

Nurturing Life in the Waters of Creation

Lent and Easter Worship Resources

This Eco-Calendar provides ministry leaders with ideas to highlight for congregations our shared call to act for the care and redemption of God's whole creation. The church seasons and festivals, scripture, music, symbols, and rituals abound with connections to the natural world.

In this 2nd quarter of the Eco-Faith Calendar, springtime brings snowmelt! Days lengthen, winter's ice melts into spring water – free-flowing, life-giving water – restoring life to the flora and fauna of the land. At first, slowly, water gurgles and bubbles. On lakes and rivers, ice thins and breaks into floating chunks. Naturalists watch carefully to record the annual dates of "Ice Out" for lakes in our land of plentiful lakes. Rivers fill, rise and gush over capacity.

Water becomes the focus and connection for our 2nd Quarter: Nurturing Life in the Waters of Creation. It is a season to remember the restorative power of God's love for the web of life, give thanks for our life through the waters of baptism, and proclaim Easter's stories of Jesus' resurrection and new life.

“The promise accompanying the waters of baptism looks for the restoration of all things.”

In Lenten texts, free-flowing water marks the way of redemption, resurrection, and restoration for all creation. In the gospel for the first Sunday of Lent, we pick up the narrative from the Gospel of Luke which we read on the festival of the Baptism of our Lord: Jesus leaves the Jordan and, full of the Spirit, goes to the wilderness. Reading the Gospel while water is poured into the font will underscore how the water of Jesus' baptism strengthens his resistance to the temptation of dominating nature and neighbor. Return to the font on each successive Sunday; stories of a fig tree, recovery of a lost sheep and a lost coin, and restoration of a lost son, will stir our hope that our God does not accept the loss of whole species from creation or the waste of wealth meant to sustain in life all of a world's creatures. The promise accompanying the waters of baptism looks for the restoration of all things. (Background for these themes is available in the commentaries on the readings of the lectionary found on the

website lutheransrestoringcreation.org, where the author develops the view that Jesus resists the habit of domination in all relations).

On the Fourth Sunday of the season of Lent, we hear of the "rush of mighty waters" that will not reach the faithful; Yahweh is a "hiding place," who preserves one from trouble (Psalm 32). But on the Fifth Sunday, we hear of "fortunes of Zion restored," like the watercourses in the Negeb (Psalm 126). The Lord "who makes away in the sea, a path in the mighty waters" is about to do a "new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackal and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people" (Isaiah 43:19-20).

Such texts and the gospel readings they accompany prepare us for the wonderfully free-flowing waters of the readings of the Great Three Days: Jesus washes the feet of his disciples (Maundy Thursday, John 13:1-17), water flows mixed with blood from Jesus' side as he dies on the cross (Good Friday, John 19:34); and on the Eve of Easter we recall the waters of creation, the Great Flood, and the passage through the Red Sea. We walk through these waters into remembrance of our baptism, and then hear the first pronouncement of the glad news: "He is risen!" Water is the sign of resurrected life!

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Celebrate the Great Three Days as an immersion in the waters of creation: Engage the congregation in dramatizations of the great readings of the Easter Vigil, leading to the remembrance of their washing in the waters of their baptism, on their way to celebrating the first feast of the Resurrection. (A complete liturgy for the Great Three Days with this strong focus on water used by Holy Trinity Lutheran Church follows these pages.)

The Second Sunday of Easter falls immediately after the world observance of Earth Day. Feature the assigned readings of Psalm 150 with its glad conclusion "'Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"; and Revelation 1:8: "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

As spring melt happens outside, take a Sunday to get up and move in a river-like procession. Open worship with a Water Walk and Thanksgiving for Baptism. Gather the congregation outside the Sanctuary to enter your worship space, singing "Wade in the Water" and songs that celebrate the gift of baptism. Add blue streamers to your procession and help people imagine themselves within the river of life and God's living water (Ezekiel 47:12; John 7:38; Revelation 21:6; 22:1).

“Invite worshippers to bring jars of water from local water sources, creeks, rivers and lakes, including tap water, and name the watershed district(s).”

Make water a special prayer focus for a day. Invite worshippers to bring jars of water from local water sources, creeks, rivers and lakes, including tap water, and name the watershed district(s). Pray for the health of the waters. You'll find an example on pages 19-20 of the Watershed Moment Toolkit, which is available online through the Minneapolis Area Synod website.

Use the Eco-Faith Watershed Moment Toolkit for more ideas to highlight water stewardship in worship. A speaker's forum, guest preachers, and banners are all available through the EcoFaith Network. Contact Grace Corbin (g.corbin@mpls-synod.org) at the Minneapolis Area Synod office for more information.

Provide copies of the ELCA Water Stewardship Fact Sheet and help your congregation discover the watershed(s) in which they live. This is available online http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Environment_Factsheet_Clean_Water.pdf