THE BIBLE AND LUTHERAN LITURGY

In September and October 2012, Pastor Kessinger offered a 6-week class on Wednesday evenings. In this issue and future issues of Tidings, she’ll answer questions about topics from the class and explain changes in the liturgy that occur during the church year. In this interview, the questions focus on an introduction to the class and to the liturgy before looking at the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

Q: Why did you want to offer this class?

A: Several reasons – I have a deep appreciation for the Lutheran liturgy especially because it is grounded in Scripture. The practice of worship can be found in both the Old and New Testaments and has evolved over time to include the center of our worship – the grace of God that we know through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Some of the words and phrases that we speak on a Sunday morning are taken straight from Scripture (or with slight variations). We honor a Biblical tradition that is also complemented and tested alongside the need to worship in a context that makes sense to a modern-day people.

I also wanted to share with people why we make liturgical changes for the different seasons of the church year. There is a natural flow that we follow as we begin the church year with Advent and travel to the end of the church year when we celebrate Christ the King Sunday.

Q: What was the main point you wanted attendees to remember?

A: I wanted those who attended the class to appreciate the rich Biblical foundation of our worship. In the class we did not just cite the different Scriptural passages used in the different parts of our liturgy; we also studied several of the Biblical stories that surrounded those words.

This kind of study leads to a deeper appreciation of what God has done for us through Christ. It also leads us to have a deeper desire to want to worship God on a regular basis and to appreciate the highs and lows of the different times of the church year.

See the separate section “What are the Biblical Roots of the Liturgy?”
From the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America website: https://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Learning-Center/FAQs/Biblical-Roots.aspx

Q: Why do Lutherans have a formal liturgy?

As Lutherans we inherited many of our liturgical practices from other traditions. I would say that the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and the Episcopalians have the most formal traditions of the western churches.

If our members were to attend services in any of these three church bodies, they would find many similarities in the way we do worship. As stated above, our liturgy is grounded in Scripture and we see influences from Martin Luther who began as a Roman Catholic priest. Luther appreciated the richness of the Catholic mass. His insights from studying Scripture opened the door for Lutherans to use the basics of the Catholic mass and to define what was necessary in worship and what later became known as adiaphora.

Adiaphora refers to those things that are not regarded as essential to faith but can be part of what we do in church. The Lutheran Confession states that for

the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.

That understanding has given Lutherans the opportunity to continue to look at how we do worship in a traditional way while we offer many versions of the service (called settings in our hymnal) to reflect the tone and nature of the weekly celebration of Christ’s Resurrection.
Q: Some aspects of the Biblical basis of the Lutheran liturgy come from the Old Testament. How did Jewish worship change and develop into a practice Christians recognize?

A: During the sixth century B.C. when the Jews were captive in Babylonia, the Jerusalem temple practice of sacrifice was no longer possible. A new type of worship developed: remembering what God had done for his chosen people through teaching and praying together.

So, the Jewish people celebrated God’s actions together in the reading of their history (Scripture, both the law and the prophets), in the songs rejoicing in that history (Psalms), in prayers blessing God for that history, and in reflection on that history (sermons). The prayers expanded to include pleas for God to act on their behalf, and over time, included our creeds.

In the Lutheran liturgy, the First Lesson is from the Old Testament except on the Sundays of Easter when we read from Acts. The Psalm is both a response to that lesson and a bridge to the Second Lesson which is a reading from one of the New Testament epistles. Excerpts from the Psalms appear again at the offertory response, in the Great Thanksgiving of the Eucharist/Holy Communion, and in the Sending liturgy at the end of the service. The Benediction is from the book of Numbers.

Q: In class you talked about the Confession and Forgiveness. There is confusion about its purpose and place in the worship service. Would you explain?

A: The Confession and Forgiveness was not intended to be a formal part of the worship service so it is traditionally placed at the beginning of the service before the opening hymn. It is a preparation for Holy Communion but is not a part of it. It is designed to stand by itself and is led by the pastor outside the chancel area. The benefits of using it on a regular basis are twofold: It is a regular discipline to deepen our spiritual life and it is a means of reconciliation of those who are estranged from each other.

At the 9:45 a.m. service, the Confession and Forgiveness is positioned within the body of the service and right before we take Holy Communion. For those of you who attend this service you will note that I now position myself away from the altar for this part of the liturgy. Once I have declared the absolution for our sins then I approach the altar for the Eucharistic prayer.

Although the Confession and Forgiveness is optional for Sunday mornings, it is not recommended for Christmas and Easter because they are the two holiest Sundays of the church year.

THE SEASONS OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

Q: The church year begins anew with the Sundays in Advent. What is the focus of this season, beginning this year on Dec. 2?

A: Advent and Lent are the two penitential seasons (a time for expressing repentance) of the church year. Advent is also a season of preparation that looks forward to both Bethlehem and the end times. The readings for the four Sundays reflect these two themes:

- Advent 1 /2  The Second Coming of Christ
- Advent 3  John the Baptist as the herald of Jesus Christ
- Advent 4  Mary as the obedient servant chosen to bear God’s anointed one

The themes for each of the four Sundays can be summarized in these words: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love.
Q: What will be different during the worship service for the Sundays of Advent?

A: Because Advent is a penitential season, we will sing the Kyrie but the Hymn of Praise is omitted. The color of the season is blue to represent hope.

In addition we will light special candles that are placed in the Advent wreath as we count the four Sundays of this season.

The Gospel readings for this coming church year will be from the Gospel of Luke.

We will sing Advent hymns during this season as we prepare for the birth of Christ.

Q: If the Sundays before Christmas are Sundays of Advent, when does the Christmas season begin?

A: The Christmas season lasts for twelve days, from the evening of December 24 through January 5. It is followed by the Epiphany season, beginning January 6.

The Christmas season celebrates the fulfillment of the Advent expectations. There are three separate selections of scripture for Dec. 24 and Dec. 25:

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<td>Christmas Day (morning)</td>
<td>Mass of the People (Hebrews 1:1-9 and John 1:1-14)</td>
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Q: What will be different during the worship service for Christmas and the Sundays after Christmas?

A: The Thanksgiving for Baptism could replace the Confession and Forgiveness before the service begins. Returning to the service is The Hymn of Praise “Glory to God” (what the shepherds said when they heard the news of Jesus’ birth).

Christmas carols will be sung. The color of the season is white to represent the purity of the newborn Christ and to our light and joy in Him.
Q: When does the Christmas season end and what season follows it?

A: The Christmas season began on Christmas Eve and ends with Epiphany which is celebrated on January 6. In the church Christmas lasts for twelve days. The secular world will stop playing Christmas music the day after Christmas but the church will begin to sing the well-known and beloved carols.

Q: What are some of the important events of the Epiphany Season?

A: This season serves as a bridge between the birth of Jesus and his passion. This year we have the unique opportunity of celebrating the Epiphany of Our Lord on a Sunday because Epiphany is commemorated on January 6. Although we are reading from the Gospel of Luke during this church year, the readings for this day are always from the Gospel of Matthew. It is the only Gospel that tells the story of the coming of the Magi (the Wise Men).

The first Sunday after the Epiphany is The Baptism of Our Lord, the event that began Jesus’ public ministry. Our reading for the day will return to the Gospel of Luke. Because this is the start of Jesus’ ministry the Second Sunday after the Epiphany will highlight Jesus’ first recorded miracle which occurred at the wedding in Cana.

The Sundays after the Epiphany are known as Ordinary Time which is also what we call the Sundays after Pentecost (the very long season between Holy Trinity Sunday and Christ the King Sunday - it usually starts in June and ends in November). The color of the season is green. In our liturgy there is no Kyrie but we will sing the Hymn of Praise.

This year the Sundays after the Epiphany will highlight the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee as recorded in Luke 4. The Last Sunday of the Epiphany is called The Transfiguration of Our Lord. One interesting thing to note is that each of our seasons begins and ends with a festival day. The color for those days is always white so people will be able to visually see that we are about to make a change of focus. The other interesting thing to note is that the Sundays after the Epiphany vary in length each year. For example, last year there were seven Sundays after Epiphany and this year there are only four Sundays after Epiphany. The number of Sundays is determined by when Lent begins - which is determined by when Easter begins - which is determined by the paschal full moon (in other words a moveable date).

Our synod has designated January 27 as Companion Synod Sunday. A companion synod is a special relationship that ELCA synods have with Lutheran synods around the world. This year we will celebrate our partnership with Namibia. Two of my friends who live in the DC area will join us that day (during all three worship services) to share their experiences with you. Molly Kestner, a member of my first parish and one of my first confirmands, is in the area as a volunteer with the Lutheran Volunteer Corps to work with Bread for the City. While she attended Valparaiso University, she spent time in Namibia. Marta Spangler, a colleague of mine from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod office, is in the area for her graduate studies at American University. She was part of the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission ministry and spent a year in Jerusalem.

Q: We look forward to those special presentations on global mission. The magi also represent a global emphasis. Why is the day when the Magi came called the Epiphany of Our Lord?

A: The word *epiphany* is from the Greek word for “reveal.” When the Magi came, Jesus was revealed as also being the Christ to the Gentiles. The Magi were representatives of the nations who came to worship Christ.

Q: What are the main emphases of the season?

A: A primary emphasis is the visit by the Magi that offers a wonderful opportunity to highlight world missions. Therefore it is perfect for us to celebrate Companion Synod Sunday while in this season. However I find it interesting that the Biblical account of the Magi is found in Matthew but not in Luke. Matthew is the bridge from the Old and the New Testament but Luke is the one who opens the ministry of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. I would have thought that we would have found this story in his gospel as well but it is not there. That is just interesting for me and something I will continue to think about as we concentrate our studies this year on Luke.

A second emphasis is the public ministry of Jesus that begins with his baptism and then the account of his first miracle. We will delve deeply into Luke 4 to capture some of the nuances that are offered here that might give us some insights into the next season of the church year - Lent.

Q: What is the importance of the Transfiguration?

A: The Transfiguration, when Jesus appeared in all his glory with Elijah and Moses, brings the Old Testament into the time of Jesus. That moment gave the disciples who were with him a preview of the glory of Christ that is to come.
In September and October 2012, Pastor Kessinger offered a 6-week class on Wednesday evenings. In this issue and future issues of Tidings, she will continue to answer questions about topics from the class and explain changes in the liturgy that occur during the church year. In this interview, the questions address the season of Lent.

Q: We’re in the season of Epiphany when we concentrate on Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. What liturgical season follows Epiphany?

A: Lent is the next season in the church year. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Eve; the dates this year are February 13-March 30.

Q: How does the Transfiguration, commemorated on the last Sunday in Epiphany, take us into the Lenten season?

A: It is on Transfiguration Sunday that we stop looking back at Christmas and begin looking forward to Lent. As Epiphany in general is symbolic of light out of darkness, the Transfiguration is the ultimate “light and mountain top” experience. The identity of Jesus as Son of God is reaffirmed by a “voice from above” while Jesus talks with Moses and Elijah. During his ministry, many will question who Jesus is. During challenging times, people could look back to this experience and believe.

Another interesting connection to “light” is the different explanations for the meaning of the word “Lent.” The word has been traced back to Dutch and German words for “spring” and for “long” (the latter referring to the amount of daylight increasing during this period).

Q: Redeemer will have a pancake supper on the Tuesday before Lent begins. What is the background for eating pancakes and what else is planned for that evening?

A: Eating pancakes on Shrove Tuesday is associated with the day preceding Lent because it represented using up rich foods (such as eggs, milk, and sugar) before the fasting season of the 40 days of Lent.

Mardi Gras (French for “Fat Tuesday”) or Carnival is celebrated in various cities during Epiphany and ends on Shrove Tuesday; rich, fatty foods are eaten during the celebration and especially on the last day in preparation for a much leaner Lent.

At Redeemer, after the pancake supper, we’ll have again the short service we did last year: “burying the Alleluias” for the season and burning the palms from last Palm Sunday. This somber service ends outside and we’ll leave in silence.

Q: You mentioned the 40 days of Lent. But, the number of days from Ash Wednesday to Easter is more than 40.

A: Yes, the tradition is that the 40 days of Lent commemorate the number of days Jesus spent in the wilderness, when he was tempted by Satan, before he began his public ministry. However, because each Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord, Sundays are not included in the total number of days of Lent.

The number is associated with a period of probation and trial and points to the action of grace that leads to revival and renewal.

Q: What is the meaning of Ash Wednesday?

A: During worship services on that day, ashes are put on the forehead of worshipers in the sign of the cross as a sign of mourning and repentance. As I said earlier, the ashes will be from the burning of the palms from last Palm Sunday. I’ll repeat the words “Remember that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return” from Genesis 3:19.

There is also an aspect of cleansing and renewal related to ashes. In earlier times, they were used in the absence of soap. So, on Ash Wednesday ashes are a penitential substitute for water as a reminder of our baptism.

Q: What are the main themes of the Lenten season?

A: Lent is a penitential time. It is a period of preparation: prayer, repentance, almsgiving. Some will “give up” something (e.g., chocolate, alcohol, Facebook, the morning latte at Starbucks) or “give for” something (e.g., an extra contribution of time or money to church or to a charity). “Giving up” some of the busyness in our schedules in order to have more time for Bible reading, meditation, and prayer aids our Lenten preparation.
Q: What is the background for fasting? What is the Lutheran outlook on fasting?

Jesus fasted during his time in the wilderness. And there are many more instances in the Bible of people fasting. Moses twice fasted for forty days and forty nights: while on the mountain before receiving the Ten Commandments and again when he discovered that the Israelites had practiced idolatry during his absence (Deuteronomy 9). King David fasted when his son was ill (2 Samuel 12) and Joel called for a fast to avert the judgment of God (Joel 1). The prophetess Anna fasted in the Temple (Luke 2). Paul fasted after his Damascus road experience (Acts 9).

But, fasting for Lent is more than not eating at certain times or for a period of time. It is also a period of repentance. Lutherans are not required to fast but people may choose to make it a Lenten discipline.

Q: Does the penitential emphasis affect the liturgy during Lent?

A: Yes, during Lent the Hymn of Praise “Glory to God in the Highest” is omitted. The “Alleluia” before the reading of the Gospel is replaced by another acclamation (e.g., “Return to the Lord, your God”).

Also, the color of the vestments will change from green to purple, a penitential color.

Q: Will there be changes in the contemporary service related to Lent?

A: Yes, the hymns will have a more somber tone to them during this season.

Q: The Wednesday evening Bible study during Lent is a study of Genesis. Why study Genesis during this season?

A: I think Genesis has the best examples of the human condition: our relationships with God and with others and how we fail in both. We’ll look at five relationships, from both a theological and relationship perspective: Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel; Abraham and Sarah; Jacob and Laban; Joseph and Pharaoh. It will be a different approach from what you might first assume when you think of these people. For example, the focus for Adam and Eve will be their role as stewards rather than their disobedience; the focus for Cain and Abel will be on their different gifts rather than highlighting the first recorded murder.

Q: Lent is preceded by the festival of the Transfiguration and is followed by the festival of Easter. How do we move from Lent into Easter?

A: Holy Week is the transition from Lent to Easter. In the next issue of Tidings we’ll look at those days: Palm Sunday through Easter Eve.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW for these opportunities to experience Lent

February 12, 2013: Shrove Tuesday - Pancake Dinner from 6:00 pm to 7:15 pm, followed by a brief service to bury the “Alleluias” and burn the palms from Palm Sunday

February 13, 2013: Ash Wednesday Services - 12:00 pm and 7:30 pm

February 20 and 27 / March 6, 13, and 20: Wednesday Evening Bible Study and Worship: 6:30 pm - Simple Dinner; 7:15 pm - Bible Study on Genesis and the Human Condition; 8:00 pm to 8:30 pm - Compline (Evening Prayer)

Something new will be added to the Wednesday Evening Bible Study Series! Our youth leader, Marlon Yearwood, will be with us during this time to do an interactive Bible study with our children while the Adult Bible study takes place in the sanctuary. The lessons for the children will be the same readings that will be covered by Pastor Kessinger.

All are welcome!
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Q: We’re in the season of Lent that began with Ash Wednesday on February 13. When does Lent end?
A: Lent ends on Easter Eve; the last week of the Lenten season, called Holy Week, is March 24-30 this year.

Q: What are the special days in Holy Week?
A: The week begins with Palm Sunday. We also commemorate Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Some churches also have an Easter vigil on Saturday evening.

Q: Palm Sunday celebrates the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding humbly on a donkey, when the crowds greeted Him as the Messiah. What is the symbolism of this event?
A: At that time, the Roman military governor would enter Jerusalem from the west in an imperial military procession, riding on a magnificent horse, dressed in fancy clothes adorned with gold and jewels, accompanied by cavalry and soldiers, etc. Because the Passover was a remembrance of the liberation of the Hebrews in Egypt, the Roman Empire had a stronger military presence in Jerusalem during that time in case there would be trouble.

Jesus’ entrance procession from the Mount of Olives on the eastern side of the city was to be different because he was to be a different kind of king. The people wanted – and were expecting - an earthly king. In the past, Israel’s kings had led the people out of exile. Jesus’ coming was to lead the community, not out of exile, but out of their sins.

Q: What is the meaning of the palm branches laid on the ground in front of Jesus as he enters the city?
A: Before Jesus’ time, palm branches were a symbol of victory. Today when we carry palms on Palm Sunday, we are remembering not only Jesus’ procession on that day but also His victory over death.

Q: Why does the Palm Sunday worship service also include the reading of the passion of Christ? Why don’t we just remember the joy of the people that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem?
A: The tradition of the Church is to read the complete story of the Passion on Palm Sunday to give the full perspective of Jesus’ ministry from the time that He entered Jerusalem to the very end. Then, on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, the events of those days are explored more deeply.

Q: What does “Maundy” mean and what is remembered on Maundy Thursday?
A: “Maundy” comes to us via French and Latin words meaning “mandate” or “commandment.” In John’s story of the events that Thursday evening, Jesus says “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) So many things happened with Jesus and his disciples on that Thursday during Passover (“... the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed” -- Luke 22:7). At supper, He washed the feet of His disciples as an example of being a servant to others; that supper was the last meal Jesus shared with His disciples and from that meal we repeat His words every Sunday when we share the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist. Then Judas Iscariot left the meal to betray Jesus to the religious authorities; the disciples accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed and they slept; the soldiers arrested Jesus in the Garden; Peter denied knowing Jesus.

At Redeemer, on March 10 the confirmands and their families will have a modified version of the Seder (the Jewish ritual service and ceremonial dinner for the first night of Passover) to reflect our Christian understanding.
Q: Good Friday, when Jesus was crucified and died, was obviously not “good.” Why does it have that name?

A: Here the word “good” comes from the word meaning “holy.” The day is also called Holy Friday or Black Friday. The name may also come from “God’s Friday.” The day is “good” in the sense that the death of Jesus Christ, as horrible as it was, led to His resurrection, which brought new life to those who believe.

Q: What types of services are held on Good Friday?

A: Some churches have services from noon to 3:00 p.m., the hours Jesus is said to have been on the cross. Scripture selections about Jesus’ words while on the cross are alternated with meditations and hymns. Some churches, including Redeemer, have an evening Tenebrae service with Scripture selections and music that reflect the last words of Christ. As the service progresses, more and more candles are extinguished until there is only one candle left. This candle represents the light of Christ. “Tenebrae” is the Latin word for “darkness” or “shadows”.

Q: How do the liturgy, the music, and the actions of those leading the worship services during Holy Week help to tell the story of those days?

A: The use of palm branches and our own procession at the beginning of the Palm Sunday services - with the joyous music - celebrate Jesus’ procession in Jerusalem. We’ll save the palms to be burned for ashes next year on Shrove Tuesday for the following day’s Ash Wednesday services.

From 7:00-7:30 p.m. on Maundy Thursday in the Prayer and Care Room, I’ll wash the feet of any who want to participate. At the Maundy Thursday worship service, the more formal absolution will be returned at the end of the confession and the Lord’s Supper will be shared as we remember His sacrifice of body and blood. The altar linens and the Lenten purple paraments will be removed, leaving the altar bare, in anticipation of Jesus’ death the next day.

At the Good Friday Tenebrae service, as I said before, the service moves from light to darkness/shadows. There will be seven readings with corresponding candles plus a candle to represent Jesus. The candle representing Jesus is carried out during the Apostles’ Creed at the words “He descended to the dead” and returned at the words “and on the third day He rose again.” The service ends in silence.

Q: During Holy Week, we move from the joy of Palm Sunday to the sadness and despair of Good Friday. But, as Christians, we know how the story ends. Why is it important to remember the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and share the emotions of those who were there the first time?

A: If we go from Palm Sunday to Easter without remembering the events between those two days, we miss the depth of the unconditional love God has for us and what God was willing to do to save us. We need to stay “in the moment” during Holy Week.

Q: If we want to live in the story day by day, what Scripture selections could we read?

A: Listed below are Scripture selections you can use for meditation and prayer during Holy Week.

**Monday in Holy Week:** Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-10; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11.


**Wednesday in Holy Week:** Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70:1-2,4-6; Romans 5:6-11; Matthew 26:14-25.


**Good Friday:** Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22:1-23; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42.