

HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONS



The Passion of the Christ in Prophecy

A gift to you from
MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

*Please receive this devotion booklet as
a gift from the Martin Luther College
campus family. We pray that our Lord
would strengthen your faith through
his Word.*



Palm Sunday



⁸But I will encamp at my temple to guard it against marauding forces. Never again will an oppressor overrun my people, for now I am keeping watch. ⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:8-10 NIV)

When he entered his city, this king didn't look like one who could defeat marauders. He didn't have an army to take away chariots or break battle bows. One man, riding on a foal of a donkey. Yet such was his mission. And when he entered to the cries of "Hosanna," the crowds were actually shouting "Save now!" Save from what? Save how?

Two of the gospels both quote this prophecy and specifically inform readers that the Palm Sunday procession fulfills Zechariah's sermon. The time is here. The true King has come! But please don't consider kingship according to the history of sinful humans serving as monarchs. Consider the king according to the Lord God's inspired job description. An Old Testament king was to hand-copy the law of God, read it all his life, and revere the LORD his God. The king was

to be humble, not considering himself above others. He was not to lust after glory or wealth or women or weapons (see Deuteronomy 17:15-20). The king, then, was to picture King Messiah: humble, a servant leader, and one obedient to the Lord's will.

Zechariah prophesied the coming of the Messiah King who would perfectly complete God's plan to save. This King keeps watch and defends his house. This King brings righteousness and salvation, eternal possessions for his people. This King conquers completely. No weapon remains raised in opposition. This King proclaims peace and establishes a forever rule of peace. With the Spirit's eyesight, we believers see this day as a day to welcome King Jesus. He comes to save.

Friend, the King comes to answer our greatest need. Every human seeks a life of peace and protection and prosperity. Sadly, though, most humans listen to the lies of the ancient serpent or to the hawkers of heretical worldviews to find such a life. Impossible. Rely not on your strength or your savvy. Rest your hopes not on your wealth or your health. Find contentment not in possessions that rust, corrode, or disappear in the darkness of thievery. Lord, for Jesus' sake, forgive such sins.

The Holy Spirit through the gospel takes my hand and places it safely into King Jesus' hand. Now we are *shielded by God's power through faith in Christ Jesus*, protected from the roaring lion who seeks to devour and from a wicked world intent on corrupting. Now we have peace against a nagging conscience, for *the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from every sin*. Now, in Jesus, we have the eternal possessions no one can take away. Jesus promises, *I go to prepare a place for you. I will take you to be with me*.

On this day we celebrate the coming of the King. He will endure much this week, suffer horribly this week, give up his life this week. And he will overcome! The King will overcome sin, death, and Satan. He did it for you. Hosanna!

Prayer:

Jesus, may our hearts be burning With more fervent love for you!
May our eyes be ever turning To behold your cross anew,
Till in glory, parted never From the blessed Savior's side,
Graven in our hearts forever, Dwell the cross, the Crucified!

Author: Mark Zarling serves Martin Luther College as president.

Monday



⁷For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. ⁸I am a foreigner to my own family, a stranger to my own mother's children; ⁹for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me. (Psalm 69:7–9 NIV)

There is a reason that the Psalms are so precious to us. In other books of the Bible, we see the actions and outward lives of God's people, but in the Psalms we see into their hearts and souls, examine their inner lives, and listen to their deepest feelings. Even more significant, in this most messianic of books, the Psalms, we listen to the deepest feelings of Jesus as he carries out his saving work.

And what does he feel? Disgrace. What covers him? Shame. What does he endure? Scorn. And this scorn wounds Jesus to the very core. The people scorn him and consider him worthless. His enemies scorn him and declare him contemptible and dangerous. Even his own family scorns him and wants nothing to do with him.

But what hurts Jesus the most, we learn, is that he knows the reason for all this scorn! The people scorn Jesus because they considered his Father worthless and contemptible. His enemies heap insult upon Jesus in order to insult the One who sent him. Jesus understood the

deep, rebellious, irrational, unimprovable, ruinous, and damning hatred that sinners have for their God. To the point, Jesus understood the hatred and rebellion that burns in our own hearts—yours and mine—toward the Holy God. He knows the awfulness of our sinful nature.

And yet, Jesus was willing to become the Mediator. As such, he was willing to be smeared with our shame, to be covered with our disgrace, to be made empty with our worthlessness, and to bear the scorn of our ugly hatred. Jesus was willing to be damned as The Sinner in order to bring pardon and peace to all sinners.

In Psalm 69 we listen to Jesus pray for us! As he carried out his atoning work, he prays that God, his Father, would bless it with success:

- that his disgrace would mean no disgrace for you
- that his shame would mean no shame for you
- that the insults he endured would mean only praise for you
- that his death would mean holy life for you

Our great joy is that God the Father listened to and answered Jesus' prayer, proving so by raising Jesus from the dead. And the result, the benefit—our gift from Jesus? No more scorn, no more shame, no more disgrace. Only beautiful life and permanent peace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are my zealous God, and I thank you for your willingness and zeal to save me from sin and hell. Fill me every day with a zeal to give as you give, to help as you help, and to love as you love. Amen.

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Tuesday



²²The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;²³the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. (Psalm 118:22–23 NIV)

Most people fear rejection. Turned down for a date. Shot down for a raise. No matter how you say it, rejection stinks. Do you agree? Then let's join in marveling at Jesus. He is the stone the builders rejected. He was willing to be rejected so that we will not be. Listen to these words of Psalm 118: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes."

Jesus wasn't always rejected. At times Jesus enjoyed a rock star following. Thousands of people flocked to hear him, see him, touch him.

But Jesus also had enemies. The builders of God's kingdom, religious leaders like the scribes and Pharisees, hated Jesus. Think of how they plotted to kill him. Jesus was under a death sentence because he said he was the Son of God.

The builders did not believe him and turned the people against him. It wasn't enough for them to reject him. Everyone else had to reject him too. The result? The ultimate rejection, captured in Jesus' words on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

A friend of mine is known as a dumpster diver. He has been known to dig through a dumpster to find a part he can use for a project. He is willing to use what others throw away.

So is the Lord. The stone the builders threw away God used to do something marvelous. The Bible calls Jesus the capstone. What does that mean? Jesus is the head of the corner. He is the middle stone in an arch. He is the cornerstone that makes two walls square. He is the stone that all others depend on. Without him everything falls apart. That's Jesus.

Being rejected didn't make him less valuable. Being rejected didn't make him fit for the dumpster. That was part of God's plan. God used sinful rejection to save sinful rejecters. God saved those who hated Jesus. God still saves those who trust him but daily disobey him—like you and me.

The worst thing that can happen to any sinner is to stand before a holy God and have him turn away from them. Because of Jesus that won't happen. On the cross God turned his back on Jesus. God punished Jesus in our place, and for our sin. In Christ, God turns toward you with love and forgiveness. God welcomes you into his eternal family.

Have you ever felt hurt or rejected? God allows his people to suffer for his name, but he does not turn his back on you. When you experience hurt and pain, let God's love soothe your soul and strengthen your heart.

Prayer: We praise you, gracious God, for the great acts of love by which you have redeemed us through your Son, Jesus Christ. You took the Stone the builders rejected and made him the Capstone of our salvation. Protect us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Wednesday



¹²I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. ¹³And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the LORD. (Zechariah 11:12-13 NIV)

In the middle of the most critical week in history, a guy slips out a back door, counting “28-29-30” pieces of silver. It seems so crass to put a price on a person’s value, so commercial, so human. We may reduce a relationship to dollars in court settlements, status by salary, severance pay. What is she worth to you? We may even merchandise our devotion to God: How much is he going to cost/benefit me? It is crassly human to stick a price on a person.

God knew that we would. In the reading from Zechariah, 400 years before Judas and the priests bargained, he prophesies that we would value Jesus at 30 pieces of silver. The shepherd of God’s people in that passage faces those who are rejecting him. What am I worth to you? What will you pay to get rid of me? They compute 30 pieces of silver. That number rings in our ears.

How much is that? Roughly figured, 30 pieces of silver were equivalent to 120 denarii, or four months' wages. Quite a bit? Perhaps to those who put price tags on relationships. And 30 pieces of silver was the standard evaluation of a slave (Exodus 21:32). The shepherd in Zechariah with scorn called the shekels "the handsome price at which they valued me!" Then he threw the coins "into the house of the LORD to the potter."

These details are puzzling and lead us to plug the prophecy into Jesus' passion. Judas sold out his Savior for 30 pieces of silver, and then he signed his contract with a kiss. His crude betrayal, though, made those shekels unbearable, so he threw them into the temple. The priests with a shrug used the blood money "to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners" (Matthew 27:3-7).

How much is 30 pieces of silver? Enough to cash in a shepherd and buy a slave? Enough to betray your Lord and Savior? Enough to burn a hole in your conscience? Ultimately it was enough to create a place where the outcasts can be laid to rest. Again the priests did something much more than they intended. The blood money from Jesus' crucifixion paid for the sins of the world. All who believe in that transaction have the peace of heaven.

It is so crassly human to put a price on a person or a relationship, and it is so divine for God to pay it. God knew exactly how much it would cost to save us—the rejection and betrayal and crucifixion of his Son, and he paid it all. That's the value he puts on you.

In the middle of the most critical week, we walk out, counting all our sins forgiven: "28-29-300."

Prayer: Dear Jesus, we praise you for paying the full price of our sins, and we mourn that we have so many for you to forgive. Help us to value well this week our meditation and worship of your sacrifice. Amen.

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Maundy Thursday



²¹Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. ²³When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down. (Exodus 12:21-23)

On the evening of the first Passover, there was death throughout the land of Egypt. As the final, awful climax to the Ten Plagues, the mighty God sent his destroying angel throughout the land to put to death the firstborn of all Egypt. Pharaoh had sinned and had led the entire nation to defiantly sin against the Lord. Simply put, sin brings the judgment of death.

There was, however, also death inside each home of the Israelites. At God's own command through Moses, the Israelites put to death innocent male lambs and spread the blood of those lambs on the doorposts of their homes. There was a promise, too, that went along

with the sacred paint; the Lord passed over—delivered from death—those doorframes that glinted red in the dark night of death.

While the Lord's Supper certainly is a life-giving gift, St. Paul reminds us New Testament believers that “whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). This rich prophetic picture from Exodus points us to him, our Savior, the one true Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29) by the shedding of his own blood on the cross.

It isn't by accident that on top of the altar in the Chapel of the Christ at MLC there is a picture of this Lamb who shed his blood. The good news of the gospel inscribed around it—“It is finished!”—announces that sin has been atoned for, sinners have been redeemed. And, in deep gratitude and joy, the Lutheran church continues to sing:

*Here the true Paschal Lamb we see,
whom God so freely gave us;
He died on the accursed tree—so strong his love—to save us.
See, his blood now marks our door; faith points to it;
death passes o'er,
and Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!*

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for going as a lamb to the slaughter in our place and delivering us from death. Amen.

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Good Friday



³He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:3-6 NIV)

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you,” Jesus said with anguish in his voice just days before his death. “How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37).

Jesus had done everything right—and everything well. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and drove out demons. He preached the good news of the kingdom, made the deaf to hear and raised the dead. What more could he have done to make clear who he was and why he was among the people?

Yet Jesus met rejection at every turn. And nowhere was this more striking than at the time of his arrest and crucifixion. His very own people handed him over to be executed—so much they hated him. Even his closest companions hid their faces, denied him, and fled in fear. If the physical torture was excruciating for Jesus, the anguish of heart was even more agonizing. Yet in love he cried out, “Do not weep for me.”

“Weep for yourselves and for your children.” This was a call to repentance—that still cries out to all of us. We are among the “stray sheep” that like to “turn to our own way.” The acceptance of the world is often much more important than recognition as a Christian. Godliness is too often a veneer—with deeper desires lurking underneath. And there are times when we hide from our Lord.

Appearances were deceiving on that hill just outside Jerusalem’s walls. From the outside it seemed that an ordinary human being from Nazareth was being judged as an imposter—even a blasphemer. The cross appeared to be the end of his deception. Clearly, Jesus did not seem like a glorious and powerful king. He certainly didn’t seem like God. Was Jesus a failure? Some of his followers wondered.

We need to see with eyes of faith on Good Friday. In truth, the criminal was innocent; those who stand beneath the cross are guilty. The pain and piercing and punishment were completely unjustified, but Jesus endured in love. Yes, his blood poured out the love of forgiveness. It was indeed a “great exchange.”

Isaiah’s prophecy highlights the supreme love of God in a most graphic way. Jesus was beaten and killed. Sinners receive healing and peace. “It is finished” was a cry of victory—a perfect life was given in sacrifice. Jesus surrendered his life for us. There was nothing natural about it since Jesus was sinless and therefore undeserving of death. But he accepted his role as the “suffering servant” under God’s plan and his righteous judgment. “By his wounds we are healed.”

Prayer: Lord God, we hang our heads in confession today. Forgive our wayward ways. Help us to see your mercy in the cross and to trust that Jesus bore the burden of our sin. Your love has given us life and hope and heaven. For this we are eternally grateful. Amen.

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Saturday



⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. ¹¹After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:9-11 NIV)

Could things have looked any bleaker than on this day between Good Friday and Easter? When the dead body of a loved one is placed in a grave, it leaves you numb. You feel as if someone kicked you in the gut. Grief overwhelms you. Dark despair threatens to consume you.

How much more hopeless and dark it must have looked to Jesus' followers! They had just witnessed the horrifying death of the One on whom they had pinned their hopes. They saw his corpse placed in a tomb. Could things have looked any bleaker?

Yet even on this bleakest of days, Jesus' followers should have had hope. They had good reason! It is found here in this astounding prophecy. Look carefully at this section of Holy Scripture and the words just jump off the page.

Yes, this man “was assigned a grave with the wicked,” executed as the worst of criminals, but it was also a grave “with the rich”! Even as Jesus’ lifeless body was placed in a grave, he fulfilled this prophecy! Who could have predicted that “a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph” (Matthew 57:57), “a prominent member of the [Jewish] Council” (Mark 15:43), would step forward to claim Jesus’ body and put it in his own tomb?

Yes, this man “had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.” Jesus’ death was a despicable perversion of justice. But there was a reason for that, and it leaves us speechless. “It was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer” and to make “his life a guilt offering.” Literally, one could translate it: “But the LORD was pleased to crush him.”

This had been the Father’s plan all along! Yes, this was his Son, with whom he was well pleased. But why? Precisely because Jesus had come to do his Father’s will: to save you and me from our sins. The Father “crushed” him because he was our Substitute. By this, Jesus credited his perfect innocence to our account and made complete payment for our sins—once for all. Isaiah prophesies as much right here: “By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.”

No, things could not have looked any bleaker on that day. But in reality they could not have been any more hopeful. As always, God’s will is done: his good, pleasing, and perfect will! As Isaiah prophesied: “And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”

Do things look bleak in your life? Whenever they do, think about them in view of this astounding prophecy, and you will find hope—sure, solid, eternal hope.

Prayer: Dear Lord, whenever the circumstances of my life leave me feeling hopeless, turn my attention back to you and your Word. Help me see there, especially in prophecy and fulfillment, that your will is always done, and that your will is good and gracious, and that your will is that I truly live with you eternally. Amen.

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Easter Sunday



⁸I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. ¹¹You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:8-11 NIV)

Luther nailed it. Several years before he nailed the 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, in fact. In the preface to a Latin edition of the Psalms printed by Johann Gutenberg for use by Luther's students, in a series of lectures that seem to have spanned more than two years, beginning in August 1513 and continuing into the fall of 1515, Luther wrote this: "Every prophecy and every prophet must be understood as referring to Christ the Lord, except where it is clear from plain words that someone else is spoken of. For thus he himself says: 'Search the Scriptures . . . and it is they that bear witness to me'" (John 5:39). Luther notes that reading the Psalms only historically and not prophetically means that one is "far away from Christ (that is, from the truth). 'But we have the mind of Christ'" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

We have journeyed with Jesus through this Holy Week, meditating on the Spirit-revealed prophecies of the passion of our Savior and reading them with “the mind of Christ” given by that same Spirit. We have clearly seen that the Scriptures do, indeed, bear witness to the Christ, and today’s reading underscores that truth. In the Pentecost sermon that is recorded for us in Acts 2, the Apostle Peter quotes these very verses, with the introduction, “David said about him” (Acts 2:25), about the Messiah, and later Peter assures his listeners, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it” (Acts 2:32).

Satan thought that he had nailed it. He thought that he had subverted God’s plan of salvation when the nails had hammered through our Savior’s flesh into the wood of the cross, but in his blind rage he seems to have missed the fact that the Christ had been “handed over . . . by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23). Our Savior’s journey did not end on Good Friday at the cross and the grave. It continued on until Easter Sunday and the empty tomb. The Father did not abandon his Son to the realm of the dead, nor did he let his faithful one see decay. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

“God has raised this Jesus to life” is the foundation of our faith. Our sin was nailed to the cross with Christ. He died to pay the wages of our sin, and the Father raised him to life to declare that the Lamb of God had taken away the sin of the world. As a result, we confess along with our Savior, “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

Prayer: God of mercy, you wash away our sins in water, you give us new birth in the Spirit, and you redeem us in the blood of Christ. As we celebrate Christ’s resurrection, increase our awareness of these blessings and renew your gift of life within us. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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It is our prayer that the devotions in this booklet will assist you in focusing on the work of our Savior in the week leading up to his death and resurrection.

