when we receive all that He delivers to us through the pastor on Sunday mornings and your Bible on the other days of the week.

Let us pray: We are grateful to you Heavenly Father for saving us by the death and resurrection of Jesus: Give us Your Holy Spirit to help us share this saving Gospel with others so they too can be rescued from their sins by the cross of Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Pentecost 7: A King Among Us

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” (Colossians 1:15)



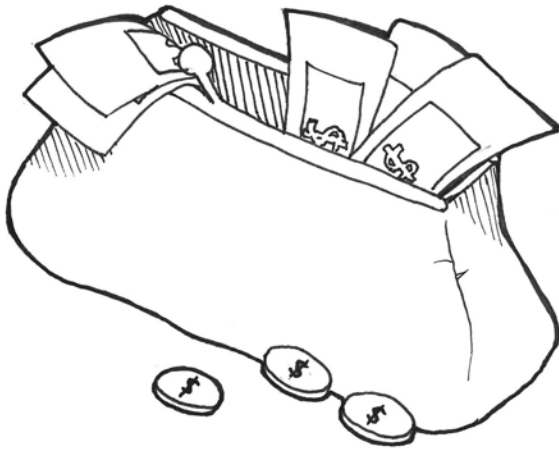
I have a little story for you. Once upon a time there was a king who wanted to know his people better. He loved them but they had some wrong and unflattering ideas about Him. He knew that if he visited them, they would be scared. He was the king after all, and they were simple peasants. So he disguised himself as an ordinary citizen. In disguise he became very popular with the people, renowned for his kindness and compassion. But in his speech and behaviour, they knew that he was no ordinary citizen. The king eventually ended up revealing his identity to them and the people were very happy. From that day forward they knew that their king loved them and understood them.

Think of the coming of Jesus Christ in a like manner. God wanted to visit His Creation, many of whom had fallen away from a true knowledge of Him. To come close to us, He not only disguised Himself as a man, but He actually became a human being just like us. He descended from His throne in heaven and became man. Because He is born of the Virgin Mary but conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is fully God and fully man at the same time. The Holy Bible says that “The Son is the image of the invisible God.” When people saw Jesus performing miracles and heard Him teach the word of God, they knew He was no ordinary man. When they discovered His true identity after He rose from the dead, as only God can do, they rejoiced in the knowledge that God was full of love and compassion for them. When this King died on the cross for us simple peasants, He not only revealed His limitless love, He also offered us the forgiveness of sins which changes our lives and helps us to rightly believe with our hearts that God is on our side, even when we do not see Him with our eyes.

Let us pray: Thank You, Jesus, the image of the invisible God, for forgiving us and for transforming our lives. Amen.

Pentecost 8: A Lost Child

“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet’”
(Luke 15:21-22)



Read together Luke 15:11-24.

Imagine telling your parents, after they have bought you everything you could possibly need in life and promised to continue to provide for you: “I want you out of my life! Give me your wallet. I want to spend it all and buy whatever I want!”

That’s essentially what the selfish son in our story did. The characters in this story correspond to our

life and our Christian faith. The ungrateful and rebellious son demands his Father’s money so that he can live a wicked and reckless life away from his family. After a short time, he has wasted away all of his inheritance and is reduced to pitiful poverty. Now, who is the father? God. Who is the younger son? Us. Like him, we have rebelled against our heavenly father to live a sinful life of disobedience, leading to our own destruction. And it doesn’t take long before our bad decisions and sin drive us into sadness, despair and spiritual poverty.

Throughout each and every day, we do not keep the commandments of God. We rebel. We are guilty of bad actions, bad words, and bad thoughts. We are unfaithful children. Yet does our Heavenly Father abandon us? Not at all! Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, died on the cross to make us beloved children of God: “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him” (1 John 3:1). From the moment of our baptism, Jesus promises to stay with us. Even when we’re mean, Jesus loves us and wants to see us return to Him and admit our sins. He wants to forgive us. He embraces us with His love and desires that we do the same with regard to others. The church is like a little family. We can forgive others and accept them back into our community of Faith because Jesus forgave us first. He has even give us His Spirit to help us. In this sense, we are not only like the rebellious son, but we can also be like the compassionate father.

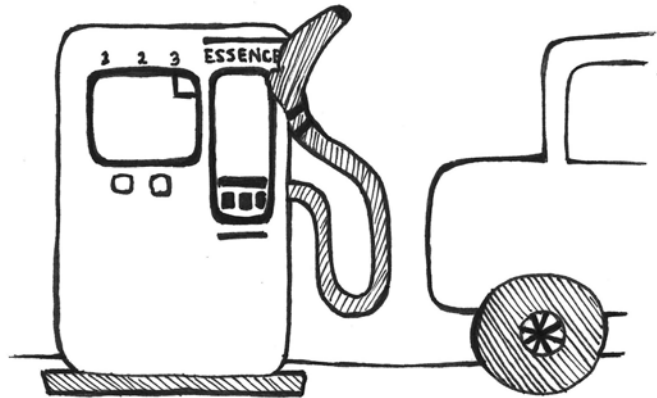
Let us pray: We praise You, Lord, for forgiving us and restoring us as Your children. Help us to forgive those who have hurt us. Amen.

Pentecost 9: The Fuel of Life

“For the Lord takes pleasure in His people... (Psalm 149:4a)

What do your parents do when their car runs out of gas? They have to go to the gas station to refuel. Without fuel, the car doesn't work. Our souls are empty without the fuel of God's forgiveness. The church is like the gas station. The Bible, the Word of God, the Sacraments, are like that gas pump, the means of delivering God's grace into our hearts and souls. They give us the power to live and continue with the spiritual energy we need to live as Christians. Every week, every day, we look inside and we discover that we are empty. Our sins and our problems make us weak. Have you fought with a family member recently? Are you always nice with your friends? We confess our sins and our

need for Jesus Christ. Jesus then fills us with His strength and His grace. Our verse says: “the Lord takes delight in His people.” Our Heavenly Father loves us and He is sad when we miss church, because it means we have chosen to live with our empty tanks, and that is a dangerous way to drive a car. Yet when we listen to the message of the Gospel and allow Him to refuel us at church, “the Lord takes delight in his people.” It is there that we receive all that is necessary to make the journey in security and safety.



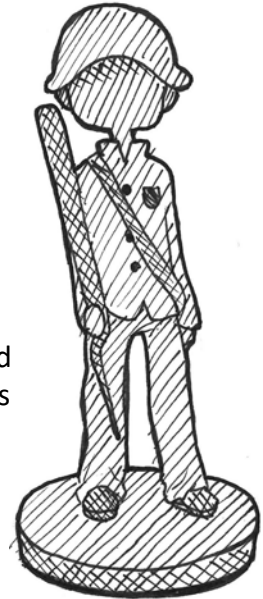
Let us pray: Heavenly Father, You sent Jesus into our world to refuel our empty souls. Thank you for His death and His resurrection, and the opportunity to receive His life and spirit every time we enter Your home or open your Word. Help us never to be lazy in our faith and devotion but to take great care of our bodies and souls. Amen.

Pentecost 10: The Victory

***“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”
(John 15:13)***

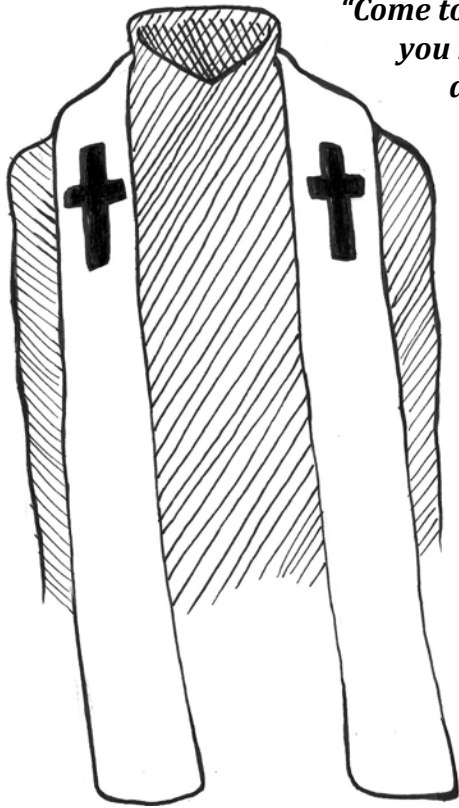
War is horrible. Countries fight each other with soldiers and people kill each other. Throughout history, millions of people have died because of the wars in which sinful human people engage. It is truly heartbreaking. Yet, even so, it is sometimes necessary.

Did you know that God engaged in a war for us? Jesus went to war with the devil to save us from his evil and terrible grasp and rescue us from his wicked kingdom. Jesus won this war at the cross and proves it through His victorious resurrection. He defeated the rebellious fallen angels called demons whose leader is Satan. But the war to save us required the biggest sacrifice imaginable: His life. Yet for Him, it was well worth it because it was the only way to save us, His beloved children. Our evil defeated enemy is a “sore loser” and still tries to tear us away from our Lord Jesus by all of his crafty temptations. But Jesus refuses to let go. When we hear His Gospel Word and remain in His Church where his apostles today, our pastors, teach, feed and care for us, we rest securely in the safe, strong and gentle hands of Jesus.



Let us pray: Thank You, Jesus, for leading and winning the battle against the devil in order to save us from sin and death. Give our pastors the true knowledge of your Word, the ability to teach Your pure doctrine and the wisdom to apply it to our lives, so we never allow ourselves to fall from your mighty and nail scarred hands. Amen.

Pentecost 11: Jesus is Our Rest



"Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29)

Do you know what a yoke is? Animals, like oxen, sometimes wear a yoke on their backs to transport something, often in buckets. Jesus tells us that, like oxen, He carried all of our heavy burdens—our sins—to the cross, because He loves us so much. And He continues to do this for us so we can be spiritually freed from their heaviness in our lives. The pastor wears a strip of coloured fabric on his pastoral dress, called a "stole." The stole is like the yoke of an ox. This stole symbolizes that through the pastor Jesus continues to carry away the weight of our sins by the words that He speaks to us over and over again during the services in church: "Your sins are forgiven." In other words, "Your burdens have been lifted to the cross and away from you forever." This is good news for us. For whenever you see this symbol

that he wears, you can remember that Jesus is like your ox who carries all of your burdens for you in order to free you. All of your big problems, especially everything that weighs on your conscience, remain on the shoulders of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Thank You, heavenly Father, for Jesus who bore all of our sins and problems on the cross. We are full of joy now because Christ gave us rest for our souls. In His Name we pray, Amen.

Pentecost 12: A Good Shepherd

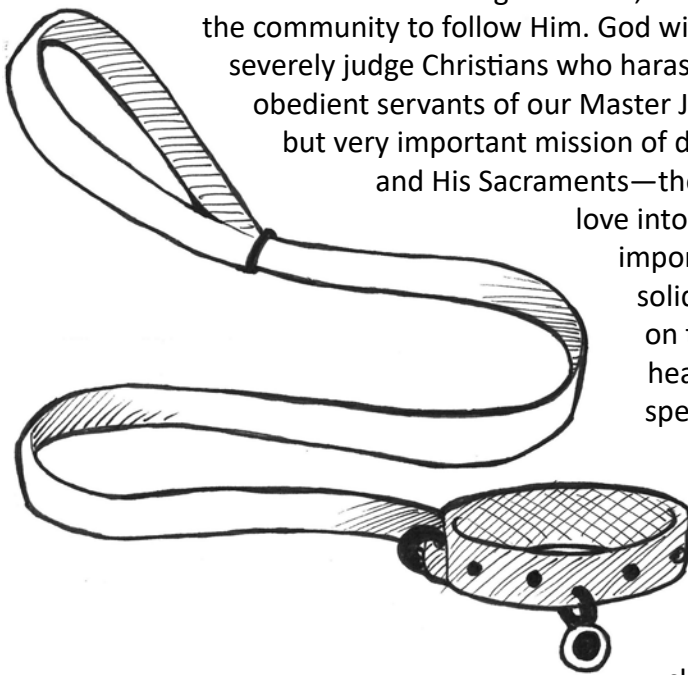
***“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.”
(1 Timothy 4:6)***

I have here a leash and a collar for a dog. It allows the animal’s master to prevent the dog from running away and makes sure it is led in the correct direction. Often, pastors or priests also wear a kind of collar, a white strip of plastic or material that wraps around their neck or is only partially visible as a little square under the chin. Although its not a dog collar, it functions in the same way. It symbolizes that he is God’s servant. And our Master is full of love and wisdom. This collar helps pastors and the congregations for which they are responsible remember that none of them belong to themselves, but rather they are Christ’s possession and members of

His larger Church. When the pastor strays off of the path by teaching false doctrines about the Bible or leading a bad life, it becomes dangerous for the followers of the community to follow Him. God will severely judge that pastor. He will also severely judge Christians who harass their pastors when they are faithful obedient servants of our Master Jesus Christ. For pastors have the difficult but very important mission of distributing the grace of God, His Word and His Sacraments—the tools by which God works His gracious love into our lives—to the people of God. Most importantly, Christ’s servants provide sound and solid teaching that keeps our Lord’s Church on the straight and narrow path towards heaven. When the faithful pastor speaks, he speaks for God and God speaks through Him. For instance, he tells us that we have messed up our lives with sin by living contrary to God’s will. We may not like to hear that: the Law. But then he proclaims to us that Jesus became our servant, and was chained to the cross to clean up our mess through the forgiveness of our sins: the Gospel. That message is awesome news! The leash is therefore a symbol

of the pastor as a servant of God, as well as a reminder that he must always boldly, clearly and without any compromise, preach the good Word of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. It’s a hard job and we appreciate our pastors for serving us in the stead of Christ.

Let us pray: Thank you, almighty God, for the pastors who are faithful to Your Word, a Word which tells us that we have the best of teachers and saviours in Jesus Christ. Amen.



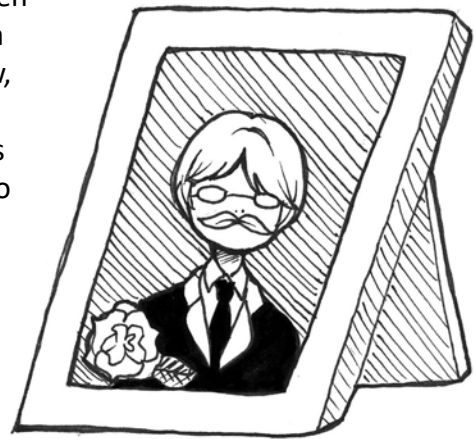
Pentecost 13: God Our Father

"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6)

Here's a picture of my father. He's my father and not everyone can call him by the same name as I call him; "dad." It's a name only his kids can use. My father provides me with good things that he doesn't give to everyone else in the same way. He works hard so I can eat, have a bed to sleep in, and lots of other good things in my life.

Our all-powerful God has created us. But He is not just our creator, He has become our Father, and we can even call Him "Abba" which means "daddy." There are huge privileges reserved for us who are truly his children, made so in Holy Baptism. Jesus worked so hard, even to the point of His death on the cross, to provide for us a home in heaven, endless blessings, the love and support we need for our souls, and the friendship of a Father who loves us so much: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1). Even though some children do not have kind earthly fathers or caretakers, we all have a heavenly Father with whom we will spend eternity. For now, even though we do not see Him, when we pray, we talk to Him. He talks back to us when we hear His Word. He speaks to us with gentleness, compassion and kindness. There is no better dad in the whole wide world than God.

Let us pray: Lord God, our heavenly Father, Abba, we are your blessed children. Your generosity towards us is without measure. Create faith in everyone's hearts so they'll become your kids as well. In the name of Jesus, Your Son and our Lord, Amen.

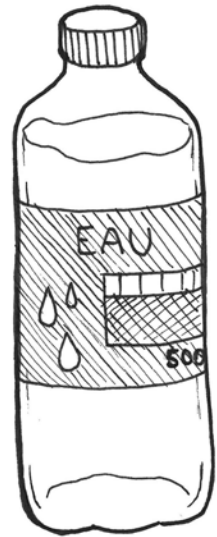


Pentecost 14: Living Water

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.’” (John 7:37)

In the middle of the summer, there is nothing better than a cold drink of water. It refreshes us. It quenches a dry throat. It gives us all of the nutrients and minerals our body needs. Did you know that eighty percent of our bodies consist of water? So if we don't drink water, we die.

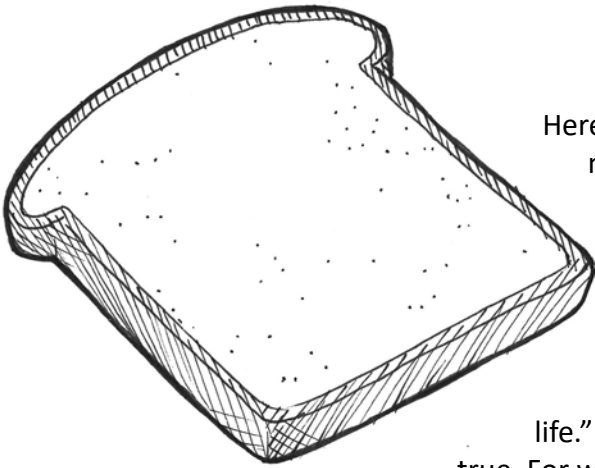
Spiritually, our souls are dry like a desert because of our sins. They are thirsty for forgiveness. Do you always listen to your parents or your teachers? Or maybe you have fought with your brothers, sisters, or friends? Or maybe you've been jealous or envious of someone? These sins, like all sins, are deadly. They dry us up. And without the life-giving power of water, our spirits shrivel up and die. Yet we have hope! Jesus is the water of life that refreshes our souls and saves us from death. He poured out His blood on the cross; a blood of the forgiveness of sins that never stops flowing, just like a river. In fact, He is the River of Life. We have access to His purifying and gracious water through our baptism when the Holy Spirit came into our souls through water and God's spoken Word over us. In that pool of water we have all the nutrients and refreshment necessary to travel through the desert of our lives with strength and energy. Jesus said: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink." If we stop listening to the words of Jesus by no longer attending church and neglecting to read the Bible, we will become spiritually dehydrated and dry. Yet unlike dying of thirst, when our souls go thirsty we may not even realize it is happening. We need to drink the water of Jesus every day, since His Word is eternal life.



Let us pray: Lord, You are the water who gives eternal life. Help me to never forget the importance of listening to Your Word which forgive all of my sins and refreshes my soul. In the Name of Jesus, the River of Life. Amen.

Pentecost 15: The Bread of Life

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” (John 6:35)



Here's a simple piece of bread. It doesn't look like much. Yet it is very important to sustain our lives.

We can live a lot longer eating bread than many other foods. Bread is also much cheaper and more accessible than other foods. Yet Jesus said that “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”

(Matthew 4:4). But He also said “I am the bread of

life.” Jesus is not confused. Rather both sentences are

true. For we have hunger in our hearts and souls because our

relationship with God is broken. We are starving to death and we

need the life only Jesus can give because His bread is the only food that can

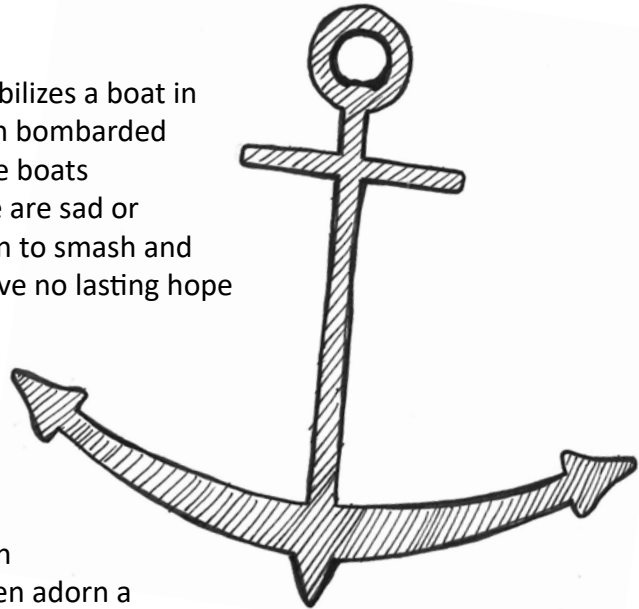
satisfy our hungry souls. The cost of this bread from heaven was the sacrifice of God's one and only Son on the cross. Jesus willingly died and then He rose from the dead to offer us the bread of His forgiveness. We eat this bread every time we listen to the Word of Jesus and when we eat this bread during the Holy Communion service at church. His loving and saving presence is hidden in, with and under simple bread. Jesus is truly the bread of life, given for you, to nourish and feed your souls! And unlike bread you bake or buy at the store, the bread that Jesus is, and offers, never runs out. He keeps His whole Church fed until we enter our heavenly home.

Let us pray: Bread of life, we thank you for having freely given Your life for us on the cross in order to feed our souls with Your body. Thank you for feeding us in such a simple and easy way so we can have all the strength we need as we walk together with all other Christian believers, towards our eternal home. We praise You that even though You wait for us there, You abide with us here, through your Body, the Church. Amen.

Pentecost 16: Anchor of Our Faith

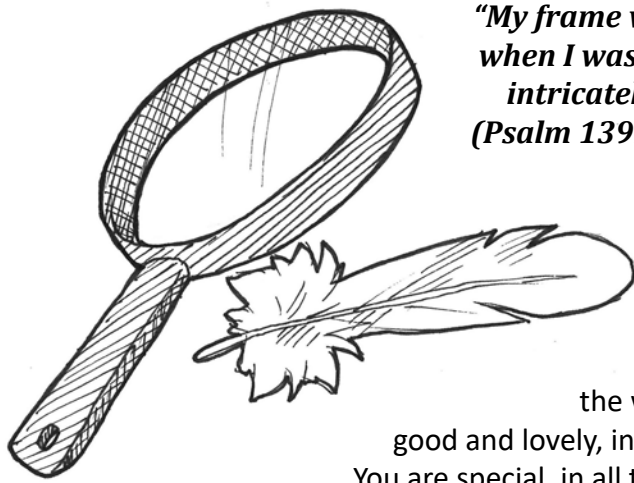
“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain.” (Hebrews 6:19)

Why do sailors use an anchor on a boat? It stabilizes a boat in the water so that it does not move, even when bombarded by big waves during violent storms. We are like boats floating through the sea of our lives. When we are sad or when we have problems, waves of doubt begin to smash and shake our faith. Those who aren't Christian have no lasting hope and they float away into destruction and despair. Yet when we are anchored on Jesus Christ the solid rock, we are safe. Like a rock hidden under the sea, upon which the anchor sits, our Lord may not be visible to our eyes, but that doesn't change His power and strength. One of the symbols on church furniture or banners (the flags that often adorn a sanctuary) is an anchor that also looks like a cross. On the rock of Calvary, where Jesus' cross sat, God promised to be with us always, to keep us from sinking under the sea of sin, trouble and despair. He does this through forgiving our sins. There are many images of ships and boats in the Church. Some ancient churches were designed to look like a boat that carries us to heaven. For Jesus is not only our rock, He is also the captain of our ship. He is our security, and Jesus is our anchor. When we pray and ask Him for help and trust in His response to us in His Word, Jesus keeps us anchored in Him and His grace. Even the biggest waves that exist cannot drown us!



Let us pray: Lord God, help us to put all of our confidence in You, even when life sends us waves. Thank you for anchoring us in Your love through Holy Baptism, and for giving us faith and trust in Your guarantee that we are safe and sound with Jesus at our side. Through Jesus Christ, the Captain of our ship, Amen.

Pentecost 17: You Are Wonderfully Made



*"My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth."
(Psalm 139:15)*

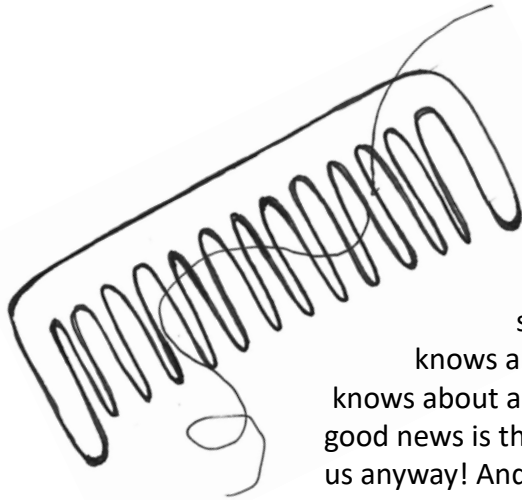
Look at all the details of this lovely feather with this magnifying glass. It's so impressive the way God made it, isn't it? God makes all things good and lovely, including you! God doesn't make mistakes either.

You are special, in all the details too. Because you are precious to Him and priceless in His sight, you never have a reason to worry. Maybe some big changes have happened in your life; a member of the family has fallen seriously ill, or a parent has lost their job. These are all sources of worry. But Jesus tells us that we don't have any reason to worry. He tells us to look at the birds. They don't worry about how they are clothed or how they are fed! God takes care of them all. And us, children of God, made so through Baptism and faith, we are even more important to God than the birds. God knows all of the details in our life and He takes care of us each day. So there is no reason to ever be scared of anything with Jesus holding us in His mighty and gentle hands outstretched on the cross, all out of love for you and me.

Let us pray: God, I praise you because I am wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Amen.

Pentecost 18: Every Hair Counted

“Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:7)

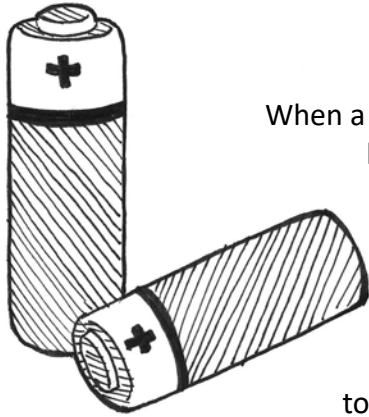


Have you ever tried to count the number of hairs on your head? Impossible! But did you know that God knows the exact number? That means He knows us better than we know ourselves. And if He concerns Himself even with the number of hairs on your head, surely He pays attention to what goes on in your life. He knows about all the worries and fears that haunt us, and He also knows about all the sins and guilt that we try to hide in our hearts. The good news is that even though He knows everything about us, He loves us anyway! And because He knows us inside out, He also knows the solution. When we come to Him with all these dark thoughts and things, and give them to Him by praying, confessing, and sharing those that really trouble us with our pastors, He lifts them away and forgives them all because of all Jesus has done for us in His life and death.

Let us pray: Thank you, all-powerful God, for creating me. In spite of all of my mistakes, I praise You for continuing to have mercy on me and loving me through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Pentecost 19: Jesus “recharges” us

“...casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

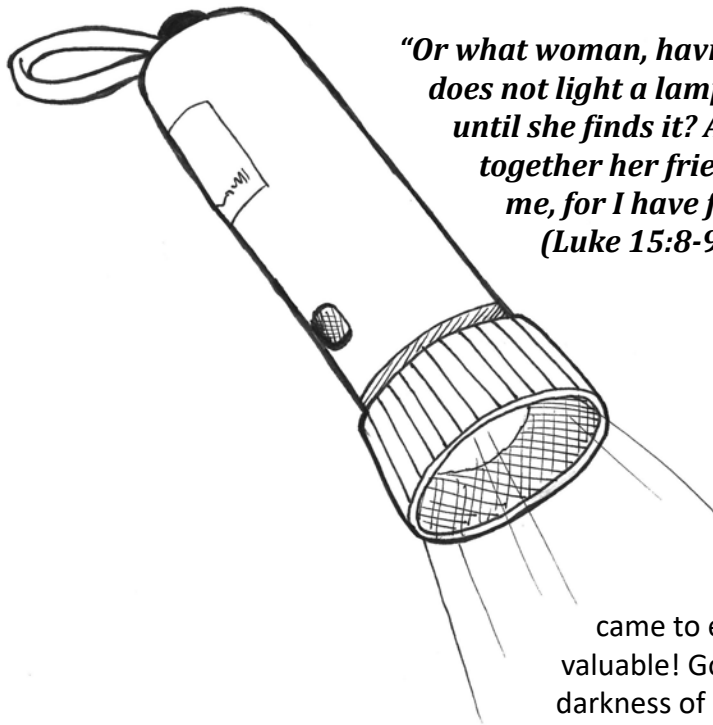


When a rechargeable battery doesn't have any more electricity, we say it's been drained of energy or “dead”. All its power is gone. It needs to be reconnected to an electrical socket, otherwise it just stays dead.

Jesus encourages us to recharge! He wants you to cast all your sins and everything that overwhelms you or hurts you upon Him. We do this through talking to a pastor or by talking directly to God in prayer. Through these means, we transfer all our burdens to Jesus who carries them to the cross which then becomes our spiritual electrical socket. Like that dead battery, we are empty of energy due to all our anxieties and spiritual darkness and need to be recharged. By Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, which delivers to us the free forgiveness of sins, we get plugged into Jesus who “recharges” us. For example, a battery powers a flashlight which enlightens the path for others who are lost in darkness. Christians do the same, when they are recharged by Jesus: the Holy Spirit has them shine light on the path for others by sharing the Gospel with others. After all, God's Word is “lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (Psalm 119:105).

Let us pray: Thank you, Lord, for this recharging that we only find in Jesus Christ. Keep us always plugged into You and y\Your means of grace. We rejoice in Your gifts of Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and even the Office of the Pastor as your ways of energizing us with forgiveness, salvation and new life now and forever! Amen.

Pentecost 20: God searches for us and finds us



***“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’”
(Luke 15:8-9)***

Have you ever lost something valuable after the sun has set? You then have to try to find it with a flashlight. It may take a long time. The searching requires a lot of devotion and patience, doesn't it? God

came to earth to search for something especially valuable! God has come to find us who were lost in the darkness of our sin! He uses a flashlight too: the Light of the world, His only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. On the cross, just before His last breath, on a night darker than any night in history, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus was announcing that His mission to save us was accomplished and complete. He had found His valuable object: us. Through Jesus’ sacrifice, God has not only found us once, but He keeps on finding us when we wander astray. When we repent of our sins—when we acknowledge we are lost in the dark through confession—and cry out to Him for mercy, He “absolves” us—forgives us of our sins—and puts us right back into the light of His love, grace and fatherly presence.

Let us pray: I thank you, Lord, for having sought and found me through Jesus Christ. Increase my faith and help me daily to search and find Jesus in the Bible which is the light of life. Amen.

Pentecost 21: The Armor of Faith

“Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one...” (Ephesians 6:14-15)

Sometimes kids like to play dress-up. Some boys like to dress us up as a medieval European knight in a suit of shining armor. Armor protects soldiers from the enemy equips them to defend themselves from attack. The Bible tells us that we Christians must fight against the attacks of our enemies: darkness, temptations to sin, and the words and works of the devil. Without the help of God, our enemies would win the battle. But God gave us a spiritual armor that protects us against these enemies and allows us to defeat them. Jesus bought us this divine armor with His death and resurrection. He gave it to you as an individual the moment you were baptized, and teaches you how it all works in His holy Word. It does all the work for us when we let it. Don't be like some lazy “Christians” who let their armor get rusty by lack of use. They resist the work of the Holy Spirit who fights these enemies for us through this armor. Instead, study His Word, believe in all of God's teachings, resist temptations, stand up for the truth, ask forgiveness for your sins, and share the Gospel!

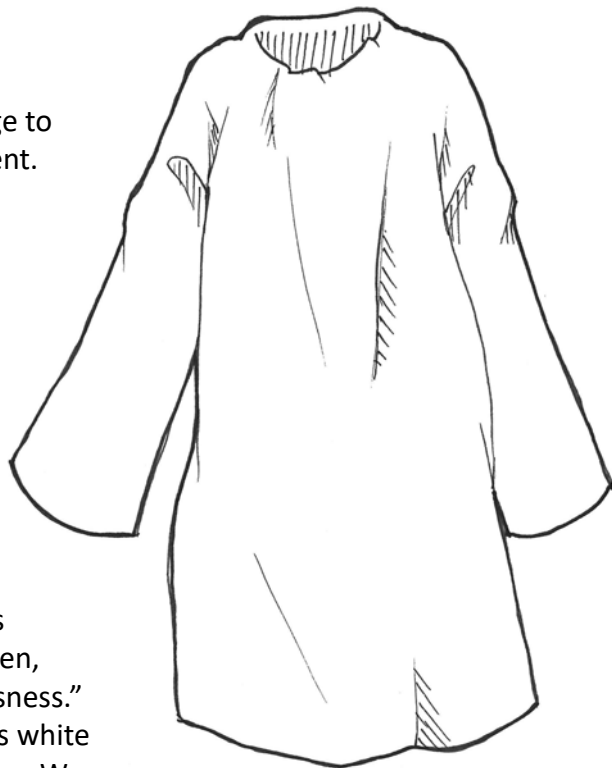


Let us pray: Holy Spirit, thank you for having equipped us with the armor of God. Help us in our spiritual battles to have confidence and faith in Jesus, our Lord and Saviour! Amen.

Pentecost 23: The Righteousness of Christ

*“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.” (Psalm 32:1)*

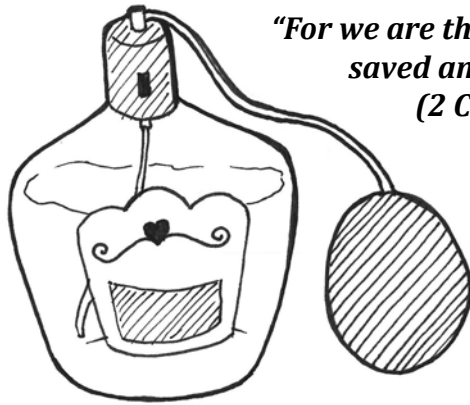
Pastors, during worship services, may look strange to some people. They wear a robe or a white garment. In North America, we call this article of clothing “an alb” or when it sits over a black “cassock”, it is called a “surplice.” Like everything the pastor wears, and like all of the symbols we see in the Church, these white garments weren’t just randomly chosen. They lead our thoughts, hearts and meditations back to Jesus Christ and His righteousness. They hide the man under them, and reveal Jesus who is hidden there, by the words the pastor speaks and the pastoral work he does. In a sense, they also remind us of how we are all clothed by Jesus Christ. Our sins are hidden from the eyes of heaven, covered by the clothing of Jesus or His “righteousness.” By Jesus’ death on the cross, Jesus purchased this white garment of forgiveness and holiness to cover us up. We cannot approach God as we are, filthy with sins and our own unrighteousness. The death of Jesus on the cross dresses us in a white robe so that we are presentable before our holy and perfect God. In other words, our sins are forgiven and we are now perfect in the sight of God!



The white garment pastors wear represents this “robe of righteousness” that Jesus Christ gave us as a present during Baptism and covers us up every moment of every day. In Europe, pastors’ robes are often black. This can remind us that Jesus took away all of our sins and took them upon himself. In exchange, He dressed us with His forgiveness. Churches may have many different traditions and colours, but as long as they all teach us about Jesus and lead us back to His loving cross, they are wonderful tools in building up our faith.

Let us pray: Almighty God, we worship You for the robe of righteousness purchased and won for us by Jesus Christ and His Blood which covers all of our sins. Give us the desire to cover the sins of others, each and every day, just as you have taught us in the best prayer of all, the Our Father: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Pentecost 23: The Perfume of God



***"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing..."
(2 Corinthians 2:15)***

Do you like the smell of perfume? People often use perfumes to cover up bad odours. Without God in our lives, we smell spiritually bad. We have a really bad odour due to our sin. We lack love for God and for others, and that stinks! Jesus, our King, want us to smell good for His kingdom. Therefore, He sacrificed Himself on the cross, so we could be sprayed with His heavenly perfume—the forgiveness of all of our sins. Now, Jesus covers up this bad smell with a good one, His grace, each and every time we listen to His Word and come to Him in prayer. The stench of our sins has been removed. We smell good to God because we are forgiven.

You could even say that because we are surrounded by the spirit of our Lord, we smell like Jesus. We smell good to others when we live lives of sacrifice, lives like Jesus. We can't do it as well as He, since He is God and we remain sinners, but every time we repent of our sins and receive His forgiveness, and then try to live differently, the aroma of His love emanates from our words and deeds. So, let's share with others the message of the love of God, who gave us Jesus as our Saviour!

Let us pray: Lord God, we are Your perfume on earth through holy lives and words. Forgive us when we hide this aroma by remaining in sin or fearing to share the Gospel in the stinky world in which we live. Amen.

Pentecost 24: The Wings of God

*"Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions..."
(Deuteronomy 32:11)*

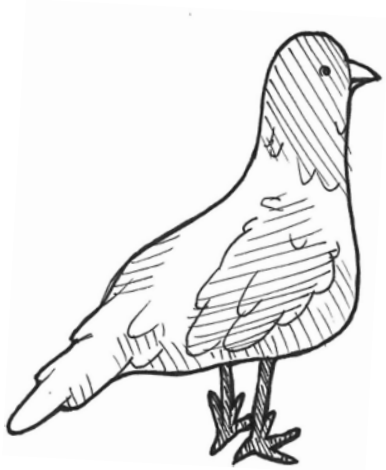
We are approaching Mother's Day. What do you love most about your mother? What are her greatest qualities? The Bible says God, our heavenly Father, is like a mother bird who guards her little babies under her wings to protect them from danger. Alone, we are not strong. God is our Father and cares for us as His beloved children. He proved His love for us. He sent His only Son as Saviour to protect us from death and to give us eternal life. The greatest qualities of your mother or father are small beside the greatness of God's love for each and every one of His children. Under the wings of the crucified Jesus, we are safe forever.



Let us pray: We thank you, all-powerful God, for protecting us in the middle of dangers. You are like an eagle who carries us on its big wings. Thank you for our parents who protect us as well. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Pentecost 25: No Reason to Worry

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Matthew 6:26-27



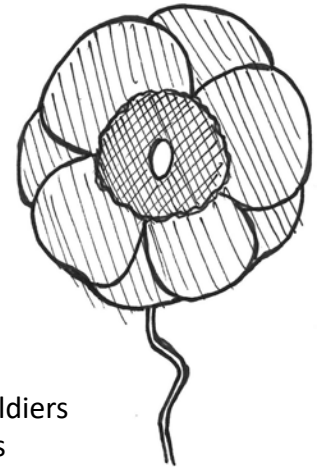
Do you worry? Maybe you get worried when school starts, or because there are some other kids you are afraid of. Now, if God didn't exist, there would be many reasons to worry. The good news is that God is with us through the resurrection of His Son Jesus. He promises to protect us and keep us safe from all spiritual harm, and also care for our physical needs.

Birds are very beautiful. Are we more important than them? Of course! If God takes care of them, He will certainly take care of us as well. Sometimes animals are wiser than us. Do they worry about their futures? Do they stay awake at night worrying about what will happen to them tomorrow? We are often troubled without reason and lack faith in God's providence, but God loves us anyways. God does not give up on us. He cares for us despite all our doubts about Him. Jesus told us that we do not have any reason to be scared because we are so precious in His eyes and He will always take care of us.

Let us pray: Creator of heaven and earth, thank you for the testimony of the birds who do not worry and, yet, receive everything from You. Give us the faith to fix our eyes on the Cross of Christ, no matter the circumstances. Amen.

Third last Sunday of the Liturgical Year: Remembering Sacrifices

*“even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28)*



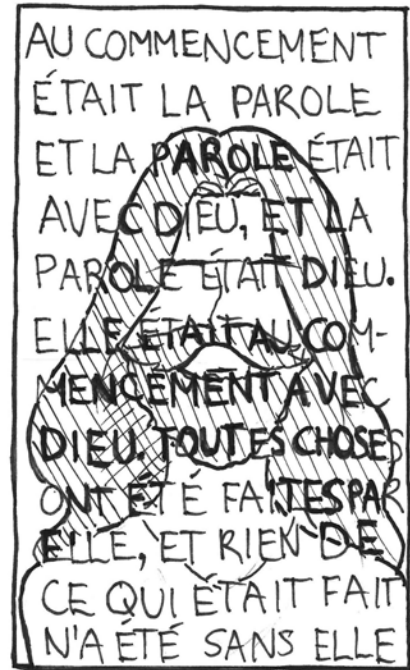
In some countries of the world, like Canada, the poppy is a symbol of soldiers who have given up their lives for a good and just cause. During WWI this flower, which had medicinal properties, was used to help soldiers die in peace and comfort. There is always a price to pay for freedom. Some soldiers do not behave well. And some wars are fought for evil reasons. But sometimes war is necessary to gain peace, such as helping those oppressed by bullies. Soldiers need to fight in such situations. The blood of soldiers who fight those wars is poured out to ensure our peace and those of other countries. It's the same for our salvation. Jesus is the heroic soldier who sacrificed His life to save us. For, there was a war between God and the devil for our soul. The devil won a battle when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and brought death into the world. He wins a battle each time we act against God with our thoughts, our speech, or our actions. But the devil did not win the war! Jesus is the victorious King! Through His birth, His death, and His resurrection, God has overcome the devil and made us His beloved children. Jesus made peace between God and humanity for all of eternity. God loved us so much that He gave His one and only Son as our Saviour.

Let us pray: Thank you, Lord, for giving Your life for us, for having redeemed us from the devil and giving us freedom forever. Amen.

Second Last Sunday of the Liturgical Year: The Purpose of the Bible

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me...” (John 5:39)

What do you think of this picture? It's a face. It's a face made of words. Can you tell which words they are? What is the artist trying to say through this picture? All of the Scripture, the whole Bible talks about Jesus and brings him to us. Jesus perfectly obeyed the divine law. He died on the cross to give us peace with God and to open the door to eternal life. The most important lesson in the Bible is that we are sinners and that God gave us Jesus to save us from our sins. The law of God shows us how we did not respect the will of God. The Gospels announced the Good News that Jesus is our Saviour.



Let us pray: Heavenly father, help us, through Your Holy Spirit, to see our Saviour Jesus Christ in the Bible so we may receive the comfort of the Gospel and the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

Last Sunday of the Liturgical Calendar: The Light of the World

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:5)

For birthday parties in many countries, we turn off the lights, we light birthday candles, and we sing "Happy Birthday!" In many churches we also light a candle during a baptism. In fact, in the olden days, babies were given their name at their Baptism. That's why it is called their "Christian name" and recorded in official documents as such. Perhaps this was the case for you also. In any case, the day of your baptism indicates your spiritual rebirth; the joyous day when your new life began. Through baptism we are all born again as children of God, regardless of our age. The light of the world, Jesus Christ, comes and lives in us and makes us His little lights of the world. Hear the words of the Holy Scriptures: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." (Matthew 5:14-15). The Lord Jesus Christ is the light of the world and He continues to shine in the darkness of this world through the words we speak and the lives we live.



Let us pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the Light of the world, into our lives through the miracle of Holy Baptism. You have lightened our spirits with Your Word and love. Use us to light our homes and neighbourhoods with the same. Give us the courage and joy to proclaim the Good News that You are a living God full of grace and truth. Amen.

As parents or teachers, we sometimes find ourselves having a hard time explaining the basic teachings of the Christian faith to those for whom we care and wish to instruct. But sharing the joy of the Good News that God loves us in Christ Jesus our Saviour is easier than we may often think!

This little book is a tool for home devotions, family prayers or Sunday school. By the use of simple household objects that are linked to the Biblical theme of every Sunday of the Church year, these short devotions help both children and adults deepen their faith in our Lord.

Harold Ristau, PhD, author and professor at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, has served as both a Lutheran pastor and military chaplain. He is married with five children.



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