

The Customs of Lent and Easter

For many people today, it is still their custom to think about “giving up” something for Lent. This may be certain foods or some kind of indulgence, i.e. chocolate, that is abstained from during Lent. But more and more, Lent ought to be thought of a time of “taking up” something. If people want to discipline themselves and make sacrifices for the right reasons, that is good indeed. If it is our response to God’s goodness and flows naturally from the Gospel, then it is even better.

So rather than “give up” something for Lent, maybe “take up” something that will connect you to your Savior and help you grow in faith would be even better. Lent’s challenge is to “take up” our cross daily and to follow Jesus. Maybe “take up” committing to memory the explanation to the second article of the Apostle’s Creed, to identify with the suffering and death and resurrection of our Savior for us.

The word “Lent” comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, “Lencten.” It refers to the lengthening of days in the spring in the northern hemisphere. Similarly, the word “Easter” had no Christian significance at first, being derived from the name of the pagan goddess of spring, Eostre. However, the Church was always willing to “baptize” pagan names and customs and put them to work for Jesus Christ.

Lent is meant to be a time of hope, knowing of the great gift of Salvation through Jesus Christ has indeed been won for us. The Season of Lent began, although not commanded nor found in the Bible, as a pre-Easter fast of 40 hours. Over time, the season of Lent stretched into a week before Easter, then two weeks, beginning with Passion Sunday, and eventually, around the 7th century, it was extended to the present length of 40 days. It reminds us of the 40 days that it rained during the Flood; the 40 days that Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments; Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness; and Jesus’ 40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. The beginning of those 40 days is determined by the date of Easter, which is the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21st, the calendar’s date for the beginning of spring. If one counts the Sundays, the 40 days include all days between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday. Most times though, the Sundays are excluded, because they are always mini celebrations of Christ’s resurrection. Each Sunday is considered a little Easter, and therefore, strictly speaking, is not part of Lent.

The beginning of the Lenten seasons usually had the Imposition of Ashes placed on the brows of the worshippers, as the Pastor quotes the words from Genesis 3:19, “Dust you are and to dust you will return,” this being where Ash Wednesday gets its name. The origin of this custom is not Roman, but seems to have originated in Gaul in the 6th century and was first used to comfort public penitents of their grave or notorious sin. From France, the custom spread to England and then to Rome in the 9th or 10th century and from there to Germany, Southern Italy and Spain. It was a sign to those to be Baptized or Confirmed and reminded them of Jesus’ death and resurrection for their forgiveness.

While in most customs, fasting was also added to the Lenten Season, fasting was not something Lutherans much picked up on. Luther constantly reminded his hearers that outward actions do not necessarily imply one is truly sorry for sin. Luther says, “the person is well prepared and worthy who believes these words: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’”

Many countries observe a festival on the day before Lent begins, called Shrove Tuesday. It is called Shrove Tuesday, taking the name from an old English word “shriving” meaning to confess and be absolved of one’s sin. In France, it is known as “Mardi Gras,” and in Germany it is called “Fastnacht,” meaning night of fasting. In some parts of the country, pancakes are traditionally eaten on Shrove Tuesday. In Europe and South America,

this is a Carnival time, much like the whole Mardi Gras celebration in New Orleans is today. Few would see any useful Christian significance in this.

Maundy Thursday comes from the Latin word “Mandatum,” meaning command. On this day, Jesus gave His disciples a new mandate with the Lord’s Supper, “to love one another as I have loved you.” Another explanation says that the word comes from the Latin word “Mundo,” meaning to wash, since on this day Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Some denominations still practice foot washing before Communion on Maundy Thursday. A third explanation for the name comes from the old English word “Maund,” meaning basket. It refers to the practice of giving baskets of food and or clothing to the poor on this day. In England there is a still a special service at Westminster Abbey, which dates back to the 5th century, where Queen Elizabeth II gives special minted “Maundy Money” to a representative group of the poor.

Good Friday was originally called “God’s Friday.” The pronunciation changed over time, just as the words “God be with you” became simply “Goodbye.” Two services that are popular on Good Friday are “Tre Ore,” usually a three hour long service, spanning the time from 12 Noon till 3 P.M., paralleling the three hours Christ spent on the cross. The other service is called “Tenebrae,” and was originally held on Maundy Thursday, but now is quite common on Good Friday. The word “Tenebrae” means darkness, gloom and shades of death and hell, all reminiscent of what Christ faced for us on Good Friday.

Finally we come to Easter. The “sun-god” that was worshipped by the pagans during this time of the year, was simply Christianized by the Church and now we celebrate the rising of the eternal Son of God from His dark grave. The chorus of “He is Risen” and “He is Risen Indeed” identifies the wonderful climax to the message of Lent. It is a message of hope that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Glory of His Father, so all believers in Christ will also rise. Since Christ did not stay dead, neither will you or I, who hope in Him. That is the message of Easter!

Your Pastor Jim

Services for Holy Week



- **Maundy Thursday – April 2nd – 7 pm with Communion**
- **Good Friday – April 3rd – 7 pm**
- **Easter Sunday Weekend with Holy Communion**
 - **Saturday Easter Vigil – April 4th at 5 pm**
 - **Sunday Easter Service – 10 am**

Pastor Jim's Sermon Series through Lent Concludes Holy Week

I am calling this series, "Encounters with Jesus". Hear from the people who crossed paths with Jesus and learn what effect Jesus had on them. By way of application, we can learn from these people and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus can have the same effect on us.

1. On April 2nd (Maundy Thursday 7 pm), you will hear from Judas Iscariot;
2. On April 3rd (Good Friday 7 pm), you will meet Simon Peter;
3. On April 4th (Easter Weekend), the Roman Centurion will be here; ***Please note that regular worship schedule will be observed for Easter Weekend.***

All of these special messages are meant to bring the truth of the Gospel into our everyday lives, making it as clear and understandable as possible. It is my hope and prayer that each of us would grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ, our Savior, as we journey with Him to His cross and resurrection.

Adult Confirmation – April 12th, 2015

I am happy to report that Michelle Kathryn Merrell (wife to Thomas Merrell) and Gabrielle Susan McMillen will be received into Adult Communicant Membership through Confirmation on Sunday, April 12th. I started confirmation instruction with both women last fall, and have completed our studies in late February. Please welcome them both into our fellowship warmly.

Walk through the Bible Class for the New Year

Come along for a trip through the Bible and learn new insights and meanings you may never have seen before. Pastor Jim gives you a thorough over-view of each book, and identifies the connections that Book have with the New Testament. He also shares with you how each book and its prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The handout class material will become your personal commentary to that book, along with the extra reading that Pastor Jim provides, will provide insight and understanding for years to come.

Class Schedule – 2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the Month

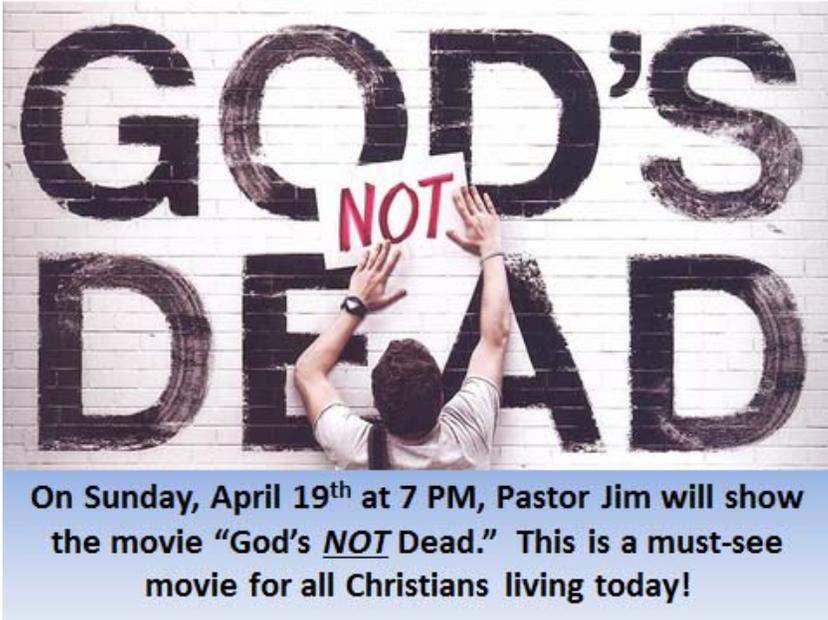
April 14th – 1 pm or 7 pm – Finish Daniel

April 28th - 1 pm or 7 pm – Begin the Books of Hosea, Joel and Amos

May 12th - 1 pm or 7 pm – Continue with Hosea, Joel and Amos

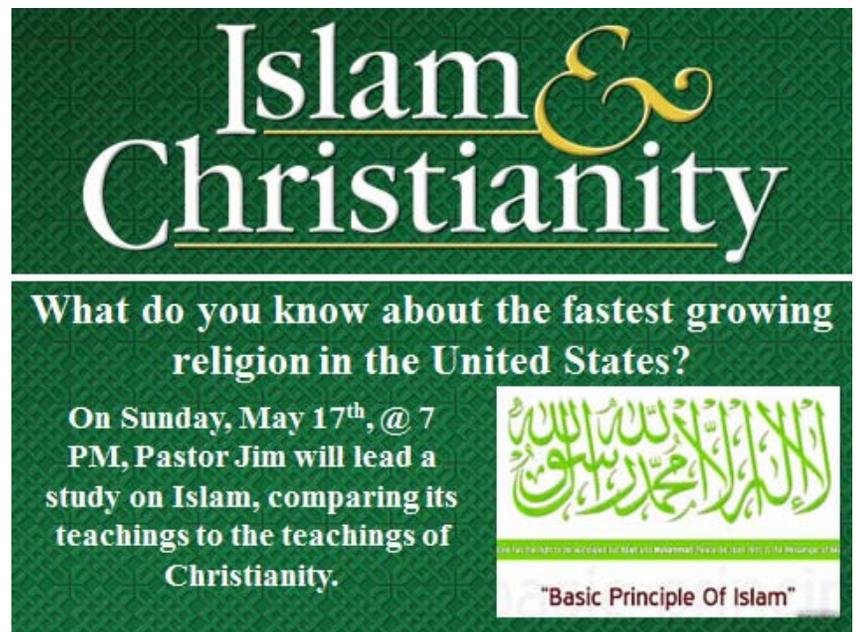
May 26th - 1 pm or 7 pm – Finish Hosea, Joel and Amos

Coming Sunday Evening Teaching Events



- Have you ever had a discussion with someone who told you God doesn't exist or that God's dead? If you have, this movie is just for you! As more and more people adopt a "God is Dead" philosophy in life, how are we Christians to respond? On Sunday, April 19th Pastor Jim will show this movie and it will help you prepare a response. This is a must-see movie for all Christians living today!

- Do you know what religion is the fastest growing in the world today? If you answered Islam, you are correct. Islam is the fastest growing religion in our world, but do you know why? On Sunday, May 17th, Pastor Jim will lead a study on Islam and Christianity and give you a comparison study of their teachings. You surely will not want to miss this study.

A green poster with white and gold text. The title "Islam & Christianity" is at the top in a large, serif font, with a gold ampersand. Below the title, the text reads: "What do you know about the fastest growing religion in the United States?" followed by "On Sunday, May 17th, @ 7 PM, Pastor Jim will lead a study on Islam, comparing its teachings to the teachings of Christianity." To the right of this text is a small image of Arabic calligraphy. At the bottom right, there is a small white box with the text "Basic Principle Of Islam".

There is no cost to attend these Teaching Events and you don't have to register in advance. Just, come and enjoy, learn and grow!

Pastor Jim Announced His Retirement Date

At the Board of Director's meeting in March, Pastor Jim announced that he will be retiring in June of 2016. He makes this announcement in order to give the congregation ample time to plan for succession of leadership and to work through a thorough evaluation of the needs of ministry here at St. John. Please keep both St. John Congregation and Pastor Jim in your prayers.