

Return From Exile

Many people find the Bible confusing. It starts out something like a novel, but the characters have strange-sounding names and the story line sometimes skips over dozens or even hundreds of years. The story line almost seems to be forgotten as the book turns from a novel to a law book and back again. There's lots of poetry. Some stories told in one part are retold in another. There are biographies, letters, and books full of just weird stuff. The whole thing is divided up into an "Old" part and a "New" part, and it's sometimes hard to see what one has to do with the other.

Yes, the Bible can be confusing. It's a collection of sixty-six books, yet it is one Book. It's a collection of dozens and dozens of stories, yet it is one Story: God's Story.

To follow this Story, we in the Lutheran Church follow a special calendar called the Church Year. According to this ancient practice, in the first half of the year (which began before Christmas) we retell the story of Jesus' life on earth. This month and next, we follow his journey from the Mountain of his Transfiguration to Mount Calvary and to the Empty Tomb. It's a season called Lent.

This Lenten season, with the help of resources provided by Concordia Publishing House, we will start each leg of our journey in the Old Testament and find our way to the New Testament. Along the way, we'll sort out some of the confusions people might have about the Bible as we make connections between some of the important parts of God's Story. Our theme will be "Return from Exile: A Lenten Journey."

Why "exile?" Our journey begins with the exile that began when Adam and Eve sinned, and were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Since that first sin—a sin we have inherited—we have been separated from God, exiled into the wilderness of sin and death. That's where we wander, unable to find our way out.

Why "return?" Because God doesn't leave us wandering. He restores the relationship broken by our sin, and he leads us out of our wanderings to our destination: everlasting life with him, in the Promised Land that he has prepared for us.

And all along the way we see Jesus. We see him as our guide and companion throughout this journey. We see what he suffered because of us and our sins, and we weep. We see where he brings us at the very end, and we rejoice.

"Life is full of journeys. Life itself is a journey. We enter this Lenten season contemplating the reality of our earthly journey but with eyes fixed on its destination—the empty tomb and the open gates of everlasting life. What joy there is in knowing that we do not walk this way alone!"