

The

# EVANGEL

Lent





# From the Editor

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In recent years, a trend has been popping up online making the 40 days of Lent into 40 days of “self-improvement.” For example, one challenge suggested cleaning out your house and filling one large trash bag during each of the 40 days.

Now, certainly, taking care of your house is a good thing, especially as you look around for people who may need the things you have or who may benefit from coming home to a cleaner house. But is this type of project the reason the Church observes the Lenten season?

Four articles in this edition on Lent shed light on why this season is helpful for believers to pay attention to:

- Our Presiding Pastor, Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, explains the basis for why the Church continues to observe this season of the Church year.
- Rev. Dan Dapelo explores the 40 days of Jesus’ wilderness temptation in Matthew 4 and what that means for us.
- Rev. Eric Ishimaru delves into our work vs. God’s work in our conversion (John 3).
- Rev. Matthew Fenn describes the account of the blind man in John 9, as a picture of us blinded by sin and healed by Christ.

What a relief to know that this season is not at all about my feelings or attempts at better living. Instead of looking at human-inspired ideas for guidance on Lent, let’s look to God’s Word. Scripture shows us again and again what God has done, and is doing, for us. Even the practice of observing the humble season of Lent can point us to these wonderful truths.

Peace be with you,

*Gretchen Baker*

Gretchen Baker  
The Editor

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# The Significance of the Season of Lent

By Rev. Dr. Cary Larson

Many people feel uneasy about Lent. Some say, “It is so depressing,” or “I have enough going on in my life; the last thing I need is someone telling me to punish myself.” These reactions are not based on Scripture, even if people do not realize it.

For confessional Lutherans, Lent is not about harsh self-punishment or trying to be perfect. Instead, it is a focused forty days of repentance and learning, centered on Christ Jesus. By setting aside this time before Easter, the Church follows the biblical truth that reaching the empty tomb means first going through Calvary’s cross. Early Christians set up this season as a special time to prepare.

Lent’s scriptural foundation comes from the importance of the number forty in the Bible. God often uses forty to show that events have a purpose and are not random. For example, there were forty days of rain during the Flood, forty years of Israel’s wandering, and forty days of Jesus’ temptation in the desert. Each time, forty days marks God’s intentional action.

Following this pattern, the Church observes forty weekdays during Lent, sometimes called the “solemn forty.” Sundays are not counted because they are always “feast days” celebrating the Resurrection, often with the Lord’s Supper, even during Lent. This way, even as believers reflect on their sins, the hope of the Gospel always stays at the center.

Lent is shaped by the Theology of the Cross. As Jesus resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), the believer joins this procession to soberly examine the gravity and seriousness of sin. Abraham’s humility is a key example for Lent: “I who am but dust and ashes.” (Gen 18:27). As the Lenten season begins, it is not uncommon to use ashes placed on the forehead within Ash Wednesday worship. Ashes, whether placed on the forehead or

carried in spirit, stand for a sober reflection of the terrible cost of human rebellion against God.

When it comes to fasting or giving certain things up for the season, the Lutheran Confessions, can serve us. *The Augsburg Confession* (Article XXVI), clarify that traditions such as fasting do not merit grace, but are beneficial for keeping the body under control to better focus on the Word.<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* affirms that fasting and bodily preparation are indeed fine outward training yet emphasizes that the truly “worthy” individual is the one who trusts in Christ’s words: “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>2</sup>

Lent is not mainly about making sacrifices for God. Instead, it is a time to reflect on our own unworthiness so that God’s love and His free gift of forgiveness FOR YOU stands out even more. During Lent, we remember that Christ’s passion and death paid for ALL sins and failures. Only Christ Jesus can lift us from the “dust and ashes” we create.

Repentance is always important for Christians, but it matters even more as we approach the “awe–full day” of Christ Jesus’ crucifixion. The tradition of setting aside the “Alleluia” and the “Gloria in Excelsis” during Lent creates a sense of longing in worship. This tradition is helpful to build up a holy anticipation for Easter.

Going through Lent helps Christians get ready for the joy of Easter morning. The Church season of Lent teaches us to let go of self-reliance and trust ONLY in the promise of the crucified and risen Lord. The Lenten season, guided by the inerrant Word of God, starts by facing our own mortality and ends with the hope of eternal life found only in Christ Jesus. Amen! †

*The Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson serves The AALC as Presiding Pastor.*

1 [35] Christ speaks of this in Luke 21:34, “Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation,”

[36] and again, “This kind of demon cannot be driven out by anything but fasting and prayer.”

[37] Paul said that he pommelled his body and subdued it,

[38] and by this he indicated that it is not the purpose of mortification to merit grace but to keep the body in such a condition that one can perform the duties required by one’s calling.

[39] Thus fasting in itself is not rejected, but what is rejected is making a necessary service of fasts on prescribed days and with specified foods, for this confuses consciences.

“The Augsburg Confession,” Art. XXVI, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 69.

2 “The Small Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 352.



Lent

# Into the Wilderness: The Temptation of Jesus for You

Matthew 4:1-11

By Rev. Dan. Dapelo

Lent encompasses a myriad of words and emotions: humility, devotion, penitence, repentance – most of all, struggle. During this time, Christians struggle with God’s call to “be holy, as the Lord your God is holy” (Lev 11:44). We reflect on the seriousness of our own sins and the Lord’s justified wrath being placed upon Jesus Christ – the One who knew no sin. What we see in Lent is two-fold: Acknowledging our sin, which exposes our need for a savior; and the Father sending Christ to endure the pain, suffering, and agony of our sins through His life and death.

The funny thing, though, is that we do not seem to have much of a problem living with sin. Our world is deep in a moral quagmire, bogged down in greed and selfishness, slogging through a swamp of pride and self-indulgence, and swimming in a rising cesspool of immorality and disrespect. And sadly, many Christians have made their peace with that, thinking, *why fight what you cannot change, whether in the world or in me*. Thus, the message of many churches has changed. It is no longer Jesus who bled and died to remove my sin, but Jesus as my example, my mentor, and my coach to have a life with purpose. This is why Lent is so essential!

Lent is struggling to comprehend that despite our sin, our loving Savior took those selfish thoughts, those vile words, those disregarding actions – and gives us grace, love, and mercy as a result of what He has done! Because of His Love for us, He came down from heaven, lived, was crucified, died, and rose again. All because of His love, He continues to provide for us and gives us all we need. All because of His love, our Father sent His Son among us to redeem and reconcile us back to Him.

Like dogs who have an itch they need to dig at and scratch, we are daily enticed by the devil, the world, and our sinful nature to chase things that do not bring us lasting hope and joy. How often do we let the idols of success, recognition, or material gain take center stage in our lives? Sure, we might not bow to a golden calf, but we do bow to other things – our careers, our comforts, our status. Jesus teaches us that we are called to worship God alone.

The reality of the Christian life is remembering that, while we live in this world, temptation is real and we are constantly bombarded by it. But thanks be to God, we also see Jesus came to

our aid, stepped into our midst, and fought the battle. In Matthew 4:1-11, we see precisely what battle Jesus is already fighting for us and how His temptation in the wilderness actually sets the course for you and me.

In Christ, we see that the solution to despair is not to ignore or make peace with the sin that causes it, but to look solely upon our Savior, for He did not come to help us live with sin or to cover it up under a false sense of security – but *to do away with sin*. Both that our sins be forgiven and that we live no longer under the curse of sin, but in *holiness*. So, Jesus came.

No, our Lord would not stand idly by and watch His creation fall away, but instead stepped into the wilderness we know quite well. Led by the Spirit, He entered into the wilderness caused by our rebellion against God and engaged the tempter, and He was not disappointed.

Right away, the tempter dangled food before Jesus like teasing a piece of food over a dog, trying to get them to jump for it. For 40 days and 40 nights, He fasted... so you can imagine how food must have looked to Him! As someone who feels famished (perhaps even hungry!) if I don't get a snack in four hours – I can attest, surely, I would have given in. Yet, Jesus stands firm against the devil's schemes and refutes them with the Word of the Lord.

Next comes the temptation atop the temple. The goal? For Jesus to not trust His Father to provide and care for Him, but instead to take care of Himself. Satan already knows God's power can protect Jesus, but he tempts to see if Jesus will trust the Father entirely, or if He will take matters into His own hands.

This temptation hits home for us today. Sometimes, it is hard to trust God above all things. We want Him to fix our problems *right now*, or at least give us a sign every time we feel uncertain. One of the most challenging aspects of faith is remembering that God does not operate on our timetable, and He does not need to perform for us. Faith is not about testing God but trusting Him – trusting that He is with us even when we cannot see His hand at work. The things of this world and within us make it so hard to trust and have faith – thus enters Jesus. The Son of God trusts perfectly and does not put God to the test. Again, Jesus refutes with the Scriptures: never departing from the way of the Father.

Lastly, the devil pulls out all the stops, tempting Jesus to fall down and worship anything other than God Himself. Satan already sees that Jesus is set apart from the rest of us, but wants to know where His allegiance lies, so he tempts Him to look for another way apart from God alone.

Oh, how well we know this! This is the heart of idolatry: worshiping anything other than God. The devil still offers this temptation to us today in various forms under the false promises of success, wealth, fame, and influence. Like a game show host, we can almost see the adversary claim: *"All of it can be yours for a small price"* – your loyalty, your service, and your worship. But Jesus shows that true allegiance is to God, and God alone. Once more, we see that the life and ministry of Christ is one of perfect service to God Almighty alone.

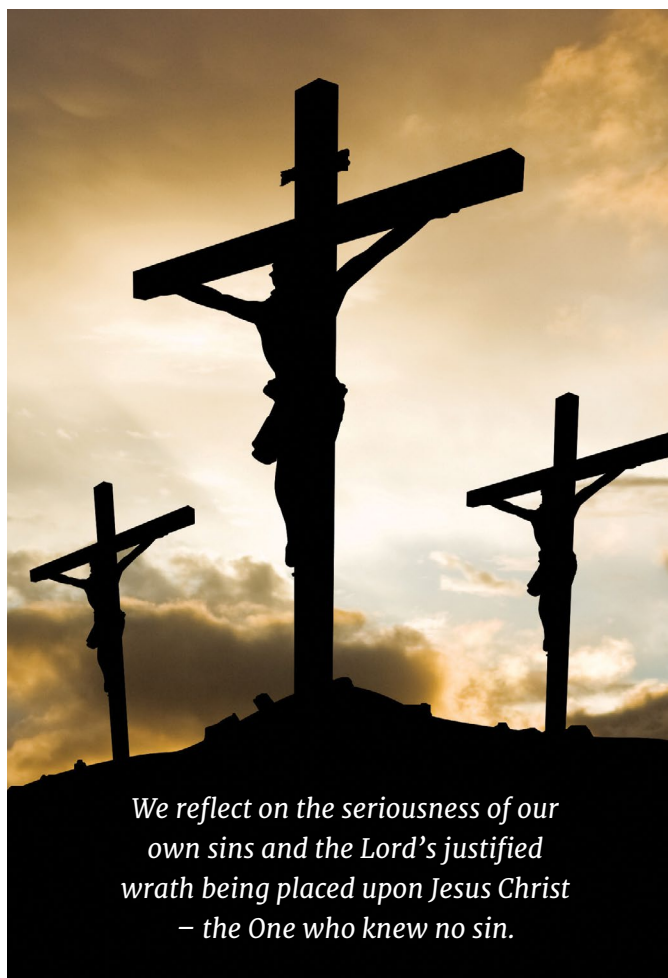
Throughout all these temptations, there is something more to be seen. Something that can truly aid during our Lenten season. We are well-versed in the merit and work done through the

cross and Christ's death in our place, but this also shows us Christ's merit and work for us in His life as well. In our daily lives of various vocations and callings where the Lord plants us to serve our neighbors, my prayer to you this Lent is this: In the midst of the messes we make, the sins we commit openly or within our hearts, the struggles we have giving something up – we would rightly know the weight and seriousness of our sin, but also through the Lord, we would fully comprehend the inexpressible joy of our Savior's life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Through these blessed things, the forgiveness of our sins comes to us by grace!

So, this Lent as we journey through the wilderness with Jesus, let us take a moment to reflect on the temptations we face daily. Whether it is in the form of instant gratification, testing God, or seeking glory apart from Him, let us rest assured through the same Word of God Jesus answered with: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:15-16).

A blessed Lententide to you all! †

*The Rev. Dan Dapelo serves St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Napoleon Township, Napoleon, OH.*





*Lent*

# Conversion: God's Work

John 3:1-17

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*by Rev. Eric Ishimaru*

If you have ever met a truly great or famous person, you may have found yourself uncomfortably self-conscious- perhaps a bit tongue-tied or starry-eyed. Maybe you asked dumb questions or said something awkward.

Likewise, our Lenten journey does not begin with our trying to “feel” something, or our endeavor to start acting more spiritual, as if we were trying to flatter God.



Nicodemus could relate. Arriving as he does, early in the lectionary readings during Lent, Nicodemus represents fallen humanity encountering Deity, darkness encountering Light. Nicodemus is our representative—the absolute best that humanity can offer God, from the standpoint of First Century Judaism. How well does he do, meeting Jesus? How would we do?

We might begin, as Nicodemus did, offering the Lord the best of our spiritual and religious instinct and perceptions: “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God...” But Nicodemus, the “teacher of Israel” and “ruler of the Jews,” is quickly baffled. Our Lord in His utter humility does not require or request our religious impulses or flattering words. Jesus is not looking for “likes.” He brushes completely past Nicodemus’ praise.

Likewise, our Lenten journey does not begin with our trying to “feel” something, or our endeavor to start acting more spiritual, as if we were trying to flatter God. Rather, Lent begins when we stop “trying” to be religious. The Third Article of *Luther’s Small Catechism* teaches, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...”

“I believe that I *cannot* believe...” Jesus shuts down Nicodemus’ religious adventure with parallel statements:

Only when one is born again<sup>1</sup> can one “see the kingdom of God.” Only when one is born of water and Spirit (Holy Baptism) can one enter this spiritual realm.

Though prophesied in the Old Testament,<sup>2</sup> spiritual rebirth is apparently an alien concept to Nicodemus. He is perplexed: “How can a man be born when he is old?” We can empathize with Nicodemus, for true conversion and faith is nothing short of a miracle. Beneath the surface of humanly initiated rituals, “decisions” for Christ or emotionalism, the Spirit effects genuine ontological change: He causes us to become something we were *not*. We become “new creations” in Christ.<sup>3</sup> Thus begins our Spirit-led journey into a new conformity with Christ.

“How can these things be?” asks Nicodemus. Maybe you have had the experience of attempting to explain your Christian faith to those who do not believe. We wonder why they do not get it.

“Why hasn’t the Holy Spirit worked faith in *their* hearts as well?” This is mystery: the wind blows where it wishes. So it is with the Spirit.

We are not in control of conversions, any more than we are in control of our sanctification, or even our Lenten journey, as if following Christ were a personal self-help program. But we are not left with a Holy Spirit who is capricious. No, He will lead us inerrantly to the truth.<sup>4</sup> The most difficult truth of all is that Jesus Christ is true God, the *only*-begotten of the Father. Quite simply, His truth is truth, for He is the *only*-begotten of the Father. He is more than Nicodemus could hope for. Will Nicodemus believe?

Here now is the dilemma: “But *you* [pl.] do not receive our testimony” (John 3:11). Nicodemus’ crisis becomes *our* crisis; here the second person “you” transitions from singular to plural. What can we do? In a word, nothing. *God* must do something, and does.

This is the beauty of the illustration of Moses and the bronze serpent. Those who were dying from the poisonous venom of serpents simply were to “look at the bronze serpent and live” (Num 21:9). Look...and live. The typology and method correspond exactly to the cross. To look upon the crucified Christ, now made sin for us, is our salvation. “Looking” is not work. Here, it stands for faith—as Walther famously said, “A preacher must be able to preach a sermon on faith without ever using the term *faith*.”<sup>5</sup>

Through the eyes of faith, we see more than a cursed sinner on a tree; we see our dear Christ, the Lamb slain for the sin of the world. For Nicodemus, and for us, Christ woos us through the cross.

Was Nicodemus converted? We are uncertain. Nevertheless, the purpose of Lent is this: “Now my eyes have seen Your salvation...” (Luke 2:30). The Third Day awaits. This is how God has loved the world: through this supreme act of self-giving.

And this is how we truly know we are loved, not condemned. Simply look to Christ crucified—and live. †

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1 ...or, born from above; the Greek word *anōthen* can be translated either way.

2 Deut 30:6, Jer 31:33, Jer 32:40, Ez 11:19, Ez 36:26

3 II Cor. 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.”

4 I John 5:7: “And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.”

5 C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 260.



# I ONCE WAS BLIND, BUT NOW I SEE

John 9

By Rev. Matthew Fenn

Our eyes are incredible tools. They allow us to see the world in all its beauty. Unfortunately, we often take this incredible gift for granted. But have you ever considered what it would be like to lose sight? Everything is bright and clear one moment; the next, you are in complete darkness.

There was once a faithful woman who suffered from deteriorating eyesight. During an appointment with her optometrist, he sadly informed her that he could do nothing to improve her condition. Surprisingly, the woman remained calm and shared with him how good the Lord had been to her and her husband. The optometrist replied, “You have no eyesight, but you can truly see.” And he spoke the truth. Spiritual sight is something better than physical eyesight.

## “I once was blind...”

In our Gospel reading, Jesus comes across a man with congenital blindness. The disciples assume that something as bad as being born blind must be a punishment of some sort, either for the man’s own sins or his parents’ sins.

The blindness of this man, Jesus says, is not a punishment for

a specific sin but the occasion for God’s work in his life to be displayed. Jesus is going to display His glory by healing this man.

The religious leaders agree with the disciples’ initial assessment. They state that this man’s blindness proved he was guilty of specific wickedness, both then and now. The Pharisees thought they had it all together. They were well-versed in the law and knew they weren’t perfect. They pretended they had everything under control, but deep down, they were plagued by sin. They were so smug and full of themselves, claiming, “We can see clearly!” when Jesus says really, they were spiritually blind to the things of God.

Just like something can be wrong with our physical eyesight, the same is true with our spiritual sight. Every single person is born spiritually blind. What is remarkable about that is how virtually no one seems to notice. Most are pretty content to live in their blindness. Some would fiercely deny that they are spiritually blind.

What does it mean to be spiritually blind? Blindness is one way to describe the effects of sin upon us. Just like a blind person cannot see the light of day, likewise because of sin, we cannot see the light

of God in Christ. Our blindness is not the lack of eyesight but the lack of faith. And it is not simply impaired vision. We are born without spiritual sight – entirely self-centered and unreceptive of God. We may have 20/20 eyesight and see the world around us in Technicolor, but we are born blind to anything involving God.

Spiritually, blindness refers to our inability to recognize the truth of God in any situation. We live as if He did not exist or matter. We do not think we are that bad. We assert, “I am a good person.” Many are completely unwilling to recognize their sins, and Jesus says such people are blind. We are all naturally unable to see the things of God. And just like a blind man cannot will his eyes to work, we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ as Lord or come to Him.

### “... but now I see.”

However, notice how our text focuses on the miracle. Jesus healed the man with congenital blindness. How did he do it? Jesus put mud on the man’s eyes. In the beginning, “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground” (Gen 2:7). This is an act of new creation. With the mud on his eyes, Jesus sent him away to wash, promising he would see again. The man goes, washes off the mud, and comes back seeing.

Jesus is the spiritual optometrist. Jesus comes to us in our sin, when we are blind and helpless. And he comes to give us sight and bring light into our hearts’ darkness. He comes with compassion. He desires to show us mercy.

The God present at the dawn of creation entered our world to mend and restore all that is broken. We see this in Jesus’ miraculous healing of the blind man. This is the work of God, and He is so dedicated to it that He is willing to die to accomplish it. In fact, through His death and resurrection, He has done even greater things than this. Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save it. He takes our sin and bears it to the cross, creating new life for all who believe. This is the promise of the gospel: that through Jesus, we can experience new life and hope, both now and forevermore.

Jesus is our great physician. He is the specialist in spiritual sight. He gives sight to the blind, and His Word makes the difference. The Word uttered in the beginning that created all things is the same Word that comes and recreates you.

What was so special about the pool of Siloam? It was not simply water, but water combined with the Word of Jesus. That is the same with Baptism. It is not simple water only, but the water joined to God’s Word and combined with His command. The Word is what makes faith.

“Faith comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17). Not seeing, not miracles. Hearing. The seeing of faith is hearing. The Word of Christ is what creates and keeps saving faith. By the Word, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the poor hear good news, the dead are raised, and sinners are justified for Jesus’ sake.

You continue to be called out of darkness through God’s Word into Christ’s marvelous light. His Word tells you of Jesus that though He was despised and rejected, He is Savior, Redeemer and

Messiah. Jesus’ Word promises you eternal life because through His death and resurrection, the reign of darkness is ended, and new creation is established. The Holy Spirit brings you to faith in Jesus as your Savior. He leads you to a recognition of your sins, your depravity, and your need for forgiveness. As a “lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Pet 1:19), the Spirit uses the Word of God as a bright torch to direct sinners in the way of truth.

This is why we need to continue to hear God’s Word. It is vitally important. Jesus said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). Jesus continues to be present wherever His Word is heard and proclaimed. With Christ’s light, we can finally see things the way they really are.

The real meaning and purpose of our lives can only be found in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ and His bloody death for us. Jesus saves us from our sins and gives us the faith we need to see the world as it is. He opens our spiritual eyes now and promises us full physical healing in the age to come.

As we gaze upon Jesus’ suffering and death, we cannot help but see our own sinfulness and guilt. But when we lay our eyes on the baptismal font, we see something else entirely: Jesus’ triumphant resurrection from the dead and our own share in eternal life. And when we look at ourselves in the mirror, we see a forgiven child of God, still imperfect but restored and renewed by the grace of Christ. We are no longer lost in darkness but have been brought into the light of His love and mercy.

The light of God’s Word should direct our every word, thought, and deed. Through His Word, the Son of God enables us to see what pleases the Lord and what is a fruit of darkness. And now we are called to walk as children of the light. The power of lies and of evil in this world is very strong. It is easy to be deceived. We will always have a blind spot when it comes to spiritual things. Jesus is the light of the world. Only by checking back to Jesus, over and over again, can we be sure that we are standing beside the man born blind and able to say, “I once was blind, but now I see.” The alternative is to stand beside the Pharisees, certain of their rightness, but locked and bolted into a darkness of their own devising.

To see Jesus, you must recognize that you are blind. Blind to any notion that you can see God by your own reason, merits, or strength. Before you can see, you must acknowledge that you are blind to the light that shines on you.

You will see by hearing. Through the water and Word of your Baptism, you will see Jesus. Through the continuing proclamation of God’s Word, you will see that Jesus is the light of the world, the light, no darkness, including your sin and death, can overcome.

And if, by God’s grace, you remain in the one, true, and saving faith until your death, one day you will see with new and resurrected eyes, and the sight will be glorious. But for now, you must hear His Word. Today, because of Jesus, all of you can say what the blind man said, “I once was blind, but now I see” (John 9:25). †

*The Rev. Matthew Fenn is the Associate Pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA, and serves as Provost of ALTS.*



# Church Anniversaries



## 150th Anniversary of Pilot Knob Lutheran Church

By Rev. Bob Snitzer

It was with great joy that Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA, was able to celebrate 150 years of ministry in North Central Iowa on September 14, 2025. The congregation began when nine Norwegian immigrants came to America clinging to their Bibles and hymnals, recognizing the need for spiritual care through Word and Sacrament. In 1875, Rev. Dahl was called to oversee three churches: Pilot Knob Lutheran being one of the three, but originally called Ellington Lutheran.

We give glory to God for providing pastors and teachers who preached and taught the inerrant word without compromise, as well as families who would not compromise. We continue in that legacy to this day.

This year's celebration was special since the 125th anniversary did not take place due to arson two months prior in 2000. Since then, God has provided a new church building (2002) through the dedication, hard work, and faith of the members. What man meant for evil, God used for our benefit and His eternal glory. He has thus opened the door for continued ministry and growth from a younger generation.

The celebration on September 14 began with a worship service calling attention to God's past faithfulness and the assurance of God's continued presence until He returns. We stand on the inerrant Word of God, and by God's grace we will not veer off course.

The day continued with a catered meal and a silent auction of two quilts made by our ladies and handmade river serving trays used for the chili cook off at the church picnic the Sunday before. Everyone had a great time visiting with old friends and looking at a lot of memorabilia and pictures. We even had a pew from the original church. God is good, and we look forward to the 175th anniversary. †

Rev. Bob Snitzer serves Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA.



(Top) A display of photos and items from the early years of Pilot Knob Lutheran Church. (Above) One of two handmade quilts auctioned off as part of the 150th Anniversary celebration. Submitted photos.



The congregation of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augusta, KY, gathered on September 21, 2025, to celebrate 150 years. Submitted photo.

## 150th Anniversary of St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church

By Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey

On September 21, 2025, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Augusta, KY, celebrated 150 years as a congregation. It was truly a joyous occasion! While we normally average 10 to 15 people on a Sunday morning, we filled the nave with 85 to 90 people this particular Sunday. Members who had moved away came back; the children and grandchildren of current members returned home. Many of those children had grown up at St. Paul. Since I also serve Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church (LC-MS) in Maysville, KY, that congregation also joined us for the service.

Two different people from the community—close friends of the congregation—sang special songs. Former pastors sent letters of congratulations and recalled fond memories. After the service, we feasted on—wait for it—*fried chicken* and mashed potatoes, along with sides and deserts provided by the congregation.

Our congregation in Augusta began back in 1875 in a one-room schoolhouse. Rev. Andes traveled between Arnheim, OH; Maysville, KY; and Augusta, KY. Though the church records do not say so, the time period (late 19th century) and the location suggest that he was likely part of the Ohio Synod. The congregation grew rapidly under his ministry, and a church building was erected at Locust Creek in 1884. That church was called The First German Protestant Church.

Various pastors served the church after that. But in 1928, construction began on a new building in the current location. The congregation maintained both buildings for a few years. But in 1931, the decision was made to worship in the new building and sell the old one. Just one year before that, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church joined the American Lutheran Church. There is still a certificate hanging in the sacristy with the ALC logo.

By 1971, St. Paul was struggling to keep a pastor in a small country church. At the same time, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Maysville was also struggling to keep a pastor, though Maysville is a larger town than Augusta. So both churches agreed to call pastors together, as a dual parish. Fifty-five years later both congregations continue to share a pastor.

Obviously, when the merger happened in 1988, St. Paul became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It was not until a delegation from St. Paul attended a district convention of the ELCA in the 2000s that they were horrified to discover what the ELCA was about. John Maynard was their pastor at that time, and he encouraged them to join The American Association of Lutheran Churches. So in 2009 that is exactly what they did.

I have been the pastor here since November 2022, and I absolutely love serving both of these churches. Neither congregation is large, but I am trying to faithfully provide Word and Sacrament ministry. There are not many youth, either, but I was pleased to confirm three young people at St. Paul recently: Emma Finn, Halle Routt, and Brady Routt. My vicar, Jacob Schaeffer, taught the confirmation classes, and he did an outstanding job. By the time you read this, he will be the new pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, IL.

St. Paul has some wonderful congregational traditions. Every December they cut down a wild cedar tree and decorate it in the nave. We used to have a chili supper as we decorated, but now we just enjoy being together and decorating. Every June, members of the congregation make homemade ice cream. Many people from Augusta and Brooksville come out to eat ice cream, hamburgers, and hot dogs.

God is bringing new people to St. Paul here and there, thanks to a new website built by Vicar Jacob. We have had midweek Bible studies in the past, but since many members are farmers, it is not always easy for them to attend. God has also brought a pianist to Trinity, and she has kindly offered to play the organ at St. Paul on Sundays as well. God is good. He has given me the gift of being the pastor of St. Paul (and Trinity), and He uses me to give His good gifts to His people every Sunday. Thanks be to God! †

*The Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey serves St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church in Augusta, KY, and teaches at American Lutheran Theological Seminary.*

# From Your Seminary



## Shaping Lutheran Leaders for the Future

Every generation of the Church faces the same essential question: Who will shepherd God's people with truth, compassion, and unwavering commitment to His Word?

At American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS), this question shapes everything we do.

As the seminary of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, ALTS exists to prepare pastors who proclaim Christ with clarity, confidence, and deep theological grounding. Through rigorous study, mentorship, and pastoral formation, we are equipping students to bring the Gospel faithfully into congregations, communities, and mission fields here and abroad.

In addition to the Master of Divinity degree that prepares men for Holy Ministry, ALTS offers two other Master degree programs, Master of Arts in Religion (M.A.R.) and Master of Arts in Theology (M.A.T.), to train lay men and women for leadership and service in Christ's Church. Also, ALTS provides a Doctor of Ministry degree (D.Min.). Its specific purpose is to enhance the pastor's heart as a *Seelsorger*, giving the care and cure of souls.

In a time when many theology programs have loosened their grip on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, ALTS stands firmly on the inerrant and infallible Word of God. Our programs—delivered synchronously online—combine academic excellence with personal mentorship and spiritual development that shapes both the mind and the heart.

ALTS students gather for live classes, deep discussion, and shared community—forming the next generation of men and women who will serve the church with devotion and integrity.



In the coming issues of *The Evangel*, we will share more about the seminary's mission, the real ministry needs it addresses, and how you can be part of sustaining this vital work.

Please know we at the seminary are praying for you. Please pray for us. †

In Christ,  
The Staff of ALTS



# March 2026

## PRAYER BOOKMARK



1. Greater Heartland Region TAALC
2. Rev. Edwin Mendivelso
3. Ascension Lutheran Church, Ames, IA
4. Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg
5. Rev. Michael Badenhop
6. Board of Appeals & Adjudications
7. To focus on penitence
8. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Ellis, KS
9. Churches without pastors
10. Clergy Commission
11. To focus on God's Grace
12. Rev. Scott Bieker
13. Ascension Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA
14. To forgive as you have been forgiven
15. Rev. Ryan Dexter
16. Faith Lutheran Church, Holstein, IA
17. Christian Martyrs
18. Humility and service
19. Grace Lutheran Church, Nunda, SD
20. Rev. Matthew Fenn
21. For all Seminary Students
22. Commission for Doctrine & Church Relations
23. Hope Lutheran Church, Brighton, IA
24. Rev. Phillip Hofinga
25. To prepare for Jesus' coming
26. For God to raise up church leaders
27. Lake Madison Lutheran Church, Rutland, SD
28. Rev. Steven Klawonn
29. To remember Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection
30. Rev. Alexander McNally
31. Mighty Fortress Evangelical Lutheran Church, Seward, NE

## 30th General Convention Planned June 23–26, 2026 Plymouth, MN

We will gather for the 30th General Convention at a unique and providential moment in the life of our Association. Standing in the Year of our Lord, 2026, we find ourselves on the threshold of our 40th Anniversary in 2027. This convention is more than a business meeting; it is a “mountain-top” moment where we look back with gratitude at forty years of God’s guidance and look forward with holy anticipation to the work He has yet to complete in and through us.

The theme for our assembly, “**Christ Jesus – Our Hope – Our Future!**”, reminds us to focus on the one foundation that never fails. As the world changes and uncertainty grows, we do not rely on our own strength or plans. With The Rev. Dr. Jordan B. Cooper as our keynote speaker, we will turn our attention to Christ Jesus. He is the anchor for our souls and the one who shapes our future.

Our Scriptural Anchor:

*“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” — Hebrews 10:23*

This exhortation from Hebrews serves as our true North Star. To “hold fast” is a call to endurance and doctrinal integrity. To do so “without wavering” is a testament to the peace we find only in Christ Jesus, even amidst the storms of the present age. Most importantly, our confidence does not rest on our ability to hold on to God, but on the unwavering truth that He who promised is faithful.

As we gather for the 30th General Convention, we do so with an eye toward 2027. This year is a “season of preparation”—a time to strengthen the bonds of our fellowship, to refine our mission of “The Great Commission,” envisioned by the Association’s founders and to renew our commitment to the authority of God’s Word.

We invite every delegate, pastor, and layperson to enter these days with prayerful hearts. May our time together be marked by the joy of our salvation and a shared vision for the future. We are a people of hope because we are a people of the Promise.

We look forward to gathering as one body at the 30th General Convention of The AALC. To Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen! †



April 2026

PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Rev. Paul Johansen
2. To remember God's command to love
3. To reflect on Jesus' crucifixion
4. Commission for Higher Education
5. Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA
6. Rev. Bruce Ritter
7. Rev. Rusty Phillips
8. For paramedics and firefighters
9. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Evansdale, IA
10. Rev. Antonio Romano
11. For our veterans
12. Regional Home Mission Developers
13. Redeemer Lutheran Church, West Union, IA
14. Rev. Robert Salge
15. For prospective Seminary students
16. St. John's Lutheran Church, Pocahontas, MO
17. Rev. Robert Snitzer
18. For those who are homebound or in nursing facilities
19. Rev. Dave Spotts
20. St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, Traer, IA
21. College Students
22. Future needs of ALTS
23. International Lutheran Council
24. St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Otis, CO
25. Rev. Roger Twito
26. National & Local Governments
27. Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, ALTS President
28. Rev. Steven Wadle
29. St. Paul Lutheran Congregation, Tripoli, IA
30. Rev. Wayne Wilken



## Women of L.I.F.E.

*The crew preparing and serving at the annual dinner at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Williston, ND. Right: Dining room on the day of the dinner. Submitted photos.*

# Our Redeemer's Serves 38th Annual Meatball Dinner

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Williston, ND, prepared and served their 38th Annual Meatball Dinner on Saturday, October 25, 2025. Williston and the area community look forward to the fellowship it creates and the wonderful meal. The tickets practically sell themselves.

The planning begins several months in advance, looking for people to chair the event and work on all of the many committees. The supplies and food need to be ordered in advance. The meal consists of meatballs, gravy, potatoes, corn, coleslaw, buns and homemade ice cream.

There are three ways to enjoy the meal, the most popular is take-out; we also offer delivery for a two-hour window, and of course the dining room. The dining room involves the most workers serving family style, but also offers the most fellowship. We have many volunteers who work all week doing the many jobs, from meatball making, ice cream making, to peeling potatoes. The age of volunteers is from young elementary age to over 80 years of age.

It is a wonderful event for our church, and it is good for all members to work together to make it happen. Plus, it raises money for our youth programs. †

# Appeal for Support of Mountain View Church

The mission and purpose of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, can easily be found in our Association's Constitution, Article V:

The American Association of Lutheran Churches, a fellowship of congregations to which the Gospel of reconciliation has been given, seeks to focus and coordinate the purposes and resources of these Congregations to the end that the Triune God may be more fully known among men through a faithful ministry of God's Word and the Sacraments.

This commitment to Christ's Gospel has been expressed by the Christian Church as the "Missio Dei" – the Mission of Christ. Here in our church body, it has been communicated as "Keeping the Fort and Taking the Frontier." Every congregation is an outpost from which God's people are sent forth with Christ's commission of Kingdom expansion and Gospel proclamation. Our Association remains committed to this faithful endeavor.

It was recently said that the Christians should not "just plant churches because it's the most effective way to make disciples (though it is), we should want to plant more churches because the body of Christ is Jesus' earthly presence until He returns. Jesus works first and foremost through churches to bring heaven to earth and God's kingdom come."<sup>1</sup>

One of our Association's fortresses for kingdom expansion, Mountain View Lutheran Church of Thornton, CO, was recently deeded to The AALC by the local leadership of that ministry, knowing that though operations were temporarily paused, it could relaunch with the help of our Association as a new ministry within that community.

With that stated goal, the Commission on American Missions (and the Mountain View re-launch Team) has been praying and working to see this come to fruition. We have a new budget in place and a facility that is ready to host the new parish. All we need are commitments from you to this endeavor.

Therefore, we appeal to you as congregations and fortresses of The AALC to walk on this journey together, as we seek the Lord's will. Our goal is to raise \$100,000 each year for the next three years to get this re-launched ministry opportunity off the ground. With such resources, a man called by God could be put in place, along with monies to cover the building expenses, etc.

As we make this capital request, here are some of the financial gifts that The AALC has already received for this ministry:



Submitted photo

- From congregations of The AALC: \$2500
- From a Women of L.I.F.E. group within one of our congregations: \$500
- From individuals (through Thrivent giving): \$500
- From individual private contributions: \$500

Our Commission for American Missions (CAM) has also made a commitment of \$25,000. You can see the Lord's hand has already started blessing this ministry.

**How can you become a ministry partner in this project?** We are prayerfully asking each congregation to become a **Congregation Sponsor**, committing \$1,000 a year, or \$250 a quarter, to the Mountain View Lutheran Church project. Through your gifts, you will be a part of renewed Word and Sacrament ministry in Thornton, CO. This re-launch will indeed be "taking the frontier," proclaiming Jesus and His Gospel, to people lost to this broken world.

If you have any questions regarding this important mission opportunity, please contact us.✚

Rev. Joe Christina: National Home Mission Developer

Rev. Steve Klawonn: Assistant Presiding Pastor

Rev. Dean Stoner: Administrative Assistant to The AALC

<sup>1</sup> Brad Edwards, *The Reason for Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2025), 198.

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## UPCOMING EDITIONS...

**Themes for 2026: Six Church Seasons and High Feast Days**

**Please be in prayer for these upcoming editions:**

May/June: Easter (*deadline March 1*)

Jul/Aug: Pentecost (*deadline May 1*)

Sept/Oct: High Feast Days in the Church (*deadline July 1*)

Nov/Dec: Advent & Christmas (*deadline Sept. 1*)

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### Church News:

*The Evangel* welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: [theevangel@taalc.org](mailto:theevangel@taalc.org)

**Or mail:** Gretchen Baker, PO Box 84, Parshall, ND 58770