

Faith and Life REFLECTIONS

January 2007

“Lent with a Baptismal Theme?”

Faith and Life Reflections is a monthly resource for lay and rostered leaders on headlines, current books, movies, social and ethical issues such as those involving natural disasters and developments in the church. Comments may be returned to the writer or to the editor, Mark A. Staples (Mstaples@Ltsp.edu, director of Faith and Life Programs at LTSP).

This article is written by Seminary Musician Mark Mummert (Mmummert@Ltsp.edu) with the assistance of George Keck (Gkeck@Ltsp.edu). Mark has served as Seminary Musician for 17 years and played a key role in development of the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* resource for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. George Keck works with Mark Staples, director of the Faith and Life Programs life-long learning initiative at the seminary.

Focus of Lent with a Baptismal Theme?:

Two resources, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* and *Sundays in Seasons*, have restored a baptismal theme to the season of Lent. Along with this article, both of these resources may be used as references for your individual or group reflection. The following material is adapted from *Sundays and Seasons 2007*, copyright 2006 Augsburg Fortress. Used with permission.

Baptisms as the Theme of Lent

The theme of Lent has changed significantly during the past half-century. But from its earliest beginnings, Lent has had a theme of baptism. This central baptismal focus of Lent has much to offer the church today.

Some may recall a time when Lent was primarily a season of penitence and sorrow. Others may equate Lent as a time to refrain from certain activities – “I’m giving up fatty foods for Lent.” The disciplines of Lent prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – all may continue for Christians, but in an evangelical context, such exercises ought not to be seen as somehow earning us merit before God. Rather, Lent constantly invites the believer to consider what baptismal living (and dying) means and how being baptized radically changes everything. Lent, then, is not a season of applied sorrow or forced

sadness, but a time of growth, enabled both by individual and communal discernment for all Christians as they continually uncover the mysteries of baptismal living.

Some points for individual or group reflection:

- What were the themes of Lent when you think back 20 years?
- Why do many young adults associate “gloom” with Lent?
- On what do the Lenten practices in your congregation focus?
- How is the attention for the assembly drawn to the baptismal font during Lent?
- The new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* book has a special section (pp.247-270) on “Lent and the Three Days” with worship patterns for Ash Wednesday, Sunday of the Passion, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Vigil of Easter.



The Lessons in Lent

Most of us tend to read/hear the lessons for Lent in a literal or chronological “newspaper-style” report of what happened in Jesus’ last days. Unfortunately, at times, the lessons are heard merely as “dead facts from the past” rather than “living stories” for the present.

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The Reformer, Martin Luther, spoke of Lent as a time when we need to crawl back to our baptism! Lent is an invitation to begin a journey to “new life.” Thus, the lectionary does not move chronologically in Lent. Nor is Lent merely “walking with Jesus to Jerusalem.” Rather the lectionary invites us to encounter Lent, and our life today, in a more baptismal manner.

Some points for individual or group reflection:

- How does our literal reading of the Bible influence our hearing of the lessons during Lent?
- How can we help our people hear the Lenten lessons as an invitation to “new life?”
- Could some lessons be read from the baptismal font?
- *ELW* includes Luther’s Small Catechism (The Sacrament of Baptism pp.1164-1165). How might the assembly use that?



Singing the Song in Lent

Hymns that accompany the distribution of communion, the collection of gifts, the sending of the people, and the Hymn of the Day ought to be chosen with the baptismal theme in mind. Consider hymns that are alive with the images of baptism, adoption into the family of God, and confession of sin rooted in the promise of God that comes only by the cross of Christ.

In general, musicians should feel free to look not only at the Lenten section of hymnals, but also the baptism section, as well as general hymns of community and forgiveness in Christ.

Some points for individual or group reflection:

- *ELW* has 28 hymns/songs with a baptismal theme. (p.1178 and p.1183)
- In what ways might music provide more baptismal identity for the assembly?

References:

Sundays and Seasons 2007, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN. 2006

Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN. 2006

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