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Contents:

What's a Gesima?	1
Christian Stewardship	4
From the Pastor	5
Homosexuality and Slavery	6
Body is as Body Does	7

What's a Gesima? The Church Prepares for Lent

We are now entering the season of Lent. In the traditional liturgical Church Year, the three Sundays before Lent are known as "gesima" Sundays. What is the meaning of "gesima" and why a three week "pre-Lent." Here's an article explaining what's going on at this point in the historic Church Year.

There's been some joyous events these last few weeks — the birth of Jesus, His naming and circumcision, the first Gentiles to find Him, and His baptism. On various dates and combinations from place to place through the ages, the Christian Church has offered its members celebrations of these things in its church year.

But a change is coming, one already present amid the joy. We know as we celebrate His birth that He was born for us so He could die for us. We know as His blood was spilled in circumcision, putting Him under the Law, His blood would be spilled on the Cross, to redeem us from under the Law. We saw that the Gentiles who found Him had to return by a different way, as the way of all who find Him is different afterward. And after His baptism, Jesus will spend forty days in the desert before beginning His public ministry, wherein He will be tempted to make Himself into the various false Messiahs into which Man makes Him anyway so often. We will soon imitate those forty days for our own devotion with the season of Lent, on the way to the Cross, without which Easter is but another metaphor or myth. A change is coming.

So the church provides a transitional time between the first and second of its three great seasons, as the joyous events from preparing for His birth to His baptism, Advent-Christmas-Circumcision-Naming-Manifestation-Baptism, now turn to the literally deadly serious reason why they happened, sin and our redemption from sin. Just like with the Christmas related season, this has taken various forms in various places and times but within the same general pattern, and the universal practice of the Christian Church since ancient times (well, until 1960s Rome messed with it, but we'll get to that) has been to provide a transition from the beginnings of Jesus' earthly life to the end of it.

So, Septuagesima is 70 Days, Sexagesima is 60 Days, Quinquagesima is 50 Days. Simple. Right? Sure...but...what are all these "gesimas" about, pronounced "jeh-see-mah," emphasis on first syllable. Glad you asked.



Septuagesima is simply another word for Seventy Days, that's all. The modern English word is derived from Middle English in turn from Old French in turn from the actual Late Latin word *septuagesima* meaning seventieth day. The septua- part is the same prefix for seven or multiples by ten of seven seen in other English words — septet, an ensemble of seven; septuagenarian, someone in his 70s; the Septuagint, the translation into Greek of the Hebrew Scriptures by seventy scholars — and the -gesima part derives from the Latin for days, dies.

With the Seventieth Day, or Septuagesima, the change is apparent on various levels. The white vestments of Christmastime joy give way to purple or violet of repentance; the joyful exclamation Alleluia and other joyful expressions are not used, and the readings, especially if one follows the hours of prayer, the Divine Office, begin their way through the sorry history of Man from his creation and fall on, which the Holy Saturday liturgy will recapitulate.

On Septuagesima itself, the Gospel reading is Matthew 20:1-16, the story of the workers in the vineyard, wherein we see man the same as from the start in Eden, trying to impose his ideas of what is right on to God's, this time arguing over whether the same wage is fair for those who worked all day, those hired at the last, and everyone in between, as if we deserved anything from God and it were not his to give and not ours to presume or demand anyway. So we argue with God and each other over the denarius rather than taking in gratitude from Him who owed us nothing! Kind of the whole problem in a nutshell.

The Eastern Church uses the following on its five Sundays in the Pre Lenten Season: 1) the story of Zacchaeus, 2) the Publican and the Pharisee, 3) the Prodigal Son, 4) the Last Judgment, and 5) the Sunday of Forgiveness.

The world, which has ever had its early Spring celebrations, has in many lands timed them on Lent, so pre-Lent attains a nature as opposite from its Christian meaning as Advent has become the gift buying and partying season before Christmas. At the beginning of Lent, fasting in some form is observed, usually involving abstaining from meat, and the most likely origin of the name for the worldly face of all this, carnival, is a farewell to meat (flesh), from the Latin root carne- for meat or flesh (as in carnivore) and vale, good-bye (as in valedictory). In most but not all places, Septuagesima is the start of carnival season, to end just before Lent starts on Ash Wednesday. As the church prepares for the penitential season of Lent the world enjoys the flesh, in all senses of the word.

In the Western Church, in most denominations that follow a liturgical calendar, the transitional pre-Lenten period has been abolished altogether! And not only is this important transition dropped, the period of time it formerly took is simply counted as Ordinary Time. That would be

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bad enough if ordinary here meant what ordinary ordinarily means. Ordinary here means the literal meaning of ordinary, which is, something that has no particular name or identity but is simply numbered. So in the *novus ordo* (now order of the Mass) and the various adaptations of it, this significant time of transition from the Christmas cycle to the Easter cycle simply ceases to exist, in numbered anonymity, in the face of nearly two millennia of Christian observance in varying forms, and the continuing observance of those who do not follow suit. Well, when you're the Whore of Babylon, you do stuff like that; maybe even have to do stuff like that. Not a lead for the church of Christ to follow.

Actually, at first in English Lent itself followed the Gesima pattern and was called *Quadragesima*, meaning forty days, the duration of Lent in the West, which was also the name of the first Sunday in Lent, a word that then just meant Spring. This still survives in other languages. For example in Spanish the word is *Cuaresma* for Lent. No word yet on whether Rome can get languages like Spanish to quit calling Lent after a pattern it has abolished. The world, though, seems securely attached to its traditions; Carnival season will endure though Pre-Lent is done in. Who knows? Maybe the next council can get Ash Wednesday moved to the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, for "pastoral reasons" of course, like they jacked around the date of Epiphany, or move it to the Monday after and call it reclaiming our ancient Greek roots.

The Eastern Church still has its Pre Lenten Season.

In the Western Church, the earliest Septuagesima can fall is 18 January and the latest 22 February. This year, 2014, it's 16 February. Join the Christian Church, East or West, in this transition, whatever your church body may have chosen to do, as we turn to the preparation for Lent, the observance of that for which He whose birth we recently celebrated came to die and then rise again, and the Easter and Pentecost joy to follow in anticipation of the eternal joy of heaven!

We start with learning from the workers in the vineyard not to haggle over the denarius but understand whose it is and that it is a gift, or, from the call of Jesus to Zacchaeus, who collected taxes for the foreign oppressors, that he doesn't have to climb a tree to see Him, that He is coming to his very house — which by the way produced more grumbling about what is right and just — after which Zacchaeus repented and made restitution to his brethren. The Son of Man has indeed come to seek and save the lost — don't worry about being seeker-sensitive, HE is the seeker — whether that be those who cast aside their own people for power or those who are idle because they are not hired, as we all seek our own gain first by nature and are all "unemployable" before the justice of God, who shows us mercy instead in Christ Whom He has sent. (Taken from www.cyberbrethren.com, edited)

THE "GESIMA" SUNDAYS



Christian Stewardship

The four Sundays in February are in the Epiphany season of the Church Year calendar. Epiphany is a word that means “showing forth” or “manifesting.” The Epiphany season begins on January 6 with the visit of the Wise Men to worship the Baby Jesus as the newborn King of the Jews. The season continues with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the calling of His first disciples, His preaching the good news of salvation and the opening of His famous Sermon on the Mount. In the four Gospel readings for February we find Jesus teaching that we are lights in this spiritually dark world who give evidence of our new birth as Christians as we love even our enemies and seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. To live that way is truly an “epiphany experience” to show that we really belong to our Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit live renewed lives.

That’s what Christian stewardship is all about! Wise Christian stewards manage all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes and do it freely and joyfully! We practice the kind of stewardship that is pleasing to our Lord when we give freely and generously of our time to serve in special ways that bless the mission of the church and the people living in our communities. This kind of stewardship is also shown when we freely and joyfully offer our talents and skills to help the church prosper and make life sweeter for those around us. This kind of stewardship continues when we give freely and joyfully of our financial resources to support the work of the church in nurturing believers and reaching out to invite others to know Jesus.

Many people view Christian stewardship as something that we have to do [a command] in order to be true followers of Jesus. That simply is not true! Real Christian stewardship is the privilege of offering all that we are and have to make a difference in this world of spiritual darkness. Just as Jesus came on that first Christmas to bring light to a darkened world, so we are called to follow His example. Will we follow in His footsteps perfectly, use all that we are and have in truly unselfish ways and be willing to make sacrifices so the mission of Christ’s church on earth may prosper and become a home for many more redeemed people? No, of course not! We are sinners and will fall short of the glory of God. But, in Christ, God has declared us to be saints because our sins and shortcomings have been forgiven and the Holy Spirit empowers us to let our lights shine so that people will see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

The bottom line for Christian stewards is to hear and obey our Lord’s words when He taught: **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [material blessings] will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.” (Matthew 6:33-34 NIV)**

“Seek first the kingdom of God...”

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth....

What does this mean? I

believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and souls, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.

For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

From the Pastor

The importance of the younger generation in our church cannot be underestimated. In the later part of last year we held a family evening at St. John's Aubigny. The theme for the night was "Come dressed in something beginning with 'P.'" It was a fun night, with the aim of resurrecting some kind of night for our younger members. It was very well attended by parents and their children, and I estimate there must have been around 30 in attendance. A month or two later we decided to meet again, this time at Troy's Road, where we would have a Bible Study, followed by skating. This night was more a Youth night, not so much a family night. However it was very poorly attended and we haven't had a night since.

There is still interest from some families to have a Youth group, or even more family nights, but this cannot happen unless there is support from across the parish. If any parents are interested in helping run one of these nights, *please* talk to pastor.

Discussions are ongoing with the ACLC (Association of Confessional Lutheran Congregations), and the OLCC (Orthodox Lutheran Confessional Congregations). The ACLC and OLCC are in fellowship talks, and pastors from these two churches will be in attendance at the ACLC conference in Minnesota USA in July, to which the AELC has been invited to attend.

Lately I have been speaking to Pastor Roger Fehr from the OLCC, and we are yet to find anything to disagree on theologically, and are praying that this won't change! The OLCC has also just received another independent pastor and his congregation into their midst, Pastor Magnus Sorenson from Denmark. Pastor Sorenson is in full fellowship with the OLCC, and I plan on contacting Pastor Sorenson shortly, after being given his contact details.

Another Lutheran Church, the ULMA (United Lutheran Missions of America) has also made contact with us, but being in the very early stages of discussion, there is nothing to report at the moment.

I have decided not to commence Bible Studies until after Easter. Instead, I encourage you all to attend our Lenten services beginning this coming Wednesday night at Trinity Oakey. I will be preaching a series of sermons based on Matthew 6:9-13, the Lord's Prayer. If you are unable to attend our mid-week services, please email me for a copy of the sermon at peterz@bordnet.com.au, or check out the sermon page at www.aelc.org.au. If you don't have a computer, ask me for a printed copy. Also, please find attached to this Newsletter daily Bible readings for Lent based on the Lord's Prayer and His Passion. I encourage you to use this through Lent. It is a tri-fold publication, so fold it and keep it in your Bible!

On February 4, Ken Ham, founder of creation science organisation *Answers in Genesis*, debated famous scientist and children's television host Bill Nye "the Science Guy" on the question "Is creation a viable model of origins in today's modern, scientific era?" I will have copies available in the next week or two. Please ask me for a copy if you want one.



Homosexuality and Slavery

Some people argue that Christians should be willing to affirm homosexuality even though the Bible appears to condemn it. Why this outlandish claim? Well, because of slavery. The argument goes like this: Since we no longer approve of slavery today, we are free to ignore what the Scripture teaches about homosexuality – implying that Scripture can't be taken seriously on moral issues because it supposedly *condones* slavery.

However, people who suggest that we can ignore what the Bible teaches about homosexuality because the same Bible also supposedly condones slavery are not consistent! These same people usually approve when the same Bible condemns adultery (Leviticus 18:20), bestiality (Leviticus 18:23), injustice (Leviticus 19:15), and theft (Leviticus 19:11) as well as commanding that we love one another (Leviticus 19:17-18). Also, looking at Scripture, we find that the Bible does not condone all forms of slavery. Therefore it is wrong to use the issue of slavery as a reason to reject the authority of Holy Scripture on the issue of homosexuality.

Before we go further, it must also be pointed out that some are guilty of the opposite error. Some people teach that the Bible condemns *all forms* of slavery. But the fact is that in both the OT and NT, we see that certain forms of slavery were tolerated and regulated – even though the institution of slavery itself was not commanded or condoned. So, how do we, as Christians, respond to the question of homosexuality and slavery?

Let us begin by defining the word “slavery.” There were various types of slavery in the ancient world – all of them found in the Bible. One kind of slavery was for those who were guilty of criminal behaviour – a kind of prison sentence. Another kind of slavery was for prisoners of war. Then there were those who willingly entered into a contract of slavery to ensure they would not be homeless or starve to death. Then there were those who were forced to be slaves against their will.

Even though the Bible tolerates and regulates the first three forms of slavery, it never condones such slavery nor does it command it! As for the fourth type of slavery, that is, those who were forced to be slaves, the Bible is clear that such slavery should not exist. Sadly, some hardened their hearts and practiced slavery anyway.

But why doesn't the Bible simply forbid all forms of slavery and insist that Christians free their slaves? Well, some Christians did free their slaves, and then there were those slaves who did not wish to be freed because then they would be homeless and would starve in their ancient culture.

However, in complete contrast with the pagan culture of his day, the apostle Paul writes the following to Christians who have slaves: “*Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him,*” (Eph 6:9).

Therefore, contrary to what some wrongly teach, the Bible does not condone much less command slavery. Instead, the Bible tolerated and regulated an institution that was part of ancient culture – even forbidding certain practices that could not be reconciled with Christ's teaching.

The OT book of Exodus shows how God delivered His people from

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“*Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him,*” (Eph 6:9).

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²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in

slavery in Egypt. The NT book of Philemon shows how the Gospel of Christ was beginning to transform the institution of slavery already in Paul's day.

Therefore, those who want to blame the institution of slavery on the teaching of Holy Scripture are simply in error. In fact, it is the teaching of Holy Scripture – *especially the Gospel message* – that is responsible for the abolition of slavery in many places around the world.

With that understood, we must note how the Bible teaches that the greatest evil is not physical slavery but our spiritual slavery to sin that is based on our rejection of God's Word! (See John 8:31-47, Romans 6:6, 2 Peter 2:17-22)

Therefore, those who point to slavery in the Bible as a reason to ignore the Bible's clear condemnation of all forms of homosexuality are dooming those whom they mislead to a spiritual "slavery" that is far worse than any physical slavery experienced by any slave – past or present. Again, in no place does the Bible command or condone slavery. In contrast, the Bible very clearly condemns all forms of homosexuality for all times and places!

Dear Philemon Date: 1:7

Your love has given
me great joy and
encouragement,
because you,
brother, have
refreshed the
hearts of the saints.

Body is as Body does...

According to Jesus' prayer, true unity is achieved by Jesus giving us His glory (St. John 17:22), by Him dwelling in us (v.23), and us dwelling in the Trinity (v.21).

Jesus has introduced this peculiar phrase before, where something physical dwells (or is in) something else physical. Meaning, we have a body and Jesus has a body, so if we are in Him and He is in us, then what we get is a *body in a body* which seems impossible!! If we page back to chapter 15, we find Jesus talking about the vine and the branches. Back further still, John 10:38, Jesus says that the Father is in Him and He in the Father.

Now, this would be easy to understand if Jesus had stopped there. Since we know that the Father did not take on flesh as the Son did, it is easy for us to picture a spirit dwelling in a body such as a spirit in Jesus' body. But He took this phrase even further. In St. John 6:56 and also in his first epistle, chapter 4, St. John continues this idea of a body in a body.

In both places, we are left with a quandary. No longer is it simply a spirit, but a man dwelling in us, for I John 4:2, "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh". This also does not go unheard by St. Paul as he teaches 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And, Galatians 3:27 "For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ."

The New Testament is littered with phrases like these and I think one must conclude that the unity Jesus is praying that His Church be in is not simply intellectual or spiritual unity, but a true union of the flesh with God. That, just as Jesus was both God and man, a full union of both, so too are believers. They are both God and man IN Jesus. Being baptised INTO Jesus is not simply to say, "We agree with Jesus", but it is to be placed, body and soul, INTO the crucified and resurrected Body of Christ.

If it were simply a matter of spirituality, St. Paul could have said so as he does in Galatians 3:26



“For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” There was no need for the Apostle’s to be putting the idea of “bodily habitation” within the minds of their hearers if they did not want to, but there it is.

So then, reading passages such as Romans 6:3 “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?” takes on a completely physical and bodily meaning. Being in Jesus and believing in Jesus now must take on a fleshly tone, because God’s Word says it is so. No longer are we separated from God as the heavens are from the earth, but we are joined to Him, bodily. As our own flesh is close to us, so are we to God, in Jesus.

Word Search Puzzle

Words are in a straight line left to right or top to bottom

O F C O M M A N D E D
 N R S V A I L I G F K
 G O D A Y N O T A R N
 E V E R Y D R I R E O
 E V I L O I D L D E W
 T F O R U E Q L E L L
 R G E N E S I S N Y E
 E P B H I M K H G E D
 E U U P T H E A O D G
 A T T H A T E L O E E
 T T O O K H P L D N C

(Genesis 2:15-17) The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Word List

KNOWLEDGE COMMANDED GENESIS GARDEN FREELY SHALL
 EVERY TREE TOOK TILL THAT LORD KEEP GOOD EVIL EDEN
 YOU THE PUT NOT MAY HIM GOD FOR EAT DIE DAY BUT
 OF IT IN