

# Wearing God

## Daily Lenten/Easter Devotional

### Messiah Lutheran Church

2021



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# Images of God

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Dear Friends,

William Paul Young's "*The Shack*" caused quite a stir when it was first released back in 2007. Everyone, it seemed, had a strong opinion to offer about the book. Some embraced the story as a creative depiction of how God works in our lives, while others dismissed it as "heresy." Without giving the plot of the story away, a father grieving the disappearance of his daughter comes face to face with the Trinity. He spends a weekend with these three interesting characters trying to make sense of all the painful events of his life and hoping to get some answers for the questions that have haunted him in the years following Missy's death. The Trinity is portrayed in a unique way with God The Father as an African American woman and the Holy Spirit as a mysterious Asian woman.

*The Shack's* depiction of God is an interesting portrait that isn't meant to be taken literally as much as it is meant to capture many of the attributes of God that we read about in the Bible. As Nicola Slee once wrote, "*No one image or model, however elusive or rich, can do more than offer glimpses and hints toward the divine.*" God is always inviting us to come and see, reflect and pray.

The 40 days of Lent challenge us to stretch our imaginations and preconceived notions about God. *How might God be like water, wind, cypress, fire, or woman in labor for you?* What you will read in the pages that follow are reflections written by Messiah Members and friends reflecting on 40 different "images of God" that come to us from the Bible.

I encourage you to spend time with the scripture, image and devotional written for each day. Pray for the writer. I am grateful to all those who participated in our first ever Lenten Devotional here at Messiah! Writing about one's faith and sharing it is never easy, yet this is our call to walk and share together our love for God! I thank you, dear reader, for joining us on this Lenten journey. These images all together make quite a dazzling array of God's identity and person. May these devotions inspire you to grow in your faith and journey.

On the Lenten journey with you,  
PJ

## Lenten Daily Devotionals - Suggestions for Use

1. Read the day's devotion twice. Let it sink into your heart.
2. Record your thoughts/wonderings in the margins or on the journal entry page at the end of the booklet.
3. Pray for whomever wrote that day's devotional, thanking God for opening their lives and sharing their faith with you.
4. Use your Bible and look up any verses referenced in that day.
5. Read the booklet as a family, at a meal, or with a prayer partner. Invite your children to read along with you.
6. Give or send a copy of this devotional to a friend or relative.
7. Ponder the following questions?
  - *What did you notice about that day's devotion?*
  - *How was God working in the writer's life?*
  - *What does the devotion make you wonder about?*
  - *How might God be inviting you to see differently this day?*

*Devotionals are also available online:  
[www.messiah-wauconda.org](http://www.messiah-wauconda.org)*

# *The Answer*

Refresh my soul with Living Water.  
Restore me with The Bread of Life.  
You are the Way, the Truth, the Answer,  
The Living Word that guides my life.

You are my Rest, when I grow weary.  
When I'm afraid, you calm my fears.  
When I cry out, in need of comfort,  
You are the Hand that wipes my tears.

You are my Rock and my Salvation.  
You are my Strength, for I am weak.  
Your Voice can still my troubled waters.  
My heart rejoices when You speak.

You are Creator and Redeemer.  
You are the Wind beneath my wings.  
You are the Light upon my pathway,  
The joyful Song that my soul sings!

You are the Vine my heart will cling to,  
The Peace reflected on my face.  
You are the Breath of life within me,  
O God of Mercy, God of Grace.

You are the Hope of every nation,  
The Hope that lives in every heart.  
You are the Answer through the ages,  
O God of Love, bright Morning Star.

*Ginny Breecher©2020*

Messiah's own Ginny Breecher composed a hymn called "The Answer." Note the use of the many images of God reflected in the song. As you read through this devotional booklet, take some time each day to read through these beautiful verses to help ground you in God's incredible creative energy and love.

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## Ash Wednesday, February 17th

### Names of God

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*"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." -Isaiah 9:6*

In 1996, while touring Wales and returning from the Penmachino Woolen Mill to Portmeirion, we inadvertently took the wrong turn and found ourselves in the Machno River Valley, known throughout Wales as the fabric of the nation's culture. Miles and miles of green and buff colored countryside rolled in front of us. Flocks of sheep stood shearing off the tops of grasses for feed. This was, by all means, their territory! Brazen fellows, even meandering in the middle of the road while we could do nothing more than pause, enjoy the scenery, and patiently relish the serenity of God's grace.

Noticing the peaceful persona, but continuing perseverance of the flock, I thought about God's perfect lamb. Lamb of God Who Taketh Away the Sins of the World, a name bestowed upon Jesus by John the Baptist. Where The Lamb in the Old Testament was the protector of the Israelites and their atoner, it was because of the blood of the lamb that they were spared death. In Christian doctrine, it was because of Jesus' blood that we were spared (spiritual) death.

All of the sacrificial lambs offered in The Old Testament point to Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace.

#### **Prayer:**

Christ, Lamb Of God  
Who Takes Away The Sins of the World,  
Grant Us Peace



Ann Reid

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## Thursday after Ash Wednesday, February 18th

### Wrestler

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*“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”*

*-Genesis 32:22,28*

Jacob, Israel, was blessed. Greatly blessed. And there are few names in the Bible more recognizable. The authors of the Torah found it noteworthy to record Jacob's struggle with God, or the angel of God. Of course, the name Israel means “struggles with God.” So, why is this so important? How many of us have what we would say is an ‘easy’ relationship with God? I wish I could say mine was, but I struggle with it daily. I don’t think this is as bad news as it seems, though. God says to us, “Struggle with Me, argue with Me, just do not ignore Me.” Our doubts and fears and even lapses of faith are blessings if we offer them to God. Ask Him these questions in our dark times: “Why is this happening?” “How long will this last?” Ask them even in anger; God wants a passionate wrestler more than He wants a serene monk. Don’t be discouraged if the struggle seems to be going nowhere. We don’t have to win; if we can just keep up the struggle until the night is over, we will be blessed indeed.

**Prayer:** Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.



Curt DeCaro

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## Friday after Ash Wednesday, February 19th

### Mother

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*"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." -Isaiah 66:13*

On my wedding day, I gave my mom a handkerchief with the quote, "To dry your tears as you have always dried mine."

Even in my forties, I still turn to my mom to help dry my tears both happy and sad. She is one of the first people I turn to with my biggest celebrations and my hardest days.

Now, as a mom myself, I see that being a mom is the best, but also hardest, job I have. I get to be a cheerleader, teacher, and best friend all in one day. However, on the dark days, I see how hard it is to see my child cry or be in pain. How I would give anything to take that pain away!

I love the quote, "As a mother, I promise that I will always be in one of three places. In front of you to cheer you on, behind you to have your back, or next to you so you are never alone."

Don't these images of God being your "Mother" just help you smile and put you at ease, knowing there is always someone there to celebrate with you, to cheer you on, or to just listen to you when all you can do is cry.

**Prayer:** God is our ultimate fan. God loves us unconditionally, God carries our burdens, and God is there to comfort us at all times - just like our moms!



Lisa Nellessen

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# Saturday after Ash Wednesday, February 20th

## Pillar of Fire

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*"The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and night."  
-Exodus 13:21*

Have you ever woken up in the morning, looked out your window and your mood changed immediately? CLOUDS!!!

Clouds were abundantly hanging in the morning sky, puffy, multicolored billowing clouds!!! Most people feel a heavy sinking feeling as they see these gloomy pillars hanging in the sky.

**Or**

Have you ever felt that same sinking feeling as the sun begins to set and darkness sets in at dusk? You ponder the long hours of darkness that lies ahead, until morning light kisses the horizon again.

Well, my friend, we are here to offer a very different response to these two very real feelings. The next time you're lying in bed as morning approaches BREATHE.... go and open the curtains.

Greet those puffy, multicolored clouds that hang before you. Embrace them, smile, and feel Gods love holding you tightly, BLANKETING you in promises of a new day and that the promise God will never let you go.

And as you look out at the horizon and darkness begins to set in, EMBRACE it. God blesses us every day with his light resembled in a flame. Strike a match, light a candle with his fire and...

**"GO LIGHT YOUR WORLD"**

Just as God lights your world each and every day and guides you through everything with his pillars of clouds and fire!!!!

**Prayer:** God, please show us the way with Your pillars of clouds and fire. Show us the way to peace and happiness!



Patti and Doug Whitemarsh

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# First Sunday of Lent, February 21st

## Water

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*"Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"-John 4:13-14*

Water: we need it to live every day and would die without drinking it. Water: we long to see it in oceans, lakes and rivers. Water: Jesus walked on it and even turned it into wine. Water: Jesus convinced fishermen to drop their nets and become fishers of men. Water: Jesus washed the feet of His disciples with it.

About fifteen years ago, I felt drawn to attend a retreat weekend that was being offered at my church. I felt like something was missing in my life at that time and was thirsty for God. I heard many wonderful testimonials that weekend, and my thirst for God started to be watered.

Jesus is our living water. We need Jesus to live. Our souls will never thirst again. Baptized with water, the sins of our past are forgiven in the living water of Jesus. God showers us with blessings and cleanses us when we are stained with sin.

Water or fire? I choose water. Water puts out fire!

**Prayer:** Dear God, please shower those who read this with blessings, according to Your will. Let them drink from Your cup of living water and be renewed in Your faithfulness of everlasting life. Amen.



Sue Hearne (Pastor Jim's sister-in-law) and Bill Hearne (editor and Pastor Jim's brother)

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# Monday of the First Week of Lent, February 22nd

## Vine

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*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." -John 15:1*

Anyone who has ever had kudzu invade a garden knows how strong and tenacious vines can be. They root deeply and entwine with anything within reach. Yet, they can be ripped out. Interestingly, if tossed aside, vines can reroot and grow back even stronger than before. Vines are also known for producing great bounties of produce. Vines are much stronger than they appear to be.

In Jesus' times, grapevines were commonplace. They grew, spread, and produced fruit that was made into grape juice and the wine of early times. These grapevines and their resulting juice were critical to provide the people nutrition between harvests, essentially, to help keep them healthy and alive. But sometimes, even the strongest grapevines could be ripped out. However, they would reroot, regrow, and produce more abundantly than before.

This analogy between Jesus and a vine illustrates the above characteristics. Jesus' teachings spread across the Holy Land. He was ripped out, crucified, and tossed aside to decay. Yet, He rose stronger than before. His ministry became tenacious, overrunning the ancient rituals and offering to His believers the nutrition of eternal life. His "fruit" became the nutrition to feed His reform of the church and to give his followers strength. He was the Messiah, the promised nutrient to save His people from sin and damnation.

His father was the gardener, providing support for the vine, but, when necessary, allowing the vine to be ripped from its rooting so it could come back stronger to bear even greater fruit.

Through Jesus' persecution, suffering, death, and resurrection, we are given the spiritual nutrition to strengthen us for an eternal life with Him.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for allowing Your Son to be crucified for my sake and for my salvation. Help me to fill my life with the fruit of Jesus' vine that I may grow strong and healthy in faith, leading to an eternal life with You. Amen.



Friend of Messiah

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## Tuesday of the First Week of Lent, February 23rd

### Whirlwind

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*"Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the whirlwind." -Job 38:1*

*Whirlwind.* That is what our family experienced the last few months of 2020. In six weeks' time, we welcomed a third child to our family, sold our home, said goodbye to a loving community, moved to a new house and were welcomed by a new church community. *All during a pandemic.*

People have told me that *just one* of these experiences would have been challenging. There were moments I questioned God's timing and wondered if this was the next right step for our family.

However, despite the challenges we faced nothing compared to the great suffering Job experienced. Job lost all he owned, his children were gone, and he was in great physical pain. He cried out to the Lord in anguish, he asked many questions. And then Job didn't hear from the Lord. God went silent.

That is until the Lord came to Job in a whirlwind- defined as "*a column of air moving rapidly around and around in a cylindrical or funnel shape.*" Can you imagine God coming to you in what is essentially a tornado? How unexpected!

But God does not answer any of Job's questions. Instead, God came as a whirlwind to remind Job that he is the force behind all nature. He can command anything to begin or end. He can take pain and suffering and turn them into good. And in the end God blessed Job's faithfulness through the unanswered questions with more than he could have imagined.

The image of whirlwind reminds us today God is behind all things we are experiencing. *We are to trust and rest in him despite our questions or sufferings.* Today, I am choosing to look for God's presence around me and to trust in God's plan even when it feels like a whirlwind.

**Prayer:** Lord, just like Job we will experience suffering and unanswered questions. Help us to remember You work all things for good. Remind us to put our complete trust in You as You have our best interest always. Amen.



Amy Hearne, Wife to Pastor Jim, Mom to Anna, Peter & Liam

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# Wednesday of the First Week of Lent, February 24th

## Burning Bush

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*"There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up." -Exodus 3:2*

When I started to think about this devotional, I was reminded of a 5 ½ hour van ride I had sitting next to an acquaintance that had just seen their personal "burning bush." Everybody in the van had spent the weekend together at a Promise Keepers conference. We all were excited and emotionally energized, but God's Holy Spirit pierced one man's heart deeper than I had ever seen before.

Moses' "Burning bush" experience filled him with excitement and purpose, and it also filled him with fear and wonder. A fear of who would believe him and how could he, a lowly stuttering shepherd change the world. Excitement and purpose that he knew God's presence was with him. The complexity of Moses' experience quickly unfolds as one reads how Moses doubted his abilities. How he questioned his resolve and turned away. Afraid to even look at the brilliance of the flame.

The wonder and awe of Moses' "Burning Bush" experience captured in Exodus makes it sound amazing and exciting. I think we all wish to have moments of faith that are beyond the laws of physics. Something so solid and real that our faith would never waiver again. Oh, to be guided forevermore.

Why I relate to Moses being frightened at first is because my first burning bush experience frightened me. It frightened me a lot. It was years before I realized what happened and dared to look up to see if God was looking back. I tried to walk away and get lost, but Jesus followed me.

What frightened me was the realization that Jesus was with me 24/7. Not just for an hour on Sunday morning or when I was with "church" friends, but Jesus was present all the time. Maybe it is also recognizing that we are sinners 24/7 with nowhere to hide. Today's reading reminds us that just as God did not accept Moses' excuses that he was only a stuttering shepherd unworthy of God's attention, we can watch for burning bushes around us, providing us warmth and guidance along the pathway of life.

**Prayer:** Almighty Jesus, thank You for today's energy, breath, and joy. Your presence opens all of our lives and lets us see the expanse and complexity of the world. May we continue to feel your presence and enjoy the possibilities of love, even when we lose sight of you. Amen.

As a reminder of Jesus' presence, I leave with the following run-on salutation.

**#Heneverletsgo.**



Steve Karnatz

**Wearing God**  
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## Thursday of the First Week of Lent, February 25th

### Root of Jesse

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*"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." -Isaiah 11:1*

Have you ever ordered a plant from a nursery catalog in the dead of winter based on the beautiful picture of its expected flower? Then, a few months later when it arrives, you open the package and find a bare-root plant that was trimmed down at the end of the last season to a few inches of very tired looking stems and a root clump. Planting a bulb or bare-root plant is always an act of faith, so you dutifully plant it anyway, and tend it, and wait, and hope... and wait...

Somehow, that very tired, bare root stock plant is what I always picture for this Bible verse. But I also see the promise of something beautiful and special to grow from it.

And so it was with Jesus. He arrived a baby- a new being, unfinished, but destined to grow into much more. How much time do you think passed before the good people of faith in His time, His contemporaries, realized that Jesus would be so very much MORE? It was faith, just like the faith you have with that bare root, that gave them hope and the realization that He was indeed the Messiah they had hoped for- the promised Fruit of Jesse's stem.

**Prayer:** Dear Father in Heaven, thank You for Your love and patience with us as we grow and learn. Please help us to be loving and patient with others as they grow and learn too. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Pam Dopke

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# Friday of the First Week of Lent, February 26th

## *River of Life*

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"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb." -Revelation 22:1

And just how do we access this "river of life" that He has promised us? This "living water" that cleanses us of our sins and failings. This crystal treasure that nourishes His kingdom or peace, justice, acceptance and love for every child of God.

**START RIGHT....**Schedule the time every day and keep it. Realize you are coming before our Almighty God. Imagine Jesus sitting beside you.

**GO TO SCRIPTURE....**God speaks to us personally. His word can be a melody in the darkness or the strife. What is it saying to you?

**REACH GOD THROUGH CREATION....**Its beauty lifts our hearts to God. All His works are wonderful.

**LIGHT A CANDLE....**It creates a peaceful ambiance and gently makes us aware of God's enveloping presence.

**LISTEN TO MUSIC....**It never fails to lift our spirits and inspire our hearts to sing again.

**DRAW ON PAST BLESSINGS....**Scan your memory for times when God was present in unexpected ways. If you seek, you will find.

**PRAYER FOR LENT:** The bread we do not use is the bread of the poor. The garment hanging in our wardrobe is the garment of him or her who is naked. The shoes we do not wear are the shoes of one who is barefoot. The money we keep locked away is the money of the poor. The acts of charity we do not perform are so many injustices we commit. May the "river of the water of life" wash over us and help us to live this prayer each of our days. Amen.



*Ed Salmon - friend of Pastor Jim*

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## Saturday of the First Week of Lent, February 27th

### Wind

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*"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." -Genesis 1:2*

As a Christian, I am intrigued by the concept of a triune, or three person, God. As I continue on my faith journey, I find myself being drawn to and connecting on a deeper level with the Spirit of God. There is something about the Ruach\*, or God's Holy Spirit or Wind, where I feel a special closeness

I find I connect best with God in nature. As I hike the local forest preserve or other nature settings when I travel, I find myself connecting with the Spirit, or Wind, of God while I view God's vast and beautiful creation. As I see the wind blowing through the pines or create movement on lakes or other bodies of water, I am reminded of and feel a closeness to the Wind of God. I feel a comfort and trust.

God's Spirit or Wind can also provide us with wisdom. 1 Corinthians 12:8 says "for as one is given the word of Wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit." My hope is we, as a Messiah family, will look to and find comfort and wisdom in the Spirit or Wind of God. May that wisdom and guidance lead us as we grow individually in our faith and as a church family.

**Prayer:** Holy Spirit-Wind of the Living God, open our eyes to Your ways and provide us with the wisdom we need. Thank You for Your presence as we feel and observe the wind on our daily walk. When we see and hear the wind in the trees, it is yet another reminder of Your presence and that we can trust You and look to You for comfort and wisdom. Thank You. In the powerful name of Jesus we pray. Amen!



John Egesdal, Messiah Member since 2019

*\*Ruach is a Hebrew word that refers to God as breath or a wind or a life force that sustains all living things*

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## Second Sunday of Lent, February 28th

### Fire

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*"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" -Luke 12:49*

In the Bible, fire has a purifying quality that separates the valuable from the worthless. Fire can also represent a cleansing for preparation of new life. In today's verse, fire means danger, panic, and destruction. Fire also means a passion to spread the good news.

This image, scripture, and even the date resonate with me. It was on this date five years ago that I received my first cancer diagnosis. That day, I looked ahead and anticipated different types of "fire" that would be used to cleanse my body of the insidious cancer-such as the "fire" of chemo and internal and external radiation therapies meant to eradicate the physical disease. In addition, there was much pre-work, or kindling, to do to cleanse my spirit as well.

This verse implies that there is significant kindling to prepare for the fire. Fire is often used in rituals as a way to cleanse and remove that which is eating at us from the inside. Whether we pray our laments, address hurts from our past, or write down our burdens and offer the papers as literal kindling, we make room for the necessary healing to occur so we may become wholly healthy and share the good news.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we seek to kindle the Fire that brings cleansing. Help us realize that we need Your Fire to make us heal and whole again.



Pastor Lynne, Part-time Interim Associate Pastor

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# Monday of the Second Week of Lent, March 1st

## Thunderstorm

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“When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.”

-*Jeremiah 10:13*

There is such beauty and strength in a thunderstorm; anticipation, quiet, soft rumbles in the distance growing ever closer, a dark and heavy sky, wind moving gently and then urgently through trees, flashes of electricity, rain pounding, heart racing, excitement, cleansing, sunshine, peace.

Thunderstorms can rage for hours or pass quickly in minutes. They can test us and bring destruction, but there is beauty before, during, and after. It seems that we have been through a long and destructive thunderstorm in 2020. We have felt a range of emotions as we navigated the pandemic from a bit of excitement, time off work, hunkering down, thrill of the unknown to fear, boredom, sadness, panic, resolution and finally peace. Despite the destruction, there was beauty-beauty in a smile from a stranger, a walk in nature, slowing down, deep connections with family, community, understanding and love. God never promised that life would always be easy. Thunderstorms are a part of life. They can cause destruction and test us but are always filled with beauty, calm and peace after they have raged.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for bringing us so much beauty in this world. Help us to remember to lean on You during the sunshine and the thunderstorms. Amen.



Erica Jawnyj, Preschool Director

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## Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent, March 2nd

### Cypress

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*"Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like an evergreen cypress; your fruitfulness comes from me." -Hosea 14:8*

Imagine you are walking through a forest in the winter. The wind chills you as it flies through the barren spindly, lifeless branches all around you. No creature stirs. You happen on a tall cypress. It is like a sturdy pillar, a beacon of hope, of life, of color, in this world of whites, grays, and browns. It bursts from the snow as if to tell of the life that will come, that it has seen this before, and it will happen again. The cypress shelters you from the storm just as it has done for many birds. You visit that tree in each of the different seasons. It is always that same sturdy pillar and beacon of hope.

Cypress trees are great trees for birds to nest in. Similarly, God is open to protect and shelter his disciples. The cypress tree is tall and strong. God is our strength when we are weak. He is upright and just. They are able to survive in harsh environments, just as we seek God when we need help in our tough world.

**Prayer:** Dear God, let me look to You for resilience in these tough times and let You be my strength. Keep me upright and sturdy like a cypress.



Genna Rector

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## Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent, March 3rd

### *Pillar of Cloud*

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*"Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations."  
-Psalm 99:2*

In the Old Testament this Pillar of Cloud phenomena guides and leads the people of Israel in their journey through the desert by day. It is, for the Hebrew people, a way God stayed close and communicated with them.

I have always had a certain fascination about cloud formations, and has been enhanced even more so in my short time in Wauconda. For five years, I had the great privilege of pastoring Transfiguration Catholic Church, and you may remember that it was from the cloud that God spoke (Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36). A voice from the cloud says *"This is my beloved Son - listen to Him."*

Guiding and leading, caring and communicating this time in the New Testament, the pillar of cloud invites us to listen to Jesus who becomes for us the new image to follow in our everyday lives. Don't be afraid to look up and listen to the clouds around us.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we thank You today for all Your creation and how it is a way for us to know You. Help us to be grateful for Your loving direction and guidance coming from a cloud - a voice - that has us listen and follow Your Son, Jesus, today and always. Amen.



Bill Zavaski, Friend of PJ; Former Pastor of Transfiguration Parish

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## Thursday of the Second Week of Lent, March 4th

### Shepherd

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*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." -John 10:11*

As I read this verse from the Gospel of John, the word that came to my mind was love... and the enormity of God's love for us. There is no greater love than to lay down your life for another, and that represents the love that God has for each of us by sending his only Son to die for us to save us from our sins. Even when we go astray, our Shepherd welcomes us back with loving arms.

As a mother and grandmother, I have often thought how I would, in a heartbeat, give my life for any of my children or grandchildren, and I am sure that many of you have felt the same way. Since I am assured of my salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ, maybe this is not such a huge sacrifice after all. My Shepherd has given me the faith needed to love others as he has loved each of us.

**Prayer:** Never let us forget the enormity of God's love, and help us to love ALL others as he has loved us.



Debbie Blair

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# Friday of the Second Week of Lent, March 5th

## Healer

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*"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."  
-Psalm 147:3*

My image of Jesus, our "healer," is of Him going from village to village curing people from their diseases and sicknesses. Jesus made the deaf hear, the mute speak, and the blind see. Most importantly, his healing made the doubters believe.

I think, at some point in our lives, we have all gotten down on our knees asking Jesus to heal us from our own sickness, worries, troubles, heartaches and doubts.

I have chosen "Healer" for my sister. In July of 2020, she was diagnosed with Bul Bur ALS. She had just retired, hoping to spend the remainder of her life doing what she enjoys, golfing, traveling, and spending more time with her family. So today and every day, I ask for Jesus to heal her. Jesus, I wish You were here so that my sister could just reach out and touch Your cloak, and then, like so many others, be healed.

Jesus, Your life here on Earth ended nailed to the cross suffering. So why, I ask, would He want anyone else to suffer as You did? This is when I have a hard time understanding, and, at times, I even doubt. I know in my heart that Jesus will bring healing to my sister, maybe not the way I want it but His way. I don't know yet what His way will be, but I do ask that Jesus give my sister the strength she will need to fight this ugly disease. Give her peace of mind and help her to overcome her fear of death. Ease her anxiety and give her restful days and nights.

When Jesus' life ended on the cross and when he needed his friends the most, they all walked away. Terri, I promise I will not walk away from you. I will be there for you and help you in any way that I can. I LOVE YOU.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I ask, in your name that You would heal this disease, that You would have compassion and bring healing from all sickness. Help us to trust in You and Your plan. Amen.



Diane Schlimgen, friend of Pastor Jim

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## Saturday of the Second Week of Lent, March 6th

### Woman in Labor

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*"For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant." -Isaiah 42:14*

I admit, I have never really thought about God as a woman in labor before reading Lauren Winner's book *Wearing God*. However, this image seems incredibly appropriate to me. I have experienced childbirth three times, and, although each experience was different, I vividly recall moments of pain, gasping and crying out. And yet, through all the discomfort, I recall a sense of knowing my body was created by God for this very purpose.

When I think of all the struggles in the world today-the struggles in our community and the challenges in my personal life because I resist following God's guidance for our lives, the image of God in childbirth makes a great deal of sense. How uncomfortable my actions must make God, and why wouldn't He cry out in distress, frustration or grief? I can imagine Him panting and gasping at the roadblocks I put in my relationship with Him.

And yet, just as I felt such joy when the childbirth was over and the babies were born, what joy He must feel when I turn to Him and allow myself to feel His overwhelming love.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for Your persistence in seeking a relationship with me. Your willingness to endure the pain and discomfort I cause is humbling. Help me work to feel Your abundant love in all I do.



Lynda Janezic,  
Messiah Member and MLPK Preschool Teacher

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## Third Sunday of Lent, March 7th

### Potter

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*"Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." -Isaiah 64:8*

Have you ever taken a pottery class or attended an event where you were supposed to fashion a plate, vase, or bowl? Watching the leader's demonstration makes it look easy. He turns the wheel with his foot, takes the lump of clay, and it begins to look like a recognizable shape in no time flat. The clay is completely under the teacher's control to be transformed into the desired form. Now, it is your turn to try. You start thinking, "I've got this," which lasts about thirty seconds, until you realize there is timing and a lot of skill involved. You may make a first attempt, and go back many times, knocking down your creation to start again, and, with many trials, you, hopefully, will go home with a piece that can be recognized to be what you, instead and others, see.

Our Bible verse likens us to the clay and God as the one who forms us. One thing gets in the way, and it is something that God himself gave us – free will. God has the ability to make us perfect, the first time, but chooses to let us try, fail and try again. Each time, hopefully, we become wiser, more patient, more compassionate, whatever "lesson" it is we have to learn to become more like Him. We learn and continue to be "shaped" until the day we go home to be with the potter.

We being the clay is like our faith journey. God keeps molding us in new ways over time. On my journey, I have been called to ask myself, "What would Jesus expect me to do?" The potter is not finished yet!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we pray that You will keep our hearts and minds open to You so that we can become more like You every day.



*Linda and Barry Polhemus*

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## Monday of the Third Week of Lent, March 8th

### Farmer

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*"Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed." -Matthew 13:3*

This scripture reminds me of growing up on a farm. In the spring, my dad would spend many hours in the fields plowing, preparing the soil, and planting the seeds. He had control over these things and carefully planned which seeds would be used in the different types of soil across our acreage. Farming is a risky business because the success of one's crops also depends a lot on the weather. Would the rains come at the right time? Would there be sunshine and light breezes when needed? Our family meals always started with a prayer, and we would pray that God would bless us with the right weather and successful crops.

Every time we talk to someone and share the good news about Jesus, we are sowing the seeds of the Gospel. Are we planting those seeds in good soil? Will the person respond and take hold and develop lasting roots? The condition of each person's heart will affect the outcome of the seed. Our part in growing God's kingdom is to sow. The rest, just like the weather, is up to God. We are merely dedicated farmers eager to see new growth. Our willingness to sow is what matters. It is our privilege and our calling.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me be confident in Your ability to use me and share the good news of Your grace. May my life be spent sowing seeds of Your great love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Marcia McWilliams, Member of Messiah

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## Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent, March 9th

### Advocate

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*"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever." -John 14:16*

In this verse, "Advocate" takes on a wholly different meaning from the legal or judgmental settings that first come to mind. Advocacy is to speak, act, and care for the sick, the helpless, the poor—those who cannot act for themselves. In this passage, Jesus is acting as an advocate for us, asking the Father to send someone who will be with us forever.

I read once that the Holy Spirit is often the most misunderstood and difficult to comprehend of the Triune God. I've found the opposite to be true. The Holy Spirit, for me, is my conscience, not only to admonish me for wrong-headed or damaging actions or words but also a Presence to call upon for guidance.

The Holy Spirit, close as my next breath, unseen as a breeze as it gently whispers through the tender grass of spring, is always with me. Therefore, it should be easy to call upon the Advocate. Yet, so often I approach the Spirit as a last resort after I've muddled through a situation or relationship, sometimes leaving it worse than I found it.

**Prayer:** God of my inner being, help me to seek You at first light and throughout each day—and to listen and accept Your guidance.



Julie Kendrick

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## Wednesday of the Third Week of Lent, March 10th

### Lamb

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*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"-John 1:29*

"Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." This image is difficult for me because I view a lamb as a soft, cuddly animal you might purchase as a baby gift. But, that is not what John the Baptist meant at all when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. Lambs in the Old Testament were symbols of innocence and purity and were often used as sacrifices to God. John the Baptist was making this comparison to let the world know that God was willing to sacrifice His son for the sins of the world. Jesus the Lamb of God, was both triumphant over sin, as well as a symbol of gentleness and goodness.

**Prayer:** Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world, grant us peace. O Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Amen.



Friend of Messiah

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## Thursday of the Third Week of Lent, March 11th

### Mother Hen

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*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under wings, and you were not willing." -Luke 13:34*

When I read through the list of the images of God, Mother Hen jumped out to me. I have been "mom-ing hard" for a while, starting with being the little mom around the house for my younger siblings. I have taken on nurturing roles like teaching and Pathway huddle group leader. These experiences seem-most appropriate now that I am currently pregnant with my first child!

The verse in Luke is in the context of Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. The conflict of wills between what God wants and what His people will do is leading to a confrontation where Jesus will be crucified. Jesus knows here in Luke that it has been God's desire to be a nurturing protector for His people for a long time. Jesus IS like a mother hen for everyone despite any unwillingness. You see, when a hen gathers her chicks, it's likely because there is a predator, and she will protect her chicks using her own body. Jesus was the perfect final sacrifice, giving up his life for our sins. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, we pray that we can feel Your wings sheltering us with Your love. Thank You for giving Your life for us for the forgiveness of sin. Amen.



Ashley Rabe

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## Friday of the Third Week of Lent, March 12th

### Gate

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*"Therefore Jesus said again, 'Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.'" -John 10:7*

When my husband and I purchased our home, we knew we needed a fence around the yard. This fence and its closed gates would be the first line of defense to keep our two dogs in our yard instead of wandering the neighborhood. This past summer, we locked those fence gates so that we had extra assurance that when our son was playing in the yard; he would be both contained **and** protected from anything unexpected that might enter our yard.

Gates keep us safely contained, and they keep others out. But what I've also realized is that each gate provides an "opportunity" for a fence. Without a gate, a fence has no permeability, no option for entry or exit. But with a gate, a fence can be transformed – either closed, to stop the flow of traffic, or opened to allow (and maybe even encourage) it.

Jesus told us in John 10:7 that he is, "... the gate for the sheep." We know that God keeps watch over us as a shepherd does his flock, but what if we also understood our opportunity to enter Eternity through God's gate by our own **choice** to follow God, as well?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for both the protection and the opportunity for Eternity that You offer us in the imagery of a gate, if only we choose to follow You. Help us to also use this image to think about the ways that we may serve as gates in our own lives: do we close and lock the gate to keep ourselves safely protected inside, or do we unlock and open the gate to invite others into fellowship and relationship with us? During this Lenten season, may we find both comfort and challenge in the image of God as Gate as we consider Your Invitation to us and experience You within both the gates and "gate opportunities" we encounter in our lives. Amen.



Jenny Berchtold

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## Saturday of the Third Week of Lent, March 13th

### Clothing

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*"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." -Galatians 3:27*

We may make judgment of people by what they wear. Do we think that people wearing designer clothes are any better than the homeless person wearing dirty and tattered clothing? Do we know at first glance what beliefs they have and the goodness in their hearts? Do we know what dedication they have to Christ?

Baptism is not just about washing for a new start. It involves taking on a mature faith. There are privileges and responsibilities that come with maturity. This mature faith is where we have chosen to clothe ourselves in Christ. We take on His values. Being clothed in Christ is a privilege we gratefully accept and enjoy as it can represent what is right, but with privilege comes responsibility. We have the responsibility to take on Christ's characteristics and live this truth.

When we put on new clothes, we might feel wonderful with the way they feel, maybe even feel pride because we earned the money to pay for them ourselves. We should always feel this happiness and pride being clothed in Christ. We are children of God through our faith.

**Prayer:** Father, clothe me in Your love, patience and strength so that I may share this peace and beauty with others. This armor of faith is our salvation. Amen.



Dona Gilbert, sister of Pastor Jim

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## Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14th

### Fortress

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*"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." -Psalm 18:2*

I love the imagery of God as our fortress, deliverer, a rock, refuge and a stronghold. All of those tell me of strength, confidence, security, protection, and ultimately trust.

Of course, God is the ultimate fortress, deliverer, rock, refuge, and stronghold. However, those are traits we look for in others too. We have trusted friends who give us advice. We seek mentors at our work places. "You're the first person I wanted to tell," may be a refrain you've used when you have received the answer to a prayer. That fortress/rock/refuge person in your life may have been the one you shared the news with. She may be a family member who has stuck by your side through all your hills and valleys and said you would make it. That fortress may have been a teacher, a coach, a scout leader, a family friend who made an impact and today you hear the echo of her words giving you the will to persevere on your journey.

Are you a fortress, deliverer, rock, refuge or a stronghold for someone?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to trust in Your safety to protect us from harm and deliver us to You.



Karen Kelly, friend of Pastor Jim.

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# Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent, March 15th

## Names of God

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*"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." -Isaiah 9:6*

God has been both a sustaining Spirit and challenging Enigma since I first knelt at my parents knee at maybe 4 years of age, praying "Now I lay me down to sleep....." That's a 68 year and counting journey.

Through illness and health, trials and travails, joys and sorrows-- in family, school, personal relationships, career, marriage and retirement, I've strived to find God's love. As Ignatius Loyola teaches, our relationship with God is both consolation—knowing and enjoying the comfort, strength and guidance from "His" presence and desolation, feeling the sorrow, loneliness and hopelessness from "his" perceived absence.

And this wise 8<sup>th</sup> century BC prophet, Isaiah, speaks to my image of God today! "Wonderful, Counselor" is exactly what I have had in my many significant life/work transitions. And continue to have. "Mighty" is a descriptor bringing and image of God which is confident, strong, powerful, comforting--able to help and support me in any circumstance. "Everlasting" --of course! Never having begun and never ending.

"Father" (and Mother)—I cannot imagine having more loving parents and I believe God has that love for every--body. Although we often don't see it or understand its mystery.

And finally, "Prince of Peace"—the Presence who can bring to the universe, the world, the soul, my soul, the perfect peace I long for, and believe I will possess someday--forever. This is Grace, without a doubt. For which I am profoundly grateful.

**Prayer:** Dear God of the universe and of my body and soul too. You know everything--so You know how I long for intimacy with You. Help me to trust that You desire that for me and with me as well, and with that intimacy, I will know the guidance, strength and peace I need to love and serve You better. Each and every day. Amen.



Tom Bachhuber

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## Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent, March 16th

### Word

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*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." -John 1:1*

In John's Gospel, the Word is a reference to Jesus Christ as an active person in communication with God the Father. John was called to bear witness of the light and then goes on to describe Jesus as "the light of men."

In verse 14, John again uses the Word in place of Jesus' name to describe Jesus' character in a way that has always stuck with me: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus was full of grace AND truth. As Christians, we seem to lean to one side or the other regarding truth. We either like pointing out the "truth" to others with complete disregard for what someone may be going through, or we avoid the truth for fear of upsetting someone or in an attempt to always be the "nice guy." Pastor JD Greear summed this up well, saying: "Truth without grace is fundamentalism. But grace without truth is vapid sentimentality. Failing in either puts us out of step with Jesus."

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, give us strength to heed the Word; to embrace grace, truth, and light in our hearts and in all we say and do. Amen.



Greg Sellers

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## Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent, March 17th

### Breath

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*"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." -Psalm 33:6*

I remember it fondly and so very intimately. Mrs. Jakicic was my third grade teacher. She was kind, gentle, fair and loving. She was like the grandmother I never got to know. She often would give us a work to do in class and then would walk up and down the rows of desks looking over and checking our work. I would be so focused on my work that I would lose track of where she was. But then, all of a sudden, I would feel her breath down the back of my neck as she leaned over me and looked at my work. It gave me goosebumps. It was a sacred moment. Feeling her breath was like feeling the presence of God.

Breath. Breathing is a sacred exercise of our human experience. At the very dawn of creation God's Spirit breathed on the waters, on the vegetation, animals, light, darkness, and on us, His beloved children. The Book of Genesis tells us, "God shaped us from the soil of the ground and blew the breath of life into our nostrils, and we became living beings." (2:7).

On average, we take 20,000 breaths a day. Breathing is a powerful reminder that God is always with us. At some point, you and I will take our last breath in this world. On Good Friday, we recall how Jesus breathed heavily carrying the cross and finally, "gave a loud cry and breathed his last" (Mark 15:37). Breathing is human and divine and is a gift we can never have back.

**Prayer:** O God who breathes life, we can see, hear and even taste our breath. May our breath be the divine touch those in our lives need to feel. In our breaths today, help us to remember Your presence always with us. And we pray, taking a deep breath together: Amen!



Pastor Jim is Messiah's Senior Pastor. He is married to Amy and is Daddy to Anna, Peter and Liam.

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## Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent, March 18th

### Silence

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*"The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah.'"* -1 Kings 19: 11-13

Silence is golden! Silence is deafening! Well, what is it? Pouring out your soul and keeping all distractions out of your mind during prayer time is when silence is golden. God is listening. Even when you feel defeated or lost, God is there. He lifts you up and carries you on his back. But, silence is deafening when we have no idea about the will of God. God works in His own time. Do not be discouraged and do not feel abandoned. God is using that silent time so that you can listen and trust in Him.

**Prayer:** Dearest God, please use my silence so that I can hear what Your will is for me. Amen.



Vinnie Jordan  
Member of Messiah for 28 years.

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## Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent, March 19th

### Smeller

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*"May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of the hands be like the evening sacrifice." -Psalm 141:2*

A few years ago, my daughter, Sarah, was putting our grandkids to bed. Molly was six, and Timmy was three at the time. After a few stories and songs, Sarah said, "It's time to pray. Who should we pray for?" Molly immediately blurted out that she wanted to pray for Grandma Lee and Grandpa Tim. This prompted Timmy to shout out in a whiny and sing-song voice, "But, I wanted to pray for them." How blessed am I that someone would "fight" over me in prayer! How blessed am I that my daughter is teaching my grandchildren how to pray.

I chose this scripture passage because the word "prayer" jumped out at me. But the image it portrays doesn't really resonate with me. Imagine a spectacular sunset on a warm summer evening; or imagine a cozy, crackling fire on a cold winter night. Then, imagine enjoying the sunset or the fire with Jesus at your side. Jesus tenderly turns to you and says, My child, my beloved, how have you been?" And then, as you look into the face of mercy and compassion, you share your fears, your anxieties, your sorrows, and your brokenness with Jesus.

I know that God created every grain of sand in the ocean and the seas. And I know that I am but one of those many grains of sand too numerous to count. But, sitting with God before that beautiful sunset or cozy fire, I am the only one He cares about at the time. It is my time to bask in His joy, light, and love! It is my prayer time!

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for sharing prayer time with me. Whether I sit in silence or cry out in desperation, You know my heart. Please hear the prayers of all those that I hold dear. Help me to live Your word. AMEN!



Lee Springer, friend of Pastor Jim

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## Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent, March 20th

### *Ancient of Days*

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*"As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze." -Daniel 7:9*

God gave Daniel dreams with visions of future events that would be filled with turmoil, strife, and warfare. But also, in his visions and dreams, Daniel saw God in all His glory, sitting on his throne, as the "Ancient of Days." God presented these powerful visions and dreams to Daniel so that he could understand and teach his people what they needed to know to save themselves and to love God.

"The Ancient of Days" refers to God the Father and emphasizes God's eternality. It is important that God is eternal because no other being is eternal. God has always been who He is, and He will never change for all time. We can trust that He has always been and He always will be. The image of God as "The Ancient of Days" presents to me the concept of God being an elderly wise "father" figure who existed prior to the existence of days, prior to the days of creation.

This name for God, "Ancient of Days," is found only three times in the Bible-in Daniel 7:9, 7:13, and 7:22, but is very memorable to most Christians. I bet you can remember this hymn and probably sing the tune:

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.*

We, too, should think about this picture of God as He sits triumphant on the throne. He is to be worshiped and praised. He **is** the "Ancient of Days." Remembering God as the Ancient of Days can give us hope that God has always been and will always be.

**Prayer:** Father, help me and guide me to worship and praise You more fully each day. Thank You for Your awesome power that I can trust my life in Your hands. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Vicki English, Member, Stephen Ministry Leader & Director of Joyful Outreach Ministry.

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# Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 21st

## Love

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*"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." -1 John 4:7-8*

I was twenty-three years old, and my life was on a path totally different than what I had envisioned. I was supposed to be planning a wedding, but instead, I was sitting alone waiting for my fiancé to respond to a letter I had sent explaining how upset I was with the direction of our relationship. When he received the letter, his mother said, "Aren't you going to call her?"

His response was, "No need. She said everything there was to say. We are done."

So, I sat on my couch in my apartment feeling more alone, depressed, and lost than I have ever felt. Where do I go from here? How do I move on? I never thought to turn to God with these questions, never thought to pray. I just sat there helpless and frozen.

It was a cloudy winter day, truly reflective of my spirit, when a bright light filled my entire living room. It floated around me and wrapped me in an intense peace and warmth. I was filled with hope, a sense of determination, and confidence that everything would be all right.

To this day I believe that an angel was sent to me because God loves me unconditionally. At the time, I was not attending a church; God was not part of my daily life. Yet, he loves me so much that he sent one of his angels to lift me up, give me the strength to go on and live my life. Did I rush out the next day and join a church or start to pray? No, but within the next couple years things did happen to bring me back to God. It took ten years for my life to turn around, but it did. As I read this verse about God's love, I know deep within my soul just how much He loves each and every one of us.

**Prayer:** Dearest Lord, thank You for loving us so much that even when we are lost and feel like giving up You carry us, giving us Your strength to move forward. Amen.



Cyndi Jordan, Messiah Member.

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## Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent, March 22nd

### Creator

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*"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." -Psalm 33:6*

Psalm 33:6 reminds us that God made the heavens, earth, and all things that are on the earth. God as the Creator is one of the first images I remember clinging to as a child. As a parent, the awe and wonder of my children as they try to comprehend the magnitude of understanding creation is one I will never forget. When you are stopped in your tracks and reminded how beautifully made and unique nature can be, that is our Creator smiling down on you. Maybe that realization comes to you as a sunset on your favorite lake or as the simplicity of leaves in the fall. May the wonder of creation not be lost on us in those moments when our breath is taken away. After all, it was the breath of our Creator which made the heavens and earth. Through His word, all was made, and we are sustained.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for the creations all around us and the moments that take our breath away. May we lean on Your word and the magnitude of Your creations when our burdens get heavy. Amen.



Sarah Theriault

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# Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent, March 23rd

## Redeemer

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*"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."  
-Ephesians 1:7*

We are made in the image and likeness of God. How can humankind, God's creation, be in the image of God when we sin and fall so far from that image?

In His willingness to show the extent of His love for us, God became us.

When Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb, **our redemption** was won for us. Jesus, the Son of God, became like us. He united humankind to the divinity of God. When Jesus was baptized, "he, who had no sin," reflected the cleansing of all humanity by His willingness to continue to claim the purpose for which He was born, **our redemption!**

Accepting Jesus Christ as Our Lord and Redeemer is the opportunity for us to know the extent of **our redemption**, which was culminated in Jesus' willingness to journey to the cross where He shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

We are daughters and sons of God, sisters and brothers of Christ. May Jesus, Our Redeemer, grant us the fullness of His joy and peace, renew the hearts of those who have lost hope, and one day gather all of us together in His Kingdom.

This is the promise of **our redemption!** We need only accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior to know fully what He has promised.

**Prayer:** Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.



Tim Springer, friend of Pastor Jim

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## Wednesday of the Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 24th

### *Sanctifier*

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*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"*  
*-John 1:29*

When I first looked at this passage, I thought what I have often thought: "If I had lived at the time of Jesus, would I have believed in Him?" I'm not so sure.

Here was a man, the local carpenter's son, who grew up in my town, and I'm supposed to believe He is God? I think I would have been quite the skeptic.

Many times in my adult life, I have thought how grateful I should be to have been given the gift of faith. On my own, I don't think I would have believed. But, the Sanctifier, gave me a wonderful gift - the gift of faith. So I can say, "I believe in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

**Prayer:** Lamb of God, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. Thank You so much Lord for coming into my heart and showing me "the Lamb."



*Darlene Dobbins, Parishioner, St. Mary Church,  
Buffalo Grove, Illinois*

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# Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent, March 25th

## Bread

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*"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" -John 6:35*

Bread is a vital part of the act of taking communion, something I treasure and look forward to each week. Jesus tells us that the bread symbolizes His body. Through the bread, Jesus is providing nourishment for us spiritually. But, I see bread as so much more.

I bake bread for my family to lovingly provide for them. I share and exchange meals with my neighbors several times a week. I take great care in what I prepare so that it will bring them comfort and joy, as well as a break from having to cook. I also enjoy making meals for Messiah members who are recovering from surgery or taking care of a loved one.

Jesus showed me through the bread of communion how much He cares for me. I show my love and concern for others through the bread and meals I prepare for them.

**Prayer:** Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.



Elsa Brinkman: wife of Dan Brinkman, mother of Caity and Madie, member of Messiah 12 years,  
Church Office / Business Manager.

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## Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent, March 26th

### Rock

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*"They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer." -Psalm 78:35*

God is our Rock. Rocks are unwavering and strong. Rocks can be used to protect and can provide shelter. In Exodus 17, God uses a rock to provide the Israelites with water and give them hope in the wilderness. Through the humble image of a rock, God provides, God redeems, God protects. God is our Rock.

When you experience large tears in the fabric of your life, it can be easy to get caught up in the tornado of instability these tears leave behind. Even when you go through events as a group, like a pandemic or enduring the wounds and grief of losing leaders you've trusted for years, it can feel as though you're all alone. It can be overwhelming. Instability leads to uncertainty and creates anxiety that can push you to your limits. When you feel the ground below your feet tremble, when your life feels like it's crashing down, when you don't know what tomorrow brings, remember: God is our Rock.

God is stable. God creates certainty in uncertain times. He is always protecting you. He is always providing for you. He is always redeeming you. You can always seek shelter in His arms. His love for you does not yield to uncertainty. He is The Rock. He does not budge in the storms your life may bring. God is your Rock. Always.

**Prayer:** Thank You, O Lord, for always providing, protecting, redeeming, and loving us with Your unwavering rock-like love. Help us to lean on Your stability and strength especially when we feel like we are losing ours. Comfort us, O Lord, when we feel alone and remind us that You are our Rock always.



Jessica Wallwin is Messiah's youth director. She is married to James, mother to Joe, and expecting another baby boy this summer.

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# Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent, March 27th

## Morning Star

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*"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." -Revelation 22:16*

Jesus proclaims, "I am the bright morning star." The wise men followed the star to find Jesus. Astronomers recently speculated that the bright morning star that led the wise men to Jesus was the close alignment of three planets, including Venus.

Who among us has not gazed at the sky on a clear night, in awe of the beauty of the night sky and also seen a brighter star among the many sparkling stars! A spectacular view in the universe that humbles us here on earth. We are dismayed when clouds come in and hide the awesome heavenly view.

Do clouds in our daily lives obscure our path as we seek to find Jesus? We find joy when there is a break in those clouds that allow us to have a view of the path to follow Him. We can preserve that joy and build upon it when we follow His way. Jesus says, "I am the alpha and the omega," the beginning and the end. We must follow His star from the beginning to the end, for He has promised much when we do.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help me to keep clouds from obscuring my view of the path to follow Jesus and obey His teachings. Amen.



Carolyn Morrow, Charter Member of Messiah

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## Palm Sunday, March 28th

### Father

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*"After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.'"*  
-John 17:1-2

Jesus is addressing his Father, not as a young child would address his daddy, but as an adult child, who has not only grown up, but has completely embraced his current place in "the family business," to make disciples, to bring salvation to all who his Father has given him. Jesus has grown up in the love and care of his Father.

The Father will glorify the Son; the Son will glorify the Father.

The love and "knowing," the shared heart, mind and goals between Father and Son is so deep that the Son knows when the time has come and is ready to do his part for their common will to be accomplished, the will to bring salvation.

**Prayer:** Father, please help me to grow up in Your love and care, to share Your heart and mind and goals, to be ready and willing, participating in "the family business." Amen.



Carol Eich

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# Monday of Holy Week, March 29th

## Love

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*"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves God has been born of God. Whoever does not love does not love God, because God is love."*

-1 John 4:7-8

When I first read this scripture verse I was struck by how timely it is. There is so much division, hate, and fear in this world. We all need to be reminded that we are called to love one another. Jesus is the perfect model on how to love, how to serve, and how to forgive others. We must try and follow his example. It will not be easy but the positive impact that it will make on this world will be tremendous.

So, let us love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul so that we can agree to disagree, help our neighbor, respect differences, and live as a light in this world. If each person performed one act of kindness, whispered a prayer for unity, or thought before speaking each day love would resonate throughout our families, our Church community, our neighborhoods, our states, our country, and our world.

*Love has the power to change things!*

**Prayer:** Lord, we love You. Help us to love as You did. Give us the strength to follow Your example and love those who are different from us, respect those who disagree with us, and love those who are difficult to love. Amen.



Kathy Lucas, Grandma to Anna, Peter and Liam

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## Tuesday of Holy Week, March 30th

### Healer

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*"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."  
-Psalm 147:3*

On Christmas day, two days before his 90th birthday, my 89-year-old father was brought to the emergency room and had tested positive for COVID-19. I could not believe how quickly all the negative thoughts started flooding into my head. Will he need to be hospitalized, need supplemental oxygen, make it to his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday? Though I was grateful he was not hospitalized, my heart was broken, helplessness, anxiety and fear set in. I prayed that God would spare him from anything terrible, but I had to fully trust Him. I made peace with God saying that it was *His* will, not mine for my father's outcome. It was at that moment when God's peace overcame my anxiety and fear. My father is feeling much better and getting back to his normal routine.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for fulfilling Your promise of healing the broken hearted and giving me the strength to bring You joy by fully trusting in You. May this testimony remind others the joy of Your great blessings. Amen



Judy Vega, friend of Pastor Jim's sister, Dona

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## Wednesday of Holy Week, March 31st

### Heart

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“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you and heart of flesh.”  
–Ezekiel 36:25-26

If a part your body fails you like my heart failed me, I pray that you are fortunate enough to receive a loving, selfless, blessing from an unknown organ donor and talented doctors and nurses. That transplanted organ that will extend your life will become a defining moment in your life. When I got the call to come in for my new organ, I was ecstatic, but my high was curtailed on the ride to the hospital when I realized that someone had died so that I could live.

Modern medicine is extending life with organ transplants. Many enlightened charitable people of faith are donating their organs at the end of their lives realizing that it is the soul that will abide for eternity with their Lord. Those earthly organs will only turn to dust if not recycled to another person.

My Christian upbringing, the Scout Oath and Law, and Masonic virtues all have shaped the man I have become. But since October 13th, 2018, 855 days ago, the date of my Gift of Life, I also constantly ask myself if I am I doing everything I can to honor my donor, and was I worthy of that gift. God knows I'm trying with everything I have.

**Prayer:** O God, who gives us hearts, and continually breathes new life into us with Your Spirit, help us to appreciate the gift of life and Your tender mercy. Amen.



Ed Ferris

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## Maundy Thursday, April 1st

### Servant

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*"So Jesus got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron" -John 13:4-5*

*Give me your feet.*

It's Holy Thursday. I am putting myself in the scene, someone who needs Jesus with everything in me. In my mind I am there with the disciples. I am present with my Jesus. You are there, too. *Can you see it?* The upper room in the drafty edifice, us stumbling in exhausted. We are starving. It's just before the Passover Feast. So much has happened. So much will happen. We gather together for a simple supper. Even Jesus has a kind of weight-of-the-world weariness about him. He's talked a lot about going away lately, but he is fully present now, and his love has arms that hold us close. Still, a sadness lingers in his eyes.

*"Give me your feet,"* he says. We are stunned silent, each of us carefully removing our sandals, unsure of what to say—what to do—faced with such shocking humility. Foot washing is the worst of tasks, despised by a servant's gesture. Yet Jesus kneels before us, one by one, and washes our feet. I watch Him move from person to person. Dear God, Jesus is on His knees, pouring water on our rough soles. The Son of God, the Son of Man, washes us as if the pitcher contains, then releases, his own tears. The water slips between our toes, and the filth of the world falls to the ground, ground now hallowed by His presence.

"I can't let you wash my feet," I say. He speaks kindly to me. "If I don't wash you, you can't be a part of what I'm doing." So I let him wash me, my Jesus, dressed as a slave, as I sit there, amazed. If you understand what I have done for you, act like it and live a blessed life. I pray you give him your feet too. Don't be ashamed, embarrassed or afraid. When he is done with you, you are washed white as snow.

**Prayer:** We are weary world travelers O God. We come dirty desperate and parched for Your life giving waters. We give You our feet, our hands, our hearts and lives so that we can be Your arms, head, feet and heart in this world. Amen.



*Lover of Jesus and Friend of Messiah*

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# Good Friday, April 2nd

## Artist

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*"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10) and "Jesus said, 'It is finished.'"*  
-John 19:30

On this day we commemorate God's saving act for us in Jesus' death on the cross, allow this poem to touch your heart.

### Masterpiece

I saw it first, this bloody work of heart,  
conceived in my mind's eye *in the beginning*,  
or what you call the beginning. Time  
was the canvas I prepared to paint on.  
I drew its outline in the life of Abraham,  
my palette history, its colors mixed  
in Israel's rise and fall. I worked from life:  
against a landscape of an Eden spoiled  
my people with their untamed rebel hearts  
stared out through masks of beauty scarred with sin.  
Painstaking detail. Light and darkness. Then  
the hardest thing I ever did: love  
was daubed with every brush-stroke of the Spirit  
on the unforgiving texture of the soul.  
Finally to shape the central figure  
I needed human hands. I labored with Mary  
to bring the enterprise to birth. Three more decades  
of preparation were meticulous—  
it is not irony that I was framed  
and hung up here to die: it is the point.  
I am the artist and the portrait too,  
painting out at last in the blood of God  
a perfect self-expression: my still life.  
This is my masterpiece and *it is finished*.



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## Holy Saturday, April 3rd

### Wind

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*"Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." -Genesis 1:2*

When I decided to pick "wind," I had just talked to my daughter, Diana, who had very recently moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming. One thing I did not know was that it is always very windy there. She "Face-Timed" me with the dogs, and the dogs ears were standing straight up with 70 mph winds! It is also very difficult to walk in strong winds! When Diana calls, she always gives me a wind report and, when I look on my weather app, I always check the wind speed.

Looking at Genesis 1:2, God IS present but is very still. Thinking about Diana's new home, it is the exact opposite, very windy! I then thought about God's perspective of us talking to Him with our prayers. God listens and sometimes hears nothing from us, but when problems arise, God gets very busy handling all our prayers!

When my life is going smoothly and routine, many times I forget to pray. I take this for granted and just go on my merry way. But when I have a big problem that is when my prayers go up to God for HELP! I am sure God had a torrential wave of prayers on 9/11 or on this past January 6 in Washington, D.C., or when someone has a cancer or Covid diagnosis. Like the great wind of a hurricane, the wind of prayers to God flow up to the Heavens.

Do I only talk to my friends or family when there is a big problem in my life, or do they want to hear from me just to say "Hi, I was just thinking of you?"

And, of course, that is what we would want too!"

God wants to hear from us when our wind is hardly noticeable and when our wind is out of control. God is in control...we just have to remember what his phone number is. "Hello God, it's ME..."

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for always being ready to answer my call, even when You have not heard from me for a while. Amen.



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## Easter Sunday, April 4th

A reflection written by Sam Hartmann, a Messiah member and junior at Lake Zurich high school.

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*"Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!'" -Mark 16: 2-6*

We are gathered today because it is Easter. What is Easter? Since we were little kids we have been told that it is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. To celebrate when Jesus rose from the dead. God gave his only Son so that he could die so that our sins could be forgiven. God trusted us with his one and only Son. We need to learn how to put our trust in him, just as he did to us.

Faith takes time. As we have also heard from the story of Easter, even the disciples did not all have faith when told that Jesus had risen. Many needed to see to believe. Even for some, they did not even believe at first sight either. We cannot physically see God, but we know that he is there. We must have faith that he is there. But sometimes when we feel abandoned or hurt or in the dark, it can be easy to question faith. Instead, I encourage you to take that time to turn to God. Build your connection with him. And you can do the same when you are joyous or uplifted or at any time you would like.

How can you build and strengthen your connection to God? There are many ways to do so, but one of the biggest is prayer. Speak to God through prayer. And there is no right or wrong way to pray. You can simply just talk as if you were speaking to a friend, and he will listen. You can pray alone, or you can pray with others. For yourself or for others. A prayer holds so much power, beyond what you may even be able to see or feel. *(continues on the next page)*

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## Easter Sunday, April 4th

*A reflection written by Sam Hartmann, a Messiah member and junior at Lake Zurich high school.*

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A couple years ago, in 2018, I went to the ELCA youth gathering. In one part of the trip we met with people from different churches from all around the Chicagoland area. One thing we were asked to do during that time was to sit in a small group of people from the different churches and each give a short prayer out loud to each other. I was nervous. I didn't know any of them. What if my prayer is not good enough? When it came to be my turn I closed my eyes, took a deep breath and said "I pray for all those who are struggling with something internally, but are struggling to find the strength to seek help. May they confide in you and may you watch over them and hold their hand to guide them through their struggles." I will never forget looking up after my prayer and seeing one of the women in my group gazing back at me with tears in her eyes. She told me that I had absolutely no idea how much she needed that prayer and after her, many other members of my group chimed in, sharing their personal connections to my prayer. I had no idea one prayer could mean so much. That day, I learned that there is no such thing as a prayer that is "not good enough."

**Prayer is so powerful.**

I encourage you all to talk to God, let him into your life. And then I ask you to have faith. Have faith that he is there and have faith that he has listened. Turn to him for comfort. Ask him for forgiveness. Even when you have sinned, God's love for you remains unconditional. Show him your faith; open your arms to his Grace. You are special. You are important. You are loved. And you are never alone. Welcome Him with your prayer. Today, tomorrow, and always. Amen.



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## Monday in the Octave of Easter, April 5th

### Vine

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*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." -John 15:1*

At my house, there is a vine system that runs all around the outer part of my yard. Every year, my mother and I find ourselves pulling and tugging and digging at the vines, but they always seem to come back in multitudes and longer than ever before. They go unseen, living an underlying life beneath the brush and dark places under the trees.

Vines are unending, and the Lord bringing down the rain and sun for them to grow initiates the strength for them to keep growing. When we get that push from the Lord to keep moving and advancing in everyday life, we receive the strength to grow just like the vines outside of my house. He keeps us from never faltering and for coming back every year stronger than before. We are the vines, and the Lord gives us the energy to keep going forward.

**Prayer:** Lord, we thank You every day for the energy You give to us and the spirit You pour into us that lets us grow and continue moving.



Tessa Kleiner

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## Tuesday in the Octave of Easter, April 6th

### Names of God

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*"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." -Isaiah 9:6*

In this verse, we are given many descriptive titles, each being a description of the attributes of Jesus Christ. A foretelling of the Son of God, a baby, sent for us, given to the world. We further ponder the years that this child grew up and walked among us speaking and teaching with the knowledge of God. To be the God of all, for always and the source of hope and peace for all. To be all things good to all people who wait, watch, see, and know Jesus, is to believe.

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank You for sending Your Son, our Savior, our hope, our everything, our compassionate listener who knows our needs, concerns and hurts and wants us to come to You as Your children for comfort and forgiveness. Although, I cannot fully comprehend Your wisdom and power, I stand in awe of Your plan for my life, the lives of all people and everlasting life with You. Thank You for the gift of hope through the birth of Your Son and the gift of comfort through Your Son, the Prince of Peace.



Friend of Messiah

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# Now What?

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Our hope is that this devotional has been a tool that God has used to move you deeply and gently. We pray that you have grown closer in your relationship with Jesus on this Lenten and now Easter journey. The Easter promise reminds us that no matter the suffering or challenges we face here on Earth, that there will be a beautiful and wonderful time ahead when we are wrapped in His glory!

Perhaps you are wondering what do I do now? This devotional book might be ending, but that doesn't mean your prayer or focus time must end. There are so many great resources that sometimes it can be overwhelming making us unsure of where to begin. Here are a few resources to help you continue spending time in God's word. Start with one resource below and see how the Holy Spirit will continue to move in your life.

## **Read a Daily Devotional, a few of our favorites are listed below:**

- Jesus Calling Devotionals by Sarah Young
- Daily Power 365 Days of Fuel for Your Soul by Craig Groeschel
- The One Year Love Language Devotional (for couples) by Gary Chapman
- Our Daily Bread Devotional: <https://odb.org/>
- Lutheran Hour Ministries: <https://www.lhm.org/default.asp>

## **Open your Bible. Read a little each day.**

- Start by reading the Gospels, one chapter a day.
- Need a Bible? Try the **NIV Life Application Study Bible**.
- **The Bible App** by Life.Church. You can read or listen to the Bible, follow specific reading plans and more.

## **Family Bible Resources**

- Open the Bible at meal times and read a chapter or story together.
- The Jesus Story Book Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones is a must have for families.
- SheReadsTruth Kids also has great resources for families. <https://www.shereadstruth.com/collections/kids-read-truth>

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# Journal Page

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# Journal Page

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*A special note of appreciation to all of this year's writers, editors and contributors. There were many behind the scenes helping to make this booklet a reality. Our growth as individuals and as a church family during this Lenten Season would not have been possible without your gift of time spent praying and reflecting on these different images and scripture verses. Thank you for sharing your gifts, insights and wisdom with us all. We hope that in God's own wondrous way these reflections have helped open your mind and heart to all the different ways we can experience God in our lives and faith journey!*