

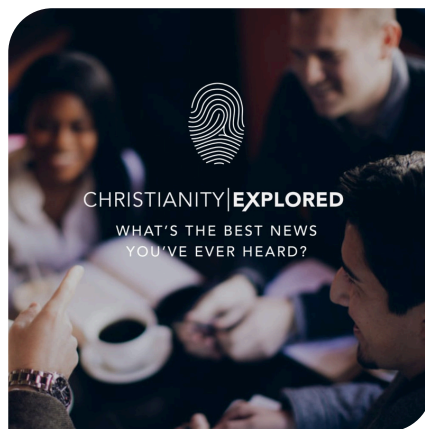
CONGREGATIONAL CHRONICLES

Declaring the Good News to all.

Notes from the Undershepherd's Heart

By Pastor Ben Spera

Christianity Explored is for EVERYONE. We kick off our Christianity Explored course at the end of the month (Feb 25th). Christianity Explored is what we might call an “Evangelistic Course”, which is to say, it is a structured and formal way to share the good news of Jesus with other people. This 7-week course walks through the Gospel of Mark, highlighting who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and what it means for us today in engaging and strategic ways to help introduce people to the saving faith we have in Jesus Christ.



But if you have been going to church for a while, you might be thinking, “Why do I need this? I mean, isn’t this meant to reach non-Christians... I’m already a Christian, so is this really for me?” And to that I want to say, absolutely! Christianity Explored is for EVERYONE. It is a helpful and engaging tool to help us walk through the gospel of Mark with a focus on Jesus.

So why should you come to Christianity Explored if you already believe in Jesus? First, it is always good to be reminded of the truths of the gospel. Second, it might help give you a way talk to others about Jesus. In fact, I hope that Christianity Explored might become a tool that you can use to walk someone through the gospel of Mark in the future. And third, I hope this will be a good recap to the gospel of Mark; since I preached through Mark, this will be a good reminder of its main teachings. So, Christianity Explored is for YOU.

But more importantly, if you already believe in Jesus, you should bring someone with you. Let me be clear, it is okay to come by yourself, Christianity Explored is for Everyone. But going through this course with a friend or family member will allow you to walk with them, answer questions, and show them the love of Jesus. So, I hope you will consider joining us for our Christianity Explored course (5:30 p.m. dinner, 6:00 p.m. study - Wednesday Evenings 2/25-4/8), maybe consider bringing someone new, and please pray that people will hear the gospel and believe in Jesus.

Sunday Service

Every Sunday
10:00-11:00 am

Ministries for Youth

Every Sunday during service,
from September - May.
For children PreK - 6th grade.

Women's Fellowship

A gathering of women to share
in service to God.
Meetings are held monthly on the third
Tuesday, at 10:15 am.

Upcoming Scripture Readings

- **February 1st:**
 - 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 - Isaiah 63:7-14
- **February 8th:**
 - 1 Peter 2:4-11 - Isaiah 63:15-64:2
 - Sunday Evening
Little Pilgrim's Progress Chp. 5-8
- **February 15th:**
 - 1 Peter 2:12-3:7 - Isaiah 64:3-12
- **February 22nd:**
 - 1 Peter 3:8-22 - Isaiah 65:1-7
 - Sunday Evening
Little Pilgrim's Progress Chp. 9-11

Prayer Emphasis

Let us pray for our Christianity Explored Course as we start on February 25th. Pray that it would be a meaningful time of growth for our members. And pray that G-d would use it to reach at least one soul for Jesus.

A Word From Women’s Fellowship

By Marlys Colyn

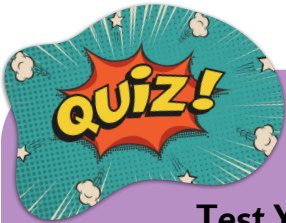
Our January meeting was postponed until the 27th due to the weather. Rosie led devotions which were based on 1 Thessalonians 5:15 which says, “See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.”

It was decided to hold a biscuits and gravy supper on Monday, February 16th.



A signup sheet will be posted for anyone willing to prepare a light dinner for the Lenten service dinners.

The next meeting will be February 17th. Phyllis will give devotions.



Test Your Knowledge! The letter of 1 Peter

1. To Whom is the letter of 1 Peter addressed?
2. How does Peter describe the blood of Christ? (1 Peter 1:19)
3. What has God called believers to be? (1 Peter 2:9)
4. What is the “ornament of great price” in the sight of God? (1 Peter 3:4)
5. Believers are told to be ready to give an answer to what? (1 Peter 3:15)
6. What does Peter say will cover a multitude of sins? (1 Peter 4:8)
7. Who helped Peter write the letter, referred to as a “Faithful brother?” (1 Peter 5:12)
8. What animal does Peter compare the devil to? (1 Peter 5:8)
9. Who does Peter refer to as “my son” / likely his protegee? (1 Peter 5:13)
10. Where was Peter likely located when he wrote the letter, referring to it as “Babylon.” (1 Peter 5:13)

Psst! You can find answers at the bottom of the last page, or your Bible!

Hymn of the Month

#26 O Love That Will Not Let Me Go

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go is a beautiful hymn, but the story behind it is just as beautiful.

George Matheson came to faith as a young boy in a Christian family, by the age of 17 he was studying for the ministry but a couple years into seminary young Matheson started to go blind. He unhitched himself from his fiancée, uncertain that he could provide, and his younger sister took him in and promised to take care of him. Matheson became a professor and wrote two books before completely losing his sight, but later he became a full-time pastor. His sister took care of him for almost 20 years, till June 7, 1882, when his sister was married. On the night when the person who was closest to him was about to leave to be with her love, Mathson felt utterly alone and turned to God in prayer. In a fit of creative or a powerful work of the spirit, Matheson wrote this hymn in about 5 minutes, the night before his sister was to be married.

Matheson later wrote “My hymn was composed in the manse of Innellan on the evening of the 6th of June, 1882. . . . Something happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering. It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life. I had the impression rather of having it dictated to me by some inward voice than of working it out myself.”

*O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*

*O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flickring torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.*

*O Joy that seekest me thru' pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow thru' the rain
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.*

*O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.*

WHAT IS LENT, AND SHOULD I OBSERVE IT?

By Shelby Turner

On Ash Wednesday, you may see people with small black crosses on their foreheads. The crosses are drawn in ash and signal the beginning of the Lent season, which begins February 18th. Ash Wednesday is traditionally observed by Catholics but is also observed by some other denominations as well. There are many denominations that do not observe Ash Wednesday but do take part in the Lent season. Perhaps you have heard it talked about in your church or on social media. So, what is Lent? Should all Christians observe it? What is the purpose of it? Let's explore each of these questions together.

What is Lent?

Lent is a period of forty days (excluding Sundays). Depending on the year, it can begin in February or March, but it always ends on Easter. It was instituted as a reminder to repent of sin and meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus in the weeks leading up to Easter. In the same way advent prepares us to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas by helping us take time to think about the significance of that event before the day comes, Lent prepares us to honor the sacrifice and death of Jesus. Lent specifically reminds us that we are sinners who are in need of Jesus's sacrifice. Jesus died for us.

Over time some groups of people began to think Lent was more about doing and saying the right things than about the attitude of the heart. They decided there were right ways to celebrate it and wrong ways to celebrate it. And if you did it the wrong way, you were looked down on. This has led to much confusion over how and why one should partake in Lent.

What is the purpose of Lent?

At its core, the heart of Lent is to focus on our need for Jesus. There is no right and wrong way to observe it. Some choose to take part in Ash Wednesday. The ashen cross on their forehead is a reminder of people in the Bible who repented of their sin while sitting in piles of dust and ash that represented their frailty and weakness. Some choose to observe Lent by giving up or fasting from something. Their restraint from a certain activity or food is a constant reminder that their life is not about consuming pleasures but worshipping their Savior.

The goal of Lent is to intentionally focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the weeks leading up to Easter so that we can better recognize the significance of what He has done for us. I know in the past I have spent more time focusing on preparing Easter baskets and planning the Easter menu than on getting my heart ready to celebrate my Lord and Savior. Lent helps us focus on what's most important.

Should all Christians celebrate Lent?

Lent is never mentioned in the Bible and is not a season that the Bible commands us to celebrate. The decision to observe Lent can be made individually. There are countless ways to center your thoughts on Jesus during Lent. You can celebrate Lent through fasting, prayer, meditation, Bible study, reflection, or worship. The benefits to taking part in Lent are many and personally, I have found that observing it has been a delight and not a burden. It is a short season that sets my heart right as Easter approaches.

In his article, "Join the 40-Day Feast: How to Prepare Ahead for Easter," Scott Hubbard so beautifully puts it like this: "If we want to make the most of this annual opportunity, we'll do more than just give something up. We'll silence ourselves before the Sovereign who became a servant. We'll fasten our eyes upon him as he teaches and heals and smiles and weeps – the only upright man in a world of cracked and curved impostors. We'll stand in awe as we hear him plead in Gethsemane. We'll marvel as he moves from the garden to the cross, silent as a sheep going to the slaughter. We'll adore him as he lets the nails pierced his sinless skin until it is finished. And then, we'll put our ears to the ground and listen for the tremors of his rising. If we do, we might just find ourselves erupting with a deeper joy as we join the universal shout: 'He is risen!'"

Make Lent Meaningful

So, my encouragement to you is to make the next 40 days leading up to Easter meaningful. Maybe you want to take time to study Jesus's life and death more than you ever have before. Don't let this season pass you by. Don't let Easter become something that is only semi-meaningful. Jesus gave His precious life and blood for you. How can you use the days leading up to Easter to wholeheartedly embrace this wonderful gift?

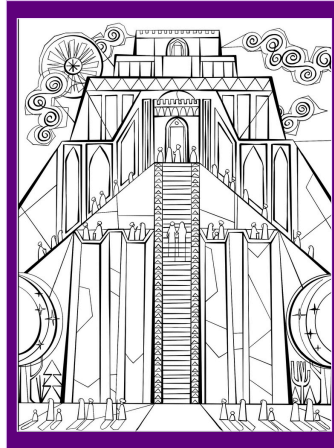
Sunday School Sessions

- **February 1st :**
 - From Bad To Worse
 - Genesis 3-4
- **February 8th :**
 - Rain, Rain, Go Away
 - Genesis 6-9
- **February 15th :**
 - A Table And A Tower
 - Genesis 10-11
- **February 22nd :**
 - The Father Of Nations
 - Genesis 11-13

Monthly Memory Verse:

Genesis 12:2

“I will make of you a great nation,
and I will bless you and make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.”



Upcoming Meetings

- **Women’s Group:**
02/17/26 at 10:15 am

Talk To Us

Main Office

(641) 227-3382

office@baxtercongregational.com

218 S Main St

Baxter, IA 50208

www.baxtercongregational.com

www.facebook.com/BaxterCongregational

Contact Pastor Ben

(641) 840-1102

bspera@baxtercongregational.com

Contact Pastor Parish

Greg Christianson

(515) 669-6703

gjchristianson@hotmail.com

Upcoming Events

BAXTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 2026 - LENT DINNER SERIES



CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED

WHAT'S THE BEST NEWS
YOU'VE EVER HEARD?

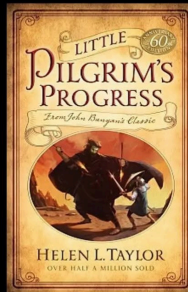
Join us for a 7-Week Study
looking at Who Jesus Is and What Jesus Did
through the Gospel of Mark

Wednesdays - February 25-April 8
5:30 Dinner - 6pm Study

Everyone Is Welcome - Especially those Exploring Christianity

Sunday Evening Study

2nd & 4th Sundays - Starting 1/25/26



A Study through Pilgrim's Progress

Using
Little Pilgrim's Progress
by Helen Taylor

4:30pm Reading

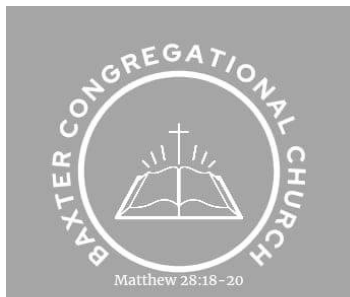
5:00pm Study

Monthly Fellowship Gatherings



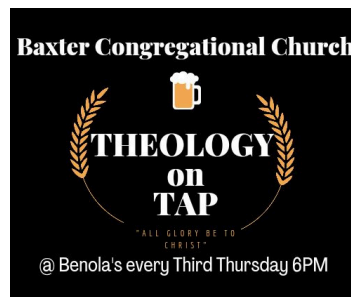
Community Coffee

Every Tuesday at the Church
9:00 - 10:00 am



Midweek Bible Study

With Pastor Ben
Every Wednesday at the Church
6:00 - 7:00 pm



Theology on Tap

With Pastor Ben
Every Third Thursday at Benola's
6:00 - 7:00 pm



Prayer Meeting

FRIDAYS 10:30AM
BAXTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Friday Prayer Meetings

With Pastor Ben
Every Friday at the Church
10:30 - 11:30 am

Quiz Answers:

1. To the "elect/strangers scattered" in Asia Minor.
2. Precious, like a lamb without blemish.
3. A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, & a holy nation.
4. A meek & quiet spirit.
5. The reason for the hope that is in them.
6. Love.
7. Silvanus.
8. A roaring lion.
9. Mark.
10. Rome.