



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2023



Sight for the Blind

The Fourth Sunday in Lent has traditionally been called “Laetare.” It derives its name from the Latin words of the Introit of the day (the traditional opening verses): “Rejoice (Laetare) with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her” (Isaiah 66:10a).

We were born in the blindness of sin, and without the light of Christ we could not find a way to safety. Christ comes to shine his light into our darkened eyes that we might see him and live. Yet for those who refuse to see their Savior in Christ, the blindness of unbelief remains. He gives gracious sight to the blind who trust in him; he gives blinding judgment on those who reject him; finally, he displays the work of God in the lives of those who now walk in the light of Christ.

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (i.e. are “proper” to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means “regular order”) portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord’s Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Lesson¹ Isaiah 42:14-21

There are two kinds of spiritual blindness. One cannot see a way to salvation; the other sees the Way, but rejects him. Here, the Lord makes promises to both groups. To his helplessly blind children who cannot find a way out, the Lord promises certain deliverance and rescue. God himself will lead them to safety and will turn their darkness into light. But to those who reject the true God and look to idols, God promises judgment! Like the Pharisees in the Gospel, God promises that though they see, they remain spiritually blind—though they hear, they remain spiritually deaf.

Second Lesson¹ Ephesians 5:8-14

Notice what Paul says. He does not say that once we were in the dark and now we are in the light. No, once we were darkness and now we are light. Our conversion meant a total transformation of what we are, and therefore, it will lead to a total transformation of what we do. No longer producing fruits of darkness, we live in the light and shine the light into the sin---darkened corners of our world. With lines from an early Christian hymn, Paul shares Christ’s call to us and his promise for us. Once you were darkness, but now you are light. Live as children of the light. The difference between darkness and light is dramatic. The difference between believers and unbelievers should be equally so. They are as different as the nursery and the morgue!

Gospel of the Day¹ John 9:1-7,13-17.34-39

In God’s plan there are no coincidences, and there is no karma. The man was born blind not because of his parents’ sin; nor was the man lying in Jesus’ path by accident. Both happened that the work of God might be displayed in the life of this man who was doubly blind: he could not see Jesus physically or spiritually. Christ opened the door to the latter by solving the former. It was no coincidence that this happened on the Sabbath. Christ had come not only to give sight to the helplessly blind—he also came to bring judgment on the Pharisees who should have seen him as the Messiah, but who refused to believe even what they saw with their own eyes. Yet for us, born in the blindness of sin, but looking to Christ as Savior, Jesus shines as the light of the world. We believe, and we worship him.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 27 C

“The LORD Is My Light and My Salvation.” The faithful Christian has a confidence rooted in the trustworthy deliverance of his Lord.

Gospel Acclamation

Hebrews 12:2

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Prayer of the Day

O Lord Jesus Christ, by your almighty power you opened the eyes of the blind and showed yourself to them. Turn our eyes away from worthless things, and lead us to love you sincerely; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

515 “Christ Is the World’s Light” (Fred Pratt Green, 1903-2000)

Minor Festivals

St. Joseph, Guardian of Our Lord (March 19)

The few references in the first two chapters of St. Matthew’s and St. Luke’s Gospels provide the only information that we have about Joseph, the husband of Mary. He is described as a pious man of Davidic descent. God raised up Joseph to be the faithful guardian of his incarnate Son, Jesus. We pray that God gives us the same uprightness of life and obedience to his commands.

Minor Festivals

Annunciation of Our Lord (March 25)

This festival commemorates the angel Gabriel’s announcement to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to the incarnate Son of the Most High, Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). The festival originated in Constantinople and was accepted in Rome about 600 A.D. Marking the first moment of the Christ’s Incarnation, it was designated for March 25th, nine months before Christmas Day.

Church Year Season¹

Lent

The season of Lent leads the Church on a forty-day journey of repentance and prayer and of remembrance and renewal of our baptism. God calls to mankind: Return to the Lord! The journey begins with Ash Wednesday’s warning of mortality and culminates at the Service of Holy Baptism in the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. The Church’s Lenten worship is muted and quiet. For centuries, the Church has omitted her most jubilant songs of praise during this season of repentance (e.g. the “Gloria in Excelsis,” and the use of the word “Alleluia”) to reflect the somber nature of the season. Note, however, that the Sundays are designated as Sunday in Lent, not Sundays of Lent. The Sundays themselves are not considered part of the forty days but are islands of refreshment in our Lenten walk.

Colors & Symbolism

Lent: Purple or Violet

These colors are a sign of royalty, self-discipline, sorrow and repentance. Purple also reminds us of sacrifice, not only because that colored clothing was very expensive (sacrifice of money), but also because in order to make purple clothing in ancient times, one had to dye the cloth in the blood of snails (sacrifice of life). Thus purple is a fitting color for the penitential season of Lent, during which we focus more intentionally on our sinfulness, and how our King and Savior, Jesus Christ suffered in our place and sacrificed himself on the cross to take away our sins.

Nain Paraments

Lent

Superfrontal: The lamb at the center of the parament represents Jesus, the Lamb of God who was sacrificed to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 3:16-17). The nimbus (halo) around its head reminds us that Jesus was a perfect sacrifice, even greater than the unblemished lambs required of the Passover meal (Exodus 12:5).

The palm branches remind us of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before he died (John 12:13). Palm branches were used in celebration of victory. Jesus entered Jerusalem to conquer sin, death, and the devil. Our crucified and risen Lord assures us in his Word that his victory is ours by faith (1 Corinthians 15:57).

[The significance of the crosses on the far left and right of the superfrontal are explained below]

Lectern & Pulpit antependia: The cross formed by four nails represents Jesus’ death by which he was nailed to the cross (Luke 23:33; John 20:25,27). The white sash around the arms of the cross symbolizes Jesus’ righteousness and his perfect victory over our enemies through his resurrection (Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23;54-57).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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