

**St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 15, 2026**



*In Baptism God opens our eyes to see the truth of
who we are: God's beloved children.*

We serve God through caring and compassionate service.

The Service

*The Congregation shall stand

The Prelude

*The Brief Order for Confession & Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **C: Amen.**

P: God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **C: Amen.**

P: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P: Most merciful God,

C: we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

P: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. Through the Holy Spirit, God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of † Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in our hearts through faith. **C: Amen.**

***The Gathering Hymn** "

***The Greeting**

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

***The Kyrie**

L: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy.

L: For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy.

L: For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy.

L: For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord.

C: Lord, have mercy.

L: Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord

C: Amen.

The assembly shall be seated.

The Prayer of the Day

Peg G

L: Let us pray,

C: Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us bring light into the darkness of our hearts and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Children's Meditation

The First Reading

1 Samuel 16:1-13(NRSVue)

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do, and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ He said, "Peaceably. I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely his anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and

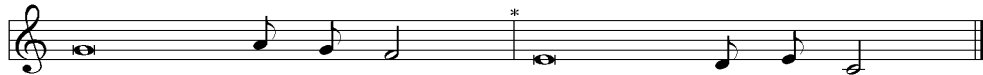
the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 23

intoned responsively



¹ The Lord | is my shepherd;*
I shall not | be in want.

² **The Lord makes me lie down | in green pastures*
and leads me be- | side still waters.**

³ You restore my | soul, O Lord,*
and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake.

⁴ **Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall | fear no evil;*
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they |
comfort me.**

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies;*
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.

⁶ **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days |
of my life,*
and I will dwell in the house of the | Lord forever.**

The Second Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14(NRSVue)

⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

The assembly shall stand.

***The Lenten Response**

C: Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

***The Holy Gospel**

John 9:1-41(NRSVue)

The Holy Gospel according to St. John

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world

began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

The Gospel of the Lord
C: Praise to you, O Christ.

The assembly shall be seated.

The Sermon "Living in Darkness or Light" **Pastor Dan Sutherin**

The Hymn of the Day
"

The assembly shall stand.

***The Nicene Creed**

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,**

**true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the
scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right
hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the
dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit; the Lord, the giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and
glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of
sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. **Amen.****

***The Prayers of Intercession**

L: Reconciled by God's mercy and sustained by God's presence, let us pray for the world and its needs.

A brief silence.

God our shepherd, we pray that you guide the church. Lead Christians in our community and across the globe in right paths for your name's sake. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our provider, we cry out for this planet and the life it holds. Rescue endangered animals and plants, preserve threatened ecosystems and save creatures from natural disasters. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our sovereign, we plead for your peace on earth. Bring an end to war and violence, and raise up leaders in governments, courts, businesses, schools, and community organizations who seek goodness and mercy. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our healer, we call to you in our need. Uplift all who are made to feel unimportant and transform the hearts of all infected by bigotry and prejudice. Care for all in special need this day especially members of our Congregation who are suffering silently, Cullom family, Scott's great aunt, Raynaud's family, Sharon's brother, Holly, Dick R, Dora Beth, Bob, Chuck, Deb, Joyce, Cathy H, Frank, Leroy, Wendy, Yvonne, Donna, Stephanie, Anita, Michelle, Ann, Genie, Wally, Troy, Anne, Cathy, Chyrstal, and Vivian. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our friend, we praise you for the diversity of people among us. Awaken us to share and receive the gifts we each possess and stir up a spirit of understanding, celebration, and welcome for all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Great Provider, help your people in need. We pray for families struggling to provide basic needs, those who utilize our food pantry. Give us the ability to serve others. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of patience, we pray for that patience as we continue in the search for a Pastor to lead us. Guide the synod staff as they select possible candidates for our call process. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our home, we thank you for all who have died and completed their baptismal journeys. Grant us faith to live until we too dwell in your house forever. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive our prayers, O God, through Jesus Christ, our strength and salvation. **Amen**

***The Peace of the Lord**

P: The Peace of the Lord be with you!

C: And also with you!

*The People may greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace.
The assembly shall be seated.*

The Offering

The assembly shall stand.

***The Offertory**

C: Let the vineyards be fruitful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of blessing. Gather a harvest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be fed with the bread of life. Gather the hopes and dreams of all; unite them with the prayers we offer. Grace our table with your presence and give us a foretaste of the feast to come.

***The Offertory Prayer**

P: O God, maker of heaven and earth, your steadfast love embraces all creation. You send rain and sunshine to nourish the earth and bring forth its bounty. Through these gifts of bread and wine, draw us into the death and life of your Son, who calls us to bear witness to his saving work. We ask this in Jesus' name.

C: Amen.

***The Great Thanksgiving**

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**C: Holy, holy, holy Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might;
Heav'n and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest**

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord, heaven and earth are full of your glory. In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension, we await his coming in glory. Pour out upon us the Spirit of your

love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord; through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

***The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever and ever. **Amen.****

The assembly shall be seated

The Lamb of God

**C: Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world;
grant us peace, grant us peace.**

The Distribution

The assembly shall stand.

***P: The Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you
and keep you in his grace. **Amen.****

***The Canticle**

C: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with your free Spirit.

***The Prayer**

P: Let us pray,

C: God of our salvation, we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls, reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey. Through the body and blood of your Son, may we become Christ's body in the world, bearing witness to your love for all creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

***The Sending Hymn** “

*The candles are extinguished.
The assembly shall be seated.*

The Announcements

The Assembly shall stand.

***The Benediction and Dismissal**

L: Receive the blessing of the holy Trinity:
 God, who calls all things into existence,
 Jesus Christ, who redeems us,
 and the Holy Spirit, whose breath sustains creation,
 + bless you now and always.

C: Amen.

L: Go in peace. Believe the good news, serve others with care and compassion.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Postlude

[Copyrighted element(s)] [Copyright notice].

Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress under license #SB162372

*The New Revised Standard Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ
in the United States of America Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.*

Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE, License #A-712334. All rights reserved.

March 15, 2026

Welcome to St. Stephen's! We are glad you have joined us for worship. **In case of emergency ministerial care, please contact Tom Stempson, Phone #317-374-8708, email: stempson@att.net.** We have been blessed to worship alongside you and hope to see you again soon!

All Who Profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and acknowledge His Presence within the bread and wine of Holy Communion are welcome to receive the Sacrament.

We welcome Pastor Dan Sutherin presiding this morning. Thank you for sharing your message with us.

Prayer Requests...

Pastor Bob & Sally – brother Dick, heart problems; Yvonne, broken ribs & hip.

Joyce & Jay D – Cullom family.

Dora Beth R – recovery surgery, breast cancer.

Kay W – stepdaughter Joyce, recovery & rehab after surgery.

Tori A – Aunt Sharon's brother; Stephanie, heart; Michelle, infection.

Bob R – health issues.

Jim & Dena T – Brother Chuck, cardiac issues; Leroy, health.

Holly E – Deb, lung cancer recurred; Anita, bone cancer; Anne, kidney transplant.

Member of Sewing Group – Cathy H, entering hospice.

Genie & Wally R – brother Frank, multiple surgeries; Genie, health; Wally, back.

Wendy B – gainful employment.

Jim B – wife Donna, recovering from a liver transplant.

Raynaud C – family in Haiti.

Dave & Beth – Troy, broken back.

Scott C – great aunt, broken hip.

Patti W – sister Deb diagnosed with PSP.

Phyllis H – daughter Cathy, granddaughter Chrystal.

Izzy L – friend, Vivian, health.

Up-coming Events:

Wed, Mar 18	9:00 am Pins & Needles Sewing 6:30 pm Table Talk
Sun, Mar 31	10:00 am Palm Sunday Worship Holy Communion
Thur, April 2	7:30 pm Maundy Thursday Worship
Fri, April 3	7:30 pm Good Friday Tenebrae Service
Sun, April 5	8:30 am Easter Breakfast 10:00 am Easter Sunday Celebration Service

Join us this morning following worship for a pitch-in celebrating our Irish Blessings! Bring a covered dish, salad, or dessert to share and great fellowship!

Calling all men!! Chefs needed to help Jeff Althouse put together the marvelous Easter breakfast to serve on Easter Morn!

If you wish to purchase an Easter Lily to adorn the Chancel on Easter Morning, please sign up on the sheet on the black bulletin board in the Narthex. The cost is \$15.00. Please pay Peggy Graham. Last day to purchase is Sunday, March 29.

April 9th Bill Beck will join the Kairos Team for a Christian Men's weekend at Heritage Trail Correctional Facility. Your support is needed and appreciated. On the table in the narthex are a prayer chain and poster. Please sign the prayer chain list with your first name and city to show support for the participants during the weekend. Please sign the poster with words of encouragement. If anyone is interested in attending the Kairos closing on Sunday, April 12th in the afternoon contact Bill Beck at 618.670.4689 to pre-register.

Current giving income received in the month of February was \$13,030.60. Amount needed each month per 2026 budget is \$9,583.00. If you'd like to make your offering online so you don't have to deal with checks and envelopes, go to ststephensplainfield.org and click on the Online Offering tab. Thank you.



Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14 - There are children activity bags in a basket in the Narthex for children, of various ages, to use during church. The children's bulletin follows the Lectionary for each week and the children can take it home. At the end of the service, please return the bags to the basket.

Volunteers are always needed to make our services a fellowship of community. Please take time to check the sign-up sheet posted on the black bulletin board for opportunities to serve. **Volunteers are needed to help with Fellowship.** If you can supply the food and snacks on a Sunday, please sign up on the list in the Fellowship Hall. Monetary donations are welcome, too. If you have questions, please see Gloria Kocher.

Please fill out the yellow cards and place them in the offering plate. The cards allow us to track attendance and follow up with visitors. For members, your name and date, along with any prayer requests will suffice. For visitors, please provide your contact information so we can send you a follow-up email or text.

FEEDING THE HUNGRY: This month our pantry is **Saturday, March 28.** Pantry set-up will be **Friday, March 27.** We know it's a lot to ask, but please consider giving some time to this important mission. Remember us when you shop or during your regular giving. We've been so successful with this mission only because of your loyalty. God Bless.

Preparing for Next Week: Monday Acts 9:1-20 Tuesday Psalm 146 Wednesday Isaiah 60:17-22 Thursday Revelation 10:1-11 Friday Psalm 130 Saturday Ezekiel 36:8-15 Fifth Sunday in Lent: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

