

Morning Prayer

Monday, September 15



Opening Statement

Leader

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him. *Habakkuk 2:20*

Confession of Sin

Leader

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Silence may be kept.

Everyone together, all kneeling:

Most merciful God,
we confess that 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.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Leader

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ,
strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Invitatory

All stand.

Leader

Lord, open our lips.

Response

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Everyone

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be for ever. Amen. Alleluia.

The Earth is the Lord's for he made it:

Come let us adore him.

Jubilate

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands;
serve the Lord with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.

Know this: the Lord himself is God;
he himself has made us, and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
For the Lord is good;
his mercy is everlasting;
and his faithfulness endures from age to age.
The Earth is the Lord's for he made it:
Come let us adore him.

Psalm 66 *Jubilate Deo*

¹ Be joyful in God, all you lands; *
sing the glory of his Name;
sing the glory of his praise.
² Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! *
because of your great strength your enemies
cringe before you.
³ All the earth bows down before you, *
sings to you, sings out your Name."
⁴ Come now and see the works of God, *
how wonderful he is in his doing toward all people.
⁵ He turned the sea into dry land,
so that they went through the water on foot, *
and there we rejoiced in him.
⁶ In his might he rules for ever;
his eyes keep watch over the nations; *
let no rebel rise up against him.
⁷ Bless our God, you peoples; *
make the voice of his praise to be heard;
⁸ Who holds our souls in life, *
and will not allow our feet to slip.
⁹ For you, O God, have proved us; *
you have tried us just as silver is tried.
¹⁰ You brought us into the snare; *
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.
¹¹ You let enemies ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water; *
but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.
¹² I will enter your house with burnt-offerings
and will pay you my vows, *
which I promised with my lips
and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.
¹³ I will offer you sacrifices of fat beasts
with the smoke of rams; *
I will give you oxen and goats.
¹⁴ Come and listen, all you who fear God, *
and I will tell you what he has done for me.
¹⁵ I called out to him with my mouth, *

and his praise was on my tongue.
16 If I had found evil in my heart, *
the Lord would not have heard me;
17 But in truth God has heard me; *
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
18 Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, *
nor withheld his love from me.

Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be.
World without end. Amen. *Amen.*

The Old Testament Lesson

Reader

A reading from the book of Numbers 21:4-9

4From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5The 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." 6Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7The 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. 8And 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." 9So 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.

The Word of the Lord.

Everyone

Thanks be to God.

Silence may be kept after the reading.

Canticle 9 The First Song of Isaiah

Ecce, Deus

Isaiah 12:2-6

Surely, it is God who saves me; *
I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, *
and he will be my Savior.
Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing *
from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say, *
Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;
Make his deeds known among the peoples; *
see that they remember that his Name is exalted.
Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things, *
and this is known in all the world.
Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, *
for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen.*

The Gospel

Reader

A reading from the Gospel according to John 3:11-17

¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶"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. ¹⁷"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.

The Word of the Lord.

Everyone

Thanks be to God.

Silence may be kept after the reading.

The Apostles' Creed

All stand

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those

who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. *Amen.*

Suffrages

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance;
Govern and uphold them, now and always.

Day by day we bless you;
We praise your Name for ever.

Lord, keep us from all sin today;
Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.

Lord, show us your love and mercy;
For we put our trust in you.

In you, Lord, is our hope;
And we shall never hope in vain.

Collect of the Day: Holy Cross Day

Leader

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

For Mission

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh, and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Trinity Cycle of Prayer

Holly O'Horo

Let us pray now for our own needs and those of others.

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

Benediction

Leader

Let us bless the Lord.

Everyone

Thanks be to God.

Leader

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Amen. Romans 15:13*

The Commemoration

During the reign of Constantine, first Roman Emperor to profess the Christian faith, his mother Helena went to Israel and there undertook to find the places especially significant to Christians. (She was helped in this by the fact that in their destructions around 135, the Romans had built pagan shrines over many of these sites.)

Having located, close together, what she believed to be the sites of the Crucifixion and of the Burial (at locations that modern archaeologists think may be correct), she then had built over them the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which was dedicated on 14 September 335.

September 14th* has become a day for recognizing the Cross (in a festal atmosphere that would be inappropriate on Good Friday) as a symbol of triumph, as a sign of Christ's victory over death, and a reminder of His promise, "And when I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32)

*(September 15th in the year 2025.)

Tertullian, in his *De Corona* (3:2), written around AD 211, says that Christians seldom do anything significant without making the sign of the cross. Certainly by his time the practice was well established.

Justin Martyr, in chapters 55 and 60 of his *First Apology* (Defense of the Christian Faith, addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius and therefore written between 148 and 155 AD), refers to the cross as a standard Christian symbol, but not explicitly to tracing the sign of the cross as a devotional gesture.

In the ruins of Pompeii (destroyed 79 AD), there is a room with an altar-like structure against one wall, and over the altar the appearance of the plaster shows that a cross-shaped object had been nailed to the wall, and forcibly pulled loose, apparently shortly before the volcano buried the city. It is suggested that this house may have belonged to a Christian family, and that they took the cross and other objects of value to them when they fled the city. This is not the only possible explanation, but I do not know of a likelier one.

The Christian custom of tracing the sign of the cross on persons and things as a sign of blessing is very old. Some think that it goes back to the very origins of Christianity and earlier.

In Ezekiel 9, we read that Ezekiel had a vision of the throne-room of God, in which an angel was sent to go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the faithful few who mourned for the sins of the city. Afterwards, other angels were sent through the city to destroy all those who had not the mark.

We find similar visionary material in Revelation 7:2-4; 9:4; 14:1, where the mark on the forehead again protects the faithful few in the day of wrath, and it is said to be the name of the Lamb and of His Father.

Now, the Hebrew word used for "mark" in Ezekiel is TAU, which is also the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (the ancestor of the Greek letter TAU and our letter T), and it refers to a mark like an X or a +, two short lines crossing at right angles.

When the Essenes (the Dead Sea Scrolls people) received converts into their community, they baptized them and then signed them on their foreheads with a TAU, in token that they were part of the faithful remnant who mourned the sins of Israel, and that they would be spared in the day of God's wrath.

It seems probable that John the Baptist and his followers were in some measure influenced by the Essenes, and they had certainly read Ezekiel. Accordingly, the tracing of a TAU on the forehead may have been a part of John's method of baptism, and may have been adopted by the earliest Christians. (We remember that some of the Twelve disciples had previously been disciples of John the Baptist -- see John 1:35-37,40.) Very possibly they began by tracing the TAU without asking what it meant -- it was simply a mark, the mark mentioned by Ezekiel. Later, they may have identified it with the Name of God.

The Essenes, in some of their documents, used four dots in place of the four letters of the Name of God, and sometimes arranged them in a square. It would be easy to interpret the four ends of the TAU as representing the four letters of the Name of God.

Later, Christians, especially Greek-speaking Christians, might interpret the sign as a CHI, an X-shaped letter, the first letter of the word XPICTOC, or Christos, meaning the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. Again, Christians might understand it to be the sign of the Cross of Christ, and it is this interpretation that has prevailed.

Today, in many Christian churches, when someone is baptized, the baptizer afterwards traces the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized person. Often, some of the water that has been used for baptism is saved and placed in small bowls near the entrance to the church. Worshippers entering the church touch the surface of the water and then cross themselves as a way of reaffirming their baptismal covenant.

(A few years ago, a Jewish friend asked me, "May I go to the Easter Midnight service with you?" I said: "Certainly, if you like. However, I must warn you that there will be baptisms, and that afterwards the priest will take a bowl of baptismal water and a sprig of hyssop, and walk up and down the aisle sprinkling the congregation with the water, and if a single drop touches you, you will instantly turn into a goy." He answered, "I will bring an umbrella and open it at the appropriate time.")

As we have seen, the practice of using the sign of the cross in connection with Baptism may very well go back to the Apostles themselves, and back before them into their Essene and other Jewish roots, having its origin in the vision of Ezekiel. In fact, the concept may go back further than that. We read in Genesis 4 that, when Cain had killed his brother and was sent into exile, God set a mark (TAU) on Cain, so that no one would slay him. Thus, from the start, the Sign of the Cross has been the protection of the penitent and justified sinner.

What is the significance of the sign of the cross? Well, in the first place, we often place our initials or other personal mark on something to show that it belongs to us. The Cross is the personal mark of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we mark it on ourselves as a sign that we belong to Him, just as in the book of Revelation, as noted above, the servants of God are sealed or marked on their foreheads as a sign that they are His.

Again, as one preacher has said, if you were telling someone how to make a cross, you might say (at least to an English speaker), "Draw an I and then cross it out." As we make the sign, we first draw a vertical stroke, as if to say to God, "Lord, here am I." Then we cancel it with a horizontal stroke, as if to say, "Help me, Lord, to abandon my self-centeredness and self-will, and to make you the center of my life instead. Fix all my attention and all my desire on you, Lord, that I may forget myself, cancel myself, abandon myself completely to your love and service."

The Shape of the Cross

Most of us assume that we know what a cross looks like--that it is two beams of wood fastened together at right angles. However, occasionally we meet someone who claims otherwise. The counter-claim is likely to run like this:

"The churches will tell you that Jesus was put to death on a cross, but that is a lie. He was nailed to a single upright beam, with his hands directly over his head. The cross is a pagan symbol, actually a letter T, or Tau, standing for the god Tammuz, who was worshipped by the Canaanites. When you wear a cross, or make any religious use of a cross, you are really worshipping Tammuz, whether you know it or not; and any church that displays a cross, or sings hymns like "The Old Rugged Cross," or "Beneath the Cross of Jesus", actually has its origins in Tammuz-worship, and is an instrument of the Devil, and if you want to avoid the wrath of God, you had better flee from all such churches and sign up with the only organization in town that teaches Bible truth and is devoted to the pure worship of God and not of idols like Tammuz, and here I am, ready to sign you up."

It is therefore of some interest to know what evidence we have about the shape of the device on which Jesus was nailed up to die. Minucius Felix, a Christian who wrote a work called *Octavius*, probably a little before 200 AD, says (chapter 29) that the shape of the cross is to be found everywhere you look.

Indeed, we see the sign of the cross naturally formed by a ship when it carries a full press of sail, or when it glides over the sea with outspread oars.

Note that a ship with a single vertical mast and a triangular sail is a modern device, used for sailing upwind by repeated tacking. The ancients did not do this. They used a ship with a square sail, and a vertical mast with a horizontal spar across it to hold the top of the sail. Hence a cross shape. Note also, that it is not necessary to agree with Minucius Felix that there is anything significant about the many places that the shape of a cross can be seen. What matters is that he knows that his readers will understand the shape of a cross to be two beams at right angles, not just a vertical beam.

The Greek word for the cross of Jesus, used many times in the New Testament and in early Greek Christian writings, is *stauros*, and the corresponding verb is *staurizo*= "crucify". Now, do any early writers use these words in a way that would make it clear what shape they were talking about?

A pagan writer, Lucian of Samosata, probable dates 120-180 AD, wrote a fantasy called *The Trial of the Vowels*, in which the letter Tau is summoned before a panel of judges, the seven vowels, and is accused of being a general mischief-maker. The charges tend to be like this (to invent an example in English):

"Consider the word SUN. How good a thing the sun is! It is the source of light and warmth, and is indispensable for life itself. Along comes the letter T, and changes the word to STUN. What does it mean to stun a man? It means "to knock him out cold--to ice him," or to deprive him of warmth. It means "to punch his lights out," or to deprive him of light. It means "to knock him dead," or to deprive him of consciousness, and potentially of life itself. What a villain the letter T is, to turn good into evil in this fashion. (Several other examples follow.) And consider that evil thing, the STAUIROS, instrument of torment and shame and death. It takes its name from the letter TAU, because it is shaped like a TAU. What an evil device, and what an evil letter it is named for!"

Before I introduce my next writer, a digression is necessary. The Jews (beginning at what time I do not know) often wrote numbers using the letters of their alphabet, which has 22 letters. (Five of these letters developed distinct forms when used at the ends of words, which gives us 27 letters in all.) If we use the first nine letters for the numbers 1 to 9, the next nine for the numbers 10 to 90, and the last nine for the numbers 100 to 900, we can write anything from 1 to 999 in at most three characters. If we put a tick mark beside a letter to multiply its value by 1000, then with repeated tick marks we can write any positive whole number. (Note that not

everyone used the five special forms. Without them, you get as far as Tau=400 and then use Tau Qoph = 400+100=500, Tau Resh = 400+200=600, etc.)

The Greeks used a similar system, which you can find in the writings of Archimedes. Their alphabet as we know it today has only 24 letters, but in an earlier version it had 27 letters. To round it out, add an F (or Digamma) after the Epsilon, and a Q (or Qoppa) after the Pi, and a Sampi (don't ask) at the end, and you have 27 letters. Use the first nine for 1 to 9, the middle nine for 10 to 90, the last nine for 100 to 900, tick marks or under linings for multiplying by 100, and you are in business. If you omit the Hebrew letter Tsaddi, the remaining 21 letters correspond exactly and in the correct order with the first 21 letters of the 27-letter Greek alphabet. (The Greeks got their alphabet from the Phoenicians, whose language and alphabet were very similar to those of the Hebrews.)

With this system in hand, some Jewish students of the Scriptures noted the numerical values of various words or sentences, obtained by adding up the values of the letters, and found symbolic significance in the results. This is called *gematria* (from the Greek word for "geometry", here understood to mean mathematics in general). Obviously, the possibilities are endless. Some Christians made similar use of the numerical values of Greek letters. Thus, since Jesus was crucified on Friday, the sixth day of the week, 6 stands for evil and death, as does its intensive form 666. But Jesus rose two days later, on what may be called the eighth day of the week, and so 8 is the number of resurrections, of renewal, of life restored and triumphant. It is thus no accident that the letters in the name of *Iesous* add up to 888.

Iota = 10

Eta = 8

Sigma = 200

Omicron = 70

Upsilon = 400

Sigma = 200

Total = 888

Now for a particular example. In Genesis 14 we read that an invading army captured Abraham's nephew Lot and some others, and that Abraham took a band of 318 warriors, followed the army and in a surprise attack rescued the prisoners. Jewish scholars noted that 318 is written Cheth ("ch" as in "Bach," please) Yod Shin. Now Cheth Yod spells "chai," which means "life." Shin is the first letter of "shalom," which means "peace, deliverance, wholeness, well-being." Thus Abraham's group of warriors had 318 men in it, and was a source of life and peace to the prisoners whom they rescued.

Sometime between 70 (when the Temple was destroyed) and 135 (when Jerusalem was sacked again and a pagan shrine built on the site of the Temple), a man called Barnabas, or the pseudo-Barnabas, or Barnabas of Alexandria (not to be confused with the companion of Paul mentioned in the book of Acts), wrote a book called *The Epistle of Barnabas*, in which he points out that 318 written in Greek letters is Tau Iota Eta. Now, Tau clearly represents the cross, and Iota Eta are the first two letters of the Name of Jesus. Hence, the source of the life and peace that Jewish scholars had discovered in Abraham's 318 men is none other than the cross of Jesus.

Now, whether you think that that is a remarkable insight, or think that Barnabas of Alexandria is a complete air-head, is beside the point. The point is that he would not have used this argument if he did not know, and expect his readers to know, that a cross is shaped like a Tau. Thus, we see that among pagans and Christians alike in the second century of the Christian era, a time when crucifixions were a common method of execution and everyone knew what they looked like, there was a general understanding that if a man had been crucified, it was probably on a vertical and a horizontal beam.