

Stations of the Manger



Renewing a Right Spirit
In Advent and Christmas

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STATIONS OF THE MANGER

The Stations of the Manger was developed to be used during the Advent and Christmas seasons to draw attention to their true spirit and meaning. This is especially important in today's culture that often clouds the true intent and beauty of these seasons.

The Stations of the Manger can be done individually or in small groups in one sitting (on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day perhaps), or can be done one at a time, perhaps during Morning Prayer, beginning with Station 1 on December 17. This will put Station 9, The Birth of Christ, on Christmas Day.

These Stations can also be used to gradually construct a Nativity scene, adding appropriate pieces for each Station as indicated in the pages below. Suggested dates for these activities are included.

Christmas hymns have been suggested for each Station, but others can be used depending on personal preferences.

Enjoy the season and the love of Christ!

The Stations

1. In the Beginning (1st Sunday in Advent)
2. Prophecy of the Coming of the Lord (Wednesday after 1st Sun.)
3. The Lineage of Christ (2nd Sunday in Advent)
4. The Annunciation (Wednesday after 2nd Sun.)
5. The Angel Visits Joseph (3rd Sunday in Advent)
6. The Visitation (Wednesday after 3rd Sun.)
7. Travel to Bethlehem (4th Sunday in Advent)
8. Encounter at the Inn (Christmas Eve)
9. The Birth of Christ (Christmas Morning)
10. Shepherds Visited by an Angel (Christmas Evening)
11. Epiphany (Jan 6th)
12. The Flight to Egypt (Jan 7th)

Station 1. In the Beginning

First Sunday in Advent

Nativity Scene: Empty; no buildings, people or animals

Scripture:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that has been made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.

(John 1:1-5)

Reflection: In the beginning the world was perfect, and all things were well. Complete love and harmony existed. But to have love there must be free will, and with free will comes choice. As a result, some spiritual beings chose their own way; some humans chose their own way, corrupting God's creation. It is God's plan, however, to eventually return His creation to the state of perfect grace once again.

Prayer: Father of Jesus Christ, open our hearts to your Word and to the power of the Holy Spirit. Give us the love to discover Your will and strength to carry it out always; for you are light, forever and ever.¹ Amen.

Hymn(s): O Come, All Ye Faithful

Response: Reflect on your own life. Renew the commitment of your Baptismal covenant to follow God's path. Know that past sins and their impact will be carried by God so that you are free to follow His love. Know that if you stumble, He will be there to pick you up and send you on your way again. Know that God is love and you belong to Him.

¹From the Glenstal Book of Prayer, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.

Station 2. Prophecy of the Coming of the Lord

Wednesday after the 1st Sunday

Nativity Scene: A lone prophet figure can be added to the scene.

Scripture:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a young maiden shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up for us a mighty savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his holy prophets of old he promised salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace. (Luke 1:68–79. Cantic of Zechariah)

Reflection: God’s plan for you and the world spans enormous amounts of time. If we listen closely, as the prophets of old did, we can sense God’s presence and the assurance that He will fulfill His promises.

“Salvation from our enemies” in the Cantic of Zechariah can also mean full relief from those spiritual things that plague our souls: pride, temptations, envy, discontent, and greed, among others.

Prayer: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Hymn(s): O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Response: Send out Christmas cards this week to friends and relatives you don’t see that often. Include messages that contain the specific theme of the coming of Christ. The time of Advent is a time of preparation. Let us prepare!

Station 3. The Lineage of Christ

Second Sunday in Advent

Nativity Scene: A few figures representing the lineage of Christ can be added to the scene.

Scripture:

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren; and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram; and Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon; and Nahshon begat Salmon; and Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king. And David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah; and Solomon begat Rehoboam; and Rehoboam begat Abijah; and Abijah begat Asa; and Asa begat Jehoshaphat; and Jehoshaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Uzziah; and Uzziah begat Jotham; and Jotham begat Ahaz; and Ahaz begat Hezekiah; and Hezekiah begat Manasseh; and Manasseh begat Amon; and Amon begat Josiah; and Josiah begat Jechoniah and his brethren, at the time of the carrying away to Babylon. And after the carrying away to Babylon, Jechoniah begat Shealtiel; and Shealtiel begat Zerubbabel; and Zerubbabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham unto David are fourteen generations; and from David unto the carrying away to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon unto the Christ fourteen generations. (Matthew 1:1-17)

Reflection: : Remember our ancestors and those who have passed from this life. They have given much for us to have what we have today. Scripture, tradition, wisdom, memories. Pray that their souls rest in peace and continue to grow in the love and service of God.

Prayer: May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. In your Name we pray, Amen.

Hymn: Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

Response: Look at family photo albums and remember the blessings of those who came before us. Thank the Lord for those who have helped us get closer to Christ.

Station 4. The Annunciation

Wednesday after the 2nd Sunday in Advent

Nativity Scene: The angel Gabriel can be added to the scene.

Scripture: (Luke 1:26–38)

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her, and said, Hail, you that are highly favored, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for you have found favor with God. And behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall be with you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God. And behold, Elisabeth your kinswoman, she also has conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren. For no word from God shall be void of power. And Mary said, Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

Reflection: Mary received the most wonderful gift in the world, only so that she could share it with the world. She received the gift humbly and gracefully. She then passed it on to us in the most loving manner.

Prayer: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Hymn(s): Ave Maria

Response: Consider spending time or giving gifts to help others enjoy a fulfilling Christmas. Donate clothing, food or money to organizations that can identify those truly in need. All the things we have come our way as gifts from God, so receive them humbly and gracefully.

Station 5. The Angel Visits Joseph

Third Sunday in Advent

Nativity Scene: Another angel can be added to the scene.

Scripture: (Matt. 1:18–25)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to divorce her privately. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, you son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary your wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shall call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Emmanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name Jesus.

Reflection: On the prompting of an angel, Joseph accepted Mary even though she would have been rejected by society for her “condition.” How often do we use society’s standards to determine who is “acceptable” and who is not? Let’s try to look beyond someone’s “condition” and begin to see Christ’s presence in his or her heart. Let’s begin healing the ills in our world by accepting and appreciating the diversity and variety we find in the people around us.

Prayer: They drew a circle to shut him out;
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in.¹

Hymn: Breath of Heaven

Response: God made everyone in His image with some unique skills, talents and abilities. Although these may not be appreciated by other people in today’s culture, they *are* appreciated by God, and will be used by Him in a special way. Give yourself space and time to be who you are; allow for this in others, too. Leave the past to God’s grace and the future to His providence.

¹ Adopted from Edwin Markham

Station 6. The Visitation

Wednesday After the 3rd Sunday in Advent

Nativity Scene: Add a lone woman to the scene, representing Elizabeth.

Scripture: (Luke 1:39–55)

And Mary arose in these days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; and entered into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; and she lifted up her voice with a loud cry, and said, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your salutation came into mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfillment of the things that have been spoken to her from the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has looked upon the low estate of his handmaid: For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty has done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is unto generations and generations on those who love him. He has showed strength with his arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart. He has put down princes from their thrones, and has exalted those of low degree. The hungry he has filled with good things; and the rich he has sent away empty. He has given help to Israel his servant, that he might remember mercy (as he spoke unto our fathers) toward Abraham and his seed forever."

Reflection: The bonds of family are important. The coming of Jesus into the world emphasizes a much larger family; all who choose to become children of God are brothers and sisters. There is a connection between our souls that we recognize as the bonds of a spiritual family; a recognition that brings joy.

Prayer: Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Hymn(s): Mary, Did You Know?; What Child is This?

Response: Visit some friends or relatives you may not have seen for a while. Visit someone in a hospital or who is homebound. Bring them a blessing, a smile, a kiss, a compliment, a flower, a reminder that they are part of God's spiritual family.

Station 7. Travel to Bethlehem

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Nativity Scene: A donkey can be added to the scene.

Scripture: (Luke 2:1–5)

Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be registered. This was the first census made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to register themselves, every one to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to register himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child.

Reflection: Sometimes we are asked to do things that we may not have planned or intended to do. Travel was not easy for Joseph and Mary, and perhaps quite inconvenient. But they went anyway, in obedience, as the situation presented itself.

God has a way of turning what seems to be our inconvenience into something very special. Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to fulfill the requirements of the census. Bethlehem means “House of bread” or “Place of food.” What a perfect description of God's gift of Jesus to the world! The bread of life that we need so much was provided for us in Our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

Our present moment situations often show us what we are to do next if we stay aware of the possibilities. This doesn't mean saying “yes” to everything, but it does mean sometimes doing what may seem inconvenient at the time. Who knows what God will turn it into?

Prayer: Blessed are You, Father, who gave us our daily bread in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Blessed is He who continually feeds us with the word of life. Blessed is the Holy Spirit, who brings us together at Christ's table of love. Blessed be God now and forever. Amen.

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Response: Practice being more aware of each and every moment. Often the will of God will be found in the people and things He places in front of us. And let us pray for those who have to travel during this season. May their travels be safe and that they find their loved ones well at their journey's end.

Station 8. Encounter at the Inn

Between the 4th Sunday in Advent and Christmas

Nativity Scene: Mary and Joseph are added to the scene.

Scripture: (Luke 2:7) ...there was no room for them in the inn.

Reflection:

If the "Inn" is symbolic of this world, then we can see this rejection as a foreboding gesture to the eventual ministry of Jesus. The world is too busy, too crowded, too egocentric to find room for a message of love, compassion and mercy. This new message is too threatening, too disrupting, too different. The very thing needed to heal and unite the world is the thing ignored and cast off.

We see this mirrored perfectly in the prologue of St. John's gospel when he tells us that "the world was made through him, and yet the world knew him not; He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him...and yet as many as received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

Thomas Merton once gave a wonderful commentary on this: Into this world, this "demented inn," in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. his place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied status as persons. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in the world.

Prayer: O Father, who have given us the Light; Lead us this day from the darkness of our minds to the Light in our hearts. Lead us this day from the sadness of uncertainty to the joy of Your Promise. Lead us this day from the suffering of separation to the comfort of Your Presence. Glory be to God who has given us this Light!

Hymn(s): O Holy Night, Away in a Manger

Response: Is there room for this Light in the "inn of your heart"? What might you be able to let go of to better receive this Gift? God's great love in sending his Son awaits your sincere and affectionate response.

¹Thanks to Thomas Merton, Fr. Ronald Rolheiser and Fr. Patrick Twomey for their contributions to this reflection.

Station 9. The Birth of Christ

Christmas Morning

Nativity Scene: The baby Jesus is added to the scene.

Scripture: (Luke 2:6–7) And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she would give birth. And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger....

Reflection: How awesome that our Creator would come from heaven in the form of a human to intervene for us, to teach us, and to show us how to love! His teaching is the foundation of our salvation – he teaches us how to shed all that is false from our true selves, our souls, so that we might reunite with Our Father and become the person He made us to be, to serve Him in our own unique way. “For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Our true selves will not die under the weight and burden of illusion and falsehood.

He lived the life of a human to show us that He understands our situation, our challenges, and our struggles. His incarnation was an act of love to teach us how to deal with these things. His eventual death and resurrection helped to demonstrate that He was indeed God incarnate – that what he was saying was the truth! As Jesus told Pilate, “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” (John 18:37) “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:32)

Prayer: Lord our God, You sent Your Son, the Light of the World, into the darkness that covered the earth and its peoples. May the brightness of his rising shine in the church, so that the nations may walk toward the light, Jesus, the Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹

Hymn(s): Silent Night, Christ is Born

Response: This is a time of praise and thanksgiving! It is important to worship God both as a community and in your own heart. Use this day of worship and praise as a springboard to a new beginning for your life. Allow the Holy Spirit to enter you and let a new heart be born in you on this Christmas Day. Renew your commitment to setting aside a few minutes each morning and evening in prayer and meditation; this is a time just to be in His Presence.

¹From the Glenstal Book of Prayer, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.

Station 10. Shepherds Visited by An Angel

Christmas Evening

Nativity Scene: Some shepherds and sheep added to the scene.

Scripture: (Luke 2:8–10) And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were very afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: You shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among people." And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us." And they came with haste, and found both Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying that was spoken to them about this child. And all who heard it wondered at the things that were spoken unto them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them.

Reflection: This whole passage could be summed up with a phrase from Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am God." How often the first words to us from heaven are not to be afraid – do not fear! We read this in scripture many, many times. We know, then, like the shepherds, that God is there, and all will be well.

Prayer: Dear Father, we ask You to make perfect all good things that are begun. We ask You to make perfect Christ's life in us, that we may come to know, love and serve Him in a way You would bless. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Hymn(s): First Noel; Hark! The Herald Angels Sing; It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Response: The Christmas season has just begun! Use these next twelve days to reflect on this greatest of gifts – that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to teach us, to heal us, to show us the right way to live our lives. To follow Him is life. How will this shape your coming New Year's resolutions?

Station 11. Epiphany

January 6th

Nativity Scene: The Wise Men and camels are added to the scene.

Scripture: (Matt. 2:1–12)

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him." And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, "In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written through the prophet. And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: For out of you shall come forth a governor, Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel." Then Herod privately called the wise men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when you have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him." And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Reflection: The wise men were indeed wise, for they came to the Christ child and laid before Him the very things that, if they were kept, would interfere with a proper relationship with Him. Gold represents all the attachments we have to worldly things: power, materialism, and wealth. Frankincense represents the smoky illusions we hold toward others: prejudices, biases, hatred, and gossip. And myrrh, being used as an ingredient in perfume, represents the veils we use to cover our own hearts, carrying guilt and shame of the past, or fear and worry of the future. The wise men knew that these things were damaging to the true self, our souls, and also knew that the only true place to remove them was at the feet of Christ.

Prayer: (Vidi Aquam)

I saw water proceeding out of the Temple; From the right side it flowed, Alleluia; And all those to whom that water came shall be saved, and shall say, alleluia, alleluia.

Hymn: We Three Kings

Response: Be an observer of yourself as you walk through each moment. Notice when one of the veils over your heart becomes apparent, and then surrender it to the love, mercy and compassion of Christ.

Station 12. Flight to Egypt

January 7th

Nativity Scene: An empty manger; no people or animals remain.

Scripture: (Matt. 2:13–15)

Now when they (the wise men) were departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I tell you: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.” And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt did I call my son.”

Reflection: Sometimes God's plans for us include pulling back for a while, to stay out of the fray, and get some rest. Sometimes a situation is just not right to stay in. It may be better to pull back or go somewhere else to preserve or refresh yourself. Jesus often went off alone to refresh himself, to reconnect with God – to “recharge” before he interacted with others again. If we listen carefully, the Holy Spirit will tell us when we need to withdraw for a while. When the time is right, He will call you back once again.

Prayer: Lord, through your wisdom you have designed a cycle of life that alternates between action and contemplation, between work and rest. You have given us the Sabbath Day to rest and worship You. Help us to know when it is time to rest, to pull back. And when it is time to return, guide us back safely and help us to heal whatever situation we may find upon our return. In your Name we pray, Amen.

Hymn: God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

Response: Reclaim the Sabbath Day. Treat it as a special time for rest, worship, study and rebuilding relationships with family and friends.

Also, it may be time for a personal retreat for you for a couple of days. Consider making a short retreat at your favorite retreat center or monastery, or set aside some quiet days in your home, if possible.

The Angelus

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

V. The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary...

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to your word.

Hail Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary...

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, Your grace into our hearts; That, we to whom the incarnation of Christ, your Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross, be brought to the glory of his resurrection. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.