



# Celebrate

Fourth Sunday in Lent  
March 10, 2024

*The fourth of the Old Testament promises providing a baptismal lens this Lent is the promise God makes to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying.*

## Prayer of the Day

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O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## First Reading

Numbers 21:4-9

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*Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.*

From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. <sup>5</sup>The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup>The people came to Moses and

said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup>And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.



You de - liv - er your peo - ple from their dis - tress.

Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good,  
for God's mercy en-<sup>1</sup>dures forever.

<sup>2</sup>Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim  
that God redeemed them from the hand<sup>1</sup> of the foe,

<sup>3</sup>gathering them in<sup>1</sup> from the lands;  
from the east and from the west, from the north and<sup>1</sup> from the south.

<sup>17</sup>Some were fools and took re-<sup>1</sup>bellious paths;  
through their sins they<sup>1</sup> were afflicted.

<sup>18</sup>They loathed all man-<sup>1</sup>ner of food  
and drew near<sup>1</sup> to death's door.

<sup>19</sup>Then in their trouble they cried<sup>1</sup> to the LORD  
and you delivered them from<sup>1</sup> their distress. **R**

<sup>20</sup>You sent forth your<sup>1</sup> word and healed them  
and rescued them<sup>1</sup> from the grave.

<sup>21</sup>Let them give thanks to you, LORD, for your<sup>1</sup> steadfast love  
and your wonderful works<sup>1</sup> for all people.

<sup>22</sup>Let them offer sacrifices<sup>1</sup> of thanksgiving  
and tell of your deeds with<sup>1</sup> shouts of joy. **R**

## Second Reading

Ephesians 2:1-10

*While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God's grace at work in our lives.*

You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace

you have been saved—<sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

## Gospel

John 3:14-21

*To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.*

[Jesus said:] “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup>“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup>Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe

are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

## Prayers of Intercession

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*The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

Trusting in God's promise to reconcile all things, let us pray for the church, the well-being of creation, and a world in need.

*A brief silence.*

Gracious God, your love unites. Give vision to the global church and foster cooperation in mission. Increase inter-religious understanding and ecumenical dialog. Make your church a sanctuary for all fleeing persecution, disaster, and war (*areas in crisis may be named*). Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, your love enlivens. Restore balance to the earth's fragile habitats. Preserve wilderness lands, rainforests, and wildlife. Cleanse oceans and rivers (*local water sources may be named*). Make us good stewards of the earth. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, your love liberates. We give thanks for those who courageously witness to your liberating love (*especially Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, renewers of society, whom we commemorate today*). Free all people from

the evils of racism, religious strife, and hatred. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Merciful God, your love heals. Care tenderly for all whose loved ones perished from pandemic disease in every nation. Strengthen health care workers, first responders, and caregivers. Relieve all who live with chronic illness and pain. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Incarnate God, your love enlightens. Open our hearts and minds to fresh understandings of our faith. Deepen our love for you and for one another. Teach us to pray for our enemies. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Abiding God, your love saves. Those who died in the faith are made alive in Christ. We give thanks for your promise that we also will be raised to newness of life. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Accompany us on our journey, God of grace, and receive the prayers of our hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.  
**Amen.**

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## Preparing for Next Week

**Monday** Psalm 107:1-16. **Tuesday** (commemoration of Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, 604) 1 Corinthians 10:6-13. **Wednesday** Isaiah 60:15-22. **Thursday** Psalm 51:1-12. **Friday** Hebrews 4:14—5:4. **Saturday** John 12:1-11. **Fifth Sunday in Lent** (commemoration of Patrick, bishop, missionary to Ireland, 461) Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 *or* Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33.

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