

RELUCTANT JOY: Easter Celebration in 2020

A word on the options presented here

At this time, many of our churches have made the painful decision to suspend in-person worship services for Easter 2020.

As a minister, this decision may grieve your soul. Rest assured that you are making this decision for the safety of the community you serve and the people you love.

Thankfully, though, not all is lost for our Easter celebration. You may have considered recently that the Christian tradition holds Easter as a moveable feast. Indeed, you may wish to schedule your full-blown Easter service for later in the year, when your congregation can resume local in-person worship practices.

Until then, what to do for Easter morning?

These days, technology permits us to worship across a distance through television or livestreamed worship. Perhaps your church may try distance worship for the first time this Easter. Or maybe your church has led worship this way for quite some time. Regardless, these are extraordinary circumstances.

But Easter is an extraordinary day, too. On Easter, we celebrate that Jesus's resurrection means new life for all people. We may also recognize that first Easter was not so much *celebrated together* so much as *discovered individually* by people who had isolated themselves after the death of their friend, Jesus.

Many parishioners—and a great many ministers, too!—will certainly grieve the loss of in-person worship in this time. We long to gather with our community to worship God; and the loss of Easter hallmarks like Holy Communion hit us hard.

But Easter worship can still provide great meaning and comfort for your people, especially if we draw on the strength and hope we find in our baptismal promise.

Included in this packet are three liturgical options meant to be adapted for your local practice. Each presents an adapted version of a Thanksgiving for Baptism to be used in distance, telecast, or livestream worship on Easter Sunday.

These Thanksgivings may be used at the beginning of worship, as is often the custom in Lutheran churches; or wherever is customary in your local context. But if you present a whole worship service for Easter Sunday, I humbly suggest using this piece at the end of worship, in the position normally occupied by the Eucharistic celebration.

Baptism and Holy Communion are different sacraments, to be sure. But both unite us to Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism cannot *replace* Holy Communion, but using a Thanksgiving for

Baptism where our worshipers *expect* Holy Communion can remind us of the centrality of the baptismal promise for the life of faith.

The options begin with original pieces meant to address the challenges of these days. This first option is written with the expectation that some of the participants are not in the same room. It should feel equally at home in a traditional worship context (worship in your empty sanctuary, for instance); or, led by a presider in a less-formal setting (say, a Zoom livestream from your living room). If the latter, make sure to bring some symbols into the picture; a cross or a candle provide a visual reminder of the sanctity shared in the worship moment.

The second and third options are adaptations of the traditional ELW Affirmation of Baptism; and the ELW Thanksgiving for Baptism. Both are slightly retooled to better serve worship leadership over the airwaves; but you may make any additional modifications to suit your local context.

Each of these options assume that your worshipers will have some access to materials before your worship begins: a candle; a dish of water; and even the words of these liturgies. Feel free to modify the format to match your use of the materials.

A note for the Presider

As you present these pieces in your broadcast worship service, please note that you will tend to lead worship more quickly than you would if you were leading a group in-person. If you want people to respond at home, you must slow down. The most effective way to ensure a reasonable pace is to include someone in your webcast who can respond to the words as you say them. Hearing others on-camera who respond to liturgy will also help your viewers feel more comfortable responding themselves.

OPTION 1: “Reluctant Joy,” A Call to Worship and Thanksgiving for Baptism¹

Notes on this option

This option collects five original pieces.

- *A Gathering Ritual*. This brief rite can be used at the beginning of worship to center your worshipers in prayer.
- *A Call to Worship*. Your Thanksgiving for Baptism may often lead the worship service in the Gathering Rite. This option is provided as an alternative in case you elect to move Thanksgiving for Baptism to a later position in worship.
- *An Invitation to the Offering*. This piece functions as an introduction to a time of offering, which could be: a musical piece; a time of silent meditation; or any other period of reflection.
- *An Offering Prayer*. This concludes the time of offering.
- *Thanksgiving for Baptism*. This is written to be included at the end of your worship service, in the position normally occupied by Holy Communion.
- *A Benediction*.

Gathering Ritual

I invite you to light your candle.

As I light mine, I will say a blessing.

I invite you to repeat each line of this blessing after I say it.

God, I light this candle now.

God, I light this candle now.

It is a sign of your presence.

It is a sign of your presence.

You have drawn us together.

You have drawn us together.

Nothing separates us from your love.

Nothing separates us from your love.

Call to Worship

In his life,
Jesus seemed invincible to shame,
immune to criticism,
impervious to illness and death.

¹ All words by the Rev. Justin Kosec

Jesus was laughter aplenty,
food abundant,
new health after illness.

Then he died.
And his friends scattered,
because they knew
death had come for them.

This is Easter morning--
the day death lingers
near the ones God loves.
And death still lingers in our world.

Like fearful disciples who sheltered in place,
**we hide in the lonely
shadow of death;**

Like Nicodemus embalming the body of God,
**we swallow our questions
and bury our hope.**

Like Jesus's friends who walked the Emmaus road,
**we struggle to understand
the signs of this age.**

Like Mary who carried one last farewell for a friend,
**we grieve the loss of the life we knew,
and we fear an uncertain future.**

But then we find the empty tomb.
The angels in white.
The useless stone.
The discarded clothes.
One question remains:
Why are we weeping?

Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Greetings to you
in the name of our mighty God,
the Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit;
the one God, Trustworthy and True,
the Firstborn of the Dead,

the Calm from the Chaos,
Rest for the overworked,
Love for the overlooked,
Breath for the overwhelmed.

Christ is Risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Even if we believe,
joy does not evaporate tears;
faith cannot always dispel confusion.

So hear the truth once more,
and trust the Word is true:
Christ is Risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Introduction to the Offering

What does an offering to God
look like on *this* Easter Sunday?

It looks different from any other Easter
we can remember,
when making your offering
might have meant:
rushing to church to beat the crowds;
laying coats across your favorite pew;
even deciding which buffet to bless
with your patronage.

Today, an offering to God
looks like the one who enters the room
of someone with COVID-19
to give them food, medicine, or
the machine to breathe.

Today, an offering to God
looks like the parent who relearns old lessons
to teach a child at home;
or the child who does the learning;
or the teacher who guides them both.

Today, an offering to God

looks like the warehouse workers
and cashiers behind plastic shields
and delivery drivers.

Today, an offering to God
looks like staying away
even when we long to be together.
It looks like reaching out to those
for whom isolation is danger.

Today, an offering to God
looks like playing hymns
to an empty church building;
and running camera in a television studio;
and the phone opened to worship on Facebook Live.

This morning, we invite you to make
your offering to God.
Wherever you are,
and however you are.
Your offering might look like
visiting [CHURCH WEBSITE]
to make a financial contribution to this ministry
or to our COVID-19 response.

Or it might mean making good on your pledge
to another ministry close to your heart.

It might mean collapsing the distance
between an old friend;
or giving a blessing to the family
you love.

Today, an offering to God
is also a simple thanksgiving
for the breath in your lungs
and for new life.

Take a moment
to make your offering
now.

Music follows the Invitation. At the conclusion of this offering piece, worship continues with the Offering Prayer.

Offering Prayer

Generous Jesus,
when you breathed your last,
you were lonely,
separated from God and the people you loved.

But death drew you closer
to people like us--
because we are frail.
We are fragile.
And this world is gasping for air.

No offering we make today
can ever equal yours.

But you see what we offer you,
each of us,
in our homes and our hearts.

Use these gifts to bring goodness
and hope to someone else;
use them to unite us
with the world you love,
and the people you died to serve;
because in your death, you taught us
that sacrifice is thanksgiving
and thanksgiving is new life.
In your name we pray.
Amen.

Thanksgiving for Baptism

A word upon the occasion of Easter

Today we cannot be together
to celebrate Holy Communion.
But we have been united in worship
through the words of scripture;
through the worship we have shared;
through the time we have spent with one another;
and by the Holy Spirit that enlivens our faith.

Normally, at this time,
we would celebrate Holy Communion.
In this meal, we meet Jesus

who died and rose again.
And we celebrate the promise of resurrection
that binds us to Christians past, present, and future.

But we cannot share the gift
of Holy Communion today,
when social distancing separates us.
We cannot share the bread and wine
that makes a meal out of unity.

But Holy Communion is not our only sacrament.
This morning,
we can use this time to remember
that Christ died so we might live.
We receive this promise
in our baptisms:
in baptism, water and Word
unite us with Christ's death;
and enable us to receive the new life
Christ claimed on Easter morning.

So on this day,
we will celebrate our unity
through Thanksgiving for Baptism.

If you haven't already,
I encourage you to find a dish of water.
I have one here, too.

Let this water
connect us to each other
and to the one baptism
that brings us to new life in Christ.

The Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Together we pray.

Great are you, O God.
Great are you, O God.

For you have chosen water

to give life and water to preserve it.

In the beginning
you separated chaos from creation
and land from sea.

But you sent rain to care
for grain grown in the ground.

Great are you, O God.
Great are you, O God.

When the Israelites ran from slavery,
the Red Sea blocked them like a prison door;
but you turned the sea into salvation.

Great are you, O God.
Great are you, O God.

When disease ate the flesh
of the warrior Naaman,
you used gentle water and a word to cleanse him.

Great are you, O God.
Great are you, O God.

You washed the feet of your friends,
when nobody else respected them.

You made mud in your hand
to open the eyes of a man
nobody noticed.

You chose to speak to a woman
who chose the loneliest hour to visit the well;
and you gave her a thirst
for your unquenchable promise.

Great are you, O God.
Great are you, O God.

When we despise the water
that floods farmland and house;
when we beg for water
as the ground cracks;.

when we fear the disease
spread by the vapor we breathe—

You are still great,
because you have made water
the agent of healing and hope.

Great are you, O God.
Great are you, O God.

Amen.

Now, take your dish in your hands
as we bless the waters we share.

God of Love,
all water
is a sign of the goodness you create:
the rivers that flow in our state;
the waters that pool beneath the ground;
and oceans that ring our planet;
the water that fills our skin, our blood, our bones.

Bless this water we have gathered
as a sign of your blessing,
for this water binds us to your promise,
your eternal word;
it is the wellspring of love
for the world you have made.

People of God, repeat after me.

We try to cross the distance;
We try to cross the distance;

but still we are alone.
but still we are alone.

We try to wash our hands of trouble
we try to wash our hands of trouble.

But only you can cleanse the soul.
But only you can cleanse the soul.

You pour out salvation.

You pour out salvation.

You refresh the weary.

You refresh the weary.

You have died and risen.

You have died and risen.

My grave will not hold me.

My grave will not hold me.

Hear now the promise
of the one who died and rose again:

Our graves will not hold us.
We will see the ones we love
and the ones we have lost.
We will hold each other close
and we will share the cup of life.

Alleluia! Amen.

Wherever you are,
use this water to mark the sign of the cross on your forehead.
And remember—
this is the great promise of baptism:
Christ was born a human
to die like one, too;
Christ lives today
so we may never die.

Worship continues with the Sending rite.

Benediction

In this litany, I will say,
“We can,”
and you will say,
“We will.”

So I will say, “We can serve the world,”
and you will say,
“**We will serve the world.**”

Normally, at this point in the worship service,
we'd send you out into the world.
But you're already there.
People of God,
recognize this:
You do not need to go far
to find the world God wants you to love.

We can serve where we are.
We will serve where we are.

Because of what Christ has done,
and because of what God does through you,
you have the words of eternal life.

Nearby,
there is a friend
in need of forgiveness.
We can forgive.
We will forgive.

Nearby,
a friend weeps beside the grave.
We can share new life.
We will share new life.

Nearby,
someone feels alone and in danger.
We can give God's peace.
We will give God's peace.

Go near and far
to love as God loves.
We can.
We will.

OPTION 2: ELW Affirmation of Baptism

This is the standard form for Affirmation by the Assembly, with slight modifications.

On the occasion of this Easter celebration

In this time of pandemic, social distancing, and isolation, we are not able to worship together as we ought or as we long to do. Even so, we know that God's promises flow through our lives like an underground spring, like water from the well; these promises connect us to the new life we have received in Christ Jesus.

At this moment in our worship service, we would normally celebrate Holy Communion.

Unfortunately, the distance between us today prevents us from sharing the holy meal together.

But Holy Communion is not our only sacrament. Today, we will use this time to affirm our baptism.

In the absence of the holy meal, there could be no more appropriate way to celebrate our unity on Easter morning. We may not be able to share bread or wine, but water connects us: through rain and cloud; through rivers, lakes, and oceans; through aquifers and underground watercourses. In water, we discover our rebirth; our cleanliness; our refreshment; our renewal.

And, on Easter, we remember that through water, we die with Christ; so we may be reborn with Christ.

Let us pray.

Merciful God, we thank you that you have made us your own by water and the Word in baptism. You have called us to yourself, enlightened us with the gifts of your Spirit, and nourished us in the community of faith. Uphold us and all your servants in the gifts and promises of baptism, and unite the hearts of all whom you have brought to new birth. We ask this in the name of Christ.

Amen.

Profession of Faith

The presiding minister addresses those making public affirmation of baptism. The assembly may stand and join in the responses.

I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God,
the powers of this world that rebel against God,
and the ways of sin that draw you from God?

I renounce them.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,**

**suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

**Or, "he descended into hell," another translation of this text in widespread use.*

Affirmation

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

If so, say, "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me."

I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.

People of God, do you promise to support and pray for one another in your life in Christ?

If so, say, "We do, and we ask God to help and guide us."

We do, and we ask God to help and guide us.

Let us pray.

We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life. Stir up in your people the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence both now and forever.

Amen.

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"On the occasion of this Easter Celebration" by the Rev. Justin Kosec for the South Dakota Synod of the ELCA.

OPTION 3: ELW Thanksgiving for Baptism

This form uses language from the ELW rite for Thanksgiving for Baptism

Thanksgiving for Baptism

This order may be used in various circumstances outside the primary weekly assembly to give thanks for the gift of baptism. Examples of settings in which this order might be used, both within and outside the church's worship space, include council or committee meetings, small group gatherings, conferences and retreats, camps and recreation areas.

The gathering may be at the font or near a body of water, or a bowl of water may be placed in the midst of those who are gathered. A candle may be lighted and placed near the water.

Those present may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the leader begins.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Amen.

The leader addresses those who are gathered.

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

The leader gives thanks, using one of the following prayers or similar words.

Holy God, holy and merciful, holy and mighty, you are the river of life,
you are the everlasting wellspring, you are the fire of rebirth.

Glory to you for oceans and lakes, for rivers and streams,
especially the rivers that wind across this state:

the Minnesota River, the Missouri River, the Red River of the North, and all their
tributaries;

and the lakes settled between prairie hills;

and the aquifers deep below that feed our faucets.

Here other particular bodies or sources of water may be named.

Honor to you for cloud and rain, for dew and snow.

Your waters are below us, around us, above us: our life is born in you.

You are the fountain of resurrection.

Praise to you for your saving waters:

Noah and the animals survive the flood, Hagar discovers your well.
The Israelites escape through the sea, and they drink from your gushing rock.
Naaman washes his leprosy away,
and the Samaritan woman will never be thirsty again.
Praise to you for the water of baptism and for your Word
that saves us in this sacrament.

Thanks to you for the water
that flows into our homes.
Now, we lift up vessels of water
we have gathered for this blessing.
Through water bound to Word,
you cross the gulf between life and death;
you link our lives to yours.

The Assembly is invited to repeat after the presider.

Use this water
use this water

to remind us of your promise;
to remind us of your promise

to reconcile us to our past;
to reconcile us to our past;

to unify us across every distance.
to unify us across every distance.

Illumine our days.
Illumine our days.

Enliven our bones.
Enliven our bones.

Dry our tears.
Dry our tears.

Breathe your Spirit into all who seek your blessing
from water and word.
Come to us behind closed doors;
join the prayers in our hearts
to those prayed elsewhere.
You have gathered us in each room

and across all creation.

Wash away the sin within us, and drown the evil around us.
Satisfy all our thirst with your living water, Jesus Christ, our Savior,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Now the Presider invites the Assembly to sprinkle each other with water, or to use their water to mark the sign of the cross on their foreheads, as a reminder of the gift of baptism.

Almighty God,
who gives us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit
and forgives us all our sins,
strengthen us in all goodness
and by the power of the Holy Spirit
keep us in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Worship continues with the Sending rite.

NOTES ON THE SERVICE

This brief order is an adaptation of the thanksgiving for baptism from the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* service of Holy Communion.

Sprinkling with water is one of several ways in which a visible and tangible reminder of baptism may be employed. Another option, especially when a small group is gathered with a bowl of water in their midst, is to have each person make the sign of the cross upon herself/himself or upon her/his neighbor, using water from the bowl.

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