

The Baptism of Our Lord – January 11. 2009  
The Rev. Dr. Charles D. Bang

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

I caught the stomach flu this past week. It surprised me this past Wednesday afternoon. I woke up feeling fine and by 4:30 I was a holy mess. Its pleasant effects lasted the full 24 hours and by Friday morning, I felt like a limp dishrag.

The good news is that I resolved that in this New Year I would finally lose some weight. Mission Accomplished.

They say the bug takes at least 24 hours to incubate, so someone, either here or at Parkside last Sunday gave me the gift that keeps on giving. I avoided seeing anyone until this morning so as not to pass on the tradition myself.

Between the snow and the ice, the stomach flu and the round of salmonella that's been going around, there's seems to be a conspiracy against good church attendance, today is no exception.

So today I thought I might take a moment to tell you that should you ever find yourself unable to come to church, if you have a hymnal at home, either the old green one or a copy of the new red one, you can do a pretty good job and holding church right at home, because either hymnal can give you almost everything you need to hold your own personal devotion, save of course, the music from Mr. Bigham and our fine choir and of course, the theological commentary offered by your pastors, though if you have an internet connection to can see the sermon on line, or at least last week's.

To that end, I'm going to ask each of you to take a hymnal out of the rack in front of you and allow me to show some of the resources you'll find there.

First, and most obvious, are the hymns that we have come to know and love over the years. In this new red book, there are more hymns that there were in the green book as well as in the red book that preceded it.

In thumbing through the hymns, please note that the first hymns listed 1-150 are the psalms. They're there as hymns, because in a very real way, they are, poetic hymns offered to God. So to open your devotions, or to use them as a nighttime prayer, all you have to do is turn to your hymnal.

Jumping to the back of the book, to the first page after hymn 893, you'll find a directory of the resources that follow. First up is a daily lectionary. And there is a daily lectionary set for each

year in the three year cycle. For those of you who didn't know it, our reading cycle repeats every three years. Currently we are in the second year of the three year cycle, intuitively called year B. The year changes the first Sunday in Advent, so we just changed from year A to year B, next year, of course, will be year C. So, if you made a resolution to read the bible more, this little resource is a good one. The lessons appointed for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, are readings that complement what you heard in the church the Sunday before and the readings for Thursday, Friday and Saturday, anticipate what you're going to hear the following Sunday. You'll notice that no readings for Sundays are written here, as they are found in the front of the book, where the Propers for each day are listed. We'll get to that in just a minute.

Going beyond the lectionary, you'll find a short piece on the structure of our Lutheran worship and the many Scriptural references found within our liturgy. So if you're wondering where that prayer came from, or the beginning of that prayer you just heard, you can turn here and find some, some of the scriptural references.

Beyond these, there is a copy on Luther's Small Catechism. This was an idea we stole from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, as they included the Small Catechism in the last edition of their hymnal, the blue hymnal and we thought it was a good idea so this time we did it too. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Luther's great little work, you'll find the text to and his explanation's of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Sacraments as well as some prayers and table graces if you're ever looking for one and don't want to resort to quoting 70's rock operas, Day by day by day.

After the catechism, a couple of indexes, the most useful of which are the ones about the hymns, a topical index and the index of first lines.

Now if you would be so kind as to open to the beginning of the book. After some 13 pages of introduction, the first thing in the book is the Calendar. Here you will find all the festivals as well as commemorations listed. If you are a member of the altar guild, here is where the appropriate colors for the day are listed. White for today, as it is a festival in the life of Christ, next week, green, for the season of Epiphany.

From page 18 through page 61, is the Sunday calendar for all three years, A, B and C. Just to show you an example, if you would turn to page 22 under the heading for the day, *The Baptism of our Lord*, you'll find the appropriate readings for all three years and for today, in year B; Genesis, Acts and Mark, as well as the appointed prayer for the day. So, if you're a confirmand and you're scheduled to read the prayer of the day on an upcoming Sunday, there's no excuse for you coming to church and not having practiced, right?

From there, until you get back to the listing of the psalms, you will find an assortment of prayers for every occasion. Once again if you're stuck at home or on the road and have a copy or access to a copy of the hymnal, these prayers will help you in your daily and private devotions and are a great resource.

So there you have it, your hymnal in a thousand words or less. If you're interested, we still have many copies of the LBW hanging around and we would gladly give you one, the resources contained therein are much the same, or if you would like to order your own copy of the ELW, or one of these nifty pocket editions, talk to either Pastor Buerk, Olsen or me and we will gladly order you one from our publishing on our account so you can secure the 20% pastor's discount.

Now, why, I'm sure you're asking, did I tell you all this. Well, to tell the truth, I wanted to talk about Mark's gospel and how this year, year B if you recall, almost all our gospel readings come from Mark's account. Now that you know the book backwards and forwards I'll never have to tell you that again, because you'll be so well versed in the lectionary and the lectionary resources right?

But this year is Mark's year and being that all, or at least most of the readings come from his gospel, the flavor of the readings for the year will take on his particular emphasis. Each of the four evangelists has their own agenda, their own reason for recording the story of Jesus as they did. Our reading this morning comes from the first chapter, the fourth verse and as you will recall from having just heard it, Jesus is already at the river Jordan, being baptized by John. There's no birth narrative, no lengthy genealogy, no angels, no visitation, no room at the inn, no shepherds, no Herod, no flight to Egypt, no census in Bethlehem, no mention of Bethlehem, no talk of Mary or Joseph. No talk of all this because for Mark, what mattered most was not his birth and the circumstances surrounded it or leading up to it, but rather, Mark was solely interested in his passion, death and resurrection. Many scholars have labeled his gospel as a passion narrative with an extended introduction. For Mark, that's all that mattered because after all, it is true, that had Christ not died and been raised, no one would have recorded his birth, or the account of his life, you and I would not be sitting this morning and certainly no ELW would have been published, no hymns written to his glory, no liturgies crafted to celebrate the gift God gave us in His Son and in the promise of his resurrection.

So as we go through this year of Mark, keep your eyes focused on Easter, and on Jesus, born to die, that we might be saved, because that's precisely what he did.

Amen.