



St. Stephen Lutheran Church

7800 Erie Street

Sylvania, OH 43560

www.ststephenlutheran.church

419-885-1551

February 18, 2026 12:00 & 7:00 P.M.

Ash Wednesday

Prelude

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Lent begins with a solemn call to fasting and repentance as we begin our journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. As we hear in today's readings, now is the acceptable time to return to the Lord. During Lent the people of God will reflect on the meaning of their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The sign of ashes suggests our human mortality and frailty. What seems like an ending is really an invitation to make each day a new beginning, in which we are washed in God's mercy and forgiveness. With the cross on our brow, we long for the spiritual renewal that flows from the springtime Easter feast to come.

THE EXHORTATION

P Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed.

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

THE CONFESSION

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

Silence for reflections and self-examination.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.

For self-centered living,
and for failing to walk with humility and gentleness:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

For longing to have what is not ours,
and for hearts that are not at rest with ourselves:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

For misuse of human relationships,
and for unwillingness to see the image of God in others:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

For jealousies that divide families and nations,
and for rivalries that create strife and warfare:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

For reluctance in sharing the gifts of God,
and for carelessness with the fruits of creation:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

For hurtful words that condemn,
and for angry deeds that harm:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

For idleness in witnessing to Jesus Christ,
and for squandering the gifts of love and grace:
**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us,
and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. Through the Holy Spirit God
cleanses us and gives us the power to proclaim the mighty acts of the one who
called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. As a called and ordained
minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you
the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the +
Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES

The imposition of ashes follows. Those who desire to receive ashes may come forward.

The minister applies ashes to the forehead of each person with the words:

“Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Following the imposition of ashes, the people sit.

P Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,

C **that we may show forth your glory in the world.**

P By the cross and Passion of your Son, our Lord,

C **bring us with all our saints to the joy of his resurrection.**

P Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not desire the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn from their wickedness and live. Therefore, we implore him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him which we do on this night, that the rest of our life may be pure and holy, and that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C **Amen.**

Stand

SALUTATION

P The grace of Jesus Christ our Savior, with the reconciling love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all

C **And also with you.**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY (in unison)

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

FIRST LESSON: Joel 2:1-2, 12—17

p. 740

HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

p. 787

Sit

Sermon

Stand

Verse 1 In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light my strength my song
This Cornerstone this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love what depths of peace
When fears are stilled when strivings cease
My Comforter my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2 In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless Babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3 There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4 No guilt in life no fear in death
This is the pow'r of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No pow'r of hell no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand

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PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

P Lord in your mercy,
C **hear our prayer.**

SHARING OF THE PEACE

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer

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

HOLY COMMUNION

Communion Song

Performed by Scott Ballard

POST-COMMUNION BLESSING

P The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you
in his grace.

C **Amen**

BENEDICTION

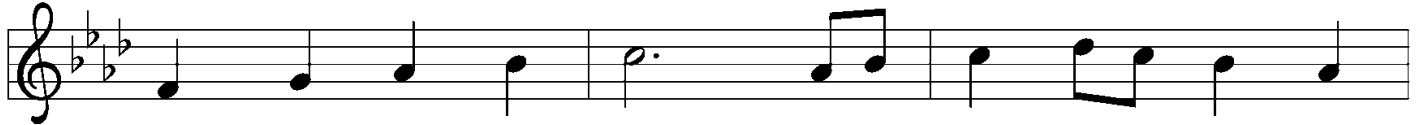
P Beloved,
we are God's own people,
holy, washed, renewed.

God bless you and keep you,
shower you with mercy,
fill you with courage
and ✠ give you peace.

C **Amen.**



1 O Lord, through - out these for - ty days you
 2 You strove with Sa - tan, and you won; your
 3 Though parched and hun - gry, yet you prayed and
 4 Be with us through this sea - son, Lord, and



prayed and kept the fast; in - spire re - pen - tance
 faith - ful - ness en - dured; lend us your nerve, your
 fixed your mind a - bove; so teach us to de -
 all our earth - ly days, that when the fi - nal



for our sin, and free us from our past.
 skill and trust in God's e - ter - nal word.
 ny our - selves that we may know God's love.
 Eas - ter dawns, we join in heav - en's praise.

Text: based on Claudia F. Hernaman, 1838–1898; para. Gilbert E. Doan Jr., b. 1930

Music: CONSOLATION, A. Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, 1816

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DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Jesus meets you on the way.
Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

Ash Wednesday

Smeared in Sin, Washed in Love

With ash and soot we begin this Lenten season with confession; we begin with Psalm 51; we begin on our knees. Today this ancient prayer placed on our lips becomes new again: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." We speak our truths from the shadow of our sin, the very shadow that marks our mortality. Like ash traced upon our foreheads, we are marked with the reality of our frailties and failings. It is stark reminder that sin and death are smeared all over us. From this inevitable reality, we cry out for mercy! For as bold as it is to name our sin and sinful ways that lead to death, it is all the more audacious to summon our God! To summon the one who actually has the power to do something about sin and the ways of death! On this day of penitence, through the work and witness of Christ Jesus, we brashly summon God to come, to hear our prayer, and to listen to our confession.

So, with our truths laid bare, we confess our unfaithfulness to God, our lackluster love for our neighbors, our neglect of suffering and injustice in the world. In the same breath, we ask God to wash us, to purge us, and to create in us clean hearts. The smears of sin are washed clean through the love of Christ. And yet, we will leave worship this day still carrying the cross-shaped trace of sin and death upon us. It is a reminder that, even amid our confession, we continue this Lenten season to listen for the perpetual call to return to the Lord our God who is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love (Joel 2:13).