



First Sunday of Lent
Sunday, February 22nd, 2026
Esther Lutheran Church, ELCA

Introduction:

Today's gospel tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert. His forty-day fast becomes the basis of our Lenten pilgrimage. In the early church Lent was a time of intense preparation for those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. This catechetical focus on the meaning of faith is at the heart of our Lenten journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. Hungry for God's mercy, we receive the bread of life to nourish us for the days ahead.

PRELUDE

BELL

WELCOME

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God

Please stand as you are able

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

P: Because you have made God your refuge,

C: No evil shall befall you.

P: God will command the angels concerning you,

C: To guard you in all your ways.

P: On their hands they will bear you up

C: So that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God, who forgives all our sin,
whose mercy endures forever.

C: Amen.

***CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:**

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We come before you with heavy hearts. We do not always follow our savior's lead. We insist on our own way, putting worldly things before you. We doubt, we discriminate; we scatter— preferring darkness to the brilliance of your truth. For all this we ask your mercy and forgiveness, that our hearts may be made clean again. Amen.

P: As a loving shepherd gathers his sheep, so God protects and cares for us. As patient as a parent to a wayward child, so is God's mercy for us. Let us rejoice that we have received forgiveness, and that every day God seeks to renew us in the image of our Creator. **Amen.**

***GATHERING HYMN: "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" (ELW 325)**

**1 I want Jesus to walk with me;
I want Jesus to walk with me;
all along my pilgrim journey,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

**2 In my trials, Lord, walk with me;
in my trials, Lord, walk with me;
when my heart is almost breaking,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

**3 When I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when my head is bowed in sorrow,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

Text: African American spiritual

***GREETING**

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: **And also with you.**

***PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

P: Lord God, our strength,

C: **The struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Please be seated

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song

FIRST READING: GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Human beings were formed with great care, to be in relationship with the creator, creation, and one another. The serpent's promise to the first couple that their eyes would be opened led, ironically, to the discovery only that they were naked.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." ^{3:1} Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked,

and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. Here ends the first reading.

PSALM 32:1-11 ~ Congregation reads the bold
Mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord. (Ps. 32:10)

¹ Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!

² **Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile!**

³ While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, because of my groaning all day long.

⁴ **For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.**

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my guilt. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

⁶ **Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

⁷ You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

⁸ **"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye.**

⁹ Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."

¹⁰ **Great are the tribulations of the wicked; but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.**

¹¹ Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord; shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

SECOND READING: ROMANS 5:12-19

Through Adam's disobedience, humanity came under bondage to sin and death, from which we cannot free ourselves. In Christ's obedient death, God graciously showers on us the free gift of liberation and life.

¹² Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned ¹³ for sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Here ends the second reading.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: (ELW pg. 216)

Alleluia, Lord, to whom shall we go?
Alleluia. You have the words of eternal life.
Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 4:1-11

Jesus experiences anew the temptations that Israel faced in the wilderness. As the Son of God, he endures the testing of the evil one.

¹ Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to

become loaves of bread.”⁴ But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory,⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ ”¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. The word of the Lord...

Thanks be to God!

CHILDREN’S TIME & SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY: “*Lord Jesus, Think on Me*” (ELW 599)

- 1 Lord Jesus, think on me,
 and purge away my sin;
 from selfish passions set me free
 and make me pure within.**
- 2 Lord Jesus, think on me,
 by anxious thoughts oppressed;
 let me your loving servant be
 and taste your promised rest.**
- 3 Lord Jesus, think on me,
 nor let me go astray;
 through darkness and perplexity
 point out your chosen way.**
- 4 Lord Jesus, think on me,
 that, when the flood is past,
 I may the eternal brightness see
 and share your joy at last.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

L: Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray for the world and its needs.

A brief silence.

L: God of all grace, grant faith to your church. Give to all the baptized the will to resist temptation and to worship and serve you alone. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: God of all creation, tend this earth. When human greed and disobedience threaten this planet and the life it contains, lead us by your Spirit into ways of reverence, awe, and gentleness. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: God of all nations, preserve us from trouble. Surround all living in places of violence with your steadfast love and give resilience to all who work for peace. Grant courage to those who challenge, especially around issues of racism and systemic oppression. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: God of all healing, mend our wounds. Bring wholeness to all who are sick, give peace to all who groan in grief, and send companions to all who are lonely or isolated. We pray especially for Jerry, Chris, Bruce, Jaxson, Kristy, Larry, Joan, Dennis, Lois, Dale, Doug, Gary, Shirley, Joyce, Bev, Reilly, Allison, Cadence, and Becky. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: God of all people, provide for our community. For any among us who hunger for bread, bring nourishment. For any among us who hunger for truth, speak your life-giving word. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: God of all life, bring us to you. We thank you for your free and abounding grace, and for those who, by that same grace, now rest eternally in you. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and salvation.
Amen.

Please stand as you are able

***APOSTLES' CREED: (ELW pg. 217)**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
on the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen**

***SHARING OF THE PEACE:**

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

C: And also with you.

Please be seated

OFFERING

We thank you for your gifts of time, talent, and treasure that help this congregation, to continue our ministry together, and to make Christ known in our communities and the world.

OFFERING HYMN: "I Love You, Lord" x2 (Worship & Rejoice Hymnal #85)

I love you, Lord
and I lift my voice
to worship you
oh my soul rejoice
take joy my King
in what you hear
may it be a sweet, sweet sound
in your ear.

I love you, Lord
and I lift my voice
to worship you
oh my soul rejoice
take joy my King
in what you hear
may it be a sweet, sweet sound
in your ear.

Please stand as you are able

*THE OFFERING PRAYER:

P: You have promised to be faithful, O God,

C: **and we put our trust in you. Accept these gifts we now bring as a sign of our belief that you will provide for our every need. Make us generous with each other and forgiving of our own shortcomings, that we might truly be your servants in the world. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

*LORD'S PRAYER: *sung* (CLH 632)

Our Father, which art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to our neighbor in need

***BLESSING:**

Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity:

God, who calls all things into existence,

Jesus Christ, who redeems us,

and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation,

✠ bless you now and always.

THREE-FOLD AMEN

***SENDING HYMN: “Jesus, Still Lead On” (ELW 624)**

- 1 Jesus, still lead on,
 till our rest be won;
 and, although the way be cheerless,
 we will follow, calm and fearless;
 guide us by your hand
 to the promised land.
- 2 If the way be drear,
 if the foe be near,
 let no faithless fears o'ertake us,
 let not faith and hope forsake us;
 safely past the foe
 to our home we go.
- 3 When we seek relief
 from a long-felt grief,
 when temptations come alluring
 make us patient and enduring;
 show us that bright shore

where we weep no more.

4 Jesus, still lead on,
till our rest be won;
heav'nly leader, still direct us,
still support, console, protect us,
till we safely stand
in the promised land.

Text: Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf, 1700-1760; tr. Jane L. Borthwick, 1813-1897, alt.

***DISMISSAL**

P: Go in peace. Believe the good news.

C: **Thanks be to God!**

IN OUR PRAYERS

Jerry Anderson	Chris & Bruce Carter
Jaxson Bosl	Kristy Fyhrie
Larry Sather	Joan Burquest
Dennis Rosenquist	Lois Rosenquist
Rev. Bruce Miller- father of Karin Wagner	
Dale Flemming – father of Laurie Ratajesak	
Doug Tvedt – brother of Joan Burquest	
Jerry Pogose – father of Chuck Pogose	
Gary Borst – friend of the Andersons	
Shirley Nesges – friend of the Thoms	
Joyce Muyres – friend of the Thoms	
Bev Guse-Ohlrech – friend of the Pedersons	
Reilly McCormick – friend of Esther congregation	
Allison Dotzler – friend of Kathy Mittag	
Cadence Smith – friend of Mandy Arvidson	
Becky Yttrie – friend of the Townsends	
Family and Friends of: Sarah Pomeranz, David Anderson, Ron Myren, Katie Jahnke, Dave Bendix, Megan Sheen, Colleen Burquest, and Chad Way	

Sunday, February 22nd – First Sunday of Lent

Sunday fellowship before and after worship

9 am – Sunday School

10 am – Worship led by Pr. Greg Billberg

2 pm – Worship at St. William's

Wednesday, February 25th

6 pm – Lent Soup & Sandwich Supper

7 pm – Worship

Thursday, February 26th

9 am- Quilting Group - bring a sack lunch

Sunday, March 1st – Second Sunday of Lent

Sunday fellowship before and after worship

8:30 am – VBS Planning Meeting

9 am – Sunday School

10 am – Worship with Holy Communion led by Pr. Preston

2 pm – Worship at St. William's

NEWS AND NOTES

Sign-up sheets for 2026 Worship Tasks are on the Narthex table.

Note from the Council: Looking for donations of flowers for the graves. Also, if anyone is interested, please make up some wooden cross stakes for the flowers. We need to replace many of the ones we have. Any questions, please ask any member of the Council.

You are invited to a Spaghetti Feed hosted by the youth groups of Grace Christian and Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church on Friday, February 27th from 5 pm-8pm. Free will offering. Youth activities 9 pm-12 am for youth ages 13+. Any questions please call Isaiah Schneider 320-491-082 or Luke Luedeke 320-808-3831. Flyer is in the Narthex.

VBS Planning Meeting is Sunday, March 1st at 8:30 am. ALL ARE WELCOME!

World Day of Prayer will be held on Friday, March 6, 2026, 7 am to 7 pm, in the Esther Lutheran Church Sanctuary.

Join us and fellow Christians around the world for an intentional time set aside to pray for our families, our communities, and our world. Schedule:

- 7 am – Morning Prayer Service
- Noon – Midday Prayer Service

- 6:30 pm – Evening Prayer Service
- We will be holding a Prayer Vigil throughout the entire day, 7 am to 7 pm. You are invited to come and sit and pray for as long as you wish.
- We are collecting prayer petitions in a “Prayer Jar” in the Narthex.

The World Day of Prayer is a global ecumenical movement led by Christian women who welcome all to join in prayer and action for peace and justice. The common day of observance is the first Friday of March.

Check out our new Esther Calendar on our website to keep up to date! Go to estherlutheran.com and click on “Esther Calendar.”

We believe everyone has a unique and valuable place in God’s family and we welcome all to share in the community of faith here at Esther. If you would like to become a member please contact Mandy in the church office at 218-338-2171 or secretary@estherlutheran.net or Jewel Townsend at 320-760-2503 or jewellht17@gmail.com

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