

The background of the entire page is a grayscale image of water ripples, with a large, prominent ripple in the upper left quadrant and smaller, more frequent ripples throughout the rest of the frame.

# **WATER MARKS**

**LENT DEVOTIONAL • 2012**

Luther Seminary • Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary



# WATER MARKS

**LENT DEVOTIONAL • 2012**

*Editor's note: "Water Marks" was written for the 40 days of Lent, so there are no Sunday devotions included in this booklet. However, daily God Pause subscribers will still receive their devotions on every day of Lent, including Sundays.*

Dear Friends,

Greetings from the students, faculty and staff of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Luther Seminary. This year during Lent, we invite you on a scriptural journey in which you will hear and experience God's word through myriad biblical passages dealing with water.

This journey is very dear to me, the author of these reflections. I remember the first time I visited the Holy Land and learned to read the Bible as a neighborhood book, written in real places. The water-marked places stood out the most: the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, the great Mediterranean, the Gihon spring and the Sea of Galilee. These reached out and reminded me of my own recent baptism, joining my two sons at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in New Rochelle, N.Y. I understood then and my understanding continues to deepen that the written word of Scripture is incarnational not only in its center in Christ but also in the way it speaks to us through new words and experiences in every time and place. Our hope is that by swimming deeply in the water passages of Scripture you too may connect these stories, prophecies and songs to your own ongoing lives of baptismal faith.

We invite you on this water marked scriptural journey in partnership with the Book of Faith Initiative of the ELCA, important to both of our seminaries, and with Augsburg Fortress Press. These devotions, which cover the 40 days of Lent, are excerpted from Augsburg Fortress' "Water Marks: a Book of Faith Lenten Journey." In the more complete book, you will find additional material such as fuller meditations, biblical wisdom, wisdom from the tradition and questions to ponder, all of which are very helpful if you are undertaking this Lenten journey with others. Additional worship helps. Suggestions and an original hymn, all written by church musician Paul Jacobson (my partner and husband of 40 years) can be found online through Augsburg Fortress.

May the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit accompany and guide you on this journey and be with you all your days.

Blessings,

**Diane Jacobson**

*professor emeritus of Luther Seminary and director of the ELCA Book of Faith Initiative*





## Ash Wednesday, February 22

Genesis 1:1-2

### God Stirs the Waters

We begin with God hovering over the unformed waters, ready to begin the journey of creation. The waters are the deep chaos and the unformed nothingness awaiting God's Word to become part of creation.

Before speaking the world into existence, God is already there as breath, wind, Spirit—all three present in the Hebrew word *ru'ah* [ROO-ach]. This *ru'ah* is God's breath pushing back chaotic waters to keep them from breaking free, God's wind stirring up stagnant waters so they might receive the breath of life and the Holy Spirit brooding over the waters, preparing for the birth of all living things. These pictures of creation call to mind God's work in our own baptismal waters. God's breath surrounds our sin and puts it to death. And for the sake of all, we are, like the chaotic waters of creation, constrained and given limits.

As in creation, God's wind stirs and awakens us. Where there was nothingness, now we are poised, ready to become what God would have us be. By that same Spirit we are made alive.

*Creator God, restrain me, birth me and stir me to life this day and always. Amen.*

## Thursday, February 23

Job 26:12-13

### Water Marks God's Great Battle

Children are not the only ones who fear monsters. There is an ancient Near East belief that the sea is a monster that must be killed by God to ensure that the world is a good and ordered place. In the Old Testament this monster is named Leviathan, Rahab, Lotan or simply the Deep. We also know this monster as Satan or the devil.

We recognize this monster in floods and terrorism, starvation and adultery, hatred and abuse. We name the monster as evil. And we see it in ourselves and name it as sin. The monster so often appears to be stronger than God and we wonder if even God can defeat such an insidious beast.

But God speaks to our fears. God has contained the mighty waters since the beginning of time. God meets the devil and will not be deceived. And God in Christ has taken up our monstrous sins and tamed them through forgiveness. We join Job, the psalmists and the writer of Revelation in thanking God for the monster's defeat.

*We give you thanks, O God of might, that you have met the monsters around and within us and have defeated them once and for all. Amen.*

## Friday, February 24

### Genesis 7:17, 21; 8:1, 3; 9:14-15

#### Water Marks the Flood

Many children know the story of Noah's ark. Versions of the ancient boat have been made into toys. But this story is actually quite frightening, as the waters of chaos become the instrument of God's destruction.

We glimpse water's destructive power in tsunamis or floods. Some wonder if such destruction is the judgment of God responding to our unabated pride, continued injustice and apparent lack of concern for the earth and each other.

Yet the account of the flood is also a tale of promise. God looks on the water's destruction and vows, "Never again!" God remembers Noah, then sees the rainbow—the sign of the covenant—and remembers the divine promise. The chaotic waters will never again have the final say.

Perhaps we do not have it wrong after all when we give Noah's ark to our children. They, like us, will come to know the horrors of floods. But through their play they also know that the picture of animals walking two by two is a water mark of promise.

*God of judgment and mercy, protect us from the floods all around us. Look to your rainbow and remember your promise this day and always. Amen.*

## Saturday, February 25

### Genesis 2:5-6

#### Water Marks the Stream in the Midst of the Garden

Water has destructive power, but it also gives life. Modern science tells us that all living things are made up mostly of water. Before any tree, plant or creature is found in the primeval garden, a stream rises up and waters all the earth. The painting "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by Hieronymous Bosch portrays this breathtaking scene. With this single image, the very substance that most threatens creation in Genesis 1 becomes the source of life in Genesis 2.

This dual reality of water is all around us. Oceans teem with life as well as threaten. Rivers overflow, but offer cultivation. We are brought to life in our mothers' chaotic waters. Proverbs 18:4 uses this image to teach us that our words can both drown and gush with wisdom.

Paradox stands at the heart of creation, just as it stands at the heart of salvation. The cross of Christ, the very instrument of death, is also the tree that gives us life. This dual reality marks our baptism and the following journey. We die with Christ, and in Christ we are reborn.

*God of grace, grant us this day the gift of seeing your life-giving waters all around us. Amen.*





## Monday, February 27

Genesis 2:10-11, 13-14

### Water Marks the Great Rivers

We often skip the part of Genesis 2 that lists the four rivers in Eden. They may seem a less significant part of the story. But let's look at where these verses take us.

A river flows out of Eden, watering the garden and dividing into four great rivers. While we know the location of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers still today, the identities of the Gihon and Pishon are less clear. What is clear is that these rivers are real. We take heart in the observation that these rivers water the whole world, making possible life beyond the garden. That four crucial rivers come from the first river God creates establishes the whole earth as the Lord's.

This river feeds our hope for the promised future. Ezekiel envisions such a life-giving stream flowing from the temple (Ezekiel 47:1-12). This river that flows out of Eden also flows from the throne of God. The picture of Eden is not only about a distant, mythic past, but also a divinely promised future.

*Source of life, we thank you for the gift of the great rivers of our world. May they inspire in us joy in your creation and hope for the future. Amen.*

## Tuesday, February 28

Psalm 46:1-5

### The River Brings Hope to the City of God

Without water, the source of life, a city cannot thrive. The principal biblical city is Jerusalem, city of God. Jerusalem, like other cities, was founded by the Gihon River, said to flow beneath the temple. In Ezekiel's vision, it becomes the river of hope from Eden. This river is also said to point to the Messiah. And indeed, the Gihon feeds the Pool of Siloam. There Jesus joined his own saliva with the waters from the stream and healed the man born blind (John 9:11).

In Psalm 46 this river becomes a sign that the watery chaos that has threatened from the beginning is no match for God. God, the ultimate source of life, is in the midst of the city. God is our refuge and strength. And the river of hope becomes, in the hymn of John Newton, the grace that springs from eternal love. How astounding it is that God gives us this concrete sign of hope so we might know that God is in our midst even when steeples are falling.

*God of grace, be with us where we live. Gladden our hearts and help us see the signs of your presence all around us. Amen.*

# Wednesday, February 29

Exodus 1:22; 2:2-3, 5-6, 10

## Water Marks the Birth of the Deliverer

In the story of God's people, water becomes a threat in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh threatens to drown all newborn Hebrew boys. God blesses a Hebrew woman with a child, and she builds a basket (ark) to hide him. In Hebrew the word for this basket is the same as the one used for the saving ark of Noah.

It is Pharaoh's own daughter who comes to the river to bathe and takes compassion on the child. This daughter of Pharaoh is adopted into the people of God. She adopts and names the child "Moses" (*mosheh*), which in Egyptian means "son" and also sounds like the Hebrew word for "I drew out" (*mashah*). Moses is drawn out of the water and stamped with a name forever. This same Moses will lead his own people through the waters of death into new life.

It's like the story of baptism. It is in these waters that we are adopted into God's family and named into a calling of service.

*Lord, we give you thanks for mothers and all women who are moved by compassion and insight. May we also draw others out of danger and despair. Amen.*

# Thursday, March 1

Exodus 2:15-22

## Water Marks the Meeting at the Well


This story of Moses at the well—like the story of his birth—again foreshadows Moses' calling of liberation through water.

Two other interwoven themes also mark this meeting: hospitality and identification with the stranger. Moses the stranger, misidentified as an Egyptian, is invited to break bread with this Midianite family. Reuel, the priest of Midian, offers Moses not only a meal, but also the hand of his daughter in marriage. But the real climax of this encounter comes with the birth and naming of the child. Just as Moses' name had significance, so also does the name of Moses' son, Gershom. The Hebrew word *ger* means "stranger" or "alien resident." Though Pharaoh feared the Hebrews, Reuel sees the stranger Moses not as one to fear but as one in need of hospitality. Through the naming of Gershom, Moses—as well as all of his Hebrew people—are marked forever with this alien-resident identity.

Like Moses and the people of Israel, we are invited to identify with the strangers in our midst and invite them to feast at our table.

*Lord, teach us to identify with the stranger, and help us both to give and receive hospitality. Amen.*





## Friday, March 2

### Exodus 7:17-18

#### **The Water is Stained with Blood**

Talking about the plagues God unleashed on Egypt presents us with a difficult moment. Our God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6). How can such a God have sent these plagues? Pharaoh is the human embodiment of chaos. The violence of the plagues serves justice. What’s more, this battle is fought to set the record straight. The Lord, and not Pharaoh, is the one true God.

Blood, like water, holds both death and life. Pharaoh wanted to fill the Nile with the blood of the Israelites. Be careful what you wish for, answers God. In the final plague—the death of the Egyptians’ firstborns (Exodus 12:29-32)—the Israelites mark their doorposts with blood to ward off the angel of death. And the blood of the Egyptians fills the waters when God closes the sea after the Israelites safely pass. All of these point us to God’s final victory over evil when the blood of God’s own Son is spilled to save us.

*God of promise, help us as we struggle with violence in your word and world. Grant us peace and hope in your Son. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 3

### Exodus 15:1-2

#### **Water Marks Victory at Sea**

No image of the Old Testament is more emblematic of God’s work as savior than the Red Sea miracle. God saves the people of Israel by opening a path through the chaotic waters for them to pass and then closes the sea, drowning the pursuing Egyptians. Once more, water both kills and brings life.

We often respond to God’s salvation by singing. This is precisely what Israel does. All the people sang the glorious Song of the Sea found in Exodus 15. To respond in song is no minor thing. To sing is to interpret, remember, proclaim, create community, praise and give thanks.

It’s no wonder that Luther wrote hymns, that African-American hymns of strife grace today’s Christianity, that we find our common faith in songs from every nation. When the people sing, we tell the world that God is active and alive, creating and redeeming. The stories of God’s victories are kept alive in worship. Through song, the story becomes the living word for future generations.

Through our songs and hymns we proclaim that God is good. How can we keep from singing?

*Lord, give us this day a new song to sing, that we might remember you always and give you thanks. Amen.*

# Monday, March 5

## Numbers 20:1-2, 11

### Water Comes from the Rock

Most of us have never been literally lost in a desert, but each of us knows the experience of being lost, afraid and deserted. Wandering the desert is a powerful metaphor for realities we all face. Sometimes we meet the devil in the wilderness. Sometimes we meet God.

In Numbers, the people wander lost and afraid. When the prophet Miriam dies, it seems that the water supply dries up. The very name Miriam in Hebrew (*miryam*) sounds like the word for *water* (*mayim*). Moses and his brother, Aaron, get instructions from God. And the most astonishing act follows. Moses strikes the rock and water comes out abundantly.

We read this story with Paul's words resounding in our ears: "they drank from the spiritual rock, ... and the rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). How we gather around this rock makes a difference. We can gather around our fear, lamenting our circumstances and longing for the past. Or we can gather around the promise of water, even from a rock. And the rock is Christ.

*Be with us, Lord, when we are lost and afraid, wandering in the wilderness, feeling deserted. Meet our fears with the water of life. Amen.*

# Tuesday, March 6

## Joshua 3:17; 4:1, 3, 5, 21-24

### Water Marks Crossing to the Promised Land

Throughout history, crossing rivers or other bodies of water has marked the beginning of a significant military victory. Caesar crossed the Rubicon, Washington crossed the Delaware, Eisenhower crossed the English Channel. And Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to claim the promised land.

This story begins as a military conquest, but most striking is how clearly this event, like all others in Israel's history, portrays the work of God rather than the work of the people. We see this in the miraculous way the waters of the Jordan part, in the setting up of 12 memorial stones for 12 tribes and in the ark of the covenant carried by Israel's priests. This crossing is yet another step in the work of God fulfilling divine promises made to Abraham, Sarah and their descendants.

Crossing the Jordan remains one of the central ways we speak of the promise of life after death. As we cross over the Jordan, we will rest in the same promise that milk and honey lie on the other side.

*Lord of life, be with us in our battles and our river crossings, in this life and the next. Amen.*





## Wednesday, March 7

Jeremiah 2:13; 9:15

### Water Marks Sin and Judgment

A challenging reality we face is that the waters of chaos can be set loose through our own behavior. The prophets of ancient Israel knew this reality well. They listened to the voice of God and delivered God's often discomfiting message.

In Jeremiah 2 and beyond we hear a devastating recital of Israel's sins: they had forgotten what God had done for them, gone after other gods and depended on alliances with the nations instead of God. They drank from their own cracked cisterns rather than drinking God's living water. So God gives them poisonous water to drink.

The words of Jeremiah are powerful. We know that this word from God is also addressed to us. It helps to remember that God's judgment was always born of love, never revenge. It was and continues to be about turning us around, changing our behavior, calling forth our repentance—which always includes actions as well as words.

God's fountain of living water is eternal, overflowing and always there for the drinking. Why would we want to drink from any other source?

*Give us courage, O Fountain of Living Water, to hear your righteous judgments against us. Let us heed your warnings and change our ways. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 8

Amos 5:24

### Water Marks Justice

Of all the prophetic calls to justice, two cry most loudly to us from the pages of Scripture. One is from the prophet Micah: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Amos 6:8). The other is today's verse from Amos 5: "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream."

Amos' words capture our attention and imagination. Here, the prophet uses the cry for justice as a carrot rather than a stick, though the word for "justice" in Hebrew is also the word for "judgment." So Amos is also inviting judgment to roll down like waters. Justice for one is always judgment for another.

Amos' cry for justice and righteousness continues to stir us. God's will for society and creation is impelling. Justice and righteousness invite us to side with the river of life, not the flood of death. Through Amos, we feel justice and righteousness in, with and under our waters of baptism.

*Change us, Lord! Help us seek justice for all and join with others swept up by your stream of righteousness. Amen.*

## Friday, March 9

Jonah 1:4, 11-17

### Water Marks a Prophet's Call

In Jonah, the sea is again an instrument of judgment and grace in God's hand. Jonah knows the Lord "made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9), but foolishly thinks he can escape the Lord by sea. Irony fills Jonah's story. His escape route becomes a death trap. God's control of the stormy sea leads to the conversion of foreign sailors. Their fear of certain destruction is turned into worship of Jonah's God.

On the other hand, Jonah gets a taste of the very judgment he craves for his enemies. He is cast into the raging sea. But then the Lord appoints a big fish to save him. Jonah believes his salvation is a sign of his righteousness, but he discovers he is saved to fulfill the very mission of grace he tried so hard to avoid.

Are we like Jonah, thinking we know just whom the Lord should judge? Are we like the foreign sailors, who recognize God's power and seek to do right? Are we ready to hear God's call to go and be reconciled, even to those we dislike?

*Lord of the sea, may the storms in our lives bring us to faith. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 10

2 Kings 5:10-12

### Water Marks the Flesh

Water is sometimes the instrument of healing. Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army, one of Israel's enemies. He was a mighty and successful warrior. He also had leprosy. He assumed, like so many people with riches and power, that he could use money and prestige to buy a cure. So he was angry, not grateful, when Elisha offered him healing for free. Only after surrendering his need for honor and control could he be healed. Naaman's cleansing is like a baptism of sorts. The promise of healing and new life awaits our entry into the waters.

In Luke 4:27-29, Jesus used the example of Naaman's healing to point to another reality: God's gift of healing is available to all—from the greatest to the least, from the insider to the foreign commander. This teaching was the one that scandalized those in Jesus' hometown. They thought the promise was only for them and not for the Romans outside their gates, just like Naaman. In Naaman's story, water marks two frequently repeated prophetic words from Scripture: the promise is free and not ours to hoard.

*O Lord of Life, we pray for healing for the world. Heal our own hearts as well. Amen.*





## Monday, March 12

Isaiah 44:3

### Water Marks Promise for a Thirsty Land

Water marks God's promise not only for people but also for land. Throughout the Bible nature is pictured as alive, active and needful of God's care. In Job 38:25-27, God sends rain to the desert, not because of human need but because the desert needs rain. In a world of environmental concerns, such divine abundance touches our hearts.

In Scripture the fate of nature is intertwined with that of humanity. In Deuteronomy 30:19-20, when God makes a covenant with Israel, heaven and earth are called upon as witnesses. When Israel obeys God's commands, the earth is blessed. When it does not, all nature cries out and curses replace blessings. The world responds to our choices and actions.

In today's passage, God's covenant promise goes beyond our expectations. God's promise of pouring out real water on a thirsty land is parallel to the divine Spirit being poured out on the people. Water and Spirit are both instruments of blessing. Baptismal promises echo throughout the land and the voices of nature and humanity join in praise to God.

*We give thanks, O Lord, along with your thirsty land, that you continue to pour out your Spirit on all your creation. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 13

Isaiah 55:1, 10-11

### Water Marks Promise for a Thirsty People

We've all experienced physical thirst. We sometimes thirst for things that are not good for us—riches, status, power, revenge. And we thirst for noble things—love, affection, justice, peace, understanding, meaning, fulfillment. To all these thirsts, Isaiah issues a stunning invitation: "Come to the waters." Are we like the leper Naaman, wondering what waters these are and what they cost? The prophet responds, "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." The waters are given to you and will accomplish precisely what God intended.

Isaiah's invitation is shouted to a people languishing in exile and yearning for home. They thirst for freedom and God's steadfast promise. In Isaiah 40-55, the prophet describes a servant who accomplishes God's redemptive purpose for the people. He calls the thirsting people to listen to his words and believe that God's word is like rain that waters the earth. With ears of faith we hear in this prophetic word a promise of another redeeming servant, Christ Jesus. In him we drink freely from the wellsprings of God's thirst quenching water.

*Lord of invitation, we give thanks that you have met us in our thirsting and led us to Christ, our wellspring of salvation. Amen.*

## Wednesday, March 14

Psalm 6:6; 137:1

### Water Marks Our Tearful Lament

The seas of chaos are internal and external. Internal chaos is marked by the salt water of our tears. The drowning flood of tears may come for personal loss, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, depression. The psalms of lament give expression to our confused and complicated feelings. With the help of the Spirit we are able to give our sorrow over to God.

Israel knew such sorrow was not confined to personal grief. Nations also weep. Psalm 137 is a community lament expressing Israel's sorrow after being exiled to Babylon, the capital of the nation that had overrun Israel's homeland and destroyed Jerusalem's temple. Israel's citizens cried out to God: How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

Only in exile does Israel learn that God is found in absence and presence, in sorrow and joy. And only when faced with the reality of the cross do we come to know the depths of God's love. In the midst of our weeping we are met by God and given hope.

*Receive our tears, O Lord. Cherish the truth found there. Then dry our tears and let us rest in you. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 15

Psalm 51:1-2

### Water Marks Our Confession

A basic use for water is cleansing. Watery cleansing also marks our lives of faith. Because we sin before God, we need deep cleansing. Every Ash Wednesday we begin Lent with Psalm 51, the most profound psalm of repentance in Scripture.

The psalm prays that God show mercy on us in three significant ways. We first pray that God "blot out," or erase, our transgressions. Then we pray to God, "Wash me." Wash me thoroughly, we pray to God; wash my sins away. Finally, we pray, "Purify me, Lord." Make it a rich and effective ceremonial cleansing.

God is the subject of all of these verbs. Psalm 51 teaches us that even our repentance is God's work. And as our prayer for cleansing continues, we ask God to move deeper still. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Water marks God's cleansing in our lives, a washing of repentance so our lives and hearts might be made new by the work of the Spirit.

*God of mercy, cleanse us. Wash away our sins that we might go into your world ready to do your work. Amen.*





## Friday, March 16

### Psalm 42:1-2

#### Water Marks Our Yearning for God

We live in a time when many are searching, longing for meaning, fulfillment and purpose. And many are eager. A wonderful image for searchers is found in Psalm 42—“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.” Deer are so drawn to flowing waters that they dart carelessly across dangerous roads.

This is precisely how our souls yearn for the living God. The root meaning for the Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated here as “soul,” is “throat.” The throat is the metaphorical place where our souls reside. Just as the deer thirsts for water, so also our throats—our souls—thirst for God. And just as our throats breathe in air so also do our souls long for the God of life.

The yearning of Psalm 42 finds an answer from Jesus. In John 7:37-38, Jesus cries out to the gathering crowds, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me.” And then he adds that the rivers of living water flow out of the believer’s heart. The thirsting soul will find drink.

*“For you, my God, the living God, My thirsty spirit pines; Oh, when shall I behold your face, O Majesty divine?” (Nahum Tate, “As Pants the Hart for Cooling Streams,” Lutheran Book of Worship 452)*

## Saturday, March 17

### Psalm 18:16; 84:5-6

#### Water Marks Our Thanksgiving and Praise

More than anything else, psalms are about praising God and giving thanks. Water streams its way through this thanks and praise. Through the psalms we thank God individually for saving us from the mighty waters, both literally and metaphorically, and for giving us refreshing water to drink. We thank God as communities for bringing us through the waters, for bringing water to the desert and for covering the earth with springs.

Psalm 84 pictures those who continually sing praises to God in the house of the Lord. They are happy and blessed. Through their praise, their hearts become like highways to the house of prayer, filled with the joy of homecoming and of experiencing the return from exile in Babylon. Their joy is like those pilgrims walking home through the valley of Baca. Their praise transforms the dry valley into a spring-fed oasis. When we give God thanks and praise, not only is God given the glory, but we ourselves and those around us are transformed.

*We give you thanks, dear Lord, for all the bounties you shower upon us. To you be honor and glory! Amen.*

# Monday, March 19

## Psalm 23:1-3a

### Water Marks the Promise

No psalm has been more central to the faith of American Protestants in the last 200 years than Psalm 23. This psalm inspires us to think about God's presence with us through our lives of faith and about our inevitable death and eternal rest.

For Christians, the psalm calls to mind Jesus, the Good Shepherd. I still remember my first class in psalms at Union Seminary in New York City, listening to my beloved professor, Samuel Terrien, talking about the time he spent living among the Bedouin peoples. Terrien spoke of how the Bedouin shepherds would care for their sheep, leading them to safe and quiet waters where the poor, not very intelligent creatures would not fall in and drown. And when the sheep were battered about, the Bedouin would bring them into their tents and anoint their heads with medicinal oil.

So it is with us. The Good Shepherd leads us to waters that mark the divine care that surrounds us all our days, even to our final dwelling places.

*Come, Beloved Shepherd. Lead us to your refreshing waters. Be with us now and when we die. Amen.*

# Tuesday, March 20

## Psalm 1:1-3

### Water Marks the Gift of the Word

Psalm 1 is expansive. It invites us into the book of Psalms and provides a view of God's word. Come, the psalmist bids us, discover the blessedness of diving into *Torah*. The Hebrew word *Torah*, here translated "law," can refer to the whole of God's word in the Bible.

Psalm 1 invites us "to meditate" on *Torah*. We usually think of meditating as quiet and thoughtful. But the word, here translated *meditate*, is used to speak of the roaring of lions and the cooing of birds.

Such activity, says the psalmist, leads to more than we can imagine. When we delight in God's teaching, we become like trees, made and kept alive with roots planted by an ever-flowing stream. We are rooted in God, in God's life-giving Spirit, in God's word in Scripture and in God's word in Christ.

Once our roots are fed by this ever-flowing stream, we produce leaves and fruit. Our leaves provide shade and shelter. Our fruit nourishes and reaches out. Being rooted in the waters of God's word brings us joy and also has at its end the feeding and sheltering of the world.

*O Living Word, water our roots so that the fruit of our study might be the healing of the nations. Amen.*





## Wednesday, March 21

Matthew 3:13-17

### Jesus is Baptized by John

Pictures of Jesus being baptized by John are everywhere—in congregations, museums and cathedrals. Why is this baptism so important to us? Perhaps in this event we both identify and become one with Jesus, while also seeing him as truly God's son.

Like Jesus, we come to the waters to be baptized. Just as Jesus stands before John, we see ourselves standing at the font. Yet we also know most surely that his baptism is not like ours. We know that Jesus is no ordinary person. He is far greater.

As Jesus emerges from the waters, this impression of difference is magnified. Suddenly the heavens open, the Spirit of God descends and God says from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Certainly this water mark on Jesus is different from ours. We are not God. Yet even in this most exalted moment, our identification with Jesus returns. When we are baptized, God's Spirit descends on us and we are named "child of God." And in our baptism, God is most certainly pleased.

*We thank you, Lord, for helping us remember our baptism each and every day. May our remembrance be marked by Christ's presence. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 22

John 2:6-9a, 11

### Jesus Turns Water into Wine

Turning water into wine at a wedding celebration in Cana is the first of Jesus' signs recorded in the Gospel of John. Just this once, water is trumped by wine. This feast is marked by an overturning of the past—the cleansing waters of purification are insufficient for the radical cleansing of God's reign. This feast is marked by abundance—the jars are numerous and huge. This feast is marked by surprise—the steward is stunned: "Everyone serves the good wine first. ... But you have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10). This feast is marked by hospitality—the needs of the guests are met and surpassed. This feast is marked by revelation—Christ's glory is revealed.

Each Sunday we are invited to a feast that exceeds this wedding feast in Cana. We experience our own foretaste of God's kingdom feast as we share Christ's body and blood. The miracle wine, this sign of a new creation, is filled with a literal foretaste of heaven. What a sign. What a promise.

*God of signs and miracles, open our eyes and surprise us this day with your generosity and grace. Amen.*

## Friday, March 23

### Matthew 8:24-27; 14:25, 29-33

#### Jesus Calms the Storm and Walks on Water

In two events on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus quiets the storm and calms the raging waves. The disciples first respond as we might expect—with fear. “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” In one situation, Peter courageously walks out on the water to meet Jesus, who is strolling on the waves to their rescue. But then, he is overcome by fear, and he sinks like a rock.

In spite of the doubt and fear, Jesus calms the raging winds and waves. The disciples respond with amazement and faith. Their proclamation—“Truly you are the Son of God”—makes it clear they recognize the power of God.

We experience our own storms. And we know well the reactions of fear and lack of faith. Can we hear the voice of Jesus calling to us in the midst of our chaotic seas? Can we hear his words of assurance? Life’s storms will come. But because we follow the one who can calm wind and wave, fear is not the last word. We are held in the hands of the very son of God.

*Lord, send us Jesus to calm the raging seas, and give us faith to meet our fears. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 24

### Mark 4:1

#### Jesus Teaches from a Boat

In the Gospels, Jesus is addressed as teacher or rabbi more than any other title. One could say that Jesus is not merely a teacher; he is *the* teacher. He embodies the figure of divine wisdom described in the book of Proverbs.

The Scriptures remind us that we should listen carefully to *how* Jesus teaches. In Mark 1:27, as in Matthew 7:29, Jesus is said to teach as one who has authority, not like the religious leaders of the day. Jesus does not usually teach by “lecturing,” but by telling stories, or parables. In these parables, the poor, the outcast and the unclean become the bearers of truth. In Jesus’ day, these parables subverted traditional wisdom and authority.

*Where* Jesus teaches is as significant as *how* he teaches. From a boat on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus calms the sea through teaching, expanding his mission to Gentiles, east of the sea, as well as to Jews, west of the sea. He travels between the two, performing wonders. The place of his teaching, as surely as his method, shows us his wisdom and power.

*O Christ, open our hearts and minds. Teach us your ways, that we might respond to the power and mercy of your profound and everlasting word. Amen.*





## Monday, March 26

Luke 19:41-42

### Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

One of the most moving sights in the Holy Land is on the Mount of Olives. When viewing Jerusalem from the simple chapel Dominus Flevit—in Latin, “The Lord Wept”—my tears joined with the tears of Jesus. I thought about Jesus’ tears, spilled over our human incapacity for insight and change, our inability to do justice, to hear the truth he was speaking, to receive those whom God sends and to recognize “the things that make for peace.”

It is impossible to confine the tears of Jesus to a distant past. We see a modern city torn apart by hate and distrust, and the weeping of the world rings in our ears. We think about our own tears. We bring our sorrows to that place.

Pausing to absorb Jesus’ tears is one of the most important things we can do in our lives of faith. In doing so, we take up the tradition of the biblical lament, telling our truths to God. Our tears are met by divine weeping. Jesus weeps *because* of us. But he also weeps *for* us. His tears are tears of forgiveness. And Jesus weeps *with* us, making our lamenting his own.

*Lord of compassion, weep for us. Weep with us. Weep for your people. Weep for your world. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 27

John 13:5, 12, 14

### Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet

In Jesus’ day, foot washing was a common practice before sharing a meal. It was a personal task, which even the lowliest of servants did not do for someone else. So when Jesus cleans the feet of his disciples, we understand Peter’s shock and disgust. Peter knows that those of higher status should not serve those of lower status. But Jesus is not interested in social norms. The depth of his hospitality and service undermines all issues of status. As he will ultimately do on the cross, Jesus takes the form of a servant (Philippians 2:5-8).

Water invites us again to consider our calling. The water of foot washing evens the playing field. No one is lesser or greater. To become greater we need to become less, becoming servants to others. The astonishing outcome is our own transformation. We become most like Jesus when we become most like a servant. Our service becomes a watermark of participation in the life and death of Jesus.

*Lord Jesus, we are humbled that you loved us so much that you acted as a servant, washed our feet and even died for our sake. May we serve others as you serve us. Amen.*

## Wednesday, March 28

Luke 5:4, 6, 8-10

### The Disciples are Fishermen

In Jesus' day, fishing was Galilee's major industry. So Jesus went to the fishermen in the midst of their work and issued a divine call. Throughout the Bible we find stories of God calling people: Abraham, Moses, Samuel and the prophets. They are called unexpectedly out of their ordinary lives. And they tend to object to the call. Peter here reminds us of Isaiah, who responded with, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). When God calls us, we see our lack of talent and overabundance of sin.

God responds with assuring words: Do not be afraid. ... I will be with you. And God always gives us a mission. The mission God gives to the disciples on that great fishing day becomes our mission too: Our fishing days have a new objective. We are called to call others, to come and see and taste and know the new reality, overflowing with an abundance of fish.

*Lord, we hear you call. We see the abundance you offer. Help us share this abundance with the world. Amen.*

## Thursday, March 29

John 4:7, 13-15

### The Woman at the Well Seeks the Water

Encounters between men and women at wells often led to marriage proposals in Jesus' day. So our defenses are up when Jesus is suddenly left alone with a Samaritan woman at a well. Self-respecting Jewish folks weren't supposed to socialize with Samaritans.

Had Jesus followed conventional expectations, he would have shunned this woman. She had been married five times and was from a mixed-race background, making her morally and ethnically impure. Had she followed her traditional wisdom, this Jewish man could not be the bearer of salvation. Neither Jesus nor the woman was held back by conventional wisdom.

Jesus doesn't offer marriage to this woman, but something more lasting: Living, fresh, gushing water that gives abundant and everlasting life. He offers to quench a thirst far deeper than what brought her to the well. And she asks for this water. Having been water-marked forever, she runs to share the good news with her people. "Come and see," she cries to them—and to us.

*We give you thanks, O Living Water, that you met us where we were and quenched our thirst. May we respond with openness and joy. Amen.*





## Friday, March 30

John 9:1, 5-7

### The Man Born Blind is Healed

John cannot get enough of water stories. In the accounts of the baptism of Jesus (John 1), the wedding at Cana (John 2), John the Baptist (John 3), the Samaritan Woman (John 4), the ill man beside the pool (John 5), walking on water (John 6), proclaiming the rivers of living water (John 7) and now the man born blind, John reveals who Jesus is through stories of water.

In John 9 the blind man receives a double watermark. First, Jesus makes mud out of his own saliva. The man is then sent to wash in the pool of Siloam. The combined waters become the waters of life and healing, showing Jesus as the source of both. The blind man now sees. And we see as well.

We see the Messiah, Jesus, our healer and Lord. We experience the power of a personal encounter with Christ. We are given drink, rebirth, healing, insight, refreshment and new life. Like those who encountered Jesus in person, we are led to the waters. These encounters invite us to view our lives and the world around us in a new light—Christ's light.

*Healing Lord, in remembrance of our baptism, let our lives serve as witnesses to our new sight. Amen.*

## Saturday, March 31

Luke 7:37-38, 44, 48, 50

### A Woman Washes Jesus' Feet

This story of the woman with the alabaster jar is among the most moving in the Gospels. A woman with a questionable past enters uninvited into a community leader's house. She is so driven by her faith in and love for Jesus that she cannot be restrained.

Her actions—from washing Jesus' feet with her tears to drying them with her hair to anointing them with costly oil—are so lavish that she, this unnamed intruder, becomes the true host of the feast. With her tears and anointing, this woman foreshadows Christ's death. Her hospitality becomes the rites of burial.

I can think of no better model for us in our devotional lives. We too should be undeterred by false boundaries. Confession of sins and devotion to Christ, rather than respectability, are our preludes to the banqueting table. We could do no better than to gather up our past sins, regrets and tears and look to exchange them for service of extraordinary hospitality and welcome. Remembering and marking the death of Christ in the midst of life is a central part of our calling.

*Christ, our Lord, may our tears be put to your service no matter the cost. Amen.*

# Monday, April 2

Acts 8:34-36

## Philip Baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch

The eunuch of Acts 8 is an Ethiopian court official, a man of position and intrigue. He is searching the Scriptures of the Jews, open to hearing another tradition's truth. He is looking for understanding and a relationship with God.

Then the angel-directed Philip comes along and this foreign dignitary invites him as guest and teacher. Philip opens Scripture to the Ethiopian. A passage from Isaiah speaks of a servant who suffers on behalf of his people. The servant, Philip reveals, is Jesus, the one who died and now is risen. The eunuch orders the chariot to stop at the first sign of water. He exclaims, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"

This question is directed as much to us as it was to Philip. Many things keep people from baptism. But Jesus took on the sins of the world, so nothing stands in our way. The Holy Spirit sends new Philips to tell the Jesus story and lead new seekers to water. What's to prevent it?

*Lord, we give you thanks for those put in our path who wish to embrace your Word and be baptized. Give us courage and wisdom to lead them to you. Amen.*

# Tuesday, April 3

Acts 16:13-15

## Lydia and Paul Meet by the River

As a woman and immigrant to Philippi, Lydia stands outside the center of power. But as a wealthy dealer in valuable purple cloth, she also has power and substance. Lydia already worships God. She is down by the river, away from the center of things, when the Lord opens her heart.

The river becomes the place of gospel proclamation and therefore also the place of baptism. This place outside the gate becomes the fountain of faith and the center of new community. The waters are transformed by the Spirit to give rebirth to Lydia and her household. Then Lydia, the newly baptized, invites Paul to "come and stay at my home." Lydia's home becomes the place of hospitality and fellowship.

We often think the newly baptized are called upon to become part of our church, part of who we already are. But in this story, the newest member sets the table. Lydia's openness to God is matched by Paul's openness to Lydia. This is the story of the beginning of the Philippian church. Are our congregations open to transformation by our newest members?

*Open our hearts, Lord, as you opened the heart of Lydia. Open our churches, Lord, as Lydia opened her home. Amen.*





## Wednesday, April 4

John 19:28-30

### Jesus Thirsts

Every Good Friday we hear the story of Jesus' passion as told by John. We hear Jesus speak words of divine wisdom. We watch Jesus carry his own cross, wearing a purple robe and a crown of thorns. We listen as he forms a new family between his mother and his beloved disciple. In his final hours, we experience Jesus as truly human and truly divine.

Jesus thirsts. Perhaps we hear in his words not only a thirst for liquid but a thirst for life. Jesus' thirst is also a divine thirst. His thirst fulfills Scripture and God's gracious purpose. Jesus obediently does his part in order to reveal his true identity. His drink mixed with hyssop recalls for us the doorposts of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, marked with hyssop and the blood of the lamb so that the angel of death might pass them by (Exodus 12:21-23). Behold our paschal lamb. Jesus' physical thirst is for us. His death gives us life. Thanks be to God.

*Keep us mindful, Lord, of all you have done for us. May we remember all those who thirst around us and daily thirst for your living water. Amen.*

## Maundy Thursday, April 5

John 19:33-34

### Water Comes from Jesus' Side

During the crucifixion, the water mixed with blood from the side of Jesus becomes the source of healing leprosy as well as healing the hunger for war and revenge. All of the biblical images of rivers and healing waters are gathered into this single verse. The water mixed with blood becomes the river of Eden, the water flowing from the rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17:1-7) and the great river of healing water flowing from the temple foreseen by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 47:1-12). The new creation is begun. Jesus' body is the temple, and in his crucifixion the Spirit is unleashed into the world.

Earlier, in John 7:38-39, Jesus promised that rivers of living water would flow from his heart and/or the heart of the believer. (In the Greek one can read the verse both ways.) We stand as believers at the foot of the cross.

From his body flows the source of our communion drink and the water of baptismal bath. Blood and water mingle together as the promise of life and healing—for all.

*Dear God, send your Holy Spirit to help us walk in the way of the cross of Christ, who shed his lifeblood to heal and renew all. Amen.*

# Good Friday, April 6

Revelation 21:1, 4

## The Sea Will Be No More

Ending a series of devotions with Revelation can be tricky. So often it's equated with predictions of end times. But promises actually overshadow predictions in Revelation. These culminate in the vision of the heavenly City of God, whose center is the majestic throne of God and the Lamb. Part of the promise is this: "... and the sea was no more!"

The absence of the sea signals an absence of chaos, the forces of evil, the source of monsters and sin we have seen in our water-marked journey through Scripture. God will contain the waters that threaten creation, banishing them as well as the monsters swarming within. Not only are external waters of chaos banished, but our internal and personal seas as well. Tears of pain, hurt and mourning will be dead to us.

I cannot imagine such a world, but God can. Zechariah 9:12 calls us to be "prisoners of hope." We live today, this Good Friday, captive to the promise that our chaotic seas will be no more.

*God of promise, as we weep at the foot of your cross, help us live in the hope of the day when we will have no more cause for weeping. Amen.*

# Holy Saturday, April 7

Revelation 22:1-2, 17

## The River from the Lamb Brings Life

In Revelation's final vision, the sea may be no more but the waters have not dried up. All water is now life-giving water. Come, everyone who is thirsty. That would be all of us. Come! This gift is for you, for us. This river waters the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. These waters are for all people.

This vision of Revelation is perhaps my favorite water-marked vision in all of Scripture. All the promised rivers, from the streams of Eden to the Jordan to Jerusalem's Gihon Spring, all the prophetic visions from Isaiah to Ezekiel, come together to form this one mighty stream from God to the world. For me, the vision always is accompanied by music: "Shall we gather by the river, where bright angel feet have trod, with its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God?" (Robert Lowry, "Shall We Gather at the River?" Evangelical Lutheran Worship 423). The answer is, "Yes." We will gather together with all the saints, past and present.

I think of us gathering by this promised river every time we gather 'round the font to welcome a newly baptized person into our midst. I sometimes envision the waters of the river flowing through the pews and out into the streets.

And the whole congregation runs out, wading in the waters and shouting, "Come ... anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift!"

Come. Join us. We are watermarked!

*God of Grace, we give you thanks for your healing waters. And mostly we give you thanks for your dear son, source of the river of life. Amen.*





# **WATER MARKS**

## **EDITOR**

Kelsey Holm

Communication Specialist, Luther Seminary

## **WRITER**

Diane Jacobson

Professor Emeritus, Luther Seminary;  
Director of the ELCA Book of Faith Initiative

“Water Marks” is a publication produced jointly by  
Luther Seminary and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary,  
schools of the Western Mission Cluster of the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Western Mission Cluster  
c/o Luther Seminary  
2481 Como Avenue • Saint Paul, MN 55108

[www.luthersem.edu](http://www.luthersem.edu)  
1-800-LUTHER3

[www.plts.edu](http://www.plts.edu)  
1-800-235-PLTS