

St. Paul Lutheran Church
of Stillwater, Minnesota
February 18, 2026
Ash Wednesday



Your presence at worship is important to God and to us! Whether you are a first-time visitor, frequent participant, neighbor, member, or friend, please take a moment as you prepare for worship to share some information on the "Welcome to Worship" card included with your bulletin. Place it in the offering plate at the time the offering is received.

On Ash Wednesday, we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that "now is the day of salvation." Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

Many of our worship materials are taken from the red Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW). Page numbers are located in the front half of the book, and hymn numbers are located in the back half of the book.

The assembly **speaks** or **sings** the bold responses.



GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

Gathering Song

ELW hymn 186

"Create In Me a Clean Heart"

Greeting

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

First Reading

Pew Bible: Old Testament Page 847

Joel 2:15-17

Because of the coming Day of the LORD, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community reminds God of his gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.

At the conclusion:

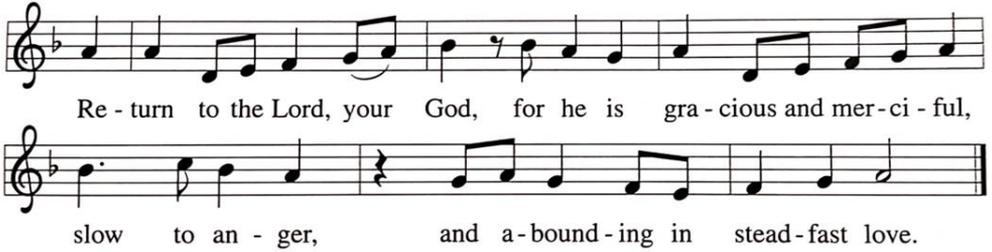
Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.



Gospel Acclamation

"Return to the Lord Your God"



Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and mer - ci - ful,
slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

Gospel Reading

Pew Bible: New Testament Pages 5-6

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.

The gospel is introduced:

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glorify to you, O Lord.

At the conclusion:

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.



Sermon

Pastor Nathan Baker-Trinity

Silence for reflection follows the sermon.

Hymn of the Day

ELW hymn 328

"Restore In Us, O God"

Confession and Forgiveness

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

The assembly sits. Silence is kept for reflection and self-examination.

Most holy and merciful God,

**we confess to you and to one another,
and before the whole company of heaven,
that we have sinned by our fault,
by our own fault,
by our own most grievous fault,
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.**

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have shut our ears to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our past unfaithfulness, the pride, envy, hypocrisy, and apathy that have infected our lives, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to share the faith that is in us, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our neglect of human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our false judgments, our uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us, we confess to you.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Restore us, O God, and let your anger depart from us

Hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.

Imposition of Ashes

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes be a sign of our mortality and penitence, reminding us that only by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are we given eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

All are welcome to come forward and kneel or stand to receive the ashes.

Ministers mark the forehead of each person with a cross of ashes, saying:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Please sing during the imposition:

ELW hymn 608

"Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling"

After those who desire ashes have received them, all may stand.

Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,
that we may show forth your glory in the world.

(Continued on the next page.) 5

By the cross and passion of your Son, our Savior,
bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins
through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Peace

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

All are invited to greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace.

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Offering

Our offering is a collection of money for the church's mission, including the care of those in need, as a sign of the giving of our whole selves in grateful response for all God's gifts. Your offering and "Welcome to Worship" card may be placed in the offering plate. The QR code on the right may be used if you wish to give electronically.



Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts,

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

You are indeed holy, almighty and merciful God. . .

In the night in which he was betrayed . . .

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks . . .

For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Remembering, therefore, his salutary command . . .

To you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory in your holy church, now and forever.

Amen.

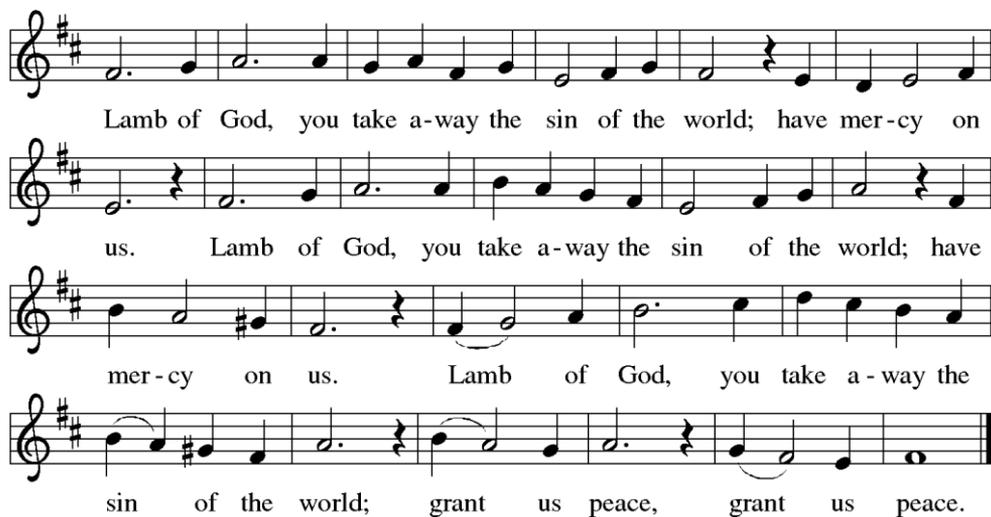
Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**





Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on
 us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have
 mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the
 sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

Communion

We celebrate at an open communion table. All who hear our Lord's invitation are welcome to participate. Receive the bread first with an open hand and eat immediately, followed by the juice (white) or wine (red). Gluten-free bread is available at the front end of the center aisle. Please indicate to an usher if you need to receive communion from your pew. Children who have received age-appropriate instruction are welcome to commune. If you prefer instead to receive a blessing, please indicate by crossing your arms over your shoulders.

When giving the bread and cup, the communion ministers say:

The body of Christ, given for you.

The blood of Christ, shed for you.

and each person may respond:

Amen.



Communion Song

"Just As I Am without One Plea"

ELW hymn 592

Prayer After Communion

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

Blessing

Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness;
be of good courage;
hold fast to that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted;
honor all people;
love and serve God,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God.

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GOSPEL MESSAGE

It Should Be No Secret

Just about anyone who reaches their ninetieth birthday has been asked at least once, “What is the secret to a long life?” The answers will vary: A good diet. Staying active. Not stressing over the little things. Even making your bed every morning or keeping a tidy house has been linked with a longer lifespan! Fostering good habits and living with intention can go a long way.

But what is the secret to a rich spiritual life? In a sense, this is precisely the question Jesus addresses at length in his Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is just the beginning of a sermon that goes on to address such topics as prayer, wealth, worry, judgment, and daily needs. His advice about practices like charity, prayer, and fasting speaks to the importance of the intentions and motivations we bring to our common life.

There’s nothing wrong with praying with others or public acts of charity. Churches, synagogues, and religious communities in general engage in these activities. The issue is whether we shine light on ourselves or on God’s mercy and on people and places in need.

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a reminder to turn to God. Where are our lives going? Where is the church going? The light of the world is not meant to be kept hidden or secret. Where and upon whom will we choose to direct the light of God’s mercy and love? The reward of this examination and turning to God is the treasure we choose to share freely with others rather than keep for ourselves.