

## Our Easter Prayer

Jonah 2:2-9

April 5, 2026 (Easter-A)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

*He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit.*

*"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.*

*"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'" (Jonah 2:2-9 NIV)*

In the name of Jesus Christ, the risen Savior who lives for us, dear friends:

This year I've been teaching 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade catechism at St. John's Lutheran School in Baraboo. On my last quiz to them, I asked them to name some places where they pray. They wrote down things like "home, church, school, on a trip", things like that. None of them wrote down, "In the belly of a big fish."

If Jonah were in my class, he could have written that down. You've heard of Jonah, a prophet whom God sent to preach to Nineveh to get them to repent. God told Jonah to go east, Jonah went west. He boarded a ship on the Mediterranean Sea to head as far west as he could go. But God sent a severe storm, buffeting the ship; Jonah realized it was because of his disobedience, and told the sailors to throw him overboard. When they finally did, the storm stopped, and then the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah alive. Our text is the prayer that Jonah prayed inside that fish. In this prayer, Jonah reflected Jesus' Easter triumph that would take place over 750 years later. This Easter, may his prayer serve as a model for **Our Easter Prayer**.

In his prayer, Jonah confessed to God his guilt. He told God, "You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas....I have been banished from your sight....The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me....To the roots of the mountains I sank down." With these words, Jonah was not accusing God. He was admitting this was the punishment he deserved. He had told the sailors, "I know that it was my fault that this great storm has come upon you" (Jon. 1:12). He had sunk to the bottom of the sea, the "roots of the mountains," the earth "barred me in forever," he cried—all because he had disobeyed God's command and didn't go to Nineveh.

Have you ever felt like you had been thrown into the depths, like Jonah, surrounded by troubles and oppressing weight on you? We too face sorrows in this life, and our bodies too will one day succumb to death. When we are in the depths, we need to call to God and confess that we deserve to be banished from his sight and to die forever because of our sins. Our guilty consciences weigh us down. Even when we're not aware of any specific sins, God's holy law reminds us that we have crossed the line with sinful behavior, often failing to do the things God tells us. In our Easter prayer, we need to confess to God our guilt.

Jesus himself was thrown into the depths on Good Friday. On the cross, Jesus was banished from God's sight: the sun stopped shining and darkness overtook the land for three hours in the middle of the day; the Father forsook his one and only Son. But Jesus had done nothing wrong; in him there is no sin. Yet, Jesus died and was placed into a tomb—dying for the sins we committed, enduring the death we deserved. As it was foretold in Isaiah 53:6, "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all."

By enduring the cross, the death, and the grave, Jesus saved us from our sins, from death and the grave too. That's how our Easter prayer turns from confession to praise and thanksgiving to God for his salvation.

The Lord rescued Jonah by providing that huge fish to swallow him in the depths of the sea. To us that might not sound like much of an improvement. Yet Jonah recognized that the Lord was rescuing him from drowning in the sea when he was swallowed by that fish. Inside the fish Jonah thanked God: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry." Jonah expressed confidence that he would return to the land of the living: "Yet I will look again toward your holy temple." In sum, Jonah praised the Lord: "But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit."

Those could have been Jesus' words on that early Easter morning. From Friday before sundown through Saturday night, Jesus lay dead in the tomb. But the Lord God raised his life from the "pit," from the tomb! Jesus had foretold this to the Pharisees: "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39,40). On Easter Jesus fulfilled the sign of Jonah: God raised him from death! God raised him because he was pleased with his Son's sacrifice for sins on the cross; he accepted that payment, and raised him for our justification, declaring us "not guilty" of sin.

This too is part of our Easter prayer: "You listened to my cry.... You, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit, from death." Easter lifts us up in our distress. How do we know our sins are forgiven? Look to the empty tomb of Easter: Jesus is not dead, but living! Our sins are paid for; we are forgiven! When death comes upon us, how do we know we'll not be dead forever but live again? Look to your risen Lord! "Because I live, you also will live," Jesus tells us (John 14:19). With Jonah we can pray confidently: "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple." One day Christ will return and raise up all the dead. Those who believe in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life, we will rise to life, just as he promises.

Such a wonderful Savior leads us to thank him in our Easter prayers. It leads us also to vow to proclaim God's salvation. Jonah made that vow while praying in the fish's belly: "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'" Jonah made a solemn promise that he was done running away from God. He wouldn't turn to "worthless idols," false gods, either. No, he would proclaim God's salvation. And after three days, when the fish spat him out on dry land, Jonah made good on that promise and went to Nineveh, proclaiming God's message to the people there.

Because God has so wonderfully saved our lives by Jesus' death and resurrection, in our prayers we will make similar vows. We too promise to stay away from worthless idols, to make sure that God alone takes first place in our hearts. We'll show that by our actions—the sacrifices we bring to God are not for sin, but thank offerings of ourselves, dedicating ourselves to serving God alone. We too will say, "Salvation comes from the LORD." Like the women who saw the empty tomb and then the resurrected Jesus, go and tell others that Jesus is risen, he lives! Tell them, "If God can save a wretch like me, he can certainly save you also!"

Wherever you might be in this world—at church, at home, at work, at school, in a car, on a plane, or even in the belly of a fish, pray, pray and pray. Ask God for help, thank him for his help, and praise the Lord for hearing our cries and raising Jesus...and us...from the dead. For Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Amen.