

+ In Nomine Iesu +

The Festival Exordium, an Oral Tradition

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As work began on this topic it became quickly apparent there are little to no resources available to use as reference tools for a research paper. In expressing this frustration to Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux of Bethany Lutheran College, he made the comment that what seminarians at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary received in their instruction concerning the use of festival exordiums was handed down by oral tradition.¹ The undersigned does not recall to what extent such oral tradition was passed on by his homiletics professors: Milton Otto, Mark Harstad and/or Wilhelm Petersen, or from his bishop during the year of vicarage: the Rev. Alf Merseth, and/or the retired pastor in residence in his first parish: the Rev. Milton Tweit. In communicating with some past and current homiletic instructors at BLTS, all indicated that the tradition of using an exordium in festival sermons was taught, but none had anything in writing to submit.² So this paper will not technically be a scholarly treatment of the topic but rather a small primarily subjective contribution to the oral tradition handed down to us in this 21st Century with suggestions from personal practice with guidance and commentary offered by some contemporaries as noted.³

In the Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary (ELH) Rite One under the heading “#15. Sermon” we read these rubrics:

The pastor may introduce the sermon with a prayer. After the prayer he may greet the congregation with an apostolic greeting (Rom. 1:7), announce and read the sermon text and conclude with the brief prayer of John 17:17. Following the sermon he may close with the Gloria Patri. He shall then pray the prayer of the church.

On festival days the following order may be observed. He may introduce the sermon with a prayer for the day. Before reading the text he shall deliver an

¹ E-mail communication from members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod clergy roster will be used as documentation and used with permission.

² The Rev. Norman Madson, who taught homiletics at BLTS in the late 20th Century stated: “I did check my Homiletic Class notes, and found nothing written down about the Exordium. It must have been information given ‘off the cuff.’” (e-mail sent by Norman Madson on Wed., Mar 19, 2014.)

³ Putting oral tradition down in writing almost feels like a Moses experience without the inspiration thing going on however.

*exhortation (exordium) explaining the festival. The congregation shall sing the festival verse or hymn. The usual order shall then follow.*⁴

“Exhortation” is a speech or discourse intended to advise, incite, or encourage. Its etymology is Latin (*exhortari* = *ex* completely + *hortari* = to encourage). “Exordium” is a beginning or introductory part, especially of a speech or treatise. Its etymology is also Latin (*exordiri* = *ex* completely + *ordiri* = to begin)⁵. While we use the term exordium for our uses with festival sermons, it is a combination of both exordium and exhortation. The ELH rubric identifies the exordium as an explanation of the festival, so that as an introductory portion of the sermon it does not function as an introduction to the theme chosen to highlight from the festival text. Its purpose as we shall see is for a special feature of the festal nature of the day.⁶

Reu uses the term exordium in his manual on homiletics as simply the introduction to a sermon as done in most every-Sunday sermons today.⁷ It also appears that Giertz’ character, Fridfeldt, in “The Hammer of God” uses the term exordium in this same way. Fridfeldt did not have time to prepare his sermon for Transfiguration Sunday. He read

⁴ The Worship Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Mankato, MN., Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, (St. Louis: Morning Star Music Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 48.

⁵ “If you take a look at the older homiletic textbooks in the European and American tradition, which were shaped by the classical tradition, like Vinet, the term ‘Exordium’ is simply the name used to designate the ‘Introduction. Quintilian and the entire Western rhetorical tradition spoke about the art of oratory and some homiletics influenced by the oratorical tradition referred to homiletics or preaching as ‘sacred oratory.’ Just as the ‘Exordium’ was a synonym for ‘Introduction’ so the term ‘Peroration’ was often used as the term of choice for ‘Conclusion’ both in rhetoric and in the homiletical tradition that drew its terminology from rhetoric. I’m not sure where the practice in our own circle of homiletics came from. Walther uses it as well, so was it a German invention? The medieval homiletic rhetorical literature that I own do not use an Exordium as we do, as a kind of Prefatory introduction. The homiletic texts I have, some of which are nineteenth century use it synonymously as an expression for ‘Introduction.’ Conceivably, the idea of an ‘Exordium’ for special occasions makes sense if it situates the text within the special occasion.” (E-mail from Prof. Steve Reagles, sent on Jan 29, 2014)

⁶ “The contemporary and classical model of ‘requiring’ an ‘Exordium,’ or Introduction, body, conclusion model that is still with us was established by Plato in the Phaedrus, where he insisted that every oration ought to have a beginning, middle and end. But then the homilies in Scripture don’t follow that model. And Luther sometimes ended his sermons with no conclusion [‘That’s enough for today.’]. Our current model, taught at seminary--and that some pastors continue to use on into parish life--depends heavily upon the Classical model of Lenski and is still echoed in basic speech classes, where we are in the ‘Introduction’ to grab attention, establish the context, announce theme and parts, but it’s quite different than an ‘Exordium.’” (E-mail from Prof. Steve Reagles, sent on Jan 31, 2014)

⁷ Homiletics: A Manual of the Theory and Practice of Preaching, by M. Reu, D.D., trans. By Albert Steinhaeuser, D. D., Augsburg Publish House: Minneapolis, 1924. p. 487.

from the late curate Schartau's book of sermons.⁸ Again in this case the exordium is preparatory for the theme of the sermon and no singing of a hymn verse is indicated, rather we are informed after the reading of the exordium: "Now came the first main division of the sermon proper."⁹

I. Historical Development

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod's practice of using an exordium with the sermon on the three great festivals in the Church Year seems to be a vestige of a Lutheran practice used since the 16th Century. Initially it appears that it was used throughout the Church year. In a communication with Prof. Dennis Marzolf of Bethany Lutheran College this point was made:

The practice of the exordium on the festivals is probably a remnant of what was likely a regular part of the pulpit service in some Lutheran regions. Friedrich Lochner gives a hint about this in his "Divine Service of the Lutheran Church", 1895. (p.183-185) He suggests that the first pulpit action was an exhortation to prayer (sort of an epiclesis for the sermon) to the Holy Spirit for a fruitful and beneficial use of the Word, followed by the Lord's Prayer (either in silence or aloud), and then a pulpit verse appropriate to the season; Christmas: To Us is Born a Blessed Child (131:2; used on every Sunday from Christmas to Candlemas), Easter: Christ is Arisen (344:1 is closest in ELH; we didn't include the old Christ is Arisen which is in TLH) and Pentecost: Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord (2). On other Sundays outside of these seasons "We Now Implore" was used as the pulpit verse. The pulpit verse was usually just ONE verse of the hymn. Then the Gospel lesson was read and the sermon commenced. He cites the Schwarzburg Agenda of 1675. My guess is that the Invocation of the Spirit, Lord's Prayer, and Pulpit verse as a common occurrence fell by the wayside with the passage of time, and that where it was retained as a traditional practice it was reserved for the three festivals. This action was not a part of the sermon introduction, but had a separate function.¹⁰

⁸ The Hammer of God, by Bo Giertz, Augsburg Publishing House: Minneapolis, 1960, pp. 200-202.

⁹ Ibid, p. 203.

¹⁰ Email sent by Prof. Dennis Marzolf on Mar 16, 2014. In "The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures In the Worship of the Christian Church", Vol 4, "The Age of the Reformation" (Hughes Oliphant Old, Eerdmans, 2002) an overview of preaching from the time of Lutheran Orthodoxy highlights Heinrich Müller, 1631-75, p. 394, ff. "The Christmas prothema concludes, " This love therefore moves us to love God in return, to rejoice in the Lord and sing hymns of praise to him. At this point the congregation is asked to sing the Christmas carol "Ein kindelein so löbelich". Again, at p. 399, an Easter sermon, he writes, "Having delivered this classic

From the Ritual of 1685 ordered by King Christian V, of Denmark and Norway, which was basically a reissuance of the Ordinance of 1537 under “#16 *The Sermon*” we read:

“Then the pastor goes to the pulpit and preaches the usual sermon based on the Day's Gospel ... The pastor, or whoever preaches, shall first of all, commend the people to prayer and call for God's help in this holy ceremony; and then as usual read the Lord's Prayer ...”

During certain seasons "they sing after the Lord's Prayer and before the Gospel is read from the pulpit" special hymn verses as specified for the seasons: "between Christmas and Candlemas," "between Easter and Christ's Ascension," "between Christ's Ascension and Pentecost," and "on the Feast of Pentecost." "At the three great Holy Days they sing each verse three times and also on Ascension Day, but after that only one time and then the pastor always gives the congregation a very short speech about each of these Holy Day's joy and salvation." "While this is sung the pastor drops upon his knee in the pulpit and prays God for help and support in this undertaking; then he stands up again ... and proceeds to the reading and exposition of the text."¹¹

According to DeGarmeaux these are the hymn stanzas that were referenced in 1685:

“during Christmas and Candlemas, after the Lord's Prayer and before the Gospel is read from the pulpit, this verse is sung: TO US IS BORN A LITTLE CHILD. During Easter and Ascension: CHRIST IS ARISEN. During Ascension and Pentecost: CHRIST TO HEAVEN SHALL ASCEND. On the festival of Pentecost: WE NOW IMPLORE GOD THE HOLY GHOST.”¹²

New festal verses were composed in the late 18th Century, which eventually became

prothema, our preacher announces the hymn "Christ ist erstanden", one of the classics of the German Protestant hymnal. We might point out that the tradition in the late Middle Ages was to conclude the prothema by having the congregation repeat the Pater Noster or the Ave Maria. This was especially the case when the sermon was held on Sunday afternoon or at some time other than the celebration of Mass on Sunday morning."

¹¹ “About God's Service in the Church” by Craig Ferkenstad, Lutheran Synod Quarterly, Vol. XXII, No. 2, June 1982, pp. 17-18. (Consulting some of currently retired ELS pastors who grew up in parsonages in the ELS consistently observed that their fathers did not drop upon their knee and pray nor was the festal hymn stanza sung three times. At least by the early 20th century that 1685 practice was not followed any longer.)

¹² Email sent by Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux on Jan. 28, 2014

those used traditionally among us today. In *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal* we read this note regarding the Christmas verse “Rejoice, Rejoice, This Happy Morn” (#79):

In Scandinavian Lutheran circles, we are informed, it is customary in the service on Christmas Day, after the pastor has delivered the introduction to his sermon, for the congregation to rise and sing this hymn of one stanza. After which it is seated, and the pastor proceeds with the preaching of the sermon.

This hymn is from the pen of Birgitte Boye and was published in *Guldberg's Hymn Book*, 1778. The translation is by Carl Döving, made in 1911 and published in *The Lutheran Hymnary*, 1913.¹³

“He Is Risen” (#189):

To be sung before the reading of the Gospel from the pulpit, from Easter until Ascension Sunday. “Han er opstanden! Store Bud!” was first

¹³ *The Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal*, by W. G. Polack, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, MO, 1942, p. 65. “Boye, Birgitte Katarine (Johansen) (1742–1824), the oldest of seven children, was born on March 7, 1742, in Gentofte, Denmark, to Jens Johansen, who was in the royal service, and Dorotea nee Henriksdatter. At an early age Birgitte was betrothed to Herman Hertz, a hunter and gamekeeper in the service of the king and later forester of the district of Vordingborg. They married in 1763 and within five years had four children. In the mid-1770s the office of forester was abolished, and the Hertz family fell into pressing financial circumstances. Birgitte appealed to Danish Secretary Ove Guldberg for help. He brought the matter to the attention of Prince Fredrik, who ordered both her sons educated at his expense. Her husband died following a year-long illness, and she was then supported for three years by a pension from the prince. In 1778 she married an employee in the customhouse of Copenhagen, Hans Boye, whom she also survived. She died on October 17, 1824. Birgitte was a talented woman who studied French, German, and English and became the most highly praised hymnwriter of the Danish Rationalistic period. In 1772 the Society for the Advancement of the Liberal Arts sent out a call soliciting contributions from every person “who had a desire and talent for writing sacred poetry.” Birgitte Hertz responded with 20 texts, of which 18 were subsequently selected and included in *Psalmebog, eller en Samling af gamle og ny Salmer, til Guds Aere og Hans Menigheds Opbyggelse* (“a hymn-book, or a collection of old and new hymns, for the honor of God, and the edification of his church”), produced at Copenhagen in 1778 by Bishop Ludvig Harboe and Ove Guldberg. She continued to compose and translate hymns so that, in all, she contributed 148 hymns (124 original texts and 24 translations) to an unauthorized hymnal put out by Guldberg himself. Her own *David's Psalmer i en fri Oversættelse*, a three-volume collection containing the first 89 psalms, was published between 1781 and 1785. She also wrote nationalistic poetry and dramatic works, many of which were apparently performed for special royal events.” (*Christian Worship: Handbook*, by C. T. Aufdemberge, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997, p. 657.)

published in *Guldberg's Hymn Book* of 1778. – The translation into English was rendered by G. T. Rygh, 1909. [Dahle, *Library of Christians Hymns*]¹⁴

“Holy Spirit God of Love” (#230):

This hymn of one stanza by Birgitte Boye was first published in *Guldberg's Hymn Book*, 1778. It is to be sung “on Pentecost Day before the reading of the Gospel from the pulpit.” The direction has in mind the ancient custom, that, according to Luther’s own suggestion, the text for the day would be the Gospel. After the pastor has delivered the introduction of the sermon and read the text the congregation rises and sings this stanza. The translation is by George T. Rygh, 1908, slightly altered.¹⁵

The Revs. N. A. Madson, C. Anderson¹⁶ and A. Harstad represented the Norwegian Synod on the Synodical Conference committee, which worked on The Lutheran Hymnal throughout most of the 1930s and published in 1941. The Rev. Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker also served on a subcommittee for this project. Very likely their influence resulted in the inclusion of all three festival verses reflecting our ELS traditions.

However, while this practice was noticeably retained among the Norwegians in mid-20th Century in American Lutheranism, the practice also had German roots as well. Marzolf makes these observations:

I think that Lutheran Hymnal retained the continental pulpit verses as well as the Scandinavian verses. It wouldn't really be correct to refer to this as a Scandinavian practice, but I think it would be correct to suggest that the practice was more clearly retained among the Norwegians than it was among the Germans in our country, although the LCMS founders who used their own regional version of the Deutsche Messe (like our Bugenhagen order) would have continued to use the Exordium practice on festivals until that regional (Saxon) usage was replaced by the Common Service in the early 20th century.¹⁷

It would appear that C.F.W. Walther used the exordium stanzas for his festival sermons, but not the brief exordium practiced among the Norwegians. It also served more as an introduction leading into the text as noted above from the story in “The

¹⁴ *The Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 172

¹⁶ “On the 3 great festivals and Ascension day, after a brief introduction, a fitting stanza should be sung by the congregation standing before the text is read.” “Our Liturgy” by Christian Anderson, *Clergy Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 2, October 1957 p. 14

¹⁷ Email sent by Prof. Dennis Marzolf on Jan. 20, 2014.

Hammer of God". For example, in his Christmas Day sermon translated by Henry Eggold, we read at the close of his lengthy six-paragraph introduction:

Let us go to Bethlehem; there you will look into the open heaven, so that all doubt is removed. But, my beloved, before we go to this most holy and most blessed place on earth, let us first lift up our hearts to God in silent prayer after we have sung a hymn.

Text: Luke 2:1-14

Permit me then on the basis of this story of all stories to bring you to the joyful Christmas message:

**Rejoice! The Savior Is Born;
Heaven Is Open for You¹⁸**

In other festival sermons from Walther made available in English, the singing of a hymn is not mentioned after the introduction before the reading of the text, but a silent prayer is urged upon the hearers based on the exordium in the Christmas and Easter sermons (not found in the Pentecost sermon). There is one exception for Easter based on the text 1 Cor. 15:55-57, Walther says immediately before reading the text: "...but first let us turn in silent prayer to the hero from David's stem who so bitterly fought for our freedom after we have sung, etc."¹⁹

The reason for its falling into disuse among the German Lutherans in America is somewhat of a mystery. Marzolf speculates:

My guess is that the transition from the local rites (Saxon, Bugenhagen metrical/chorale ordinary) to the prose text (Common Service form, Loehe's Agenda, Kirchenbuch out East) led to the demise of the Exordium verse. The interesting/ironic thing about that, if it's true, is that the imposition of the more "ancient" rite actually displaced a liturgical practice that was older than the models used in the composition of the Common Service.²⁰

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's "Christian Worship" also includes these festal verses:

¹⁸ Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Sermons, Trans. by Henry Eggold, ed. Aug. R. Suelflow, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1981, pp.23-24 (Similarly he handles the Easter text as well, cf. pp. 77-79.)

¹⁹ Standard Epistles: C.F. W. Walther, translated by Donald Heck, Concordia Theological Seminary Press: Fort Wayne, 1986, p. 205. (cf. also p. 31 and Old Standard Gospels: translated from Walther's Evangeliumpostille, translated by Donald Heck, Concordia Theological Seminary Press: Fort Wayne, 1984, pp. 26, 154 & 199.)

²⁰ Email sent by Prof. Dennis Marzolf on Mar 16, 2014.

- #49 "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn" (ELH #142 + TLHy #183 + TLH #79, LW #520 v.1, LBW #43, LSB #391, ~~ELW~~);

- #162 "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!" (ELH #348 + TLHy #329 + TLH #189, LW #520 v. 2, LBW #138, LSB #488, ~~ELW~~) & #144 "Christ Is Arisen" - the older Easter single verse not found in ELH [cf. #344 "Christ the Lord Is Risen Again", 3 stanzas] + TLHy [cf. #334 "Christ the Lord Is Risen Again", 7 stanzas] but included in TLH #187, LW #124, LBW #136, LSB #459, ~~ELW~~ #372);

- #180 "Holy Spirit, God of Love" different translation although both attributed to George A. T. Rygh + TLH #230, ~~LW~~, ~~LBW~~, ~~LSB~~, ~~ELW~~ (ELH #399 "O Light of God's Most Wondrous Love" + TLHy #383).

It is reported by the Revs. Mark Jeske and James Tiefel that the Revs. Walther Gullixson and Erling Teigen offered input to the committee that produced "Christian Worship" and may well have influenced the inclusion of these three festival stanzas. However the practice of using them with an exordium does not appear to be a common practice among WELS congregations. It was noted that some WELS pastors use the Christmas and Easter stanzas for the closing hymn on their respective festivals.

The older Lutheran practice of using an exordium for any sermon on any given Sunday or festival might be relegated by many American Lutheran pastors today to the initial greeting for the service and an explanation of the theme for the Sunday. However it is not the formally crafted address as done with exordiums, even though the opening hymn may be chosen to coordinate with the theme.

A Demonstrative Interlude: Christmas 2006 (Appendix II)

**Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn,
A Savior unto us is born,
The Christ the Lord of Glory.
His lowly birth in Bethlehem
The angels from on high proclaim
And sing redemption's story.
My soul, extol
God's great favor,
Bless Him ever
for salvation.
Give Him
praise and adoration.**

II. Practice and Mechanics

The exordium as used in the late 20th Century and early 21st Century in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is not as noted above an additional introduction to the theme highlighted in the festival text. It is more akin to a keynote address for that particular festal day. It is to capture the mood of the day.²¹ We think of keynote speeches in regard to secular conventions or conferences as providing a rousing proclamation encapsulating the overarching theme for all the event participants. In a sense this is what an exordium is to accomplish by focusing on the flavor of the particular feast day in the Church year, instead of the particular focus of the festival text for the sermon of the day. (See some examples of this tradition from some recently translated festival sermons from the Rev. U. V. Koren in Appendix I)

It has been the practice of this writer to keep the script of the exordium to a maximum of one page of the manuscript (double-spaced); thus having no more than one extra page in the manuscript of a normal Sunday sermon. It is also the practice not to begin with a prayer as is done on normal Sundays nor even begin with the apostolic greeting. Rather, by breaking with the familiar, it should grab the attention of the hearers indicating that something different and special is going on this day. The exordium is begun with a statement or question, which will seize the attention of the hearers.

The information about the festivals can be considered a tired old subject, so the speaker desires to secure the attention in perhaps a novel way. The exordium's content should be uncomplicated, fresh and vital to the celebration at hand; a welcome change from the usual and commonplace. A nice balance between the novel and the familiar should be maintained however, so that what is stated is interesting but also has a base of acceptability lest it become distracting during the delivery of the sermon proper.

It is also the goal that by the end of the exordium the hearers, yes, even the dairy farmer who has been awake for hours already (and may often be fast asleep by the end of the normal introduction) to be motivated to rise and sing yet again on this festive day. The Rev. Norman A. Madson Sr. demonstrates this goal in a Christmas exordium:

²¹ "I personally find the Exordium as often used, to be ineffective, simply because in many cases it feels like a second introduction to the sermon. I keep asking myself, why is the preacher 'setting up' the audience to hear the sermon a second time. That was the classical purpose of the Exordium, to prepare the hearer for the central oration. But there was only one introduction, i.e., 'Exordium.' At least the way some preachers use the exordium the entire Classical rhetorical theory of introducing the speech to **singular effect** is countermanded by a second 'set-up' 'Introduction.' ... Rhetorically speaking, it seems to me that an Exordium could be effective only if it has a purpose that does not duplicate the function of the sermon's introduction." (E-mail from Prof. Steve Reagles, sent on Jan 29, 2014)

Is it any wonder, then, that our pious fore bearers have so been gladdened by the Christmas Gospel that they have been wont to greet their pastor in the pulpit on this day with a song of praise? Shall we remain cold and indifferent to its wondrous message? No, we will do as did they, arise and join our hearts and voice in the singing of our festival stanza: “Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn, ...”²²

Therefore in its composition and delivery the preacher will want to build up to a crescendo of excitement so that the verse which is sung upon the completion of the exordium will reflect a festive response among all participants.²³

Following the singing of the festal verse appropriate for the day, while the congregation is still standing, the text is read. Then a suitable prayer collecting the thoughts of the text in preparation to its proclamation is given, calling upon the Spirit for His blessing of all who shall hear. With the congregation seated the hearers are addressed as the fellow redeemed in the name of Jesus (*e.g., the Christ Child born of Mary; the crucified and risen Lord; the ascended Lord who sends out the Spirit to His Church*).

Since the exordium is not directly related to the text, or to the theme for the sermon, it is a subject, which the preacher can have come to his mind throughout the church year. From other sermon preparations, his devotional readings, his theological study, his Catechism instruction, etc., he will take note of thoughts that will potentially grab the attention of festal hearers. Current events may give some direction to its composition (see Appendix II: Easter 2008, Pentecost 2003 & 2011). Another’s composition may serve well as a stand-alone exordium (see Appendix II: Christmas 205 & 2013). More often than not it has been the experience of this writer to find Christmas exordium material in preparation for a midweek Advent series; Easter exordium material in preparation of midweek Lenten series and the use of the passion account during the pre-Easter season; and Pentecost material in preparation for the last few Sundays after Easter. Another way to prime the pump, so to speak, is that one could consult the content of the festival stanza itself and highlight something stated within its lyrics. A good example of this technique is demonstrated by the Rev. Norman A. Madson JR.:

Once again we have come into our house of worship to celebrate the birthday of our Savior. And if there is one word in the English language that ought to describe the frame of mind in which we have gathered here

²² Morning Bells at Our Savior’s, ed. Norman A. Madson Jr., Lutheran Synod Book Company: Mankato, MN, 2008, p. 48. (cf. also p. 143 & 195)

²³ “As I recall, [my Dad’s] words began in a normal tone, perhaps asking a thought-provoking question ... His pace and tone would continue to rise through the 2 to 3 minute exordium until in joyous fashion he would invite the congregation to rise and sing” (E-mail from Pastor Nile Merseth, sent on Mar 25, 2014).

today, it is the word REJOICING! Even those hearts among us which may be weighed down with some special sorrow or problem, must on this occasion be lifted up as we give heed to the angel's announcement: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

It has been a custom of long standing among God's people to greet His wonderful works with hymns of rejoicing. When God for example, blessed the aged Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth with a child in their old age, Zacharias was inspired to sing a beautiful song of praise to God for the gift of their miracle son, John the Baptist. When the virgin Mary was informed that she was going to be the mother of God's Son, she broke forth in a beautiful song of praise, called Mary's Magnificat.

It is a wonderful work of God that the Christmas gospel presents to us again this morning. And to show our gracious God our gratitude for the sending of His Son into this world to be our Savior, we shall arise and join our hearts and voices in signing that glorious Christmas stanza: "Rejoice, rejoice, this happy morn, ..." ²⁴

During Lententide 2014 while this paper is being composed, an Easter exordium is being pondered focusing on the subject of grave robbers. It was a menace on the minds of the chief priests and elders as they asked for Jesus' tomb to be secured. It was part of the lie they instructed the Roman guard to use if asked about what happened. Upon seeing the empty tomb Mary Magdalene suspected such a crime and reported it as such to the disciples and of which she accused even our Lord thinking He was the gardener. In truth Jesus Himself was the grave robber! Our Lord robbed the grave of His holy body. In that miraculous act, we find the promise that on that Last Day our graves will be robbed by Him as well. Quoting from Handel's Messiah based on 1Corinthians 15: "then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" However since an Easter festival sermon will not be composed by this writer until 2015, it will be filed away for now. The exordium is a stand-alone piece of oratory; it can be composed separately and retained for future use.

Using an exordium does not have to be restricted to the three festival days. Any special day for the Church at large or a local congregation may be most appropriate for the use of an exordium. We are approaching the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017. Employing this special feature for such a festival service would serve God's people well by highlighting what by God's grace they are celebrating. Certainly this could be done on the day that a congregation is marking one of its significant

²⁴ An exordium included in a 2010 Christmas letter by the Rev. Norman A. Madson, JR.

anniversaries. One could even imagine its use at the funerals of significant figures within the Church like a J. S. Bach (although he was not so much appreciated for his contributions until about a century after his death) or C. F. W. Walther or U. V. Koren.²⁵ In all of the above circumstances the festal verse that could be sung would be “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage”. Other significant events might cause the Church to assemble for worship recognizing God’s gracious working among us – the end of a great war, the recovery after a severe pestilence, or upon the cessation of government sanctioned or sponsored immoral practices like abortion or genocide.

When composing an exordium one is not required to adhere to a strict Law/Gospel presentation, since it is part of a larger proclamation, which will be given such careful inclusions and distinctions. However the Gospel should definitely predominate in an exordium since the good news of our salvation is the very nature of any festival celebration in the Church. With that said it can be observed that normally an exordium will have both Law and Gospel in it and could serve as a stand-alone seasonal devotion or newsletter article. (It may also end up serving as one of the three sermons the dairy farmer will hear in its entirety all year!)

Even though the exordium is not the proper introduction to the theme and body of the sermon, it may serve well to refer to its subject matter again towards the end of the sermon in or before the conclusion. Obviously it will be a related thought for the festival day. But an indicator that the exordium is being misused is if a reference to it can serve as the conclusion to the sermon.

Introducing the use of an exordium in a parish that is unfamiliar with this practice would not be a major innovation, if a pastor would desire to do so. It would likely not be viewed as something obtrusively innovative. However it is always a wise practice patiently to wait for initiating a new practice after trust and respect have been

²⁵ “Many years ago I had read Garry Wills' *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*. In it he discusses the speech delivered by Edward Everett and includes the full text of that 2 hour oration in his book. It appears to me that the short opening paragraph is a classic exordium. You can find the full text of the speech by Googling ‘Edward Everett's Gettysburg Speech’. The opening paragraph goes: ‘Standing beneath this serene sky, overlooking these broad fields now reposing from the labors of the waning year, the mighty Alleghenies dimly towering before us, the graves of our brethren beneath our feet, it is with hesitation that I raise my poor voice to break the eloquent silence of God and Nature. But the duty to which you have called me must be performed; - grant me, I pray you, your indulgence and your sympathy.’ I think that constitutes an exordium. It sets a tone or atmosphere for a solemn occasion, in this case the dedication of a cemetery, without actually getting into the subject matter that follows.” (E-mail from Prof. Mark Harstad, sent on Jan 31, 2014)

established by the newly installed pastor and he has had the opportunity to learn about any peculiar sensibilities among the flock.²⁶

Another feature the pastor may consider to complement his exordium is to compose a special clause to be inserted into the post communion blessing which would reinforce the emphasis of the exordium. So for example it may go something like this:

*- Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has now bestowed upon you His holy body and blood, **the very body and blood born of Mary for you**, whereby He has made full satisfaction for all your sins ...*

*- Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, **whose empty grave has robbed our graves of their victory and** who has now bestowed upon you His holy body and blood, whereby He has made full satisfaction for all your sins ...*

*- Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has now bestowed upon you His holy body and blood, whereby He has made full satisfaction for all your sins, **has sent to us His Spirit in full measure freely giving us all the blessings of Christ's perfect sacrifice** ...*

A Demonstrative Interlude: Easter 2005 (Appendix II)

**He is arisen! Glorious word!
Now reconciled is God, my Lord;
The gates of heaven are open.
My Jesus did triumphant die,
And Satan's arrows broken lie,
Destroyed hell's direst weapon.
Oh, hear
what cheer!
Christ victorious
riseth glorious,
Life He giveth –
He was dead,
but see, He liveth!**

²⁶ "In my ministry I observed the practice of using the exordium after I'd entered the pulpit. With the possible exception of Grace Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, FL, I used the exordium in each stateside parish I served. It was a constant. I believe that in time I may very well have introduced it at Vero Beach and in the foreign mission field churches I started and/or served." (E-mail from the Rev. James Olsen sent on Mar 23, 2014)

III. Contemporary Usage

A survey was administered at five ELS congregations where exordiums are traditionally used. Of the 161 communicant respondents who regularly attend festival services (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), 112 (70%) recognized that the pastor does something different with the delivery of the festival sermon than the regular Sunday sermon.²⁷ Of the 112, there were 99 (88%) who checked that the differences they recognize on those festival days added to the festive nature of the day. (See Appendix III for the full results of the survey. 13% were also honest in observing that the recognized difference made the sermon longer!)

There may be a few other conclusions we might draw from the answers of these ELS respondents. A large majority of the laity who have experienced the exordium on festival days appreciate this special feature. There may not be a full understanding of the structure and function of the exordium, but the expressed appreciation should encourage pastors to continue to employ this traditional practice and move pastors who have not used an exordium in the past to consider instituting it in the future. There also seems to be a proper understanding that this should be reserved for church festivals and not secular holidays like Memorial Day and Independence Day, with perhaps the exception of Thanksgiving. Again of those who recognized a difference on the three major festivals – 34% did not check any other day and would appear to prefer that this unique practice be reserved for only those days. However, as noted above there may be other occasions when an exordium would be appropriate. Might we even consider having a special service in 2026 on or near the Fourth of July introducing the sermon with a special exordium followed by the singing of “God Bless Our Native Land” (ELH #602)?

A survey was also administered among pastors who are currently serving ELS congregations, asking the following questions:

Q1: I graduated from the following seminary:

Q2: Year of seminary graduation

Q3: I was taught in seminary about the use of an exordium for festival sermons.

Q4: I consistently use an exordium prior to the sermon for: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost.

Q5: I have always used an exordium for festival sermons.

Q6: I know what an exordium is.

Q7: If no for #6, I would be willing to learn what it is and how to use it.

²⁷ From the breakdown of the various confirmation-age groupings we can observe that the one comprised mostly of baby boomers noticed the difference to a larger degree. (1-10/67%; 11-30/69%; **31-50/78%**; 51 +/65%) This might suggest that those who have traditionally been interested in variety not only noticed it but also appreciate it more than others.

Of the eighty who responded to the survey, sixty-five were graduates from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato; six from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon; six from Concordia Seminary, Fort Wayne; two from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and one from "other".

As expected the majority of those who graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary did recall being instructed concerning the use of the exordium on festival days (1970 & before/100%; 1971-80/73%; 1981-90/69%; 1991-2000/78%; 2001 & after/52%). We might conclude that most recently the rate of those who acknowledge being instructed about exordiums at BLTS is decreasing. However it is reported by the current seminary administration that this is still a part of the institution's homiletics instruction.

Of all the ELS pastors who responded 40% have always used exordiums. From the various time periods we find these percentages of consistent use: 1970 & before/50%; 1971-80/36%; 1981-90/46%; 1991-2000/43%; 2001 & after/44%. Of those who consistently use the exordium, the following number of pastors used it accordingly: forty used the exordium on Christmas; forty-five used it on Easter ("the queen of seasons") and thirty have used it on Pentecost.

All the responding pastors who were trained in the WELS, LC-MS or another Lutheran seminary reported that they were not taught about the exordium, except for one from Mequon who was trained in the 1970s. Of the eighteen ELS pastors who acknowledged not knowing what an exordium is, only one was not now willing to learn about it. There were another six who answered that they DID know what an exordium was but answered #7 despite the instruction that it was only for those who did NOT know. Those six indicated that they also desired to learn. So it is assumed that those six were communicating that they were eager to learn more.

A Demonstrative Interlude: Pentecost 2008 (Appendix II)

**O Light of God's most wondrous love, Who dost our darkness brighten,
Shed on Thy Church from heav'n above,
Our eye of faith enlighten! As in Thy light we gather here,
Show us that Christ's own promise clear Is Yea and Amen ever.
O risen and ascended Lord, We wait fulfillment of Thy Word;
O bless us with Thy favor!**

The use of exordiums for our festival sermons would appear to be a salutary practice in the Church; one worthy of preserving and perhaps promotion in our midst. It is obviously not a command of God nor a tradition which when broken indicates a spiritual decline. However, while not commanded there may appear to be an ancient precedence found in the epistle written to the Church at Philippi by the Apostle Paul

and the epistle written to the Hebrews. These introductory words in these epistles are more than simple introductions to the overall theme (Phil. 1:3-11 and Heb. 1: 1 - 2: 4). While these epistles come to us today in written form and are not usually read in their entirety, we should understand that they were intended to be read aloud and completely for the initial receiving congregations to hear.

When the Rev. Ted Gullixson, the son of the late Rev. Walther Gullixson and nephew of the late Rev. George A. R. Gullixson, was asked about his recollections about the custom of using exordiums in festival services in the ELS, he made this comment: "Before my uncle G.A.R. Gullixson died, he asked me to promise that I would uphold the Norwegian liturgical practices, especially the Exordium. For 37 years I used the Exordium and Festival hymn at the three major festivals."²⁸ And again: "One Exordium I remember my father using (which he likely got from someone else) was "How do you punctuate Easter?" (e.g. comma, question mark, asterisk, exclamation point). I have used that one a couple of times."²⁹

The ELS may not be alone in the world as those who still retain this festal custom. The Rev. Tor Jakob Welde of the Lutheran Confessional Church (Norway) writes:

In our church body (established 1978) we do not use such exordiums. I tried to find out (on the internet) about what is in use in the bigger (state) "Church of Norway", if that might be of interest to you. And I see their "manual" for the brand new liturgy/service book suggests verses to be sung on the three major festivals, "Høytidsvers" (Høytid = Hochzeit) "in the introductory section of the sermon". It is something, which is optional, apparently. I think earlier (up until 1977?) it was more "obligatory", I remember seeing something about this in an older Norwegian hymnal.³⁰

A question might be raised about the preferred use of the exordium as a special feature on festival days especially on Christmas and Easter. These are often extraordinarily busy times of the church year for the preacher and having to do the extra work of composing an additional component to the sermon might seem overwhelming. In addition, on those two festivals there is often already many extra features making the service memorable and significant, such as additional singing by the congregation, choirs and soloists; the use of other musical instruments; special decorations adorning the chancel area. Most pastors probably regret observing the apparent disregard for the third high festival shown by their congregations. It is often treated as a stepchild in the family of high festivals. Choirs are often disbanded for the year after Easter. There are no Pentecost trees or wreaths, lilies or white cloth draped crosses. Even the pastors who

²⁸ E-mail sent by the Rev. Theodore Gullixson on March 25, 2014.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ E-mail sent by the Rev. Tor Jakob Welde on Apr. 7, 2014.

consistently have used the exordium have not observed it on Pentecost as frequently as they do for the other two festivals (Christmas 87%, Easter 98%, Pentecost 65%). Therefore to elevate this festival of the Holy Spirit one might especially be encouraged to use the exordium and hymn stanza to mark Pentecost as a special day in the life of the Church. By doing it along with the other two high feast days, it will at least subliminally elevate Pentecost in the minds and hearts of God's people.

There are other reasons to retain or initiate the use of the exordium on all three high feast days.³¹ Exordiums enhance the worship experience for most of those who experience them as shown in the congregational survey (Appendix III). This unique practice adorns the service of the Word with a special preparatory proclamation of the Gospel. In a strange kind of way we might consider that the exordium with the accompanying stanza sung by the congregation being like the glory of the Lord shining round about the shepherds, the earthquake that took place on Easter morning and the sound of the mighty blowing wind in the enclosed room. God still would have been active without those reported occurrences taking place, nevertheless in their reporting they were significant. The huge difference of course would be that with Elijah God was not found in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in the low whisper. So our Gospel-rich exordiums can serve as the effectual low whisper, which prepares the hearers for the main Gospel proclamation itself in the body of the festal sermon.

We might observe that since the break up of the Synodical Conference in the mid 20th Century, the ELS has become a melting pot among American Lutheran church bodies, (congregations, members and pastors alike). However it becomes self-destructive for the ELS, if the melting pot concept is replaced by a mosaic of multiculturalism. WELS and the LC-MS appear to have a well-established culture, which easily assimilates new members, building a loyal base that supports its peculiar brandings. However the ELS could easily lose its unique and beloved culture and heritage when different elements are introduced into it with no conscious effort of melting together to achieve a harmonious whole. The ELS is in danger of "*each doing what's right in his own eyes*" by the importation of a wide variety of customs and rituals, hymnbooks, catechisms, etc.

To retain this custom of using festival exordiums, which has been passed down generationally in the ELS, would help to maintain a unified identity among us and in American Lutheranism at large. We have other unique practices, which distinguish the

³¹ The writer remembers a response to his first exordium. It was on Christmas Day 1982 while serving his vicarage in the Northwood/Lake Mills, IA parish. After returning home in Northwood, two Watchtower witnesses came to the front door trying to spread their lies about Jesus' person and work to the many Christian residents in Northwood. Inviting them into the foyer, they heard the stand-alone exordium, which clearly proclaimed the glorious news of the incarnation of our Lord. They uncomfortably apologized as they made a hasty exit. They certainly felt the sting of the law when their lies were exposed, but they also most certainly heard the Gospel in the evangelical exordium.

ELS – the use of the Bugenhagen order of service, chanting, individual absolution, with a regular sermon the preacher often begins with a prayer and concludes with the “*Gloria Patri*”, promotion of liberal arts in higher education, lutefisk dinners and requiring many of our males in local leadership roles to leave home on Father’s Day (the jellied fish menu and the anti-family time of an annual gathering could be dropped without losing much however). While it may be too bold and energetic to nurture an evangelistic fervor in regard to the exordium, a case could be made for the ELS to export its wholesome and salutary practice to other Lutheran church bodies in the CELC and beyond.

President George Orvick often made the point that while the sister church bodies of the ELS and the WELS are agreed in doctrine, there is a distinctive flavor in both of these synods. As often described, the flavor of the ELS has been characterized as being evangelical and Christ-centered; the “one thing needful” aroma emanating from the Bethany experience wafts out to our congregations in various ways. The festival exordium is a Gospel centered feature, which should be retained and promoted among us, with the result that our distinct flavor is preserved and a good fraternal collegiality be strengthened among us to the glory of God and to the welfare of His people.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

Pastor Glenn Obenberger
ELS West Coast Conference
Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church,
Tacoma, WA
April 30 & May 1, 2014

APPENDIX I

U. V. Koren's Exordiums
from a recently translated collection of sermons
By Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux

Christmas

The Holy Scriptures and the example of the prophets and the apostles show that the believers' life on earth is not just joy and happiness, but that there are often difficult and dark hours, days, and times for them, when sighing and sorrow are a daily experience. Every Christian will have experienced that, if he lives long enough. The distress can dim the light, which the Word gave him, but it cannot rob him of it. There are particular times in the church year when it seems even the appointed portions of God's Word have to put to shame every sorrow, and bring God's joys right into our hearts, yes, make the joy so much greater by contrast.

For when the heart is most opprest,
 The harp of joy is tuned the best.³²

And this festival of ours is such a time. Nothing else is fitting for us than to be joyful. Otherwise it would have to mean that we did not understand or did not believe the message.

So then, in spite of sin and Satan and sorrow, let us meet our Savior with joy, and with thanksgiving in our heart sing and confess His birth, as we sing our Christmas hymn:³³ *"Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn."*

Easter Sunday

Again the song of praise sounds over the whole earth. The more clearly the Gospel is recognized, the greater the joy with which the Easter festival is celebrated! For the meaning of our deliverance and salvation is proclaimed today. Who then rightly keeps the Easter festival? Let St. Paul answer: *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* [Rom. 10:9-10]. So we too, by God's gracious help, will do this – in faith we will turn to the Lord, show that He lives and hears us, and thus we will confess His victorious resurrection and sing our Easter hymn: *"He is Arisen!"*

Pentecost³⁴

God grant you true Pentecost joy through the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name! Amen.
 In this lesson we have heard again today about the wonderful event in Jerusalem ten

³² H. A. Brorson: *In this our happy Christmastide, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* 150.

³³ Translator's note: It has been a custom in the Norwegian church to stand and sing a festival verse before the reading of the sermon text on Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

³⁴ Translator's note: Another translation can be found in *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*.

days after the Savior's Ascension. There we find Jewish men and women who had been His followers. For the past 50 to 60 days they had experienced all these astonishing things that occurred after Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem. They had been as happy as children and zealous for Jesus while they traveled around with Him. They had been miserable and sad when He had died. Yes, who can describe their misery when He was gone, the One for whom they had left everything, and from whom they had hoped for everything, first and foremost peace for their souls.

But He had come back and they had seen Him—but then He was hidden from them again, and they didn't see Him; for they are to be saved not by sight, but through faith in their heart. Did they believe then? Yes, and yet, no. He had rebuked them for their unbelief, and they had to own up to what they themselves saw and heard. But then He was gone again. Their hearts were wavering.

Finally, they had seen Him ascend into heaven. Before that happened, He had told them that they should remain in Jerusalem and there "*wait for the Promise of the Father,*" and that they would "*be baptized with the Holy Spirit,*" and that they should "*be clothed with power from on high*" [Luke 24:49]. What was that all about? What did He mean by that? No one knew. So the ten days since the Lord's Ascension had passed amid these expectations. The Jewish festival of Pentecost had come, and they were sitting together as they usually did. What their thoughts were centered on is not difficult to imagine.

Then all at once they heard a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind. The miraculous surge entered them and filled the whole house, and immediately they saw something that had never been seen before: flames of fire, tongues as of fire that glowed above each of them. And as the fire visibly rested on them, a heavenly fire was also burning in their hearts, and with a previously unknown ability they spoke in languages that had been foreign to them before, and they testified of "the wonderful works of God" in all the languages of the world "as the Spirit gave them utterance."

This is how God the Holy Spirit came from heaven. He no longer comes visibly and audibly—but He still comes with fire and tongues: with fire in the hearts that are kindled by the miraculous testimony that the almighty, holy, righteous, merciful God loves us; and with fire on the tongues that will and must confess and praise Him whose love has made our hearts so indescribably rich and happy.

So now it is Pentecost around the world. Around the nations, among all peoples and races and in so many languages God is praised for the gifts of the Spirit. It may be that, by God's permission, in many places the enemy of souls has succeeded in confusing hearts, so that in many ways and to a great extent they have not kept the testimony of the Spirit. Yet God has kept for Himself a seed among the peoples who continue through the Word and who by the Holy Spirit have learned and still want to learn to believe that God loves them. They learn this by having the Spirit explain to them Him in whom God's love is revealed, Jesus our blessed Savior. This grace has come also to us. The mighty Spirit of truth has proclaimed our ascended Savior also to us. So let us be glad and sing our Pentecost hymn and invite the heavenly Guest to come to us again and abide with us, in our hearts, in our homes, in our church.

Let us sing: "O Holy Spirit, Enter In"

Appendix II

*Some Festival Exordiums Preached by Pastor Glenn Obenberger
at Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tacoma, WA*

Christmas:

2002

Christ was handed over by God into the hands of sinners. Now normally we think of this expression in terms of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, condemnation and execution. This is how the Holy Scriptures use this statement. But God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son. Right away at the birth of Jesus, God handed over His Son into the hands of sinners. We look at the hands of such sinners as Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, Simeon and Anna as being hands which received Him with faith and love; however that was the small minority in our world filled with the majority who remain hostile towards God.

For many God had come too uncomfortably near to them. Herod, the chief priests and elders, all Jerusalem were disturbed by the news of the wise men that a new King of the Jews had been born. Herod sought to get His hands on this newborn king and kill Him. But while God thwarted His efforts, there would come a time 33 years later that the evil design of sinful man would have its way. But what they meant for evil, God meant for good.

God comes near to us, by sending His Son to be our brother. To live the perfect life we are required to live, but fail to produce and to die the death we as sinners are required to die, so that we might live. There in the Bethlehem stable it was time for the Virgin to be delivered of the baby and so He was, delivered into the hands of sinners. Many even today find that Christ the Lord is too uncomfortably near and seek to be rid of Him, even from His own celebration of His birth at Christmastide. But by God's grace there still are those whose hands having been washed clean by His blood in holy baptism desire to receive Him with joy and gladness. O dear Christians, God has handed over His Son to us sinners, let us raise our voices in joy that we know and believe the goodness God has worked by delivering Him over for our offenses and raising Him for our justification. Let us rise and sing Hymn # 142

2003

In 1st Samuel chapter four we read that when the Israelite soldiers learned that the ark of the covenant was brought into their camp as they were facing the army of the Philistines, "all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook." What this meant was that God's presence was among them ready to defend them against their enemies. This was true, but not in the way they thought; the greater enemy was to be found in their own leaders and God used the Philistines to bring them to repentance.

On the last day when Jesus returns we read from the first letter to the Thessalonians: the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. Our Lord's presence then will also be ushered in by a tremendous shout, a shout that will shake the very foundations of the earth as all the dead will rise!

The shepherds heard the shout of the angelic choir as they gave glory to God in the highest. In faith they were moved to search for the gift of God to them, namely His Son. We are present here as Christmas worshippers because God has moved our hearts to believe and find Christ where He has promised to be for us today. God is present among us through the work of the Spirit bringing Christ and all his blessings to us. We then this morning, worshippers of the new-born King should also open our merry mouths to sing of our joy that He still is present for us today graciously giving us all good things. Let us arise and sing Hymn #142.

2005

Good Christians all, this Christmas time,
 Consider well and bear in mind
 What our good God for us has done,
 In sending his beloved Son.
 As did blest Mary, we should pray
 To God with love this Christmas Day;
 In Bethlehem upon that morn
 There was a blessed Messiah born.

The night before that happy tide
 The noble Virgin and her guide
 Were long time seeking up and down
 To find a lodging in the town.
 But mark how all things came to pass:
 From ev'ry door repell'd, alas!
 As long foretold, their refuge all
 Was but an humble oxen stall.

Near Bethlehem did shepherds keep
 Their flocks of lambs and feeding sheep;
 To whom God's angels did appear
 Which put the shepherds in great fear
 "Prepare and go", the angels said,
 "To Bethlehem, be not afraid,
 For there you'll find, this happy morn
 A princely babe, sweet Jesus born."

With thankful heart and joyful mind
 The shepherds went the babe to find,
 And as God's angel had foretold,
 They did our Savior Christ behold.
 Within a manger he was laid,
 And by his side the virgin maid,
 Attending on the Lord of life,
 Who came on earth to end all strife.

Good Christians all, this Christmas time,
 Consider well and bear in mind
 What our good God for us has done,
 In sending his beloved Son.

2006

Where was the embarrassment among the angels? They were there barring reentry into the Garden of Eden; they were there with Lot in Sodom when the men of the Sodom wanted to have their way with them; they were there when Zechariah one of the priests of the Lord doubted the word from God that his aged wife would conceive and give birth to a son. Where was their embarrassment to speak of the lowly circumstances surrounding the birth of the Lord of Glory?

They certainly knew that the Son of God entered this world of sin and shame in such a lowly fashion, hardly fit for even a peasant child, not to mention the King of kings. But there was no shame. Rather as the angel announced: this was "good news of great joy"! Although these holy angels always behold the face of the heavenly Father in heaven, they were not ashamed to behold the condition of the Son, nor too ashamed to speak of it. These holy angels serve us who believe and they knew the meaning of this act of God for us and they could not hold back from singing God's praises.

Shall we hold back this morning because of the humble setting of the birth of our Savior? Do you know why this birth happened in this humble way and why it is truly good news of great joy. If you do, please rise and sing with joy and mirth in your heart: #142.

2007

The Apostle Paul in part speaks of the animal kingdom in Romans 8 when he says: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Now there is an incident in the Holy Scriptures where the groaning of an animal is put into human speech. That was the incident of Balaam, a prophet used by the king of Moab to speak a curse upon God's people, but the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, stood in the way to prohibit it. Balaam could not see Christ at first, but his donkey could. After beating the donkey to make it go forward

three times, the donkey spoke up and objected to this beating she was receiving at her masters' hand.

Animals were created to serve mankind and when the whole human race fell into sin, the animals now must serve us under the weight and curse of sin. But one wonders about the animals gathered at the Bethlehem stable the night of Jesus' birth. Perhaps there was a donkey Mary rode upon from Nazareth. Perhaps there were cattle housed in that stable who had recently fed from the manger. Perhaps some of the sheep and lambs accompanied the shepherds as they came to worship the Christ Child.

Animals have senses we as humans do not and perhaps they sensed that someone special was among them that night - their Creator wrapped in swaddling clothes. If so, perhaps the braying, the lowing and the bleating normally done as their groan under the weight of sin ceased for a brief time. Now whether they did or not, Paul also tells us this: "we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Therefore as we recount today what God was about doing in that stable for us, we have reason to cease our daily groaning and raise our voices in praise to God who has sent His Son to redeem us as His dear children. Please rise and sing #142.

2011

With every act of disobedience we commit we join Eve in her quest to become like God. Remember what Satan told her: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..." "So when the woman saw 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. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked."

Our first parents having been made in God's image wanted to become more like God, but this desire brought only disaster driving the human race from its Creator. Yet God loved us so much announcing that He Himself would become flesh - like us. The Seed of the woman would come and crush Satan's head, defeating sin, death and hell.

This was God's plan from eternity. He in the second person would take on human flesh. He would be born naked and have our shame covered by swaddling clothes. He would take that perfect body and soul to the cross, where He would once again be stripped, suffer and die in our everlasting guilt and shame. Oh my fellow sinners, we in our sin still shamefully long to become God, but God has overcome our foolish desire, by becoming us, setting us free from all our shamefulness forever. Lift up your voices once again in great joy for God's incarnation by singing Hymn #142. Please rise.

2013

"Those who have traveled all night in their car may have noticed, toward dawn, a star of unusual brilliance appearing in the sky as a herald of the new day. This star is

used in the last book of the Bible as a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ and the new era ushered in by Him. Certainly there was a heavenly brightness to be seen in Him. St. John says in his Gospel that *Jesus* is the Light. Luther says that the coming of His Spirit into the soul of a man is like a light being turned on so this man sees things he had never seen before. Most of all, the love of God shines in his heart “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.” (2Cor. 4:6).

“The *coming* of our Lord meant that a new day dawned for the world. Men presently began to number the years from His birth. His religion changed human institutions. There is no area of life that has not been affected by the words He spoke, the life He lived, the death He died. In our part of the world we owe our ideas of liberty, justice, charity, the dignity and rights of man, and the place of women in society to His influence. No one could have suspected, when His star first appeared in the eastern sky; how bright would be the day that would follow and how all-pervasive its light.” (*Guide Me, Savior; CPH 12/3*)

Rejoice, this light has appeared for you, a new day has dawned upon you! Rise to sing of this our blessed morning light, hymn #142.

Easter:

2001

An often overlooked occurrence at the time of Jesus’ death on Friday is what is reported to us by Matthew: “The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.” These were believers in Christ who having died had been raised to life when Jesus breathed His last. We would love to know what it was like for them. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son of Nain, and Lazarus, Jesus was right there and others as well to explain all that had transpired. But what did these newly raised think and do, finding themselves still wrapped in grave clothes, having their graves broken open with no one around?

What is especially significant for us this morning is that we are told they went into the holy city after Jesus’ resurrection and they appeared to many people, who had known that they had died. Jesus would soon be showing Himself alive to many of these same people, so what is the significance of these resurrected believers? Jesus, being the eternal God, we would expect that He lives, but the glorious significance is that because He lives we too shall live. These resurrected believers were living, breathing testimonies of this and what is more they rose, not when Jesus’ rose, but when Jesus’ died. Why then? Jesus is the sinners’ substitute, when He died, He took the death of us all. These believers rose to show that their death and ours was swallowed up in Christ - it no longer has a claim on any of us.

Our joy this morning is precisely the same. We do not have dead loved ones

coming to us this morning from our cemetery, but the same Lord whose death and resurrection raised those Jerusalem believers, is our Lord. Our joy and comfort in the truth that Jesus lives, is not so much that HE lives, remember had He never come into our world, He would have lived forever; but our joy is this BECAUSE HE LIVES WE TOO SHALL LIVE. Please rise and sing Hymn 348.

2003

We read how on Friday afternoon the women watched where Jesus was buried and saw how the stone was rolled into place. There no doubt was another observer of Jesus' burial - Satan. How delighted he must have been to see the power of death come to God's Son. He knew of Jesus' prediction that He would rise again, he knew that Jesus had raised others, but it still remained to be seen if He could break the grip of death Himself. No doubt Satan was made to smile when the chief priests and the Pharisee asked Pilate to make the tomb secure calling Jesus "that deceiver". Satan, the father of lies, enjoyed to hear Truth incarnate called "that deceiver".

Perhaps Satan even visited the tomb between Friday and Sunday. Perhaps he frustratingly observed that Jesus' body was not decomposing like all other human bodies do in the grave. Jesus' tomb was secure, however, and the death wrappings were still in place. But then Christ was made alive and He went directly to Satan's eternal home - he descended to hell. There Jesus showed that He was very much alive and fulfilled all that was said concerning His work of salvation. Jesus then rose, left the tomb and an angel came to roll back the stone to show that He was gone. As always Satan was powerless to stop the work of God.

But Satan was not done. The guards would be bribed to lie. The disciples lived in fear and would not believe even with the reports that the tomb was empty. Sin, death and hell were all defeated by the Savior sent by God for all people; but Satan still roamed the earth and does even today, looking for those he can devour. How about you? Has Satan paid you off with enough worldly pleasures and treasures that the report of Jesus' resurrection is of little interest to you? Are you caught up in all the fears that this world can throw at you, that you take no comfort in Jesus victory over Satan by conquering death for you? No, you are here this morning because you believe this most glorious truth that the One whom God has sent to take your place as the condemned sinner, not only took your punishment all the way to the point of death, but that He overcame all of this for you - He lives and you with all your fellow Christians throughout the world today rejoice. Let us sing out our Easter faith by turning to hymn #348, please rise.

2004

If the message of Jesus' resurrection from the dead were strange to you, you would not be here this morning. Now you may be a bit fuzzy about all that the great events of Jesus' rising from the dead means for you personally, but you know about it

and long to hear it again.

However, even though our culture leaves very few ignorant of Jesus' name, many of your neighbors would find it new and strange that Jesus rose from the dead and that it benefits them personally. Most of your neighbors would classify Jesus as just a great person on the par with such persons of the past like Aristotle, Socrates, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr.

Thank your Lord that these Easter truths are not new or strange to you. Prepare yourself once again to renew your faith in these blessed eternal truths. Let us rise and sing of our joy and faith. Turn to hymn #348 - He is arisen! Glorious word!

2005

This was the second morning Barabbas got to wake up a free man after that strange incident of suddenly being taken off of death row and released from prison on Friday morning. Maybe the earthquake early Sunday morning centered outside the city in that garden awakened him and beads of perspiration quickly formed on his forehead thinking the Roman soldiers were at his door seeking to arrest him again. But instead, as far as we know, this murderous insurrectionist, yes, even terrorist, was still free. Deep down he probably knew he did not deserve to be set free, but very likely he thought his cause was right and his actions which landed him in prison in the first place were justified.

We would love to know what Barabbas did with his new-found freedom. An innocent man was executed and he, the guilty, was set free. Did this change his life? Did he use his freedom for good, or did he abuse it in service of evil again? What would you have done? Or better yet, what do you do with the freedom this same holy One has bought you with His innocent suffering and death?

"Christ died for the ungodly. ... Christ died for us." Unlike Pilate who unwillingly declared Barabbas innocent and reluctantly set him free, God joyfully declares us sinners innocent while condemning His perfect Son in our place. You are blessed my fellow redeemed, Barabbas likely woke up Easter morning free but frightfully still bound to his sin. You, on the other hand, rose this morning knowing why and how you have been set free. Let us sing of this magnificent freedom made certain for us by Jesus' resurrection from the dead, turn to hymn #348, please rise.

2006

Remember the sad words the first Adam heard from God as a consequence of his sin: "dust you are, to dust you will return." - words spoken to and about you, if you had the imposition of ashes put on your forehead on Ash Wednesday. Elton John's famous song from the soundtrack of Lion King tries to make this sad cycle sound so very beautiful and attractive in 'The Circle of Life.'

This cycle of death really, has no human solution. Poetic lyrics set to a *mellifluous* tune, does not change the fact that for thousands of years, the earth has been

methodically reclaiming her dust. But the message we sing about today is that THE CYCLE IS BROKEN: JESUS DID NOT RETURN TO DUST! Jesus took our sin, suffered our hell, took our death, but the ravages of our sin stopped there with Him. The line was drawn in the sand, or shall we say the dust?

We can picture Satan pacing in that tomb where Christ's body lay, taking note that the ravages of death were not setting in - no rigor mortis, no stench. It was not moving, it was not breathing, but Jesus' body was not cooperating with death's decay. Death took hold of Jesus, but now Jesus took hold of death. And as soon as that earth shook on the third day, that lifeless body was once again alive. Death was swallowed up in victory by the sinless Son of God. We sing a much different tune today, not the Circle of Life, or in truth the Cycle of Death, but we sing the glorious words of resurrection and life, please rise to sing hymn #348.

2007

It is reported by many combat veterans that no matter how big, or bad, or mean a soldier or marine is; no matter if he's married or has a girlfriend, when that man is dying, when he's laying shot in the dirt, scared, screaming for someone in the last seconds of his life, it's his mother for whom he's going to call. This was not the case for the great Warrior who faced down all our enemies on that cross. Instead, handing over a son's responsibility for his mother to His trusted friend, He before taking His dying breath called out with a loud voice to His Father. It was not in desperation either.

Jesus' final words were: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." There was confidence in His last words, a confidence that His work was completed and acceptable to the Father in heaven. He came to suffer and die in our place and He fulfilled all that was necessary to present an acceptable sacrifice for all our sins. He even cried out our cry of eternal damnation to its full extent for each one of us sinners. Jesus was not wishing that His sacrifice would be acceptable to the Father, He knew beyond any doubt that it was.

By the resurrection three days later, the Father responded to the Son's: "It is finished!" with "Amen." Let's add our voices in that exchange of victorious words by singing Hymn #348, please rise.

2008

Jesus died, which means that His soul was separated from His body. His soul was in the loving protection of the heavenly Father's hands, safely abiding in the heavenly paradise along with the soul of the believing malefactor. But, who was protecting His body? Satan, the prince of darkness, the enemy of God's creation, desires all human bodies and souls to be with him in his eternal hell.

You would think Jesus' disciples would have been standing watch outside His tomb keeping a vigil, especially in anticipation of the third day, when Jesus promised to rise again. But rather, we are told that they were all hiding from fear of Jesus' enemies.

So who did God arrange to keep watch, to guard that sacred tomb of His Son? The chief priests and elders asked for the protection and Pontius Pilate provided it. So Jesus' very enemies kept the vigil!

Who knows how you and I would have fared under those same circumstances. We live today virtually unmolested by Jesus' enemies. Yet we battle with our own sinful flesh and its natural desire to remain indifferent to the Easter joy. Can it be that our hearts are lifted up more by such things as the prospect of receiving a rebate check in May from the government, than the good news that Jesus lives? God forbid! Please join me in demonstrating otherwise, by rising and singing Hymn #348.

2009

This is the greatest day God has made since the seventh day of creation week! We just got done confessing this when we read Psalm 118: "This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." The disciples had sung these very words with the Lord Jesus three days earlier. At the close of the Passover meal it was customary to sing Psalms 115 - 118 and we are told that as Jesus and His disciples were about to leave the upper room to make their way to the Mt. of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, they sang together.

Perhaps those words were echoing in their heads as all the awful events of Friday played out. So by what the disciples would witness: the arrest, trials, beatings, crucifixion, death and burial it would rather appear *this was the worst day, which the devil had made, for they were grief stricken and in despair, as though death had overcome.*

We have an advantage, which the believers on that first Easter did not have. As we are told after Peter and John visited the empty tomb that day - "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." They would not be led to understand this until after Pentecost. But because we are the Church post-Pentecost we understand why this truly is the greatest of all days. With faithful understanding, let us rise and sing hymn #348.

2010

Once again we hear the angelic invitation not to fear. There is a good reason why the Easter visitors at the tomb should not be afraid, Jesus took care of the one fear He taught them to have and this is now resolved by the empty tomb. Hell is what Jesus said we should fear. "Do not fear the ones who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell".

We see in our Lord's life that He did not fear the crowds attempting to throw Him off the cliff in Nazareth or to stone Him in Jerusalem. He did not cower before Pilate who arrogantly announced to Him: "I have the power either to free you or to crucify you". He was not afraid of the Sanhedrin. He was confident and tranquil, even when he was being arrested. But when He faced drinking from the cup of judgment of His Father, we are told He sweat drops of blood. That was endured on the cross, the grave

for Jesus was a restful place for His holy body to sleep for three days.

Death, eternal death, is our enemy, the wages of sin. Today we rejoice because death, yes, even eternal death, is a defeated enemy! The resurrected Jesus defeats death, brings life, and makes all things new! This is our joy today; this is the reason we too need not fear. He who believes in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus will live, even though he dies. With fearless confidence in the Risen One, let us rise to sing Hymn #348.

2011

Jesus was judged to be treasonous and was executed by Pilate, although in truth Pilate declared Him to be innocent and tried washing his hands of the whole affair. It was Rome's custom to leave bodies on the cross as carrion and then the remains were gathered up many days later and traitors were given a dishonorable burial in a criminal's graveyard.

Now in Judea, Rome made the concession that the bodies of the crucified, once dead, could be removed. So while Jesus' body would not be left on the cross overnight, it would have been the custom to discard it in a criminal's cemetery in great dishonor. But Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body. As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus was to be buried in an honorable grave among the wealthy.

Pilate no doubt gave Joseph permission to spite those who "forced" him to crucify that righteous man. But the fear on Easter morning among Jesus' followers was that His enemies undid this honorable burial and discarded His body somewhere never to be found again. But such was not the case - burial was no longer needed. He, who bore our sin, rose from the grave, all charges against Him were answered, punishment paid in full, just as He declared from the cross. In the greatest honor of all, no grave was now needed - He lives to give us life! His living body is found by us even today hidden for example with that bread, buried, if you will, most honorably within His believers, but living, giving us life - life to the fullest. Let us rise to sing Hymn #348!

2013

If you were an unbeliever and heard that the God of the universe was going to come Himself to our earth to address a problem for our race, what would you ask it to be? - the ending of all wars between nations? - the stopping of all crimes against humanity? - the cure for cancer or heart disease? How about the ending of all natural disasters? What is the threat that has plagued the human race the most, which you would want solved by your Creator God?

My guess it would be none of them specifically, but all of them in general. These are all only symptoms. There is a common root problem to all of them. You know it. That is why you, my fellow believers, are here this morning to worship in joyous celebration. The root problem is sin, but that in itself is not the biggest threat, which we all fear the most. It is the resulting death, which comes to our race on account of sin.

The eternal God came to our world to solve all these problems and more. The Son of God who became flesh, said concerning His purpose for the human race: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." – and this by laying down His life for us in dying on the cross and by taking it up again in rising again from the grave. If ever there was a basis for worship, it is here; God has rescued us from death – forevermore! Please rise to sing Hymn #348.

Pentecost

2003

(May 1, 2003 Pres. Bush displayed the "Mission Accomplished" banner.)

But the War has ended! What more needs to be done? Victory has been declared; there is no question who the Victor is. Yet peace seems elusive for many. Yes there was a promise that after the victory there would come a period of change, painful and even deadly at times. We are living in that time, my fellow redeemed. Change has happened and continues to this day, the promise has been kept.

The end of the War was marked in April, on Good Friday. Victory was declared most spectacularly on Easter Sunday. Christ is the victor over sin, death and the devil. The promise of the Spirit's outpouring upon the Church of Jesus Christ has occurred. We are living proof of this life changing work of the Spirit in our lives. We are led daily to repent over our sins, to put to death our sinful natures and to rise with Christ in newness of life. All that was promised to happen for our eternal benefit, has been accomplished.

How many languages has the message of our deliverance come through to get to us today in English? Aramaic, Greek, Latin, German, Norwegian, Korean to list just a few. We now hear most clearly as the Spirit has worked from nation to nation, generation to generation the transforming message of God's love, that all our sins are forgiven by the atoning sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. Let us join in singing with the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language our joy in His gracious working among us, hymn #399, Rise!

2004

If it were not for this day we observe today - Pentecost, the other two festivals of the Church year, Christmas and Easter would only be historical events probably not even footnoted in history textbooks today. We celebrate the work of the Holy Ghost today and its crucial part in the plan of our salvation. The announcement of the angel to the shepherds: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.", if it were not for Pentecost, the words "to you" could be dropped, because they would mean nothing. When Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb and said: "Go ... to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and

your Father, to my God and your God.”, without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, “your Father” and “your God” could also be dropped.

The Father willed our salvation from eternity. The Son came and won salvation for us on the cross. Now the Holy Spirit is at work distributing this salvation to us individually. Perhaps we feel a little guilty about our lack of attention to this great high festival. However, normally when the Spirit comes to us sinners it is not with dramatic results as was found on that first Pentecost - the sound of violent wind, the tongues of fire and the speaking of unstudied foreign languages. The Spirit rather comes in the undetectable way as Jesus told us in John 3: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” We find ourselves believing in Christ and cannot trace the exact time and place of the Spirit working such faith in our hearts, but since we believe, we know He has been at work in us. We now know and trust that Christ Jesus was born to be OUR Savior and that He rose to life defeating OUR sin and death making US right with the Father in heaven. Let us rise and sing of this gracious working among us, please turn to Hymn #399.

2005

Remember the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis? God punished the entire world even to the very last day because of the stubborn arrogance of the people who would not obey His Word to subdue the earth and fill it. Rather they stayed put and constructed a tower to their own glory. God confused their language, so that they would be forced to separate and scatter throughout the world. This has led to wars and rumors of wars and other tragedies right up to this day.

Although while we are troubled and vexed by this consequence of this ancient disobedience, God is not. On this festival day we remember how the language barrier posed no difficulty for the Spirit and His Church. Jesus knew of this miraculous work of the Spirit, He did not hesitate to command us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel.

People of many languages who were once illiterate had God’s people come, learn their language and develop an alphabet, so that the Gospel might truly be heard and taught. In the Revelation John received from our Lord, he got a glimpse of heaven filled with all believers and this is how he described it: “there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They ... cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” We have begun to sing this song here on earth in our language my fellow redeemed, let us rise and sing hymn #399:

2006

This day was anticipated at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry when John the Baptist denied the thinking of the crowd that he was the Christ: "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Jesus would often speak of this day of the Spirit's outpouring upon His Church and shortly before He ascended into heaven, He instructed His disciples with these words: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

What happened on this day, which we celebrate today has been and still is an essential part of God's order of salvation. Yes, the securing of our salvation by the blood of the Son of God was an essential part, but unless the Spirit was sent in full measure we could not receive the forgiveness, life and salvation which Jesus won for us. God's desire that all men be saved would have come to a grinding halt, if the Spirit had not been poured out on the Church. The Spirit's worldwide work still spreads like fire today, so that your baptism and mine is the Spirit filled baptism, which Jesus promised.

As those who have been set on fire with the Spirit of God, let us sing of this great work among us, by turning to Hymn #399, please rise.

2008

Recently I spoke with a Lutheran pastor who had been visiting the country of Turkey, although it is about 90% Muslim, it has a secular government. But there is the Turkish policy on religion against "proselytizing." It is illegal to share one's faith with another unless specifically asked. In effect this is enforced only against Christians. The pastor asked their tour guide why it would be so wrong simply to talk about one's faith. "*Everyone knows what happens then,*" she said. "*Whenever they have the chance, Christians talk about their faith, and then there are converts. People shouldn't change the religion they were brought up with, and wherever Christians talk about Jesus, people are converted.*" "*But nobody is forcing them to change,*" the pastor said. "*You can say that,*" she replied, "*But everyone knows what happens when Christians talk about what they believe.*"

Do you know what happens when you speak the good news of salvation in Jesus? - the Holy Spirit is at work upon the hearts of those who hear! When Christians speak, the result is not just that sinners listen, but the Holy Spirit is at work mightily working on the hearts of sinners. It is this blessed work of the Holy Spirit begun on this day that we celebrate today. Oh that we might be compelled always to speak. Please rise and join in singing Hymn #399.

2009

When the world observes its special days of celebration, they are usually memorial celebrations. Perhaps we could say that our July 4th celebration in the United States not only recognizes the freedoms declared in 1776, but that we enjoy them even to this day and plan to in the future as well. But anyone with a sense of history knows that any nation or empire sooner or later falls.

However the festivals observed in the Christian Church not only focus on past events and not only recounts how these events have impacted the Church ever since in the "here and now", but we celebrate the ongoing eternal benefits of what we celebrate. On Christmas the Church rejoices that God has become man and our joy is that God is our brother in the flesh even today and forever. On Easter the Church rejoices that our crucified Savior who died in our place, defeated death for us by His resurrection and He now lives and will live forever granting us life in the flesh forever as well.

So today on Pentecost the Church rejoices that the Holy Spirit continues to be poured out upon the Church of believers. In our festival hymns we are confidently asking that the same Pentecostal Spirit would be poured out on us today bestowing upon us the eternal blessings of Christ. Let us sing Hymn #399 and rise.

2010

The closeted Christians were entering their seventh week, almost two months, hiding from the hateful murderers of Christ. Jesus was no longer dead, having arisen and having appeared to His disciples on many occasions – yet they remained closeted, fearful of what man could do to them. But on this day, the closeted Christians became confessing Christians. What changed? - The hatred for Christ by the general public? No! - A decision these closeted Christians made with great sincerity and passion? No! - A new-found enthusiasm produced by a seven week intensive and effective evangelism program? No! - A nontraditional more inspiring form of worship? No!

The change was what Jesus had promised would happen on this day. These closeted Christians moved from their locked room to the open courtyard of the Temple grounds where those who had cried out over fifty days ago "*Crucify Him!*" were all gathered. Now with bold confession the once closeted Christians convicted many hearts. Especially Peter who in this very location had boldly lied: "*I know not the man!*" now declared this was the Man whom God had promised to send, whom they however had crucified. But graciously he invited them to believe and be baptized in this very one they crucified.

Whether you recognize it or not, you my fellow redeemed are numbered among these bold confessors today, because the same outpouring of the Spirit has been given to you, rise and sing out your confession, we are not closeted here, this is a public gathering, let's sing hymn #399 as the confessing Christians our Lord has made us to be.

2011

(also graduation from Parkland Lutheran School)

The disciples were failing their tests which Jesus, their teacher, had been giving to them throughout the three years of schooling. For example: when mothers were bringing little babies to Jesus, they tried to make them leave; when they were surrounded by crowds that exceeded 5,000 and again 4,000, they were unable to turn to Jesus in faith trusting He could feed them; after Jesus rose from the dead, He "rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe ..."; even on the day of Jesus' ascension they wanted to know if Jesus was now going to take His kingly throne on earth.

Failing one test after another, we take note that Jesus was still patient with them and told them that things would improve after the Holy Spirit would come to them. We see the change with Peter, who about 50 days earlier denied knowing Jesus to save his own life. On this holy day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out upon Jesus' Church in full measure, Peter would speak to many of those who had called for Jesus crucifixion. He would speak harsh law to condemn and then spoke the sweet Gospel of God's love and forgiveness in the very one they had crucified. The gift of the Holy Spirit made all the difference for these disciples and it still does for us believers today. Let us acknowledge this same working among us by singing our verse #9 in the worship folder, please rise.

2012

As Jesus went to Jerusalem for the last time with His disciples, He told them this: "everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him...' [They] did not understand any of this."

Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, was handed over to the Gentiles by His fellow Jewish religious leaders. Gentiles were non Jews despised by most Jews. The Gentiles took *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews* and did their worst to Him. But the worst they did to Him was the best that could have happened for all people. Through this Gentile cruelty, God had His Son suffer and die to save us all.

We get to celebrate the great high festival of Pentecost when the Spirit enlightened His Church to the meaning of what Christ has done for us all. Through the miracles of this day, God handed over the Christ to the Gentiles as He converted the Jews gathered in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven" and sent them back with the good news of our salvation in their own native tongues.

What happened then is still happening today. You and I are among the Gentiles to whom God has handed over His Son. Let us rejoice over this great gift, by singing Hymn #399, please rise.

APPENDIX III

Festival Sermon Survey

(administered at five ELS congregations where exordiums are traditionally used)

Approximate Number of Years. As a Confirmed Lutheran:

30 1-10; 35 11-30; 45 31-50; 51 51-+ = **161** respondents

1. I have noticed that on Christmas, Easter and Pentecost that our pastor begins his sermon differently than he does for his regular sermons.

112 Yes *(continue with 2-5)* 49 No *(stop)*

2. The difference is in the ... *(check all that apply)*

45 prayer; 69 greeting; 56 introduction; 43 body;
24 conclusion;
 other: 4 had something musical; 3 wrote exordium _____

3. The differences ... *(check all that apply)*

14 make the sermon longer than normal 99 add to the festive nature of the day
1 have little to no effect
0 are tedious

4. The differences are so effective it should be considered to be used on other occasions:

31 Epiphany; 23 Ascension; 8 Memorial Day; 4 Fourth of July; 10 St. Michaels; 26 Reformation;
24 Thanksgiving; other: 38 chose none, 1 wrote "all the time" _____

5. Other observations or suggestions concerning festival sermons and services: