



Lenten
Devotions
Inspired by
Handel's
Oratorio
Messiah

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Art

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March 1

John 1:29

Behold the Lamb
of God that
taketh away the
sin of the world.

What does it mean that Jesus is the “Lamb of God”? In his *Great Confession on the Lord's Supper*, Martin Luther lists titles of Jesus that are often labeled as figures of speech, including “Lamb of God,” “the Door” (John 10:7) and “the True Vine” (John 15:1). Luther says the claim that Jesus is merely using illustrations in these situations is a backwards view. Jesus is not comparing Himself to a lamb, door, or vine, rather Jesus is saying that He is the Lamb, He is the Door, and He is the True Vine. As Creator, He purposefully gave us lambs, doors and vines to show us what He is. We understand what it means that Jesus is the Door because we have doors through which we enter; we understand that Jesus is the True Vine because we have vines which grow fruit.

Likewise, the Father created lambs to use as a picture of the ultimate sacrifice. He instructed the Israelites to use the blood of the lamb to protect them from the Angel of Death in Egypt (Exodus 12). This event enables us to understand Jesus as the true Lamb. He is not a created, sin-corrupted creature (as the Israelites were instructed to use) but the perfect, uncreated, eternal sacrifice from God the Father. The true Lamb surpasses the illustration. Throughout the Old Testament history, millions of lambs were sacrificed for the sins of people, but these lambs were insufficient to cover the multitude of sins of the believers. Jesus was sacrificed once for all, for the entire world. By His blood everyone has been freed from the bondage of sin.

By Rev. William Sabol

Prayer

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost: Christ, the Rock of our salvation, Is the name of which we boast; Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt! None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built. Amen. (LSB 451:4)

March 6

LSB 823

May God bestow on
us His grace, With
blessings rich pro-
vide us; And may
brightness of His
face To life eternal
guide us, That we
His saving health
may know.

I have had to recruit people for different endeavors and by different methods. For example, I've had to recruit people for work I knew they were not going to enjoy but that needed to get done. (In this case, better leave the details unsaid!) For that, I urged people to remember their duty and offered rewards. On the other hand, I've had the opportunity to recruit people to come to a friend's restaurant to build business. Once I'd tried the food and seen how low the prices were (in this case, the details can flow!), it was easy to recruit. People could see that trying the restaurant was its own reward.

How do we hope to bring people into God's kingdom? Is this a duty-bound endeavor only? Or is coming into a relationship with the heavenly Father its own reward? Martin Luther's succinct hymn “May God Bestow on Us His Grace” illustrates beautifully that it is the latter.

In this hymn, Luther begins with God's grace, and moves from grace to grace. Only briefly does Luther consider the judgment of God as motivation for the church to reach the nations. And there, it is contrast point for the people led by grace, who are able to increase in good works, increasing God's praise.

So, how do we increase the missionary effort of the church? How do we get ourselves fired up to share the good news about Jesus? “May God bestow on us His grace... And may the brightness of His face To life eternal guide us!”

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Prayer

O let the people praise Thy worth, In all good works increasing; The land shall plentifulous fruit bring forth, Thy Word is rich in blessing. May God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit bless us! Amen. (LSB 823)

March 5

Isaiah 53:5

And with His stripes we are healed.

Sometimes the process of healing hurts. We can all recall the tender pain of a fading bruise, the sensitivity of a mending wound, or that deep-down ache as the body recovers from an illness. For me, as a child, pain and healing were vividly connected. Whenever I scraped a knee or sustained some small cut, my mother would paint the wound with methiolate, or, even worse, iodine. Those liquid applications would grab the raw nerve endings and sear them with a burning sensation that told me they were working to kill any germs and speed the healing. But I never looked forward to the cure that was so unpleasant.

It is not pleasant for us to contemplate the suffering our Lord Jesus Christ endured. To realize the pain and suffering that He went through is discomfoting. This is especially true when we acknowledge that He was smitten and afflicted for our sakes. Jesus was sinless. He did not deserve to be beaten, pierced, crucified or to have died.

The wounds inflicted upon Christ's body are physical manifestations of our sin. Every lie we tell is a rip in His flesh, every wicked thought is a thorn in His brow, and every sinful deed is a hammer blow driving the nails deeper. But for us He accepted and bore all this. This is His grace and mercy poured out. His shed blood heals the wounds and disease caused by sin that would otherwise infect and decay our heart and minds. As the old gospel song says, "There is a balm in Gilead that heals a wounded soul." That balm is the blood of our Savior.

By Rev. Richard Gizynski

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that my sins have hurt you, and for that I ask your forgiveness. I give thanks that you have healed my sin-sick soul with the shedding of your blood. In your name I pray, amen.

March 2

Isaiah 52:15

Kings shall shut their mouths because of Him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Is 52:13-53:12 is called the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah, the song of the Suffering Servant. It is traditional to read this section of Isaiah on Good Friday, for it speaks so clearly about what our Lord suffered for our sake. It is no wonder, then, that Handel chose to use this reading for a series of pieces in the *Messiah*.

Is 52:13-53:12 tells the story of how the Servant would be sent to suffer greatly to "bear the sin of many," though He Himself "had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth." This passage is full of radical irony, for though He saves us, "we esteemed him not." Yet the prophecy also foretells that many nations will come to believe because of Him.

This is illustrated marvelously by one of the legends that is told about Handel's *Messiah*. One of the traditions of the *Messiah* is that during the great Hallelujah Chorus, everyone stands, including the orchestra. Legend has it that everyone stands because King George II stood at this point in the music. Royal protocol holds that when the monarch stands, everyone stands. Now, no one knows why the king stood. It's possible he needed to stretch his legs.

But the best construction is that George recognized this music as greeting the returning Messiah at His Second Coming. So George, following royal protocol, stood Himself, acknowledging that though he was king, Jesus is the King of Kings.

And thus the prophecy of Is 52-53 comes full circle, that while Israel did not recognize her king, great monarchs and presidents and judges have come to see and understand the glorious Gospel of our God.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Prayer

Light of the World, shine upon the darkness of our sinful hearts, that we might find our joy in you. Amen.

March 3

Isaiah 53:3; 50:6

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

What is grief? It is the loss of someone we love. It is rejection by those we seek to love. It is the humiliation that results from occupational or social failure. It is common to every one of us.

What caused Jesus' grief? What brought Him such sorrow? It was not simply the emotional pain of loss, rejection, and humiliation. Even more than that, the grief our Lord endured emotionally was coupled with quite physical and quite real suffering.

Our Lord's grief did not come in the mere loss of someone He loved, but in smiting with fists and whips upon His back by those same people. It did not come in the mere rejection by those He came to save, but in those same people He came to save placing a crown of thorns upon His head and spitting in His face. It did not end in mere humiliation, but in His death by crucifixion.

Yet our Lord hid His face from none of this. He willingly and gladly endured this emotional and physical grief that He might purchase and win for us the forgiveness of sins through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

The grief and sorrow of our Lord was not by happenstance, but it was the very plan of God, the very promise of the Scriptures, the very reason He took flesh, and it is now our very salvation.

By Rev. Richard J. Serina, Jr.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, hold not our offenses against us and remember our sins no more. Amen.

March 4

Isaiah 53:4-5

Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him.

When Christ our Lord marches forth unto the cross, when He undergoes His passion, in reality He is marching to our cross, He is taking up our passion.

We see in our Lord's suffering the consequences of sin distilled to their most graphic and intense point. We know that our sin brings grief and sorrow, and then we see Christ under them. We know sin brings hurt and pain, physical and emotional, and we see Christ bear them. We know that our rebellion against God brings with it death, and we see Christ take that up for us.

And what for? As Isaiah prophesies, for "our peace." When we behold Christ's suffering, we see not only the burden of our sin, but we see our peace, our life, our salvation being won. We see the great depths of God's love for us. The Father would rather have Christ suffer than you. That is what our Lord's passion means—it means that the Father takes the burden and penalty of sin off of you and places it upon Christ. And why? Because that is His love for you.

Indeed, we know and see this now, even in this sinful world. We know that we shall see it more and fully and forever on the last day, when Christ the Crucified in love calls us all forth from the grave to celebrate and enjoy the peace He won for us for all eternity. Christ works for our peace, and that is wondrous!

By Rev. Eric Brown

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you sent the Prince of Peace to earth to battle sin, death, and the devil on our behalf. Grant us a firm faith, that we might ever enjoy the victory which He has won for us. In Jesus' name, amen.