

# Christ IN THE Tabernacle



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# CHRIST IN THE TABERNACLE

In this Holy Week devotional, we will explore the Old Testament tabernacle and how it pointed to the coming Savior.

The tabernacle provided God's people with a place to worship and fellowship with him.

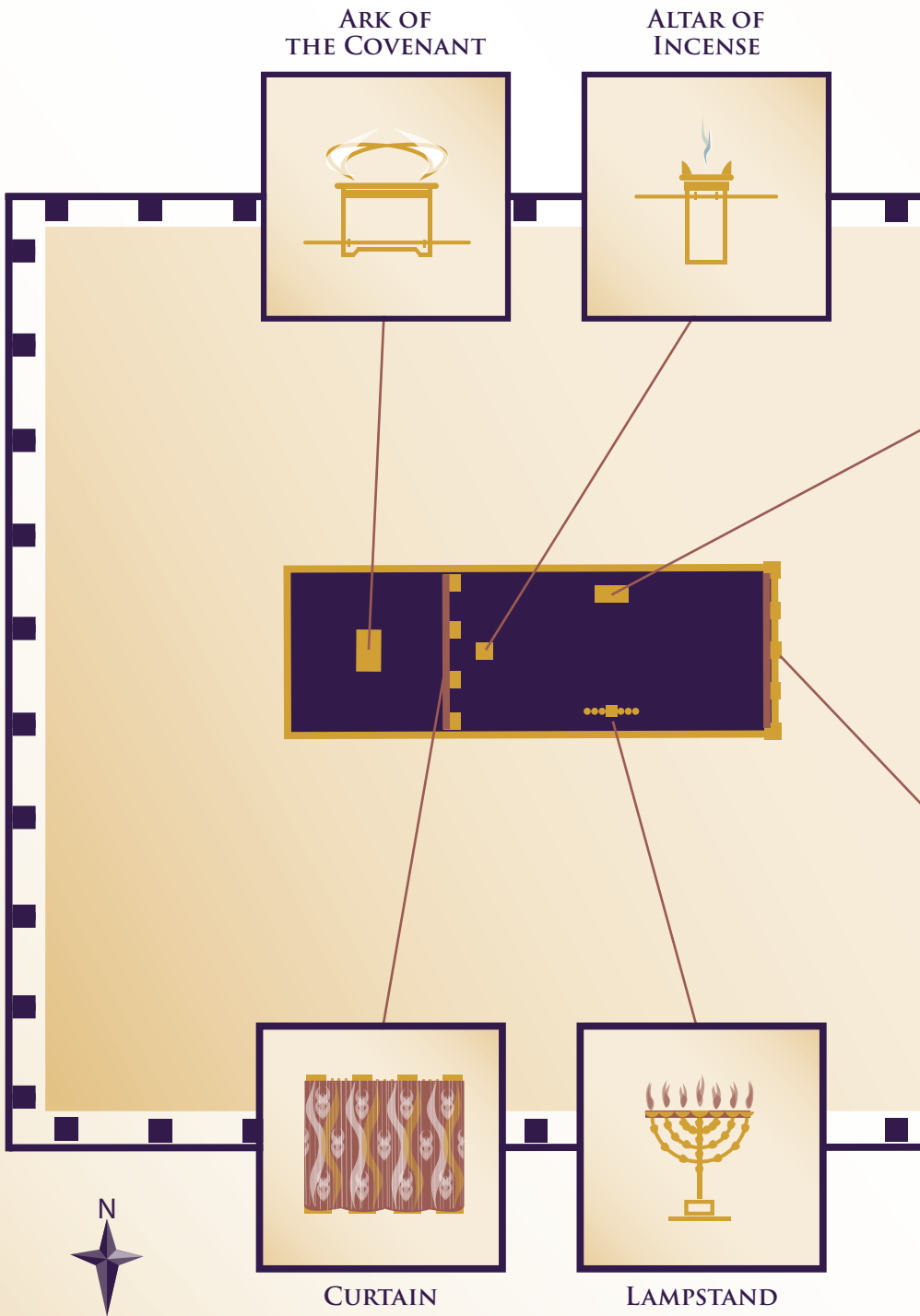
Its structure taught that sin separated them from a sinless God and that only through bloody sacrifices could they possibly approach him.

Its furnishings provided other shadows that would be fully revealed and fulfilled in the Messiah.

Through *Christ in the Tabernacle*, we ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see our Savior as the fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed there.

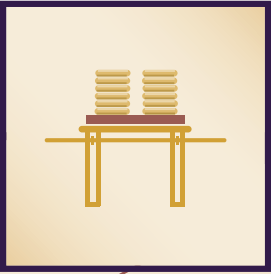
God bless your Holy Week!

# TABERNACLE

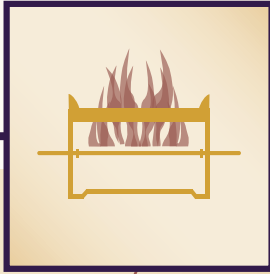


# TABERNACLE

TABLE AND BREAD  
OF THE PRESENCE



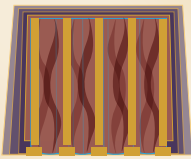
ALTAR OF  
BURNT OFFERING



TABERNACLE  
ENTRANCE



BASIN



## THE TABERNACLE

*[The LORD said to Moses,] “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” (Exodus 25:8-9)*

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. His infinite love caused him to use his infinite power to create a wondrous, majestic universe. He created the earth so that he could dwell there with those he created. He placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to enjoy his blessings in perfect fellowship with him. And it was very good.

That goodness was soon gone. Satan, in the form of a serpent, slithered into the Garden, and Adam and Eve were ensnared by his schemes. Sin and death stuck their ugly heads into human existence, and the perfect relationship between God and humanity was destroyed.

God is a God of infinite justice. “The wages of sin is death.” The first half of Romans 6:23 states a universal principle more unalterable than any law of the Medes and Persians. The God of infinite justice, however, is still the God of infinite love. Already in the Garden, before our first parents were expelled, our loving Lord gave them a promise that he would undo the tragic consequences of their actions. And the rest is history. Salvation history. That fulfilled history is why there is a second half to Romans 6:23: “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

During the Exodus, after God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, he instructed Moses to have the Israelites build a tabernacle for him. This portable sanctuary was to be constructed, along with all of its furnishings, according to the blueprint God himself would provide. As we journey with Jesus through this Week that we call

# DAY PALM SUNDAY

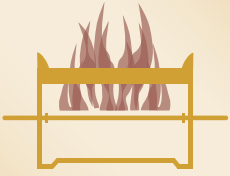


Holy, each day will give us the opportunity to stop and unpack the meaning of one of those furnishings. On this first day of the week, let us marvel at the fundamental truth that God built into the tabernacle: “I will dwell among them.”

That is grace. The God of the universe chose to live with his people in a tent, as the Israelites did. He truly is Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), “God-with-us.” That presence of God with his people reached a climax when, as John put it in the prologue to his gospel, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” In his incarnation, Jesus became one of us—true God and true man, fully human and fully divine—and “tabernacled” with us so that he could satisfy God’s infinite justice by taking our place, living the perfect life that we could not and dying on the cross to pay the wages of our sin. What wondrous love is this!

**Gracious Father, as we enter into Holy Week and journey with Jesus to Jerusalem, into the Upper Room, on to Calvary, and finally to the empty tomb, bless our meditation and worship. Open our eyes of faith to see our Savior in the Old Testament tabernacle and furnishings and to rejoice that he dwells among us. In his name we pray. Amen.**

*Rev. Dr. Lawrence Olson serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and as director of the Staff Ministry Program and Congregational Assistant Program.*



## THE ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING

*They built the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood, three cubits high; it was square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. They made a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar were of one piece, and they overlaid the altar with bronze. (Exodus 38:1-2)*

*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)*

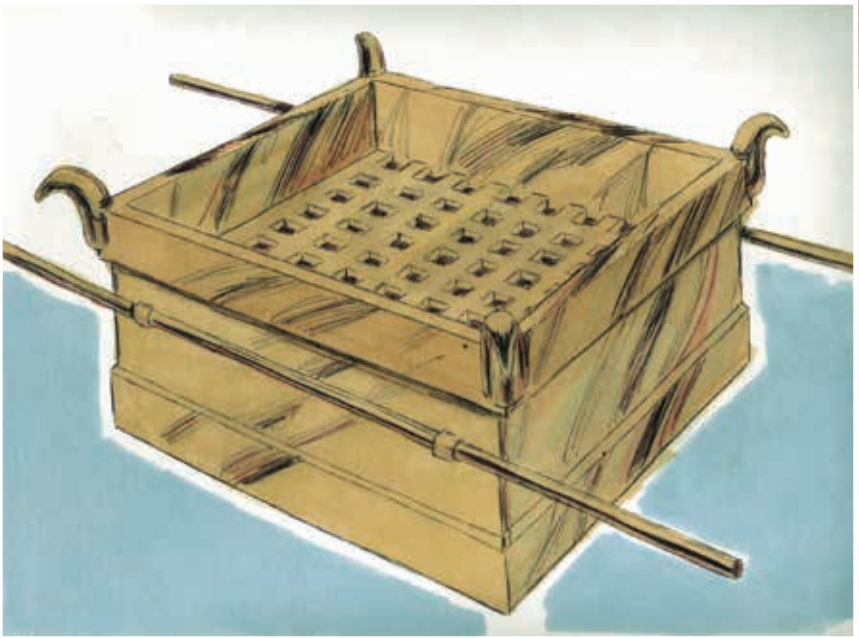
Some are still looking for the perfect security access method. Keys get lost, along with passwords and PIN numbers. Fingerprints remind me of being investigated and booked. Retina scans through the window into my soul? Scarier still. The daughter of one of my colleagues looked at his computer screen, and his facial recognition feature let her in. He said to her, “Oh, I am so sorry.”

If my access has anything to do with what I have, am, or bring to the door, I’m in trouble. So God uses smoke.

Between the outer curtain and the entrance to the tabernacle stood the altar of burnt offering. Before people came any closer to the presence and blessing of God, they had to pass that horned and bloody table smoking with whole burnt offerings. Whole animals were sacrificed there, burnt up and completely consumed by fire. Only then could a few people at particular times enter and meet God.

God used smoke from these sacrifices as the security clearance to his mercy and fellowship. And it wasn’t the nice kind of smoke—not the warmth wafting up from a wood fire, not the smoke you can almost taste from grilling steaks. No, since whole animals were being burnt, I expect the smoke was like that coming from a house or garbage fire—sharp, even sour, whiffs of many things that should never be burnt. But this is the kind of smoke that is “an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (Leviticus 1), because “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). This kind of smoke from total consumption gives access to God. Nothing’s left. Just ashes.





Those sacrifices on the altar in front of the tabernacle, though, were not really a payment for sin. They were a picture of the sacrifice to come and a needed reminder that no one can stand before a holy God—much less grab hold of him—unless there is a slaughter. The real payment for our access, the real slaughter, the smoke that was the sharpest, came from God consuming his one and only Son, the smoke rising from Holy Week.

We were locked out, but Jesus pressed his handprints all over our crimes. He put his face in our place, and God opened up the door to worlds and worlds of wonder. Now we can search for answers, connect with a universal community, and check our outstanding accounts. They're all paid in full. We know that because the smoke of their payment this week still lingers in the air. I'm in! And we're not the only ones. Jesus is the burnt offering for "the sins of the whole world."

**Thank you, God, for sending your perfect, innocent Lamb to die for the sins of the world. Help us to marvel at your grace and at the access this sacrifice gives for all who believe. Amen.**

*Rev. Brian Dose serves Martin Luther College  
as a professor of English.*



## THE BASIN

*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it.” (Exodus 30:17-18)*

*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)*

Our God pays attention to details. We see them in Israel’s tabernacle, that “Tent of Meeting” in which God lived symbolically among his people during their bumpy, twisting, 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. God’s Spirit flooded the last 16 chapters of the book of Exodus with details about the tabernacle. There the Lord laid out a blueprint for the hub of Israel’s worship life, including the finer features of both the tent itself and its courtyard.

God meant this tent and its grounds as something far more than mere space for ceremonies and shelter for services. With an artist’s sense, an architect’s feel, and especially with a Father’s love, God directed Israel to build into their mobile worship center details that reminded them of—and strengthened them in—their relationship with him. On purpose—God’s purpose—those details taught both law and gospel to his people.

They still do. Consider the basin. It stood outside the tabernacle in the courtyard, the second thing—after the altar of sacrifice—that one would see after passing through the curtain that enclosed the sacred courtyard. We don’t know its size. Still, even though it was bronze, it was—like all else for wandering Israel—portable. Compare it to a washstand.

Which gets to its purpose. It held water. By God’s command, Israel’s priests had to wash their hands and feet at the basin, both before stepping into the tabernacle proper and before offering sacrifice on the altar. The washing ceremonially cleansed them for close contact with God. The command to wash made clear that the priests, even the high priest, were dirty sinners, and by extension



the people were filthy too. The ritual confronted them all with the sad fact that no unclean person could stand before the holy God.

But hand in hand with that reminder was God's gracious way of addressing the problem of their sin. He had ordered the basin. He had attached to it his promise of cleansing. The basin was one more representation of—and result of—the promise God had made to bless them and all nations with the Savior.

The basin gave the faithful of Israel a glimpse ahead to the washing away of all sins that Jesus would accomplish. Our thoughts move from this basin to another, the baptismal font, where the Holy Spirit's miracle of plain water and powerful Word creates faith in Jesus and the washing he accomplished. His blood washes away our sins. His blood enables us to stand clean before our God. Only his blood can cleanse our souls.

Smudged by sin's dirt? Stained with its grime? Come to a brimming basin. Wash in Jesus' blood. Be clean. You are forgiven of every sin. In every detail.

**Savior Jesus, cleanse me and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Amen.** (Psalm 51:7)

*Rev. Daniel Balge serves Martin Luther College as a professor of Greek and Latin, and as academic dean for preseminary studies.*



## THE LAMPSTAND

*[The LORD said to Moses,] “Make a lampstand of pure gold. Hammer out its base and shaft, and make its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms of one piece with them.” (Exodus 25:31)*

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)*

As long as you have light, you will never walk in darkness. A streetlight guides home weary travelers. A nightlight comforts an anxious child. A flashlight guides the way on a dark path.

In the wilderness tabernacle, God drove away the dark in his Holy Place with a golden lampstand. The lampstand, also known as the menorah, was constructed of solid gold. God told Moses to make the lampstand from one talent, or about 75 pounds of solid gold. The lampstand had a center column with six branches extending from it, creating seven branches. These arms resembled the branches on an almond tree, with ornamental knobs, ending in a flower at the top.

Although this object is sometimes referred to as a candlestick, it was actually an oil lamp and did not use candles. Each of the flower-shaped cups held a measure of olive oil and a cloth wick, which gave off a small flame. Aaron and the priests were to keep the lamps burning continuously.

The golden lampstand was placed in the Holy Place, opposite the table of showbread. Because this chamber had no windows, the lampstand was the only source of light. Not only was it ornamental, it was critical for sight.

Like all the other tabernacle furniture, the golden lampstand foreshadowed Jesus Christ. There is other symbolism. Seven, the Hebrew number for completeness, pointed to God’s complete presence, protection, and guidance. God designed the lampstand to look like almond branches. The almond tree blooms very early in the Middle East, in late January or February. Its Hebrew root word means “to hasten,” telling the Israelites that God is quick to fulfill his

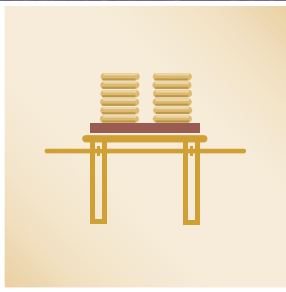


promises. Perhaps the almond branches also reminded the people of Aaron's staff, which was a piece of almond wood.

But the golden lampstand's chief purpose was to point to the true Light that gives life and salvation, and that is Jesus Christ. Jesus told the people: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." His light shined in his perfect life of love. It shined when he hung in the darkness of Good Friday and cried out, "It is finished." With that cry, he proclaimed his victory over the darkness of sin, death, and the devil. He confirmed that victory in the early morning light of the first Easter. Jesus shines the light of salvation on us in his Word.

How dearly we need to rely on our Light. He drives away the darkness of the devil's accusations, reminding us that we are forgiven. And when the fear of death surrounds us or a loved one, our Light lives to assure us of victory over death's darkness. When you live in the Light, you will never walk in darkness.

**Christ be my leader by night as by day,  
Safe through the darkness, for he is the way.  
Gladly I follow, my future his care;  
Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there. Amen. (CW 367:1)**



## THE TABLE AND THE BREAD OF THE PRESENCE

*[The LORD said to Moses,] “Make a table of acacia wood—two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. . . . Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times.” (Exodus 25:23,30)*

*[Jesus said,] “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51)*

It was an astounding miracle right before the Passover Feast. Thousands had come to Jesus on the hillside. Jesus took the lunch of a boy and gave thanks. Five loaves fed five thousand, not counting women and children.

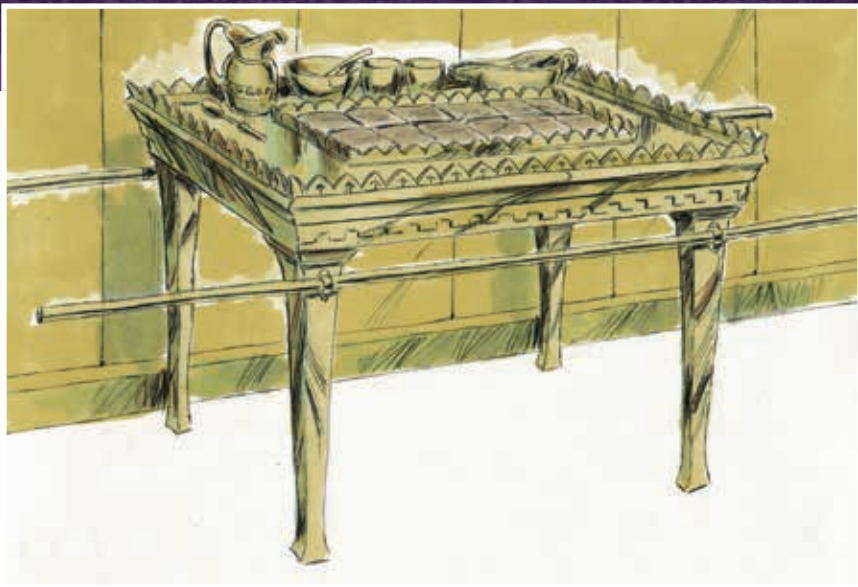
The next day crowds went out to search for Jesus. They found him on the other side of the lake. They pursued him because they had full stomachs and wanted the gravy train to continue. Christ admonished them: “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

The crowds wanted miracles. They wondered if Jesus could one-up Moses and the menu of manna from heaven. In response Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry.” Sadly, grumbling greeted Christ’s invitation. Hard hearts could not hear the grace offered.

Jesus used the context of miraculous meals to present himself as the only food that nourishes a soul with the gift of eternal life. Consider the context in John 6. Crowds fed by the loaves of a boy. A miracle. Desert wanderers sustained by manna. A miracle. Sinners alive forever, sustained by the Word Incarnate. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” The miracle of grace, of forgiveness, of eternal life provided by a gracious God.

This same gracious God used bread to reveal the same gracious truth in the Old Testament. Only God sustains life, both physical and

# MAUNDY THURSDAY

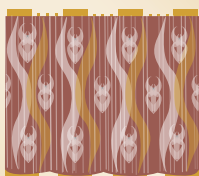


eternal. In the Tabernacle there was a table of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was placed in the Holy Place. On it was the “bread of the Presence,” sometimes called the showbread. There were 12 loaves, one for each tribe, arranged on the table. Every Sabbath new loaves were made while the old loaves were consumed by the priests. Week after week, month after month, decade after decade, a silent testimony was visible on the table of showbread.

The Savior God provides for his people. Over and over, he has proven his power to miraculously provide for the physical needs and nourishment of his people. The Scripture is replete with such testimony. Do not doubt Scripture’s promise that the Word of God creates and sustains our faith life. But beware. The desert wanderers of old quickly tired of the manna and God’s faithful daily providence. Does that ennui endanger our soul if we feel surfeited with Scripture? Satan tempts us to such sinful contempt. Lord, for the sake of your Son’s blood, cleanse our souls. Lord, instill in us a daily desire for quiet time in the Scriptures so that we are fed richly with Jesus, the Bread of Life!

**Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, and that by patience and comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*Rev. Mark Zarling serves Martin Luther College  
as president.*



## THE CURTAIN

*[The LORD said to Moses,] “Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the covenant law behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.” (Exodus 26:33)*

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)*

The words *confidence* and *death* don't belong together. When one thinks of death, sadness and pain usually flood the mind. Outwardly, disease, aches, and a changing appearance signal an aging body that's approaching death. It does not inspire confidence. Death has the opposite effect.

But there was a death that brought confidence. This death is what made a certain Friday good. In the story of Jesus, his death instilled confidence by destroying the thing that had stood in the way. It was the separation between God and us.

For years the separation between God and mankind was visibly represented by a magnificent curtain. It was a curtain made with the finest colors of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, intertwined with twisted linen and overlaid with cherubim. The curtain was hung with gold hooks on four gold-covered wood posts standing tall on four silver bases.

Its purpose was to hide the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place where the Lord God dwelled. It prevented the priests who worked in the tabernacle—and later the temple—from confronting God's glory. The curtain symbolized God's demand for perfection and the fact that sinful humans couldn't even exist in God's presence.

For years, only the sacrifice of a lamb would allow the priest to push back the curtain and stand in God's presence. But on the first Good Friday, the curtain was removed. It wasn't just pushed aside. It was torn



# GOOD FRIDAY



completely in two. As a life of perfection cried out and was ended, now anyone could enter the Most Holy Place. Jesus' blood removed the separation between God and mankind forever. Now there was confidence for all to enter and stand face to face with God.

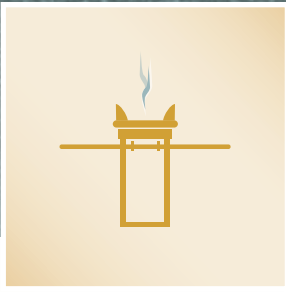
You might be thinking, "Who cares? The curtain that separated God and humans was a symbol for a different people at a different time." But without Jesus, the separation is still there! How often do you find confidence in everything else but him? How often do you forget that his death is the only way to true confidence in life and finally in death? By finding confidence in anything else but him, you are really separating yourself from his death, which brings true confidence.

But gloriously, even though the sinful part of you tries to retain that separation, the curtain pieces remain torn in two. The separation between God and mankind is gone forever. Jesus' actions on the cross assure you that your heart is cleansed and confident.

Day to day and season to season, you can confidently point to what Jesus did on the cross to reunite you with God. Rejoice in that. It's Good Friday today, but every day is good. Because of him, separation is gone forever. Keep this confidence at the forefront of your mind as you march on toward the day when you will be fully reunited with Jesus.

**Dear Lord, as a person who deserves to die and be separated from you forever, I know that your death today means confidence for me. Let me continue to draw near to you this Holy Week and all my life on account of your death for me. Amen.**

*Rev. Hans Thomford serves Martin Luther College  
as an instructor and dormitory supervisor.*



## THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

*[The LORD said to Moses,] “Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high—its horns of one piece with it.” (Exodus 30:1-2)*

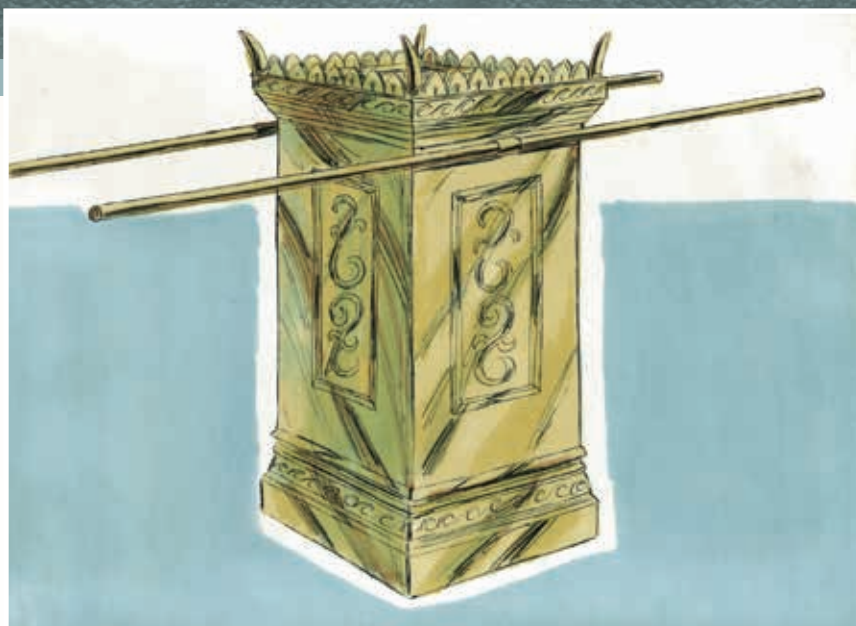
*Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand. (Revelation 8:3-4)*

In the temple of Jesus’ day, a priest could expect that he would be selected for the honor of offering incense on the altar of incense just once in his life. As best as we can tell, there were some 9,000 priests who served on a rotating basis in the temple throughout the year, and the various important duties (such as offering the incense) were chosen by lot during the two-week time of service. So, the one time in his life that Zechariah was given the honor of offering up incense in the Holy Place was the very time that an angel appeared to him, announcing John’s coming birth.

As we learned in our Lutheran Catechisms, one of the great works of Christ is to intercede for us as our great High Priest. The altar of incense foreshadows this work, and was designed by God himself to teach his people two important things.

The first is this: the altar of incense preaches a comforting truth, namely, that our prayers do indeed ascend heavenward toward the throne of God, and God himself invites us to pray without ceasing to him. The beautiful scene from Revelation reminds us of the privilege of prayer, and that as one half of the globe goes to bed each night with prayers on its lips, the other half is rising to a new day with praise on its tongue. And so the prayers of the Church are unceasing throughout the world from morning until night.

But this altar also teaches us that there must also be a mediator for our prayers. For we simply cannot approach a holy God in our sinfulness, believing that our own worthiness should somehow be enough to secure an audience with the holy King of kings. So it was



that only the priest could enter the Holy Place and put incense on the altar, and make intercession for the people.

The tabernacle and temple are both long gone, and with them, the altar of incense. Yet in this Holy Week we see Jesus, the High Priest whom we confess. Although during this week we rightly focus on the sacrifice for sin he made on the cross of Good Friday, we are reminded today also of our Savior's continuing role as intercessor for us at the throne of grace. We still need a mediator, and because Jesus rose from death, "he lives to plead for me above." Because he has washed away our sins with his own blood and made us his children through baptism, we can go to our Father, praying in Jesus' name, asking for all we need. And because our High Priest still lives, we know that God hears and answers us.

**Let my prayer rise like incense before you, O Lord, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Give us faith, O Holy Spirit, to hold on to your promise, that whatever we ask in Jesus' name, our gracious Father will hear and answer us. Amen.**



## THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

*[The LORD said to Moses,] “Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.” (Exodus 25:21-22)*

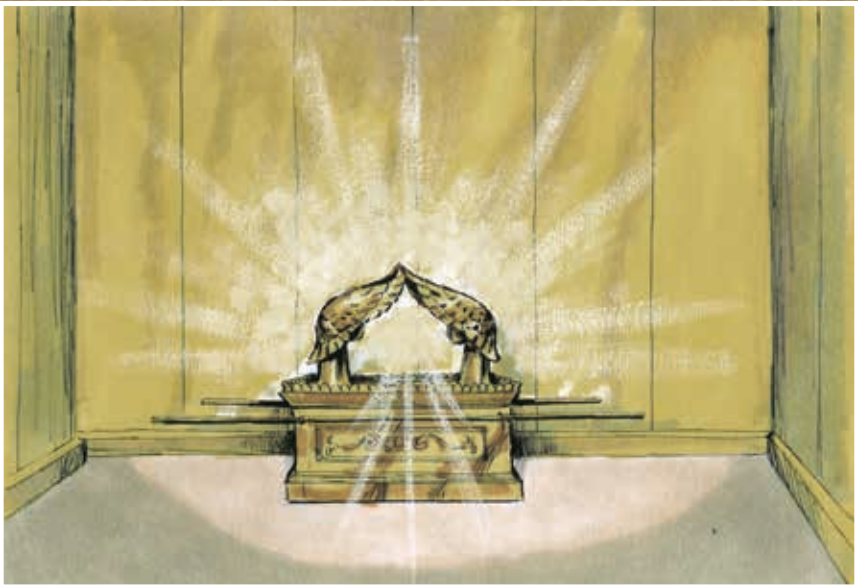
*Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25)*

“Bezalel.” Do you recognize that name? In his day, in his field of expertise, he was known above all other names. Yet in our era, you may not have even heard of him. You may even have difficulty forming your mouth and lips to say and pronounce his name. “Bezalel, Bezalel.”

So, you may be thinking to yourself, why on this most celebratory day in history, when death itself was conquered by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, are we giving devotional time to a relatively obscure man named Bezalel? The answer lies in the fact that Bezalel was a master craftsman, a chief architect, an interior designer, and a supreme artisan above all others of his era. God chose Bezalel, out of all the Israelites, to be the general contractor of a building that was to become the central focus in the worship life of God’s people, namely, the tabernacle. Scripture also records for us that Bezalel was entrusted with the special honor of constructing the most important piece found in the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant.

Bezalel carefully constructed the box where the 10 Commandments were placed. Yet Bezalel’s job was not complete. He still had to fashion and build the most important piece of furniture in all of Israel, the covering, the lid to place on top of this box. The importance of this lid lay not in the gold, the wood, or the craftsmanship used in construction. Nor were the golden wings of the cherubim, arching over the cover and the ark, its most valued feature. It was the fact that God himself would sit on that piece of

# EASTER SUNDAY



furniture and dwell among his people on what was known as the atonement cover, the mercy seat of God.

Look into that ark. There are the 10 Commandments. There we come face to face with our sins as God's holy covenant law convicts us. There we come face to face with the consequences of our sins, realizing that the ultimate curse of sin is a wage extracted called "death."

But now step back and look at that cover on top of the ark, the atonement cover, the mercy seat of God. Watch over the ages as 83 different high priests entered the Holy of Holies on Atonement Day and sprinkled the sacrificed blood of an animal to signify the forgiveness of sins. Yet none of those priests nor all of the blood they sprinkled were enough to cover our sin.

That blood belongs to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:19). Jesus is both the victim and the priest. Jesus is the spotless Lamb, and his blood purifies us from every sin. The grave is empty. Sin is atoned for. Death is conquered. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

**Dear Jesus, you have made atonement for my sins. Your sacrificed blood covers me completely. You paid the price of death for me with your death. You conquered death once and for all by rising from the grave. Your ascension assures me of my own ascension. All the blessings associated with being "at one" with God are mine because of you. Praise be to your name! Amen.**

*Rev. Douglas Lange serves Martin Luther College as a professor of theology and physical education.*

CHRIST IN THE TA



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

## PRAYER FOR MLC

*The Word became flesh and made  
his dwelling (tabernacled) among us. (John 1:14)*



# CHRIST IN THE TABERNACLE



Dearest Lord Jesus,  
you came to earth and “tabernacled” among us.  
It is only through you and your sacrifice  
that we can approach a holy God.  
We thank you for your love, your saving work,  
and your continual presence among us.

We also thank you for the Christian schools in our midst—  
our grade schools, high schools, colleges, and seminary.  
Preserve these schools that share your Word with the next generation.

Today we especially thank you for Martin Luther College,  
which equips Christians to be witnesses for you:  
pastors, teachers, and staff ministers  
who will go out into the world to share the gospel.

We also ask you to inspire more men and women to consider  
the amazing adventure of the public ministry.  
Move them to ponder the beautiful privilege of your calling:  
“you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Lord Jesus, just as the Israelites looked to the tabernacle  
as a symbol of God’s presence,  
so we look to you,  
grateful that you remain among us  
in all your power and love. Amen.



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

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