



LIFE IN CHRIST

Receiving God's Gifts — Sharing God's Gifts

The Newsletter of Christ Lutheran Church, Jackson, MS

+ Easter Season 2021 +

About the Cover:

The Vale of Tears

Gustave Dore

1883

Painted by Gustave Dore, a French illustrator who found his start in the making of comics, but most well known for his woodcut illustrations of various religious books, most notably Paradise Lost and Dante's Inferno, *The Vale of Tears*, survives as one of Dore's few famous paintings. A massive work, originally fourteen feet by twenty, it depicts the entrance of Christ into Sheol, known as the 'harrowing of hell', which is confessed in the Apostle's Creed with the words '*he descended into hell.*' In his work, Dore shows Christ bearing the cross, the weapon by which he had won the war against Satan, and has our Lord coming over the crest of a hill to preach the Gospel of his victory over sin and death. The scene is filled with a multitude of figures, some poor peasants dressed in simple tunics, some rich rulers, showing that the good news of Christ was for all. The figures hail from different regions (some are clearly European, some Middle Eastern), but more interestingly, different time periods, some ancient, some medieval, and at least one which, some scholars believe, to be modern, or at least modern during the lifetime of Dore. This expresses the enduring power of Christ's Gospel unto all eternity, to all nations, and for every individual person.

It was the last work Dore ever composed, and so expressed his assurance that even he would be saved from 'The Vale of Tears' by his Lord.■

Life in Christ

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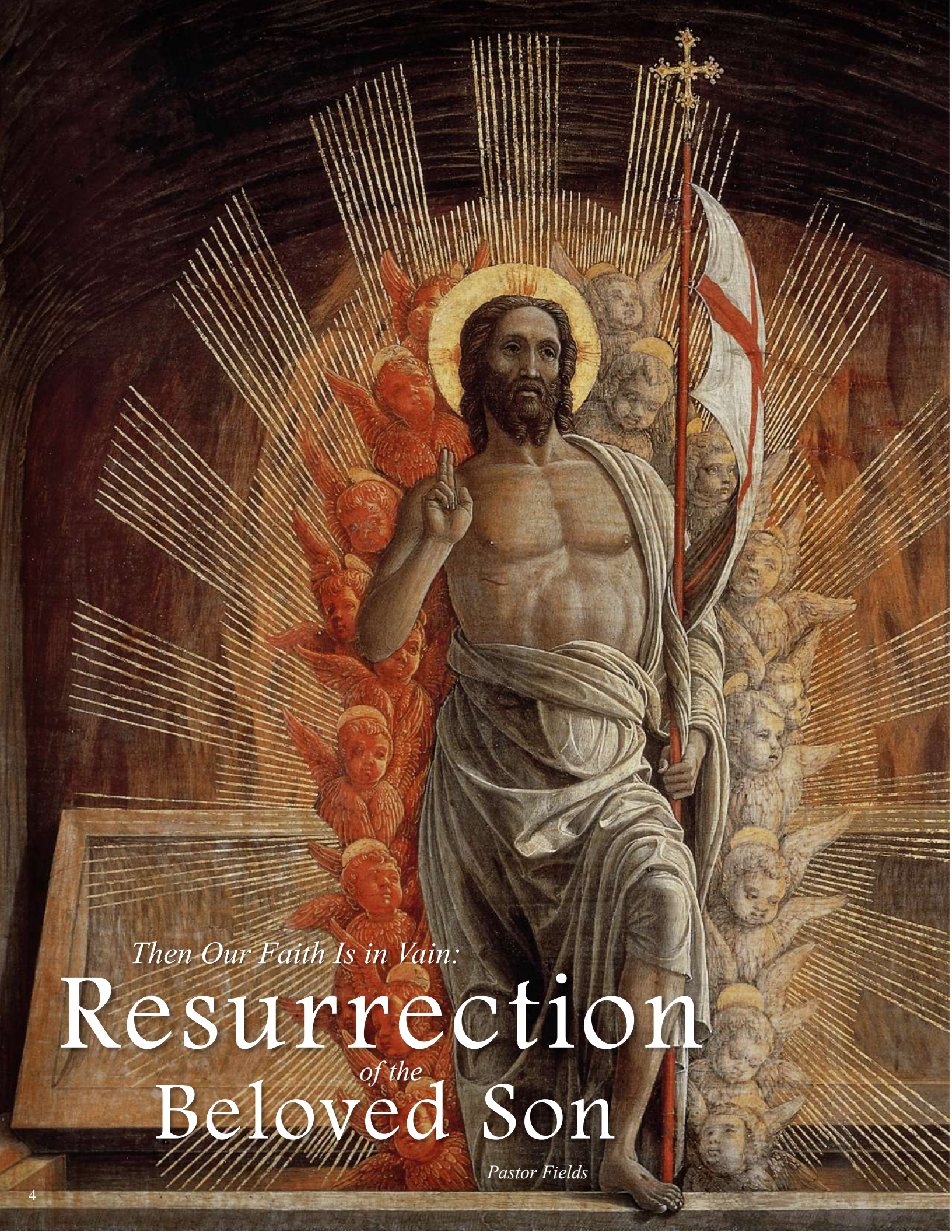
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Then Our Faith Is in Vain:

Resurrection *of the* Beloved Son

Pastor Fields



It is written, *'if Christ is not risen, then your faith is in vain.'* This is a strange thing for an Apostle to write, for he does what no other religion does: he offers the criterion by which his own religion could be rendered disproven.

Such was the faith of the Apostle in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he himself told both friends and enemies how that same faith might be invalidated. But he does not merely offer a criterion for some sort of empirical verification of his claims. Rather, his main purpose is to proclaim the centrality of Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead; and not only its centrality, but its place as the doctrine upon which all the other doctrines of Christianity rely. Without the Lord's resurrection, there is no Christianity.

From the earliest days of the Church, with such heresies as Docetism and Gnosticism, up to the modern era, with theological liberalism and rationalism, there have always been attempts to formulate a kind of Christianity that did not need a bodily resurrection: in ancient times, because the idea of a corporeal rising from the dead did not conform to the norms of Platonic philosophy; in modern times, because the same idea does not conform to the strict norms of scientific empiricism.

Those who wish to privilege the preconceptions of contemporary secular philosophies over the revealed and witnessed Word of God have often tried to 'salvage' Christianity by reducing it to a sort of moral wisdom or philosophy of life. They focus on Christ's teachings, His admonitions to live a good life, free of judgment, and they emphasize the love He showed to others while living.

Indeed, Christ taught the great truth of God, eternal and perfect; and indeed He embodied that truth in His own life of infinite charity and integrity.

Yet if that is all that the Lord did, teach good teachings, and do good deeds, He would merely have shown a better way to live in this fallen life. He would not have revealed a new and infinitely better life. A life above this life. An entrance into the eternal divine life, not merely a life commanded by the divine eternal.

By His resurrection, the Lord Jesus breaks out of the mortal pattern of life, the only life we know, and abolishes it for all who believe in Him. In its place, He reveals the Triune life of the Godhead, and gives to His disciples, all who believe, participation in that life, both now, and in the life of the world to come. Humanity's destiny is remade. We are no longer born with the grave ultimately in view, but with the everlasting vision of the Beatific Vision in our sights. All human existence is transformed. We no longer live out the fate of Adam, who chose sin, but the fate of Christ, who has ascended unto His Father in heaven.

It is indeed true, then, that *'if Christ is not risen, then our faith is in vain.'* For we would be robbed of the heart of Christianity, which is the unending presence of God, now and unto the ages of ages.

But Christ is Risen. ■

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Pastor's Study



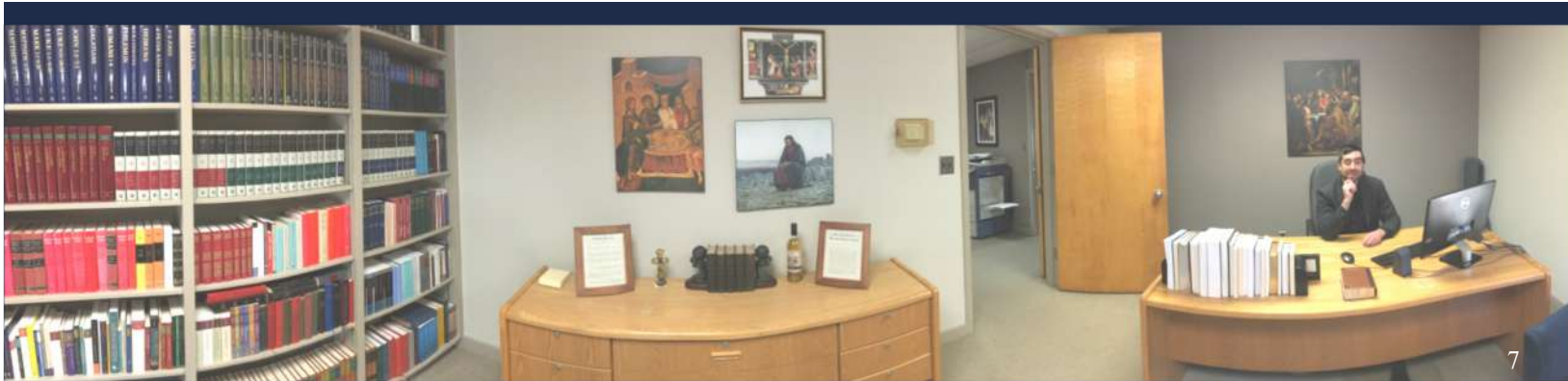
As the office bids farewell to its faithful inhabitant Pastor Holowach, it welcomes a new resident! Pastor Fields now occupies the pastor's study—and indeed, much studying will be done there! Come with your questions, with your crises, or simply with your greetings, and say hi to Pastor in his new habitation!



Thank you to Mary Atchley for her hard work and asthetic eye! The study looks fantastic, and Pastor Fields is extremely grateful for your help!



If you walk into an old church and look for the pastor's office, you will be greeted by a door that reads "Pastor's Study." This is for good reason, as a pastor's education certainly does not end with seminary. He is constantly digesting the Scriptures, probing the tomes of Church history, maintaining his biblical languages, and keeping up with the current world in order to apply God's Word faithfully to His people in this time and place. Pray for your pastor as he strives to serve you according to God's Word! ■



Has your attention ever wandered during the Divine Service... during the sermon, during the prayers of the church? Of course it has. It happens to all of us. I don't bring this up as a condemnation. Actually I want to use it as a way to encourage you!

So let me ask another obvious question. When it's your birthday and there are presents and cake and loved ones gathered around, where is your mind? Are you thinking about what is going to happen after the party, what's on TV right now, etc.? Probably not. You're focused on the party. You are thinking about the family and friends, the CAKE (wink), and the presents. The world and life in general doesn't start crowding in until sometime after the party is over. Maybe you are even a little disappointed when everything is over. While the party is going on, you are totally focused on the gifts in all their forms.

This is exactly what is happening in the Divine Service. God is continually pouring out His gifts on us throughout the service—His service to us. He starts with the Confession and Absolution where He hears our confession and absolves us of all our sins through His servant, the pastor. He then pours His Word into us through the Service of the Word including the Kyrie, the Gloria, the readings, and culminating in the sermon. Finally, Jesus gives us His own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins in the Service of the Sacrament. These are all God's services to us, His gifts to us. Every Sunday we enter into God's presence to receive these gifts. And, when we receive these gifts, we are not just standing with our brothers and sisters at Christ Lutheran that we see with our earthly eyes. We are standing with all Christians that came before us, the ones that are all across the world still in their mortal flesh, and all the ones that will come after us. Most importantly, we are all standing in the presence of God who loves us more than we can comprehend, and He is pouring His unending gifts on all of us. That's a pretty amazing picture!

So when our sinful mind starts to wander, remember that too is forgiven and try banishing those thoughts with the wonderful vision that God provides. Remember that you get to hear God's absolution. You get to hear His Word and say His Word back to Him (the very definition of confession). You get to receive His Body and Body in your mouth, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins. You get to do all these things with the entire Church throughout time (the Body of Christ). Remember these gifts are being given to you directly from God's own hand, in Whose very presence you are standing.

Try letting your mind wander with that vision in your head.■



Sunday Morning Gifts

Keith Martin



2021 Easter WORK DAY

Prepare the Royal Highway, along with the sidewalks, parking lot, garden, and all the church! On April 27, Christ Lutheran had a wildly productive work day in preparation for Holy Week and the coming Easter season. Shrubs received *much*-needed haircuts, leaves were swept and debris removed, and McDonalds was enjoyed by all (thanks, Bill!). Many, many thanks to all who pitched in!

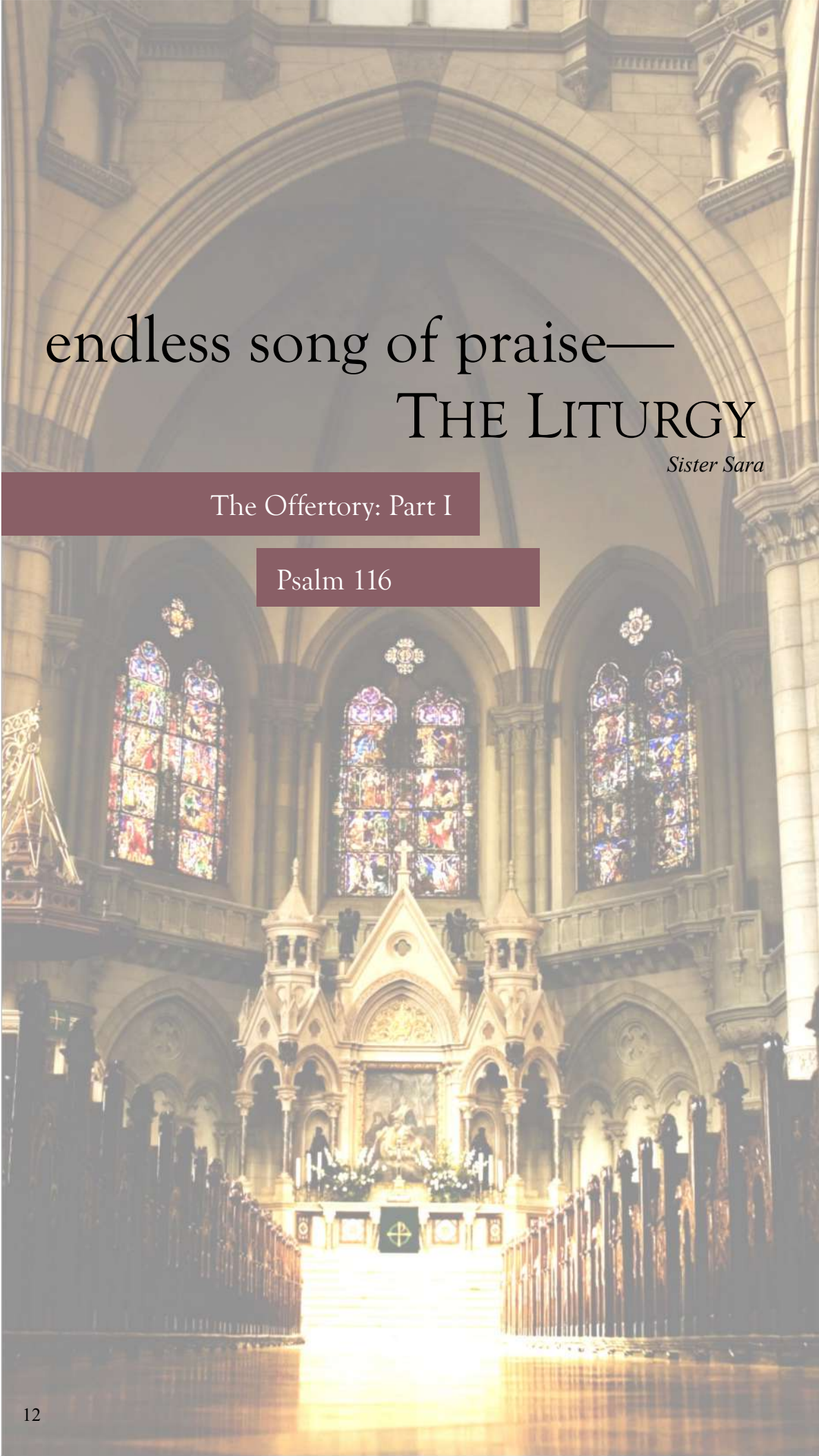
Upper Left: Bill provides necessary calories for all the hard workers! **Upper Right:** Mark tidies the sidewalks. **Lower Right:** Laura makes the bushes look as good as her! **Lower Left:** Hooray, Bob got more pinestraw!





Above: Mark, Jo, and Allen survey the impressive trailer-load of cuttings to be hauled away. **Upper Right:** After Mary and Margaret clean Pastor Field's new office, they enlist the raw brawn of Gary, Eric, and Mark to move furniture. **Far Right:** Chuck blows us all away... literally. **Center:** Gary unearths the road by the parking lot entrance. **Lower Right:** Member-to-be David rakes up the carpet of dead leaves. **Below:** Eric prunes back the unruly shrubs outside Pastor's office.





endless song of praise— THE LITURGY

Sister Sara

The Offertory: Part I

Psalm 116

If you recall our discussion of the liturgy last issue, you might remember that we are in the midst of the *preparation*, the bridge between the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament.

The preparation has two parts: 1) the collection of the offerings, and 2) the offertory. From the early days of the church, as early as Justin Martyr (second century AD), the offertory was defined simply as the consecration of the offerings (i.e., the offerings were presented to God at the altar, accompanied by a prayer that He would accept and sanctify them). As the priest offered these gifts back to God, the people would sing a psalm; this collective action - the presenting, praying, and singing - is known as the offertory. Nowadays, in our hymnal, we summarize this three-fold action by referring to the psalm we sing as the “offertory,” and it is upon this psalm that we focus now...

Historically, Psalm 116 and Psalm 51 have each been used as the offertory, and our LSB includes both (116 in Divine Service I and II, and 51 in Divine Service III). Since we are praying Divine Service II throughout this Easter season, let us begin there.

Psalm 116 is one of six “Hallel” psalms that were sung during the Passover. We are familiar with the Hebrew word *hallel* because we use it frequently when we exclaim “*hallelujah*,” that is, “praise the Lord!”

These psalms were songs of praise, and Psalm 116 was one reserved for the end of the liturgy of the Passover supper, thanking God for His salvation.

While it is well worth reading through the entire psalm, and even singing the whole thing during the offertory, our liturgy focuses on a small portion of it:

“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?
I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord.
I will take the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord.
I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people,
In the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.”

It begins with a question: “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?” The real question we should be asking is, “What *can* I render to Him?” The sad truth is that there is nothing, *nothing at all*, that our sinful hands could offer to God. Even before the Fall, there was nothing we possessed that God had not given to us; and since the Fall, there is nothing He has given us that we have not plunged into utter sin and degradation. Not even the blood of bulls and goats dyeing the hillside of Zion could accomplish our redemption, but this the Lord demanded of His people, as a type of the atonement that would one day be made upon that holy mountain.

Yet, there was one sacrifice, conspicuous in the Law of God, that was explicitly *not required* of sinful man. It did not atone for sin or expiate guilt, it was not offered for transgression or uncleanness. Rather, it was optional, a freewill offering made purely in gratitude: this was the Thank Offering, or Sacrifice of Thanksgiving.

Interestingly, the Church has long considered the thank offering to be the sacrifice offered by pre-Fall Adam, for it was the only sacrifice in the Law of God that did not assume the existence of sin. A perfect man would have no need of scapegoats or atonement, but he could offer God his thanksgiving in all truth and purity. Only a perfect man possessed the *free will* required to make this “freewill” offering.

Being bound in sin, our will is enslaved to sin, and cannot freely offer anything to God. But there is One who is not bound - One who has even loosed *our* shackles by uniting us to Himself.

Indeed, the perfect Man came to offer Himself as the culmination of all the Old Testament sacrifices on our behalf; for only a truly pure and blameless offering could make atonement for the sins of man. And in the Sacrament of the Altar, the Body we eat and the Blood we drink is that which has been sacrificed on our behalf, that makes us pure and blameless as He.

But, as Psalm 116 reminds us, that is only the beginning.

Jesus, the perfect Man, the Man who knew no sin, is the only One who can truly offer the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving. For He alone is not enslaved to sin; rather, He freely submits to the Father of His own accord, praising God “for all His benefits to me.”

And, as He celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem, Jesus sang this very *Hallel* psalm. On the night when He was betrayed, He took the cup after supper - the cup which would forever bear salvation unto us - and recited the words, “I will take the cup of salvation and will call on the name of the Lord.” That night, and into the day, He paid His vows in sight of His Father and in the presence of all His people - indeed, in the courts of the Lord’s house and in the midst of Jerusalem. There and before the whole world, He offered Himself as the eternal Sacrifice of Thanksgiving, pouring out His life in gratitude to God, in a way that we never could.

And yet, by taking us into His own flesh, Jesus not only redeemed us from sin and restored us to unity with God, but He has sanctified us in His Body to be able - with and in Him - to offer that pure sacrifice. Made new by the washing of His Blood, we too may offer the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving.

And so, as we watch the elements prepared upon the altar, as we meditate upon the Sacrament of which we are about to partake, we sing the words of our Lord, “I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of salvation...” Jesus’ song is our song, and in singing it we confess the salvation that He has accomplished for us and which we will momentarily taste upon our own lips.

Surely, it is no accident that we call this Sacrament the *Eucharist*: that is, “the thanksgiving.”■



grateful *Goodbye*

Dear my brothers and sisters in Christ at CLC,

I know that I have not had the opportunity to get to know all of you as a result of these times in which we find ourselves. To those who I have been able to spend time in fellowship with, it has been a pleasure getting to know you. I am grateful for the relationships I have been able to build during my time in the South. To those who I have not met, I am thankful for the wonderful church body of which you are a member (Romans 12:4 - 5). You have been given a blessed gift and are a beautiful oasis in the desert that is this sinful world. Cherish it, for it is a rarity in the time and place we inhabit. Pray for your pastor, yourselves, your circuit, your district, the Synod, and the church as a whole, that we may be preserved (see the Small Catechism explanation for the petitions of the Lord's Prayer).

I thank God for my time here. He provides for us in ways we do not expect and often it is only in retrospect we see the ways in which He has done so. This place, the people here, have been a home away home and a respite for me in this season of my life. Unfortunately, I find it necessary to move back to Colorado for the time being so that I may be closer to my family as I continue my job search. I will keep Pastor Fields and Sister Sara updated on my progress, and in time, I will have to drop by for a visit!

Your sister in Christ,
Kristen Shavlik ■

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Now Thank We All Our God

1 Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voice - es,
2 Oh, may this boun-teous God Through all our life be near us,
△ 3 All praise and thanks to God The Fa - ther now be giv - en,

Who won-drous things has done, In whom His world re - joice - es;
With ev - er joy - ful hearts And bless - ed peace to cheer us
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in high - est heav - en,

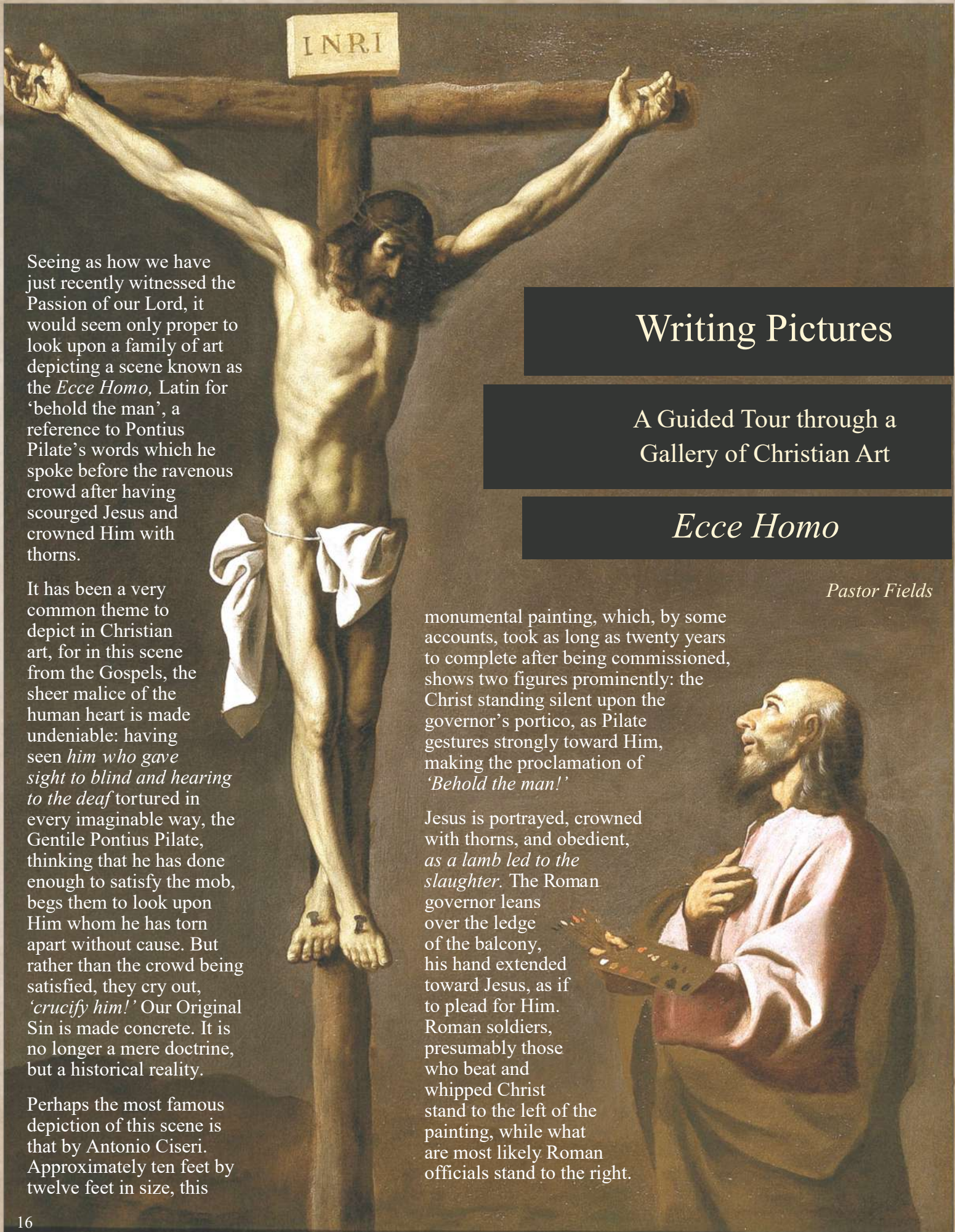


Christ Lutheran has new acolytes joining the ranks! As they memorize the catechism and prepare for confirmation, these students take on new responsibilities in the church. Pray for Emma Agent, Miles Agent, Nathan Burkhalter, and William Held (as well as our veteran acolytes James Hansford and Emily Held) as they serve within the Body of Christ. ■

acolytes

New worship servants at Christ Lutheran.





Seeing as how we have just recently witnessed the Passion of our Lord, it would seem only proper to look upon a family of art depicting a scene known as the *Ecce Homo*, Latin for ‘behold the man’, a reference to Pontius Pilate’s words which he spoke before the ravenous crowd after having scourged Jesus and crowned Him with thorns.

It has been a very common theme to depict in Christian art, for in this scene from the Gospels, the sheer malice of the human heart is made undeniable: having seen *him who gave sight to blind and hearing to the deaf* tortured in every imaginable way, the Gentile Pontius Pilate, thinking that he has done enough to satisfy the mob, begs them to look upon Him whom he has torn apart without cause. But rather than the crowd being satisfied, they cry out, ‘*crucify him!*’ Our Original Sin is made concrete. It is no longer a mere doctrine, but a historical reality.

Perhaps the most famous depiction of this scene is that by Antonio Ciseri. Approximately ten feet by twelve feet in size, this

Writing Pictures

A Guided Tour through a Gallery of Christian Art

Ecce Homo

Pastor Fields

monumental painting, which, by some accounts, took as long as twenty years to complete after being commissioned, shows two figures prominently: the Christ standing silent upon the governor’s portico, as Pilate gestures strongly toward Him, making the proclamation of ‘*Behold the man!*’

Jesus is portrayed, crowned with thorns, and obedient, *as a lamb led to the slaughter*. The Roman governor leans over the ledge of the balcony, his hand extended toward Jesus, as if to plead for Him. Roman soldiers, presumably those who beat and whipped Christ stand to the left of the painting, while what are most likely Roman officials stand to the right.



Unlike many depictions of this scene, the crowd is not shown to be in an enclosed courtyard. Rather, they seem to be streaming out into the streets and hanging off the rooftops, all mocking Jesus. This is to show the universality of sin committed against the *Lord of Glory*, that it was not merely some Jews and Romans back in the day that crucified Him, but all mankind.

Almost all of the main figures in the painting have their back to the viewer, and if not their back, their face is at least partially hidden. The sole exceptions are two women on the right, one older, one younger. The older is generally considered to be Procla, the wife of Pontius Pilate, who begged her husband to set the innocent Christ free, and the younger, her hand-maiden. Procla is shown overcome by a depression verging on despair as her handmaid leans toward her, as if to hear her sad words, her conviction that Christ is a man of God. They alone have their face exposed to the audience, for they alone, at least in some sense, bear not the shame of having called for the death of the Lord.

As a concluding note, though the scene is given the title *Ecce Homo* since that is what Pilate said according to the Latin Vulgate translation, it is likely that Pilate did not speak to the crowds in Latin, who probably did not know the language. Rather, he likely spoke in either Hebrew or Aramaic, saying something like *'hine, Adam.'* Meaning both 'Behold, a man' and 'Behold, Adam.' For Christ is indeed the Second Adam, and the True and Everlasting Man. ■



what is a *Maundy* anyway?

Pastor Fields



It is easy to understand why Holy Saturday is holy, for on it, Christ arose from the power of death and hell. It is a little less clear why Good Friday is good, since Christ was crucified on that day, yet we know that it was good for us sinners, for by His sacrifice on the cross, remission of sins was bought for us all. But why is Maundy Thursday, well Maundy? What does that even mean?

I shall tell you.

Words have a habit of changing, or to be more accurate, degrading over time. People's tongues are lazy, so if there is an easier way to say a word, we will say it that way. It is for this reason that we pronounce the word 'daughter' as 'dah-ter' instead of original way it was pronounced, which was something like 'da-wugh-ther'. It's just easier.

Similarly, the word 'maundy' is a degraded form of the Latin word 'mandatum,' which means 'commandment.' What started as 'mandatum' became 'mandat', then 'mandé,' then finally 'maundy'.

The reason that Thursday is called 'Maundy' is because the traditional reading comes from John 13, where Christ washes the feet of His disciples, and then explains *'a new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.'*

In many traditions, including the Lutheran tradition, generally outside of the US, the pastor washes the feet of the congregants before the service begins. This foot washing is also called 'the maundy'.

Regardless of whether feet get washed or not, we recall on that day the significance of this new commandment, which is also an old commandment, first given on the Torah, but given new life and meaning in the Passion of the Christ. May we ever recall this commandment, day by day, until we be taken from this mortal coil to dwell with the Lord forever. ■





Church went Long...

the TRIDUUM

Pastor Fields

With Holy Week behind us as we enter into the Season of Easter (and it is a season, not just a day), we have a little time to look back and contemplate what we experienced.

Much can be said of deep theological importance—profound insights into the mystery of our salvation accomplished by Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. But probably one of the most common questions pastors receive is the following: ‘Why is there no invocation on Good Friday?’ That is, why do we not start our service with ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?’ Why do we just start with a collect?

The answer is actually quite simple. Good Friday isn’t a service at all. It is the middle third of one service, one liturgy: a liturgy that lasts three days, starting on Maundy (or Holy) Thursday, and ending with the Eucharist of Easter Vigil. Therefore, the invocation for this one long service, known as the Triduum (Latin for ‘Three Days’) is pronounced only at the beginning of Holy Thursday, and the Benediction is only spoken at the end of Holy Saturday.

Particularly careful parishioners may have noticed that the sermon for Holy Thursday begins with the traditional blessing, ‘in the name of Jesus’, but does not end with it. The sermon on Good Friday neither begins nor ends with it. The sermon for Holy Saturday does not begin with it, but does end with it. And this is simply because they are not three sermons, but again, one sermon that is preached over three days.

The reason for having this ‘three-day-long liturgy’ is to confess that, during Holy Week, we do not observe three separate events, that is, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Rather, we observe, and walk through with Christ, the single event of salvation of mankind through the complete work of Christ.

During the Triduum, then, and hopefully only then, can it be said that Church, indeed, went long. ■

