

## Prayer Vigil 2015



Greetings to you from God our Heavenly Father, and from His Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! We are pleased that you have accepted the invitation to spend an hour in prayer and meditation during these forty hours leading up to Easter 2015. It is our hope that this time of prayer and meditation will be a blessing to you and to those for whom you pray, as your prayers rise up before God as incense. It is also our hope that your faith and your daily prayer life will continue to grow through this experience.

Prayer is the means God gave to us to communicate with Him so that we can build a personal relationship with Him, express our adoration for Him, and present our needs to Him. St. Paul, in Philippians 4: 6-7, exhorts us *'not to be anxious about anything, but in*

*everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus'*. God answers our prayers according to His will for us. His answer may be yes; it may be no, and it also could be wait for God's timing, depending on the need that we express, and what is His good and gracious will for us. God's answers may come to us through divine intervention, through His Word, or through the Holy Spirit that indwells us as His baptized children. Prayer is an act of Christian obedience. Throughout the gospel narrative about Jesus, we see that Jesus engaged in prayer to His Heavenly Father for His disciples, and when performing the miracles of healing, casting out demons, and raising people from the dead. We see Jesus at His most intense in prayer when He went with Peter, James, and John into the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal.

Read the following accounts of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane:

- Mark 14: 32 – 42
- Luke 22: 39 - 46

It is after each of the three times that Jesus prayed to His Heavenly Father that He found His disciples sleeping. When He had taken them out with Him to Gethsemane, He asked them to remain and watch while He prayed in the distance, but after each prayer He found them

sleeping and asked if they could not watch for one hour. This must have been very disconcerting and disappointing to Jesus as He was about to face arrest, suffering, and death on the cross the next day.

In response to Jesus' question to His disciples about watching and praying for one hour, we, as followers of Jesus, and in obedience to Him, continue with this yearly Easter Prayer Vigil. It is a time for meditating on who our triune God is, who we are, and how God works in our lives, not only for our benefit, but for the well-being of all others whose lives do touch us in one way or another.

Let us now call upon our God as we continue with our time of prayer and meditation by making the sign of the cross in remembrance of our Baptism and saying:

- In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or read: LSB Hymn #772: In Holy Conversation

**Pray;**

- *Father in Heaven, we thank You that we are able to communicate with You through prayer, and that we can do so at any time, wherever we are, whatever our needs may be. Your Son Jesus told us that anything we ask in His name You will give to us. We thank You that You are always there to hear our prayer. We are told in Proverbs 3 to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight”. So it is with this in mind that we come this day in prayer to You, asking You to guide our thoughts and meditation throughout this hour, and we pray that this time with You may lead us to a deeper relationship with You and to a more active life of faith and service to You. We ask this in the name of Our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.*

**WHO IS OUR GOD?**

Concordia, the Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord, the Lutheran Confessions, in Article 1 of the Chief Articles, tells us that God is one divine essence who is eternal, without a body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker of all things, visible and invisible, (Nehemiah 9:6). Concordia continues, “Yet there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). These three persons are of the same essence and power.”

Each and every Sunday we confess that we believe in the Holy Trinity, that is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. We get a clearer explanation of the Holy Trinity in the Athanasian Creed.

- Read: **The Athanasian Creed** (LSB Pages 319-320, Concordia Pages 17-18)

From the Athanasian Creed we see God in three persons, in one substance, all co-equal and co-eternal, none created or made.

By faith, we know and confess that God existed before the creation of the heavens and the earth. He is the creator of everything in this world and beyond, seen and unseen

- Read: **Genesis 1.**

The Bible record in Genesis 1 tells us that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Over five days, we see God creating light, night and day, the waters above (the heaven), the waters below (the seas), dry land (earth), vegetation (plants, trees), the sun, the moon, and all living creatures that fly, or live in the waters, or on the earth. God spoke, "Let there be" or other similar words, and so there was, and He deemed everything He created to be good. We see the omnipotence (all powerful-ness) and perfection of our God in His creation of the heavens and the earth, and all that it needed. Mankind was created by God on the sixth day, male and female, and they were told by God to be fruitful and multiply. God also said that mankind would have dominion over every living thing and over all that grows on the earth. It was during the creation of mankind that God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The critical words here are "us" and "our" in terms of who our God is, and we get an explanation of who the "us" is in the Gospel of John.

We read the following in John 1:

*"<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*

These verses tell us that Jesus was present at the time of creation, that Jesus is also God, and that He became God incarnate and dwelt on this earth as Immanuel, God with us. We also see the Holy Spirit being present at the time of creation in Genesis 1:2, where "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

We have seen the power of God in the creation record. Let us now get to know the character of God, and how He relates to us.

- Read: **Psalm 103**

In Psalm 103, we read that God heals all diseases, forgives all sins, is merciful and gracious, and is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He does not deal with us according to our sins, or repay us according to them. In 1 John 4:8, we read that God “is love” and His actions and attitude toward us, as we read in Psalm 103, clearly show His love, mercy and grace toward us.

- Sing or read: **LSB Hymn #507: Holy, Holy, Holy**

#### Prayer points

- Thank God for His abundant love, grace and mercy
- Thank God for the mental, physical and spiritual healing He gives us
- Thank God for His gift of faith to you

### **WHO ARE WE?**

As we read in Genesis 1 we were created in the image and likeness of God. We get a more detailed picture of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 2 when God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve.

- Read: **Genesis 2 & 3**

So Adam was put into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. At that time God gave Adam specific instructions not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day that he did he would surely die. However, God had given them free will since He wanted mankind to love Him of their own accord. Because of this free will, Eve, when she was tempted by the serpent (Satan) to eat the fruit in order to be just like God and know good and evil, did eat the fruit and gave some to Adam to eat. God was very displeased with them and cast them out of the Garden of Eden, disciplined them by introducing pain at childbirth, thorns and thistles in among the plants for food, sacrificed an animal to clothe them, and put in place a plan of redemption to defeat Satan and save mankind from eternal death.

As Adam and Eve, and the generations beyond them began to be fruitful and multiply, there was increasing corruption on the earth. In Genesis 6:5-7, we read: <sup>5</sup> *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* <sup>6</sup> *And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* <sup>7</sup> *So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."* `

So God said that He *"will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die."*

However, through Noah, God saved mankind and the living things of this earth from being wiped out in the flood that covered the entire earth. We read in Hebrews 11:7 that *"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith."*

This did not solve the problem of sin. After the flood, the earth was once again populated by new generations, but the sinful nature of man once again took over and disobedience to God increased. Through Moses, God brought in the Ten Commandments to show us what rules should govern our relationship to God and what our relationship to others should be. These commandments served to highlight the sinfulness in us as we broke some or all of them. James 2:10 tells us: *"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it."* In other words, if we have broken any one of the commandments, we have broken them all.

Because of the fall of Adam and Eve, we all have been born with original sin. King David wrote in Psalm 51:5, *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* This applies to each of us. We all have a sinful nature. Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

In Genesis 3, God promised a plan of redemption for man that would include His Son Jesus. We read the following in Genesis 3:14-15:

*"<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you*

*shall eat all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*

In this text the serpent is Satan and Eve’s offspring will be Jesus. This promise of God is followed by many prophecies in the Old Testament, culminating in the birth of Jesus in the New Testament. We read in Isaiah 7 that “*the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us)*”. We also read in Isaiah 9:6-7: “*For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”*

In Isaiah 53, we read how Jesus will suffer and die for us:

- **Read: Isaiah 53**

These prophecies about Jesus’s birth, suffering, and death were all written about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus.

Let us now fast-forward to New Testament times. Jesus came to this earth specifically to offer Himself as a once and for all sacrifice for sin, and to give Himself as a ransom for us so that we may receive the gift of salvation and eternal life. John 3:16 says that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. We read on that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it but in order that the world might be saved through Him. So whoever believes in Jesus is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned.

In the gospels we read about Jesus’s life from birth to death on the cross. John the Baptist called Jesus the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Throughout His life Jesus taught us about who He is and what was needed for us to enter the kingdom of heaven. He told Nicodemus (John 3) that unless one is born again, born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus also showed the power He had from God the Father to forgive sins, to heal the lame, the sick, the deaf, and the blind, and also to raise the dead back to life. He also stated (in John 11) that He is the resurrection and the life, and that whoever believes in Him, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone

who lives and believes in Him shall never die. In John 14 we read that He says that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him.

However, for man to be saved Jesus Himself said (in Matthew 16) that the Christ had to come and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

**Read: John 18:28 – John 19:37**

**Sing or read: LSB Hymn #451 – Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted**

Prayer points

- Thank God for loving us so much that He sent Jesus to die for us
- Thank God for his gift of salvation through Jesus
- Thank Jesus for His willingness to suffer and die for us so that we may have forgiveness of our sins and eternal life

### **WHO OUGHT WE TO BE AS REDEEMED CHILDREN OF GOD**

We have read in the Gospel of John how Jesus suffered and died for us. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, pure and sinless, who came down to earth in human flesh to take our sins to the cross so that we may be freed from sin, death and the devil. Only God in the flesh could have been this unblemished once-for-all sacrifice for us.

**Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1- 24, 50-58**

We see in these verses what our destiny will be as believers in Jesus and His followers. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so will we. As the Scripture says, *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”*

We know our final destination. We will be resurrected and made alive. Death has been defeated. In John 11:25, Jesus Himself said: *“I am the resurrection and the life.<sup>[d]</sup> Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”* Jesus also said in John 14:1-3: *“Let not your hearts be*

*troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”.*

As believers in Jesus, we know that we will be spending eternity with Jesus and our heavenly Father. So let us now explore who we are expected to be while we live out our earthly lives.

In Philippians 2, we read the following: *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>6</sup> who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,<sup>[b]</sup> being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

So we need to exalt the name of Jesus and we should be more Christ-like in our attitude in terms of how we relate to God and to each other.

In Galatians 5, St Paul exhorts us to keep in step with the Spirit.

*<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things*



*there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

Here we see what the desires of the flesh are and how to avoid doing the things we ought not to do. We need to be walking by the Spirit, and having been redeemed by Christ, we see what ‘fruits’ or qualities we should exhibit in our lives. Our sinful desires and passions were crucified in the flesh when Jesus died on the cross, so we need to leave those behind and live according to the Spirit who indwells us as baptized children of God.

In Matthew 25, Jesus also warned us about how our lives should be lived.

*“<sup>31</sup> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’.”*

We see in this text how we should treat and relate to each other, especially those with needs of body, mind, and soul. We need to show them kindness and compassion by helping them to satisfy their needs.

St. Paul exhorts us in Philippians 4 as to how to go about our lives so that we do not fall into despair. He says:

*“<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

We are told to be reasonable and to remember that Our Lord is near, so we need not have anxiety or worry but to pass our requests on to God and He will give us the peace we need. We are also told not to dwell on the evils of this world or on calamities that befall us or others, things like sickness, disease, natural disasters, wars, and conflicts, but to think about those things that would uplift us instead of causing us worry and despair.

Satan would like nothing better than for us to be worried or in despair, and in response, for us to involve ourselves in the kind of actions that would draw us away from God. However, the Bible has words of advice for us to not fall into this kind of temptation. In Ephesians 6, St. Paul tells us how to protect ourselves from the devil and other principalities and powers. He writes:

*“<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

So in our battles with the devil and his fallen angels we need to know the promises of God in the scriptures regarding our salvation, be armed with the Word of God, be firm in our faith, spend time in prayer, and look to the Holy Spirit for guidance and protection.

**Sing or read: LSB Hymn #656 or #657 – A Mighty Fortress is Our God**

Prayer points:

- Give God thanks for always being there and for His continual provision, care, and protection,
- Ask God to give you a spirit of generosity to enable you to share your daily blessings with those in need.
- Pray for strength to resist temptation and for God's guidance to live a life that is pleasing to Him.
- Pray for those whom you know that are dealing with various temptations, that God may deliver them from their temptations, and that they will turn their lives over to Him.

**CONCLUSION**

It is our hope that this hour of meditation and prayer has reinforced your faith and will bring you closer to God as you deal with life here on this earth, and that it will help you to better prepare for your life in eternity with Jesus Christ. In the meantime, we have to live an earthly life that is surrounded by many evils, injustices, inequalities, health issues, and other ills that affect us personally. We also live in a world that seems to be getting increasingly dangerous because of the many conflicts and acts of terror that seem to be prevalent. For all these things we need to offer up our prayers to God so that we, and those we are concerned about, may have lives of peace and joy with all that they need to sustain them.

Prayer points

- Pray that God keep us safe from all evil and securely in His love as we struggle against Satan in this life.
- Pray that Satan's influence in the life of others may be diminished and that Christ's love will penetrate the darkness in their hearts.
- Pray for all those living in areas where there are wars and conflicts, that they know peace, not as the world gives, but as Jesus Himself does, and also that the wars and conflicts will end.
- Pray that God will grant healing to all who are suffering with various health issues. Pray too for those living in countries that are affected by deadly diseases, that the threat of these diseases will be eradicated.
- Pray for those living in poverty here in Canada and around the world, those without some or all of the basic necessities of life – food, shelter, clothing, medicine, education, sanitation – that they too will be blessed this day and always with the things they need to sustain them and grant them a better life.

- Pray for young women and children throughout this world that they may be protected from the evils that are being visited upon them by sex traffickers, pornographers, and others who prey on young people.
- Pray to God to give you a generous spirit so that the light of Christ may shine through you.
- Pray for God to give you the conviction to set aside a daily time for prayer if you are not already doing this.
- Pray that God will guide you in your prayers to include the needs of others together with yours.
- Pray to God for Him to turn more hearts away from lives of sin to lives of faith in Jesus.
- Pray for our church that it may continue to preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity.
- Thank God for this prayer time with Him, and thank Him for listening to the prayers you offered up to God, and for patience as you wait for His answer.

Sing or read: **LSB Hymn #770 - What a Friend We Have in Jesus**

### **BENEDICTION**

Let us complete our prayer and meditation time with the Benediction.

**May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; may the Lord look upon you with His favour and grant you His peace. Amen.**