

Week of Laetare

First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.



Weekly Catechism section: *First Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Luther's Small Catechism)*

Hymn of the Week: *Jesus, Priceless Treasure (TLH 347)*

Monday - Introit (Isaiah 66:1-11; Psalm 122:1-2, 6, 8)

Read Isaiah 66.

Laetare means "Rejoice!" That's an interesting name for a Sunday in Lent, isn't it? Isn't Lent all about sorrow over sin and repentance? Isn't it all about Jesus' suffering? Yes, and that's the point. In the *Introit* we say, "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her; that you may feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom." (Isaiah 66:10-11) This rejoicing is given to those who are poor and contrite over their sin, trembling at God's Word (Isaiah 66:2). As we tremble at Word of God -- a true fear that the Spirit teaches us (Isaiah 11:2) -- we are comforted and therefore rejoice in consolation of the Church of Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem. The Church of Christ is his beloved bride whom he bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25-26). He has given her his Word, which alone gives eternal life (John 6:68). Therefore, as we meditate upon our sins, we have every reason to rejoice, because our hungry souls are satisfied by the bread of life, Jesus Christ, who earned forgiveness and salvation for us.

And this relates to our Gospel lesson. By feeding the multitudes with only five loaves of bread and two fish, he reveals himself to be God, who provides for our every need. He satisfies us with physical nourishment. But Jesus also teaches us to seek all good things first in the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). That is to say, when we first know Jesus as our Savior from sin who credits to us his very righteousness (Rom 4:5), then we learn to trust God for all other things. This was the test that Jesus was giving his disciples. He was testing their faith -- that they would depend upon his Word, which alone delivers to them righteousness, life, and rejoicing. And so God tests us. He provides for our every need, and yet he tries our faith that we would depend only on his Word for our true comfort and joy. And we find this

Word preached in his Jerusalem -- his Church -- where we may "feed and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom."

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Deuteronomy 18:15-19)

Read Deuteronomy 18.

After the people of Israel heard the law from Mount Sinai, they wanted Moses to speak to them rather than God, because they would die if they heard the voice of God (Ex 20:19). God knew that no one could behold him in his bare majesty and live (Ex 33:20). And this is why he promised them a Prophet like Moses. God is a consuming fire. But we are sinful mortals. So God became a man in the person of his Son, just as he had promised when he said that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the devil (Gen 3:15). We cannot approach God in any other way than through his Son, Jesus Christ, who claimed our flesh as his own, put himself under the same law given in thunder and terror on Mount Sinai, and suffered the torment and punishment we deserved.

The people of Israel said this after hearing the Ten Commandments proclaimed from Mount Sinai. The law revealed the curse of their hearts, and it struck terror into them. As Moses said to them, God is testing you so that you do not sin. In other words, God is afflicting you so that you might repent. This is the chief function of the law. But this is not God's chief function. That is why, while he sent Moses to give the law, he would reveal his pure grace and truth through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). God's proper work is to show mercy. But his love must be fulfilled. This new Prophet would therefore not abolish the law, but he would fulfill it (Matt 5:17). He would reveal himself to be the very God who not only gave them the law in loud thunder, but also fed them with the sweet manna in the wilderness. Jesus reveals himself to be the Prophet spoken of by Moses when he feeds the five thousand. Here is God in the flesh, helping and showing mercy on his unworthy creatures. He is not an earthly king or lawgiver. He is much greater than these. His reign excels beyond that of earthly kings who can only rule the body, and his works are greater than prophets who only give the law. He fulfills what all the kings of Judah could only hope in, if they actually feared God. He fulfills what all the prophets foretold when the Spirit gave them utterance. He fulfills all righteousness and salvation, and he thereby rules our hearts and minds with his grace.

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Wednesday - Gradual (Psalm 122:1, 7)

Read Psalm 122.

Psalm 122 is where we get our *Gradual* for this Sunday. "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD' Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces." This is always our refuge in tempest, famine, plague, war, and all attacks. It is the house of the LORD. St. Paul calls this the Jerusalem who is above. She is the church of God cleansed by the blood of Jesus. She is protected from all evil. But on earth, she is seen as torn down. Soon after David and Solomon's reign Jerusalem's earthly power and influence became less and less until finally the Babylonians came and took it all away. God graciously caused the city to be rebuilt until he sent his Son into the flesh to gather the remnant into the holy temple of his body forever. The earthly Jerusalem rejected him, so St. Paul says that this earthly Jerusalem is in bondage with her children. She remains in bondage as long as she does not find her rest in Christ who gave his body up into death in order to present to himself a pure bride, a free mother of all those who trust in him. This is his pure and free church who is free from all condemnation.

The heavenly Jerusalem is hidden here on earth. It is visible in the gathering of his saint around his pure gospel and holy sacraments. But even when people are prevented from gathering around the visible signs of the church, they find their refuge in the Word of God where their Savior gathers all his saints. Those who avoid the house of the LORD for the pleasures of this life are in bondage with the earthly Jerusalem, because they are finding their comfort in worldly things that are passing away, in their own accomplishments and desires. But what of those who are stuck at home, sick, or near death? They are the ones who should rejoice in the Word of their Savior when their pastor and other members of Christ's body bring them the comfort of the gospel. We are one body, after all, united together by the freedom Jesus gives in his gospel. When you have God's Word, then you can be glad, even when steeples are falling. The God who provides daily bread for our bodies will see to it that we are nurtured in our souls when we dwell in his Word.

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Thursday - Epistle (*Galatians 4:21-31*)

Read Galatians 4.

St. Paul finds the deeper meaning under the account of Sarah and Hagar.

He is not denying the natural meaning of the history. It is true that Sarah was Abraham's wife, and Hagar was her maidservant. It is true that God promised that the Seed would come through Abraham (Gen 12:1ff). Hagar was thrown out with Ishmael, because Ishmael was trying to put himself over Isaac (Gen 21:8ff). All of the history is true, but Paul finds a deeper lesson hidden under the history. He is not saying, necessarily, that Hagar and Ishmael fell away from faith. In fact, there is strong evidence that they were in fact restored (Gen 21:17ff). Rather, Paul is drawing from certain details of Moses' account, which confirm certain spiritual truths, such as the freedom we have in Christ.

This is called the mystical sense of Scripture. It is not another meaning among other possible meanings in the text. Rather, it is nothing other than the gospel, which is plainly taught in God's promises to Abraham. We learn from these promises that God's inheritance is not one gained by human merits, but through faith, just as Abraham believed and was declared righteous (Gen 15:6). This is clear from the plain meaning of Moses' words. We therefore find that when Sarah says that the slave cannot have any share in the inheritance of the free, her plain words are in fact confirming the other deeper truth, which God gave to Abraham. Her words confirm how much less our slavish works share in what is freely given by our heavenly Father. No matter how much Ishmael tried he would never be the true heir. How much less can our works inherit eternal life! Isaac did not earn his inheritance, but was born free. So even less are we born by our own works, but rather by the water and the Spirit of freedom (John 3:5) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:3; 3:21). We are nourished in the care of the church who is free from sin and all ills because of her Bridegroom, Christ. Therefore, just as Moses' account confirms the truth of this spiritual freedom, may it be confirmed in our lives as well!

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Friday - Verse (Psalm 125:1-2, 5)

Read Psalm 125.

Psalm 125, which serves as our *verse* for this Sunday, is a very simple declaration of law and gospel. There is an unconditional promise to those who trust in the Lord. They are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so does the Lord surround his people. The Psalm continues with a strict warning against those who turn away from the Lord. They will be carried away by the Lord with evildoers. And then the Psalm ends with a gospel proclamation of peace upon Israel. This Sunday, in the midst of Lent, we

concentrate on rejoicing. This Psalm is filled with rejoicing, even as it has within it a strict judgment on the ungodly.

So this week we remember that God provides for our every need. We remember also that he has raised up for us the Prophet promised long ago, his own Son, Jesus Christ. He has made us free as we live under his grace. This is freedom from the fear of our enemies. Here, in the midst of Lent, even as we are warned against the devil's constant attacks, the world's deceitful lure, and the flesh's vain desires, we are established in the confidence and care of our Maker. He surrounds us, even as we live in the wilderness of this life. Psalm 34:7 says that the Angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Here the Angel of the Lord is clearly identified as the Lord himself, even though he is a distinct person. This is none other than Jesus. So he surrounds his people like great mountains. He fills all things with his Word and Sacrament, filling our hearts with joy even as we must face the cares and troubles of life. When we strive and scheme to bring about better results, then we end up only wanting more. This happens especially when people become obsessed with growing the church. Instead of simply finding joy in confessing God's Word to friend and foe alike and being content with anyone God provides who confesses and trusts in the Word of the Lord with us, our sinful hearts are led to worry that it won't be enough to pay the bills. But those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which will not be moved. They rejoice in the midst of sorrows, knowing that the Lord himself surrounds them.

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Saturday - Gospel (John 6:1-15)

Read John 6.

When Andrew asked concerning the five loaves of bread and two small fish, "What are these among so many?" the question was simple. It is nothing. The bread we provide cannot satisfy the multitudes. In fact, bread, though a good gift of God, is a sign of our fall into sin. "You shall eat bread by the sweat of your brow," is what God said to fallen Adam (Gen 3:19). We toil for our daily bread, and we still cannot satisfy fully.

But by multiplying the bread and fish, Christ shows from whom it is we receive our daily bread in the first place. He is God, provider of all good things. Even what he makes us toil to receive is a gift. As he caused the fish to hatch from their eggs and grow, he caused the barley and wheat to sprout up. Therefore, in Christ, toiling to earn our daily bread turns into a blessing, as we learn to trust not in our merits nor on our own

understanding, but on Christ who has already showered us with all good things. Christ's disciples try to talk numbers with him, as if money and budgets have anything to do with what he provides. Instead, Christ has us give even when we have nothing. He teaches us not to fret over our puny five loaves and two fish, whether this is a small pocketbook or bank account, or a lack of physical ability. He frees you from such bondage by teaching you that man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. He teaches you to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and he satisfies you fully by taking your sin away. He therefore teaches us that the bread with which we help our neighbor, each according to his own measure, is the fragment of what Christ has given us in his abundant generosity. When his generosity is what rules our minds, then such charity is done in freedom, not in fear. This is why Christ departed when they wanted to make him king, because his is not an earthly reign. His reign is in righteousness and peace and the Holy Spirit. When this rules your heart, then the fear of losing what is earthly is puny compared to the joy of loving your neighbor and hearing the gospel proclaimed.

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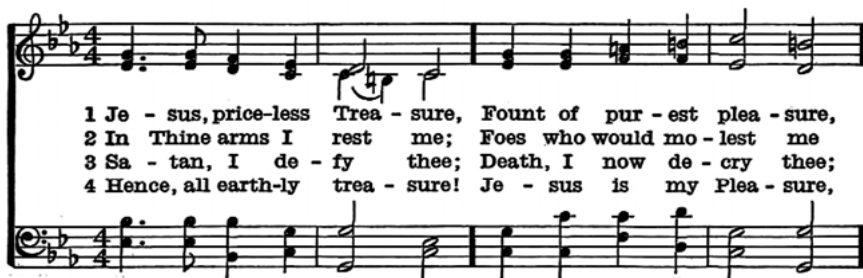
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Jesus, Priceless Treasure

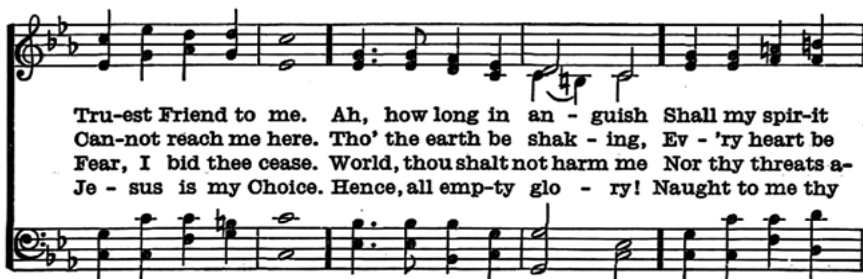
Matt. 13: 46
 Jesu, meine Freude
 Johann Franck, 1655
 Tr., composite

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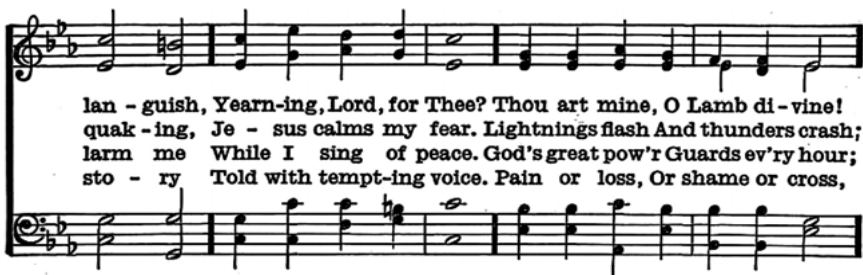
Jesu, meine Freude
 Johann Crüger, 1649



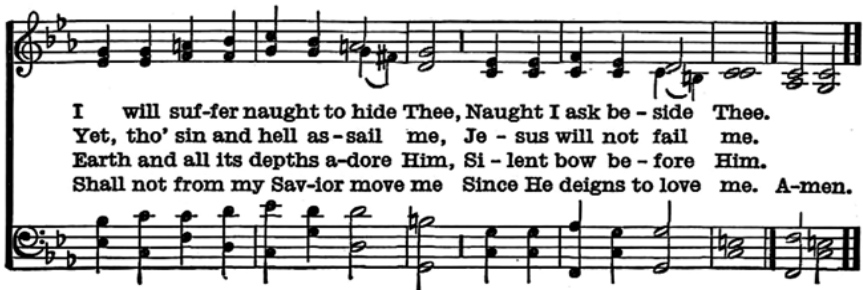
1 Je - sus, price-less Trea - sure, Fount of pur - est plea - sure,
 2 In Thine arms I rest me; Foes who would mo - lest me
 3 Sa - tan, I de - fy thee; Death, I now de - cry thee;
 4 Hence, all earth-ly trea - sure! Je - sus is my Plea - sure,



Tru - est Friend to me. Ah, how long in an - guish Shall my spir - it
 Can - not reach me here. Tho' the earth be shak - ing, Ev - 'ry heart be
 Fear, I bid thee cease. World, thou shalt not harm me Nor thy threats a -
 Je - sus is my Choice. Hence, all emp - ty glo - ry! Naught to me thy



lan - guish, Yearn - ing, Lord, for Thee? Thou art mine, O Lamb di - vine!
 quak - ing, Je - sus calms my fear. Lightnings flash And thunders crash;
 larm me While I sing of peace. God's great pow'r Guards ev'ry hour;
 sto - ry Told with tempt - ing voice. Pain or loss, Or shame or cross,



I will suf - fer naught to hide Thee, Naught I ask be - side Thee.
 Yet, tho' sin and hell as - sail me, Je - sus will not fail me.
 Earth and all its depths a - dore Him, Si - lent bow be - fore Him.
 Shall not from my Sav - ior move me Since He deigns to love me. A - men.

5 Evil world, I leave thee;
Thou canst not deceive me,
Thine appeal is vain.
Sin that once did blind me,
Get thee far behind me,
Come not forth again.
Past thy hour, O pride and power;
Sinful life, thy bonds I sever,
Leave thee now forever.

6 Hence, all fear and sadness!
For the Lord of gladness,
Jesus, enters in.
Those who love the Father,
Though the storms may gather,
Still have peace within.
Yea, whate'er I here must bear,
Thou art still my purest Pleasure,
Jesus, priceless Treasure!