

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)  
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March 17, 2021

Lent 4 Midweek

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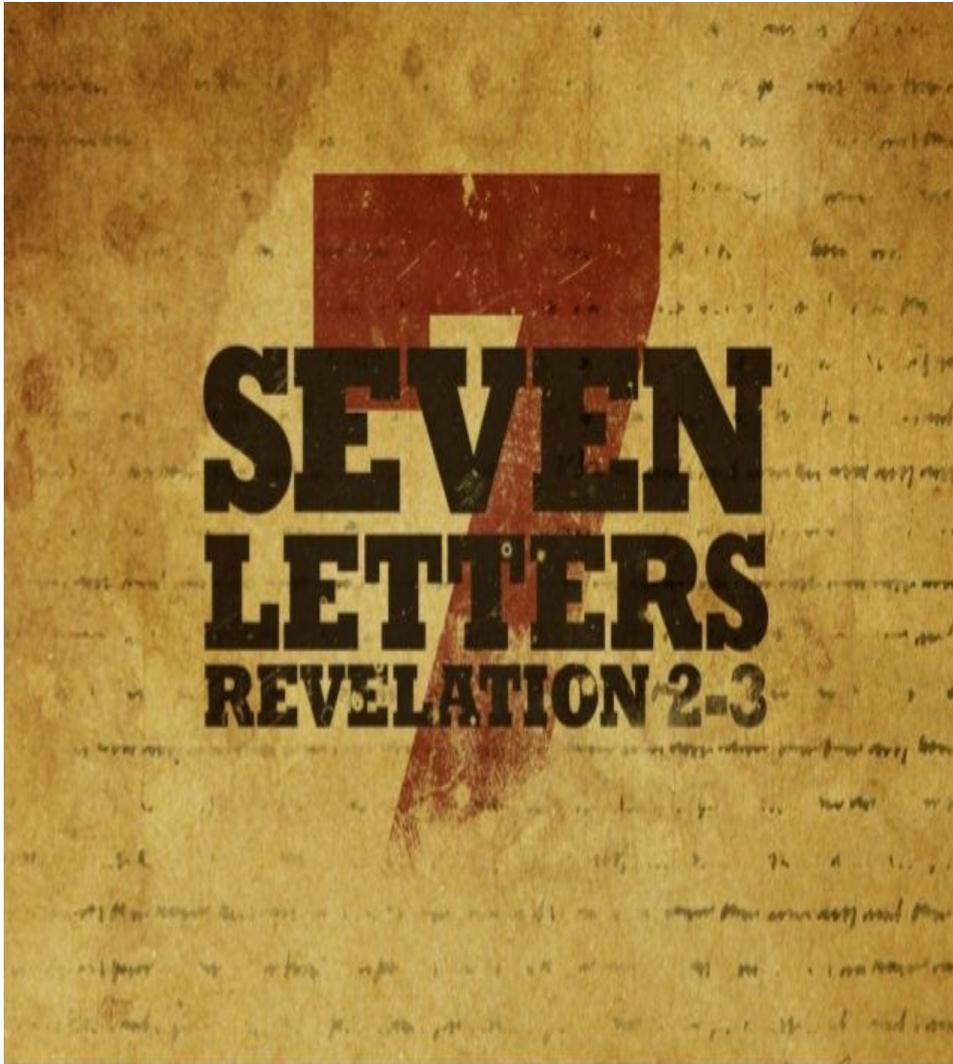
*The order of worship is based upon Evening Prayer, from Hymnal Supplement 98 (CPH, 1998)*

### Service of Light

- P** Now is the time of God's favor;
- C** **now is the day of salvation.**
- P** Turn us again, O God of our salvation,
- C** **that the light of Your face may shine on us.**
- P** May Your justice shine like the sun;
- C** **and may the poor be lifted up.**
- P** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- C** **It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**
- P** Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**

### Psalm 1

- <sup>1</sup>Blessèd is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- <sup>2</sup>**but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.**
- <sup>3</sup>He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.
- <sup>4</sup>**The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**



**To the Church in Sardis**

<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

<sup>6</sup>for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

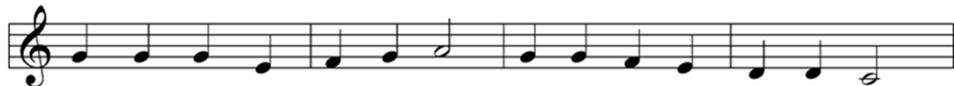
### Canticle Hymn: 422 On My Heart Imprint Your Image



On my heart im - print Your im - age, Bless - ed Je - sus, King of grace,



That life's rich-es, cares, and plea-sures Nev - er may Your work e-rase;



Let the clear in - scrip-tion be: Je - sus, cru - ci - fied for me,



Is my life, my hope's foun - da - tion, And my glo - ry and sal - va - tion!

### Readings

#### First Reading

*Revelation 3:1-6*

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

**P** This is the Word of the Lord.

**C** Thanks be to God.

### The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ IV. The Praetorium

When they had bound Jesus, they led him from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment and gave him over to Pontius Pilate, the governor. It was early. They themselves did not go into the judgment hall, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

Pilate then went out to them, and said, “What charge do you bring against this man?”

They answered and said to him, “If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.”

Then Pilate said to them, “Take him, then, and judge him according to your law.”

The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” So the word of Jesus was fulfilled, signifying by what death he should die.

The charges they brought against him were: “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.”

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered him, “Do you say this for yourself, or did others say it to you about me?”

Pilate answered, “Do you take me for a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have given you over to me. What have you done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would have fought that I should not be given over to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not of this world.”

Pilate therefore said to him, “Are you a king then?”

Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. I was born and I came into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice.”

Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no fault in this man.”

The chief priests kept laying one charge after another against him, but he answered not a word. Pilate questioned him again, saying, “Do you answer nothing? See how many charges they lay against you.” Jesus answered him not a word. Pilate was utterly amazed. He said to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no case against this man.”

They pressed their charges more vehemently: “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee to this place.”

When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man was a Galile-

an. When he learned that he belonged in Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him on to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem for those days.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was delighted, for he had long wished to see him because of what he had heard of him, and he hoped to see him do a miracle. He questioned Jesus repeatedly, but he gave him no answer. The chief priests and scribes stood there and vehemently accused him. Herod and his soldiers mocked him. They put a splendid robe on him and sent him back to Pilate.

Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that same day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You have brought this man before me as one subverting the people. See now, I have examined him before you and have found nothing in this man guilty of any of your charges against him, and neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Mark this, he has done nothing worthy of death. I will have him punished and release him."

Now at the feast it was the governor's custom to release to the crowd any one prisoner whom they asked for. They had then a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. He was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection in the city. Pilate knew that it was out of malice that the chief priests handed Jesus over. Therefore he said to them, "Do you want me to release for you Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?"

The chief priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Pilate asked them again, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?"

And they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas."

While Pilate was sitting in the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message: "Do not have anything to do with that man; I have suffered much over him today in a dream."

Again Pilate addressed them, for he wished to release Jesus. He said to them, "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ? What shall I do with him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

They all cried out, "Crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found no guilt worthy of death in him; I will therefore punish him and let him go."

They cried out all the louder, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers of the governor led him away into the praetorium. They gathered the whole band of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a purple robe on him.

When they had woven a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and a reed in his right hand, and they knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. They knelt down and did him homage.

Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I bring him out to you that you may know I find him not guilty." So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!"

When the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I do not find him guilty."

The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard this, he was more afraid and went again into the judgment hall and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and I have power to release you?"

Jesus answered, "You would not have any power at all over me, unless it had been given to you from above. For that reason he who handed me over to you has the greater sin."

This prompted Pilate to go on trying to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement or, in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was the Preparation of the Passover, about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your king!"

They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"

Pilate said unto them, "Shall I crucify your king?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but rather a riot was under way, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this man; see to it yourselves."

Then all the people responded, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Then Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, gave sentence that it should be as they demanded. He released to them Barabbas for whom they asked, the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder. He had Jesus flogged and then gave him over to their will to be crucified. The soldiers mocked him, stripped him of the purple robe, put his own clothes

on him, and led him out to crucify him.

- P** In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets.
- C** **But now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.**

### Litany

- P** In peace let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and for all the people, let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For our public servants, for the government and those who protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all the people here present who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need let us pray to the Lord.
- C** **Lord, have mercy.**
- P** For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ let us give thanks to the Lord.

### **C** **Thanks be to God.**

- P** Help, save, comfort, and defend us gracious Lord.

*Silence for meditation.*

- P** Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord.

### **C** **To You, O Lord.**

- P** O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments; and also that we, being defended from our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, God forever.

### **C** **Amen.**

- P** Lord, remember us in Your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

- C** **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.**

- P** Let us bless the Lord.

### **C** **Thanks be to God.**



## Office Hymn: 429 We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died



1 We sing the praise of Him who died, Of Him who  
2 In - scribed up - on the cross we see In shin - ing  
3 The cross! It takes our guilt a - way; It holds the  
4 It makes the cow - ard spir - it brave And nerves the



died up - on the cross. The sin - ner's hope let  
let - ters, "God is love." He bears our sins up -  
faint - ing spir - it up; It cheers with hope the  
fee - ble arm for fight; It takes the ter - ror



all de - ride; For this we count the world but loss.  
on the tree; He brings us mer - cy from a - bove.  
gloom - y day And sweet - ens ev - 'ry bit - ter cup.  
from the grave And gilds the bed of death with light;

5 The balm of life, the cure of woe,  
The measure and the pledge of love,  
The sinner's refuge here below,  
The angels' theme in heav'n above.

6 To Christ, who won for sinners grace  
By bitter grief and anguish sore,  
Be praise from all the ransomed race  
Forever and forevermore.

### Sermon

Text: Revelation 3:1-6

Title: "To the Church in Sardis (and to Us) "

### Prayer

**P** Son of the living God and true Son of Man, Your great love for us sinners soared to its loftiest heights when you so willingly bore the pain and shame of the cross to save us from everlasting death. Grant steadfastness to our faith that we ever treasure the love with which You loved us in making Yourself an offering for our sins. Enable us through the Spirit to follow the example of Your true love and humility by doing always what pleases our Father in heaven. Teach us to be loving and merciful, so that we gladly help those who are in

need and show patience and forgiveness toward those who sin against us. Do not allow us to be discouraged from such crosses as You may call upon us to bear for Your names' sake. Give us boldness at all times to confess You as our Lord and Savior before an ungodly world and nation.

While we live here, cause all sorrow, distress, sickness, persecution, and every trial and temptation we are called on to endure, to purify our faith and draw us closer to You.

Throughout our lives You have been a continual source of earthly blessings. And you always have richly blessed us with the comfort of forgiveness and with the wonderful hope in heaven. For these and other blessings without number, we offer our heartfelt thanks and praise.

O Holy Redeemer, forgive all our sins; forgive every instance of our failing to let Your cross and the beauty of Your love shine forth in our lives. Cause Your saving name to be preached in all the world, and open hearts everywhere to receive and worship You as Lord and Savior. Teach sinners in every land to lay their burden of sin at the foot of Your cross and to look only to You for pardon, help, and healing. Hear us for the glory of Your name.

**C** Amen.

**P** Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from heaven that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and in the confession of Your name may abide to the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C** Amen.

### Blessing

**P** The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

**C** Amen.



## Hymn to Depart: 890 O Blessed Light, O Trinity

1 O bless - ed Light, O Trin - i - ty, O ev - er -  
2 To You our morn - ing song of praise, To You our  
△ 3 All glo - ry be to God a - bove And to the

last - ing U - ni - ty: As now the fi - ery  
eve - ning prayer we raise; We praise Your light in  
Son, the Prince of love, And to the Spir - it,

sun de - parts, Send forth Your light in - to our hearts.  
ev - 'ry age, The glo - ry of our pil - grim - age.  
One in Three! We praise You, bless - ed Trin - i - ty.

### *Silent Prayer*

### **Acknowledgements**

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4<sup>th</sup> Lenten Midweek Service  
March 17, 2021  
Revelation 3:1-6

### **“To the Church in Sardis (and to Us)”**

Grace and peace be to you from the One who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Geographically, Sardis was southeast of Thyatira, further inland still. It was once the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia (7<sup>th</sup> century BC) and is believed to be the first city where gold and silver coins were minted. It manufactured textiles, jewelry, stood on a major trade route, and was fortified. Despite this, it ended up falling to invaders twice in its history. So Sardis remained an influential city, yet was such under different rulers, first the Persians, then the Greeks, finally the Romans. At the time our Lord had John write this letter to Sardis, though the seat of a Roman proconsul, its inhabitants could only take pride in a glory long past.

Sadly, the secular history of Sardis would seem to give a fairly good view of the Christian congregation present there as well. Both were well established, both gave the external indications of life, but yet, deep down, both seemed to have their best days behind them and could only speak of time past when they “were something.” The Lord of the Church noted, except for a few exceptions, the congregation in Sardis was spiritually dead, or awful close to it.

It is of interest to note the lack of persecution of the Christians in Sardis. One’s first thought may be that perhaps the citizens were more tolerant of Christianity there, or perhaps there was very little religious zeal for false faiths, and therefore the Christians did not face the discrimination and maltreatment in Sardis that they did in other places. If only that were the case.

As always, the truth is revealing. As far as pagan faiths went, numerous mystery cults flourished in Sardis, especially the cult of Cybele, the goddess of the fruitful earth, and these were opposed to Christianity. The sad reality of the situation is that the heathen unbelievers of Sardis could easily ignore the Christians, because they received no challenge to their sinful ways from them. Those who were to bring the Gospel light of Christ into a sin-darkened world simply were no longer doing so, becoming of the world, falling into the culture around them.

Now this doesn’t mean that there wasn’t a congregation in Sardis. There certainly was, as Jesus had a letter sent to them. They still got together and did the “church-thing,” with the external rituals attached to Christendom being present, and the members showing up if their schedules allowed it. But true faith in the heart was almost dead for most of them, swallowed up by the concerns and entertainments of everyday life. And without this living faith, there could be no active Christian life of challenging the evils in the world around them, and witnessing of Christ as the only hope for forgiveness and salvation to their unbelieving neighbors. Thus, the Lord declared that they were dead, their works incomplete.

Unfortunately, it’s not that hard to fall into the same trap that the Christians in Sardis did. Many of our congregations are fairly old, being established when Lutheran immigrants first entered an

area. There is a lot of history in these congregations, and it is fairly common for them to be able to look back at earlier years and see the “glory days.”

Those were the days when the pews were filled, extra chairs put in the aisle, the Sunday school and confirmation classes were loaded with kids, another table or two had to be pulled out for adult Bible class, and there were numerous active groups within the congregation. For various reasons, though, those days are “a thing of the past” for many congregations, and this can lead to a spiritual melancholy and lethargy within a congregation.

“You can’t save a sinking ship,” the saying goes, so people just go through the motions, putting their time in at the church, wondering when the ship will finally go under. And as the once living faith weakens more and more, the zeal of a Christian life fades away as well. O sure, externals continue for a while, but the heart is no longer in them, and thus the Lord sees such works as incomplete, as the words and life of the members of the congregation become increasingly hard to differentiate from the unbelievers that surround them as the “church works” stay at the church, not following into daily life.

Or perhaps a “rejuvenation” has occurred. One which seems to show the congregation really has life, new members coming in even. Yet too often these works are not challenging evil, but more about tolerance of such. Too often these works are less of sincere Christian love for the needy and downtrodden by individuals, but are more focused on justice and equity as the world defines such, and so push political lobbying for the government “to help” the poor by taking from others. Though seemingly alive to the world, the Lord judges such works to be incomplete as they are not the works of holiness, love, and witness that He commanded His people to do.

But did you notice that the Lord doesn’t have the same theory about sinking ships that many people do? He doesn’t just write the congregation off. No, before it is too late He tells them, “Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die.”<sup>i</sup> How? The Lord gives them the answer, “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.”<sup>ii</sup>

The Christians at Sardis were told to remember what they have been receiving and hearing, namely the Word of God and His precious Sacraments. They don’t need anything new, either to believe or works to do. They only need to return with a repentant heart to what they had from point one, the precious Gospel of Jesus. The Gospel that called them out from the world of condemned unbelievers and made them Christians by declaring them forgiven for Christ’s sake, and which has given them a new life in Christ, which will last forever.

Jesus still speaks these same words today. To all the congregations who look wistfully to the past, or who think they have found something new, He says. “Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.” We only need to hear God’s Word and receive His Sacraments, because the Lord of the Church sends His Holy Spirit through them. The Spirit who is the Lord and giver of life, sustaining and nurturing our faith, bringing forth in us true works that will be complete in the sight of our heavenly Father.

It is true that Jesus threatens the congregation in Sardis with an unexpected visit if they did not rouse into action. If they determined that their calling as a Christian was simply one aspect of

their multifaceted lives, that peace with the world and enjoying life were more important than living as a faithful Christian, then the Lord would surprise them with judgment. In His mercy, these judgments may begin as temporal ones, to shake the congregation out of their lethargy. But if these fail, then the final judgment would be their final surprise visit, a most unpleasant one.

So He will visit us as well. The exalted Lord sees through our facades and smokescreens right into our very heart. What does He see there? Does He see a living faith, which, yes, is struggling daily, but that's because it is struggling to remain *faithful*? Or does He see a husk that might be impressive on the outside, but on the inside it is withered and sickly?

The Lord says to *us*, "Remember, then, what you received and heard." Do we remember the joy we once felt when we heard those Bible accounts about God's love for His people, especially the ones about Jesus? Do we remember the peace that surpasses all human understanding that we have felt when we heard the declaration of the forgiveness of all our sins for the sake of the perfect life, innocent death, and glorious resurrection of our Lord? Do we remember the reverent awe that was upon us the first time we received the body and blood of Jesus that was given and shed for us on the cross for our salvation? Do we remember feeling the desire to tell others about Jesus, to make a personal stand against sin, and to serve our neighbor in gratitude for God's great love for us? Do we remember that incredible sense of hope that got us through the trials we faced, as we confidently looked forward to eternity with our God in the glories of heaven?

Dear Christians, *none of these truths and blessings have gone away*. Our emotions might falter and fade, but God's gifts are as real today as when we first experienced them. This is because the Gospel is built upon Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, and it does not falter or fade since it is built on the sure foundation of His fully completed work!

So remember that! Remember that your name has been written in the book of life at your Baptism, and He will not erase it, an assuring reminder given every time you hear His Gospel Word and receive the Holy Supper. Remember that you are covered with the white robe of Christ, and that your works are complete through faith in Him. Remember that on the Last Day, He will confess you before His Father and all the holy angels, and you who walked with Him by faith now will walk with Him by sight in perfect holiness forever.

God grant us to keep remembering His warnings and promises, that we would keep repenting, and thereby live for Him in all aspects of our life, living in the hope of the life to come. Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> Revelation 3:2. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>ii</sup> Revelation 3:3.