



Worship Planning for Easter Sunday

Options and Ideas for Easter Worship

Theme The theme of E20 is “Victorious!” Every musical element in the service outline below except the opening hymn includes some mention of victory, victor, or victorious. This theme complements the NPH Lenten resource, “[The Son of God Goes Forth to War](#),” with its “Victory” theme for Easter.

Easter sermon series

The “victorious” theme is one that can easily be carried throughout the entire Easter season. Publicizing a sermon series is an excellent way to encourage visitors to return. Even if you have already planned Easter season worship and picked hymns, it is likely that the suggestions below can work with your plan.

Planning Christian Worship (Year A, page 75; available at <https://worship.welsrc.net/>) gives themes for each Sunday. Here are suggestions that edit themes to include some aspect of victory while maintaining the focus in PCW, which states “The themes for the Sundays are keyed to the Gospel message of the season: The Redeemer Lives!” PCW themes are at the left; edited options at the right. If preaching on some text other than the day’s Gospel, some adjustment of these victory themes might be useful.

Easter Dawn:	He lives to dry my tears and take away my fears	Victory over fear and sadness
Easter Festival:	He lives to take me from death to life	Victory over death
Easter 2:	He lives to give me proof and peace	Victory over skepticism ¹
Easter 3:	He lives to restore my Hope	Victory over despair
Easter 4:	He lives to be my Good Shepherd	Victory over bad choices ²
Easter 5:	He lives to be the only Way to heaven	Victory on the only path to heaven
Easter 6:	He lives to call me to live for him	Victorious living empowered by the Spirit
Ascension:	He lives to rules all things for the Church	A victory to share with all people

¹ Consider the difference between doubt and skepticism. The terms are somewhat synonymous, and PCW refers to doubts. Most Christians have doubts at times, but there is value in an apologetic angle both for the sake of members and visitors. See Mike Berg’s *Preach the Word* article on resurrection apologetics: <https://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/preach-the-word-volume-22/>.

² We, the sheep, are tempted not to follow the Good Shepherd. PCW states: “Jesus’ ‘I am’ statements highlight the exclusivity of the Christian message. Christ is Savior, and there is no other! Jesus is the only gate for the sheep, and there is no other!” Note the exclusivity themes in this Sunday and the next, being sure to distinguish the emphases for each Sunday.

Easter 7:	He lives to give me eager expectation of glory	Victory no matter what happens in this life 3
-----------	--	--

Easter Sunday service outline

For most elements, musical options are below.

Hymn	CW 157: Jesus Christ Is Risen Today.
Song of Praise	CW 265: This is the Feast replaces the Gloria, ideally for the entire Easter season*
Psalm of the Day	Psalm 118 from <i>Christian Worship Supplement</i>
Verse of the Day	Options are available for free download.
Hymn of the Day	CWS 720: Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands
Sermon Hymn	Thanks to You, O Christ, Victorious **
Hymn	CW 162: He Is Arisen! Glorious Word.

* If this has not been your custom in the past, give it a try. If the hymn is unfamiliar to the congregation, have a soloist or choir sing the verses with the congregation joining in on the refrain. If this has been your custom in the past, creative musical settings will enhance appreciation. See below for versions with choir and optional instruments.

** If sung immediately after the sermon, see comments in sermon notes.

Worship folders

A worship folder draft of 20 pages is available in [E20-Worship Resources](#). Local information and announcements may be added on pages 2, 17, and 20. The back cover prominently announces the Easter season sermon series.

Since the text and music for This Is the Feast is copyrighted, this is not included in the worship folder. Those with the electronic version of *Christian Worship* can insert the music graphic and license via OneLicense.net. Or, if you have enough hymnals for a packed Easter service, sing from the hymnals. Or substitute another song if you need to print everything in the worship folder.

The worship folder selections included are not meant to suggest that these are optimal for every WELS congregation. They are simply a baseline starting point, using mostly items in the public domain or for which copyright permission is easily granted for free distribution. Many congregations will want to include an Easter anthem. Some will include a more festive and challenging setting of the psalm, etc.

The worship folder includes by permission some artwork from Ian Welch (ianmwelch.com). Additional graphics from him are available for free download at the *E20* Worship site.

³ In the Gospel Jesus prays, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name." But consider preaching on 1 Peter 4; PCW: "In this life, sufferings will come; but we live in eager expectation of glory." Or 2 Corinthians 4; PCW: "Who thinks that their troubles are light or momentary? When we lose a loved one, when we face mortal illness or financial ruin—who could ever think those troubles insignificant or passing? Only people who have a perspective that stretches to the unbounded time of eternity and encompasses the unbounded joy that we eagerly expect there." And reference Jesus' prayer in the sermon.

Sermon

The NPH sermon suggestion is “Victory!” and is based on Revelation 19:11-16. *E20* also provides thoughts for a sermon on 1 Corinthians 15.

Lectionary

The readings appointed for Easter Year A contain baptismal themes. (Note the baptismal themes also in the Prayer of the Church.) If 1 Corinthians 15 is included as a reading and basis for the sermon, the Jonah lesson may also be changed. In the CW lectionary 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 is appointed for Easter Dawn, Year C. In the new hymnal’s lectionary, it is appointed more prominently for Easter Day, paired with Isaiah 25:6-9 for the first reading. Thus Isaiah 25 is a good substitute for Jonah, if desired.

Or retain the appointed readings and add 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 as a preaching text. There is ample victory theme in the Jonah reading, and the Colossians reading emphasizes our determined outlook in light of victory.

Prayer of the Church

The prayer in the worship folder was written by Daron Lindemann for the Easter service at the 2011 WELS worship conference. Another option is to adapt a prayer from LetUsPray at <https://www.lcms.org/worship/three-year-series-prayers>. These prayers tend to be very well crafted. With occasional editing, they can serve well in WELS congregations. A way to incorporate one of these prayers without printing the entire prayer follows.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Each petition of the prayer concludes:

M: ... Lord, in your mercy,
C: **hear our prayer.**

The last petition of the prayer concludes:

M: ...one God, now and forever.
C: **Amen.**

Opening Dialogue

Regarding the Easter Proclamation: There are two common versions. Here is the version found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* and common in some other denominations:

M: ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN!

C: **HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!**

Another custom omits the Alleluias. If you have an established custom, edit the worship folder to match your custom. Include this Easter Proclamation at the beginning of each service during the season of Easter.

Song of Praise

Some churches follow the custom of singing CW 265, This Is the Feast of Victory, every Sunday of the Easter season. (This custom is recommended in the forthcoming WELS hymnal.)

From an outreach perspective, recognizing that some visitors might be “de-churched,” it’s worth noting that this hymn/canticle has been published in 40 hymnals. That means it’s known outside of Lutheran circles.

If your congregation is not yet familiar with this hymn, you could email a link and ask people to listen a few times before Easter Sunday: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9h1P65VnKo>. Or: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u-VlqFCOrI>

Those churches able to muster a brass ensemble, with optional choir and timpani can use the well-known setting by Richard Hillert. This works with just one trumpet as well, and optional timpani. Most churches don’t have timpani, but perhaps a local high school will loan a set. An article describing how one church borrowed/rented timpani is available under [E20-Worship Resources](#).

If your church has done the original Hillert setting and wants a fresh arrangement for similar instrumentation, try a 2014 setting by Jeff Blersch. Granted, only a few big churches can manage this one! But it sure is glorious! This is the Feast (Festival); <https://online.nph.net/catalog/product/view/id/26165/>.

N.B.: The Hillert and Blersch settings skip the refrain after verse three. Make sure this is clear in the worship folder.

Another musical version of the text is by Peter Hallock. This version will appear in the digital resources for the forthcoming WELS hymnal. If you want to program it now already for E20, order through NPH.

Yet another option for the Song of Praise is CWS 788, “Thanks Be to God!” –with these lines in the refrain recurring four times: “He gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This canticle, too, could be sung for every Sunday of the Easter season. Due to lack of familiarity, a choir or soloist should sing the verses at least for the first two or three Sundays.

Please order all music through NPH, even special order items. NPH is our partner in ministry. The more we order through NPH, the stronger they can be as our partner.
Call 800-662-6022 or email orders@nph.wels.net.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 118 from CWS is included in the worship folder. The accompaniment is available for free download for those who do not have CWS. You may substitute a more festive setting. Find additional options by searching “Psalm 118” at NPH. One by John Behnke includes handbells, for those capable. An old standby from NPH is: <https://online.nph.net/psalm-118-i-will-not-die-but-live-pdf.html>.

Hymn of the Day

A new concertato for E20 on CWS 720, Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands. The Commission on Worship and NPH commissioned Benjamin Culli to write a new concertato for E20 on this great Luther hymn set to the new tune by Kermit Moldenhauer. Culli's arrangement is for SAB choir, congregation, and optional trumpet. But it works also just with congregation and keyboard (organ or piano). If the tune is unfamiliar, the choir could sing stanza 1 as well as 4 and 6. <https://online.nph.net/choral-christ-jesus-lay-in-deaths-strong-bands-1.html>

At seven stanzas this is a long hymn.* But note that after the sermon there are only two single stanzas. Thus the climax of the service is Luther's powerful hymn and the sermon. Consider how some phrases from the hymn might fit in the sermon. St 4: "The victory remained with life, the reign of death was ended." St 6: "Now his grace to us imparts eternal sunshine to our hearts" —what a powerful statement of the motivating drive for Christian living!

*But if you desire shorter version for the Hymn of the Day, Culli provides flexible ways to shorten the hymn.

The original concertato: While Culli's new concertato is accessible for smaller churches, Moldenhauer's original concertato remains a great choice for churches with a brass quartet. But note that the brass is optional, and the SATB choral stanza can be done with fewer parts as noted in the score. Note that this setting includes only four stanzas. <https://online.nph.net/christ-jesus-lay-in-deaths-strong-bands-full-score-vocal-inst-congr.html>

Choral music

Verse of the Day: If you desire a simple unison selection, note how the Seasonal Response for Easter/Ascension from Morning Praise and Evening Prayer echoes the E20 theme: *The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Death has been swallowed up in victory. Alleluia!* This could serve as the Verse of the Day; it appears in the worship folder. NPH has given permission for this to be available as a free download along with the standard NPH musical setting of the Verse of the Day. Another option for the Verse by Carl Schalk, covering every Sunday in Easter, is: <https://www.cph.org/p-31793-alleluias-and-verses-for-the-easter-season.aspx>.

Thanks to You, O Christ, Victorious – J.S. Bach: CW 147:2. A SATB version set to Bach's famous "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" harmony is available for free download—in three different keys: F (the lowest) for congregational singing; G for average choirs; A-flat for choirs with better sopranos and tenors. Consider using versions of this stanza (for choir or soloist, for congregation) multiple times during the Easter season.

Thanks to You, O Christ, Victorious – Benjamin Culli: This is a 2018 concertato by the same composer WELS commissioned for the new concertato on Christ Jesus, Lay in Death's Strong Bands. The text is CW 147 without the first stanza. But the suggestion for E20 is to consider only the first stanzas as a unison anthem (not the entire piece as an alternate to Christ Jesus, Lay in Death's Strong Bands). Note:

Culli's new tune, CHRISTUS VICTOR, will not appear in the new WELS hymnal.

<https://online.nph.net/catalog/product/view/id/26164/>

Service music

The following resources for a prelude, offertory, or postlude are based on the hymn tune NORTHRIDGE (the Hymn of the Day) and on FESTIVAL CANTICLE (This Is the Feast). Many other possibilities on other hymns are not listed.

FESTIVAL CANTICLE

This is the Feast (organ): <https://online.nph.net/organ-this-is-the-feast-callahan.html>. You can hear a recording from the WELS church in Antioch, IL here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1VhY50c14I>.

Piano Impressions for Easter: <https://online.nph.net/piano-piano-impressions-for-easter-keesecker.html>

Handbells – an arrangement by Rett Richards for 2-3 octaves (**order through NPH: 800-662-6022 or orders@nph.wels.net**): <https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/this-is-the-feast-of-victory-pdf-dhb0453>

NORTHRIDGE

NPH has published four keyboard settings of this tune—three for organ, one for piano. Search NPH on NORTHRIDGE to find these: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=northridge>.

Additional musical options

These links provide both choral and keyboard suggestions.

Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=zuversicht>

His Battle Ended There: <https://online.nph.net/easter-mosaics.html>

Like the Golden Sun Ascending: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=munter>

The Strife Is O'er: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=%22strife+is+o%27er%22>

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=orientis>

Alleluia! Jesus Lives: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=%22fred+til+bod%22>

Awake My Heart: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=%22auf%2C+auf+mein+herz%22>

Awake My Heart (choral): <https://online.nph.net/awake-my-heart-with-gladness-octavo.html>

Wie schoen: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=leuchtet>

The Day of Resurrection: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=lancashire>

With High Delight: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=zart>

Wake, Awake: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=%22wachtet+auf%22>

Saints Behold: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=coronae>

Praise the One: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=%22beach+spring%22>

Abide with Me: <https://online.nph.net/catalogsearch/result/?q=eventide>

Hymn details

The following hymns specifically mention victory. Of course, victory is implicit in any Easter celebration and alluded to with other words in many other hymns. But these specifically mention victor, victory, or victorious. Some of the hymns listed might prompt ideas for a choir or soloist, or they may substitute for one of the hymns in the worship folder, or they may be used with verbal or printed commentary on some Sunday in the Easter season to reinforce a “victory” sermon series.

141 At the Lamb’s High Feast. In the forthcoming WELS hymnal, the “communion stanzas” are restored to this hymn, and it will appear in the Holy Communion section rather than the Easter section. If you plan a “victory” theme for the entire season of Easter, consider using the full version of this hymn during communion distribution some Sunday. A free download is available from the E20 site.

145 Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won

146 His Battle Ended There

147 Like the Golden Sun Ascending

148 The Strife Is O’er, the Battle Done

149 Christ the Lord Is Risen Today. Stanza 4 reflects 1 Cor 15: Where your victory, O grave?

153 Alleluia! Jesus Lives. Stanza 2: “Praise the Victor-King, whose sway Sin and death and hell obey.” And stanza 4: “You with him at his right hand Victor over death shall stand.”

156 Awake, My Heart, with Gladness: Stanza 2:

For Christ again is free;
In glorious victory
He who is strong to save
Has triumphed o’er the grave.

161/720 Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands. Stanza 2:

It was a strange and dreadful strife
When life and death contended.
The victory remained with life;
The reign of death was ended.

162 He Is Arisen! Glorious Word.

“Christ victorious, Rising glorious,
Life is giving.
He was dead, but now is living!”

166 The Day of Resurrection: Stanza 1 mentions “hymns of victory” and stanza 2 “the victor strain.”

168 With High Delight Let Us Unite. Stanza 2:

“His death has been death’s undoing.
“And yours shall be Like victory
O’er death and grave,” Said he, who gave
His life for us, life renewing.”

206 Wake, Awake: An End Time hymn during the Easter season? Just stanza 3: “Therefore will we In victory Sing hymns of praise eternally.” This could be a closing stanza with a verbal or printed comment drawing attention to its emphasis on the “victory” theme.

216 Saints, Behold! The Sight Is Glorious: “victor...” twice in the first stanza. Perhaps on Ascension.

341 Crown Him with Many Crowns: Stanza 3:

Crown him the Lord of life
Who triumphed o’er the grave
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save.

353 Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness: Stanza 3:

Let us praise the Word incarnate,
Christ, who suffered in our place;
Jesus died and rose victorious
That we may know God by grace.

588 Abide with Me: Sing just 6-7 after the sermon some Sunday in Easter. From 6: “Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if thou abide with me.”