



# *Lenten Devotions*



# **LENTEN DEVOTIONS**

**Week 1**

**February 18-25, 2026**

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Dear friends in Christ,

Lent has always been a season of introspection, repentance, and finding the mercy of God each day. Corporate worship on Wednesdays is certainly part of that process. Personal devotion is also a piece that can be used to hear the Word of God in new ways. To that end, I've put together these devotions that will follow the themes of each week in Lent, leading up to Holy Week and Easter. You can use these in place of your usual devotions or in addition to them. I pray that they are helpful to you in your life of faith and that, through them, you hear of God's mercy and love in Jesus Christ.

Pastor Joe

# Lent, Holy Week, Easter 2026

## Questions Series

2/18- *Ash Wednesday*- Where is their God? Joel 2:12-19

2/25- Who told you that you were naked? Genesis 3:8-13

3/4- Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Job 38:1-7

3/11- Son of Man, can these bones live? Ezekiel 37:1-6

3/18- What do you want me to do for you? Mark 10:46-52

3/25- Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? Revelation 5:1-5

4/2- *Maundy Thursday*- Do you understand what I have done for you? John 13:12

4/3- *Good Friday*- What is truth? John 18:38

4/5- *Easter Sunday*- Who will roll the stone away for us? Mark 16:3

**2/18/2026**

**Ash Wednesday**

Joel 2:17 “Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

On Ash Wednesday, the people of God reflect sincerely on their sinfulness. We may not reflect on specific sins and maybe it’s better if we don’t. Sometimes, we can get bogged down and despairing of our particular sins. We might call it spiritual myopia or tunnel vision. The devil enjoys when we turn so far inward that we can’t see any light or hope. Yes, Ash Wednesday is a time to reflect on sin but let’s do so with caution lest we, like those who mock the people of God, begin to say, “Where is our God?”

You will never find God by turning inward. In order to know God, one must look outward. We have to look to the places where He promises to be found. Jeremiah 23:23 says that God is close by, at hand, and not far away. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus declares that the Kingdom of God is at hand or has come near and that people He encounters are not far from it. Yes, we can see the kingdom of God’s creation all around us, but there are even better places to see Him. We see Him in His Word, the Holy Scriptures. We see Him in the Sacraments. We see Him when we gather as His people in worship as the Body of Christ. Where is our God? He is here, amongst us, with us, and in us.

**Ever-present God, we seek You where You may be found. Thank You for making Yourself known in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**2/19/2026**

**Thursday**

***God is Not Far***

[Jeremiah 23:23 “Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far off?”](#)

I am fascinated by technology that helps us see things far away and close up. Binoculars and telescopes, magnifying glasses and microscopes, all of them are incredible instruments. The James Webb Space Telescope can see galaxies so far away and scanning electron microscopes can see down to the very miniscule pieces of matter. But none of them can find God Himself. But is that because He is so far away or so close up?

The answer, in good Lutheran terms, is yes to both. He is the Creator of the universe so He stands outside of that which He created. But He is also so close, connected to each of His children by the Spirit. The words in Jeremiah were spoken by God to people who thought they were outside His reach and thought they spoke for Him. They were leading people astray and needed to be reminded that God is always present and close to His creation. We, too, need that reminder. God, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, is closer to you than you can imagine, no matter where you might be.

**Ever-present God, You order Your creation rightly and graciously give Your children Your own Holy Spirit. You are present with us and close to us in love and mercy. Amen.**

**2/20/2026**

**Friday**

***Near and Far***

Luke 10:9b "...[S]ay to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"

In 1975, a landmark presentation was made. Grover, the loving, blue monster from Sesame Street, taught all of us about Near & Far. By running back and forth in his own monstrous way, he established that near was closer than far. It was groundbreaking television, at least for me. Near and far became part of my vocabulary but it would take some time before the actual understanding would firm up.

When the people of God were asked "Where is their God?" in the prophet Joel, the two possible answers were near or far. Is God near to us or far from us? Jesus answered that question by becoming human and dwelling with His people. God was not far from us but was intentionally near to us. In Luke, He sends His disciples out to the villages around them to bring the Kingdom of God near to them. As they bring the Gospel message with them, Jesus remains near to all who hear it.

It is the same for us today. God is not far off and, in Christ, the Kingdom of God has come near to us. In the Lord's Supper, He is once again near to us. Jesus is never far, but always near.

**Ever-present God, whether we feel near to you or far from you, help us to remember you are always closer than we know. In Jesus and by the Spirit, amen.**

**2/21/2026**

**Saturday**

***Getting Closer***

Romans 13:11b “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

Sometimes it's called the point of no return. Others call it the tipping point. We all recognize it as the time or point in our lives where you have to move forward and that the majority of life events are in the past. We may experience a number of these points in our lives, but the thought is still the same. It would be impossible to go back, so we must go forward.

Our baptisms are points like these. We can only go forward with our lives with our salvation in God's hands. We simply can't turn back to our lives before. The cost is too much for us to bear. In fact, to get us to the tipping point cost God all He had in His own Son, Jesus. The Cross of Christ is the tipping point for humanity and our baptism connects us to that Cross. Once the sin of all creation, all people, of all time was atoned for on that Cross, the world could not return to what it used to be. Paul encourages us with the words of a promised salvation, a return of the Savior, a redemption of all creation. It is getting closer. We're well past the tipping point. We can only go forward to the glory that is promised in Christ.

**Ever-Present God, send Your Son, our Savior soon. Make real our salvation in Him and restore all of creation to Your perfect plan. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

**2/22/2026**

**Sunday**

***The Time is Now!***

Matthew 4:17 From that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Late night TV used to be saturated with commercials selling all sorts of products. These things were each touted as the answer to all of your questions, but you had to act now! Don't wait! Time is short! Call now! Most of these things would work on TV but not when you got it home. But you just had to have the diamond-encrusted frying pan guaranteed not to stick.

Jesus begins His public ministry in Matthew 4 echoing the words of John the Baptizer. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Now is your chance to repent and receive the promised kingdom. What Jesus was saying, paraphrased of course, is, “Hey! I'm here. God on earth. This is your chance to be directly near to God without fear!” In Jesus, the reign and rule of God was made known and made personal. The power of God was put into human form and now is the time to act! Jesus promises us at the end of the Gospel of Matthew that He would be with us to the very end of the age. So the time is still now! The kingdom of heaven is still at hand. God is still near us in Christ. In His gathered body, the Church, God is present, near, and at hand. In fact, in the Lord's Supper, He is not only at hand, but in your very hand.

**Ever-present God, You are near to us each moment of our lives. We praise You for being close and fulfilling the promise of Your eternal presence. In Christ, we pray. Amen.**

**2/23/2026**

**Monday**

***You Are Not Far***

Mark 12:34 And when Jesus saw that [the scribe] answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

I think that most people have played the “Warmer/Closer” game with a child. Something is hidden and the clues of “you’re getting warmer” or “you’re getting colder” signal that the seeker is on the right or wrong path. I wish there was a way to play that game by yourself when you’ve lost your keys or your glasses. It would make finding things a little less frustrating maybe.

In Mark 12, Jesus has had a conversation with a scribe, a teacher of the law, about which commandment is most important. Jesus actually answers the question this time when He outlines the two tables of the Law. Love the Lord your God with everything you’ve got and love your neighbor as if he were you. It sounded like the scribe understood when he quotes the Psalms to back up his knowledge. Jesus agrees and tells him he’s getting warmer. In fact, if he knew how warm he was, he would’ve clung to Jesus right then and there.

We’re warmer than we think. Jesus is so close to each of us that we’re downright lava-hot. With His Spirit, His love, and His promised presence, we’re closer than we think and getting warmer all the time.

**Ever-present God, let the light of Christ warm our hearts and shine in our lives, amen.**

**2/24/2026**

**Tuesday**

***Salvation Unto Us Has Come***

Luke 19:9-10 Jesus said to [Zacchaeus], “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

So goes the opening verse of Hymn 555 in our Lutheran Service Book. This could be a Christmas hymn or an Easter hymn or anytime hymn. There are nine other verses to be sung, and you might think it would get tedious. But each verse points us to the work of God, the faith we’ve been given, and the nearness of Christ. Verse nine begins with “Faith clings to Jesus’ cross alone.” You can’t cling unless you’re close. Zacchaeus clung to the tree in order to get a peek at Jesus as He came by. Jesus invited Himself to dinner at the tax collector’s house. After a short while, Zacchaeus was clinging to the kingdom of God and to his salvation instead of the tree. Jesus, who came to people such as Zacchaeus, was all the more than happy to have him clinging. Salvation indeed had come to Zacchaeus.

Salvation unto us has come, by God’s free gift and favor. His closeness is a gift and so is His grace. Through Christ, we are brought close to God and live in His ever-present love. Cling to the Cross. Hold on to Him.

**Ever-present God, by Your Spirit, You have brought us close to You. By Your Son, You came close to us. Help us to remain close to You all of our days. Amen.**

2/25/2026

Wednesday

Genesis 3:11a [God} said, “Who told you that you were naked?”

Voice of Shame

Author and researcher Dr. Brene Brown defines shame: Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.<sup>1</sup> She says that shame is a universally felt human emotion. In other words, we’ve all felt shame. But shame is filled with lies and is kept alive by secrecy and fear. Shame comes into the human experience right from the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve weren’t embarrassed. They felt a deep sense of shame that didn’t exist prior to their attempt to become like God. They didn’t listen to the right voice. They hadn’t listened to the voice of love but to the voice of shame. God asks them who they had listened to besides Him. Had they listened to the devil or to themselves? Either answer would have been wrong. Where they once had freedom, now they had shame.

The wrong voice leads down the wrong path. Now, shame is a universal feeling. But... God doesn’t expose His children to shame. He reminds them again and again what He has told them. You are my children and I love you with a love that is unimaginable, unfathomable. Jesus died on the cross, despising its shame... taking away the power of the lies of the devil and our own consciences. For you.

**Ever-loving Lord, You see in us, not our shame and sin, but the love of Your one and only Son, Jesus, our savior. Amen**

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Brene, Atlas of the Heart. New York: Random House, 2021. 137.

2/26/2026

Thursday

Exodus 3:15-16 “You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.”

A Voice Thrown

Ventriloquism has always been a little strange to me. Perhaps it is because I could never do it myself. But the ability to put words in the mouth of something or someone else and make it look like they are speaking seems weird. In the old Tom and Jerry cartoons there was always a bit with a mouse using ventriloquism to trick the cat. This is the art of giving voice to inanimate objects.

Moses was not an inanimate object, but he certainly wasn't willing to offer his own voice in service to God. God was about to send him to Egypt and to Pharaoh. But Moses doubted his ability to give voice to what God wanted. So, God sends Aaron with him. Now Aaron was to be the voice, but the words wouldn't originate from him. God would throw his voice to Moses who would throw his voice to Aaron who would then speak. God would get His message out one way or another.

His message still goes out today. He throws His voice to the Word. The Word throws His voice to the Spirit, and the Spirit gives you the words to hear and to speak. It's not ventriloquism. It's the voice of God spoken in a way that our human ears and hearts can handle.

**Ever-loving God, Your voice resounds throughout time and space. We thank You that, for our sake, You have made it hearable and knowable, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

2/27/2026

Friday

Joshua 3:9 And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God."

Come and Listen

It's story time in the kindergarten classroom. The teacher takes her seat near the chalkboard with book in hand. Each of the children grab a square of carpet and make a half circle in front of the teacher on the floor. They sit with legs crossed, ready to listen to the story. These are signals that something exciting is about to happen. They have made themselves ready to hear.

"Come and listen," Joshua says to the people. This is something they need to hear and need to pay attention to, but they are not just empty words or a colorful storybook. These are the words of the Lord that He gave to Joshua to give to the people. These are vital words of instruction and encouragement. Come and listen to these words of life. Later, Jesus' disciples would respond in a similar way to Jesus' words. "You have the words of eternal life."

Come and listen to the words of the Lord. Each Sunday, God's people gather to hear the words of the Lord, in Scripture, in song, in sermon, and in sacrament. Some people even bring a little square of cushion to sit in the pews.

**Ever-loving God, Your word has echoed down through generations. Countless people have come to listen. May countless more come to listen even today. Amen**

2/28/2026

Saturday

Psalm 81:13 “Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!”

Listen, Listen

If only they had listened. The voice of reason, the voice of experience, and the voice of warning all have things to say. Sometimes it pays to listen to them. Mistakes can be avoided. Pain can be minimized. People tend to do otherwise. They don't listen. They trust their heart and it leads them in the wrong direction and sets them up for a long season of struggle.

God laments in the Psalm. If the people of Israel would just listen, then things wouldn't get to be so bad. If they would listen, they would know the right way to go about living. They could walk in the right way down the right path. Instead, they only listen to themselves and voices of others who do not have the same love for them that God has. This only leads to struggle and suffering.

What voice do we listen to when making life decisions? We do get it right on occasion and we listen to God's voice in His word. Then again, we often listen to others, people we know and even people we don't know. It takes the work of the Holy Spirit to open our ears to hear what the Lord has to say.

**Ever-loving God, we are stubborn people who often only hear what we want to hear. Help us by Your Holy Spirit to hear your word. Amen.**

3/1/2026

Sunday

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Echoes Only

When I worked at summer camp, there was a spot on the beach where you could stand and if you shouted, your voice echoed. The lake was shaped just right so that you could hear it bounce from one end to the other. Echoes are cool things. But sometimes we can find ourselves stuck in what is known as an echo chamber. That's where we only hear opinions and thoughts of people who agree with us and we don't listen to any other words. We become enraptured with our own voice.

Paul is informing Timothy that there will be people who won't listen to him because he's not saying what they want to hear. They will go looking for someone who will echo in the chamber with them. It doesn't matter what it is they want to hear, just as long as there is someone to speak it. Conspiracy? Yes. I'm perfect? Yes. My opinion is the only right one? Yes.

The word of God only speaks truth. That truth can be hard to hear especially when it doesn't agree with us. We start to find ways to discount and dismantle the word. The thing is, without the truth, there is no Truth. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Word made flesh. He is the one and only true voice.

**Ever-loving God, Your Son is the only Truth that sets us free and the only True teaching we need to hear. Sanctify us in the Truth of Jesus. Amen.**

3/2/2026

Monday

Matthew 17:5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

One Voice

There are people in our lives who we see as authorities. They may be authorities on certain aspects of life or on a certain subject. They may have credentials or degrees or they may not. Wisdom and knowledge are two different things but they can come in the same person. It's up to us to know who to listen to. There are a lot of competing voices and authorities out there. How can we know which is the right voice?

This part of the Gospel of Matthew is the Transfiguration story. Peter, James, and John are overcome with fear and emotion. God the Father takes this opportunity to set them straight and on the right path. The Holy Spirit shows up as the cloud and God the Father's voice tells them to listen to Jesus and only Jesus. Jesus' voice was the only one that mattered.

It's still the same today. With everyone having the opportunity to give their voice to the noise, Jesus' voice can get lost in the sound. Thanks be to God for His Holy Spirit that helps our ears cut through the din and hear the voice of Jesus. At worship, in prayer, and in study, we can hear the voice of Jesus calling us.

**Ever-loving God, as Your voice instructed the disciples to listen to Jesus, so enable us to hear the voice of our Savior calling out above the crowd. Amen.**

3/3/2026

Tuesday

Ecclesiastes 5:1 ...To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools...

Listen More

Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt. I learned early on that God gave us two ears and one mouth so we should listen twice as much as we spoke. I've always tried to be a good listener and have had varying degrees of success at that. Listening is difficult for us since we like to talk. There's a lot of noise and talking in the world around us. Maybe we should give listening another try.

In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher is giving some proverbial wisdom. When going to the house of God, it's better to listen to what is being said than making a fool of yourself and drawing attention. It can be a hard thing to do. The human attention span is not very long. I'd argue it never has been. We fidget, squirm, and can't wait to move on to the next distraction. For Solomon, the Preacher, hearing the Word of God as it is taught in the temple is the most important thing. For Luther, it was the same. We gladly hear and learn it.

Today, the sanctuary is a place to hear the word, to listen to the teaching and preaching of the Gospel. Let's hold that opportunity sacred and gladly come to the house of the Lord and listen.

**Ever-loving God, Your word has been taught in various ways and places through history. Help us to hold Your word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Amen**

