



What Sunday is Reformation Sunday?

This question came up in one of our planning meetings as we were trying to decide dates for the choir to sing. It's a simple question, but it gives a chance to talk about why we celebrate certain events when we do.

You may have noticed that there aren't a lot of special "Days" in the church that have fixed dates. Christmas is one - we always celebrate it on December 25. And since Epiphany (the Wise Men day) has been fixed at 12 days after Christmas it is always celebrated on January 6. Easter, as you probably know, is a "moveable" date that follows the moon more than it does the calendar. Easter is set as the "First Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox," so it can be anywhere from March 22 to April 25. Since Ash Wednesday (40 days before Easter - not counting Sundays), Ascension Day (40 days after Easter) and Pentecost (50 days after Easter) are all dependent upon the date of Easter, they are never on the same date from year to year either.

Even though we do have fixed dates to celebrate Christmas and Epiphany, we really don't know the exact date Jesus was born or when the Magi showed up. Early on the church settled on those dates as the ones we would set aside to celebrate the birth of Christ and the first Gentiles coming to worship Him.

But there is one event we celebrate that we do know the exact date that it occurred in history - the beginning of The Reformation. It was on October 31 in the year 1517 that Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the school bulletin board on the north door of the University of Wittenberg Castle Church. Those statements served as a notice of an academic debate that Luther hoped would clarify the church's teaching regarding the sale of indulgences. The church in that day raised funds through the sale of indulgences that promised the purchaser a reduction in (or total removal of) the punishment for sin. Luther held that this was not Scriptural and hoped a debate would clarify and settle the matter. The debate was never held, but the 95 Theses sparked a movement to restore the church teachings to the truth that we are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus, not by anything we can do or pay.

However, since October 31 only falls on Sunday once every seven years, Lutheran churches typically celebrate it either the Sunday before or after October 31. This year we will celebrate the Reformation on Sunday, November 2, two days after the anniversary of the posting of the 95 Theses.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net