

Life Sunday 2026

Isaiah 49:1-7 "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made"

Rev. Dr. Michael Salemink, former Executive Director of Lutherans For Life
lutheransforlife.org

Mother's wombs may give life.

But they don't give it up without a fight.

The womb doesn't make for a particularly peaceful place.

How loud the whomp and whoosh of landlady's pulse,
pummeling in attic and basement, pounding against the walls themselves.

Intestinal oceans drive tidal waves to slap and shatter,
a percussion of bubbles erupting like bombs behind and all around.

The womb shrink-wraps occupants in a continuously constricting straitjacket
thick with stifling ninety-nine degree heat and smothering hundred percent humidity.

Cells incessantly swell and split.

Nerves erratically spark spiderweb circuits into service.

Detainee gets fed when and what someone else wants,
sat down at another's control and gotten up without one's own consent.

Right where eternity's portal opens to earth,
heaven has humankind securely clamped to its laboratory table,
operated on by Almighty God's power to make life and take it.

We mistakenly imagine mother's womb as tranquil.

Intense, more like.

Traumatic, even.

No wonder we come out crying.

Of course we exit trembling.

For nine months, things bigger than us have had their way with us.

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We awaken to existence aware, above all, of weakness.

Our earliest experiences orient us with ownership,

branded upon us by belly buttons that bear witness into perpetuity.

I suspect the sense never really leaves us.

In fact, it seems we've been born with the ambition to overcome vulnerability.

So Isaiah's timeless insights today juxtapose mother's womb with sharp sword and honed arrow.

The Lord God dealt like dagger and dart with me, too light a thing already inside mom's body.

Time and environment will not permit you to forget
you come about as one engineered and forged, carved and chiseled into being,
every bit as fearfully made as the Scripture famously proclaims.

Israel's whole history embodies the churning.

Age after age they get stirred and extruded.

And they model the prototypical human instinct,

ever desperate to extract an advantage,

interpreting the ordeal as an indignant wound

and manipulating it into a deadly weapon.

Fearfully indeed we lean into that legacy of bigger bullying littler.

What we assume as the way of the womb we then assimilate into the way of the world.

Strength dictates. Superiority imposes. Success exploits.

Fearfully, though, so you'd rather not think about it.

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A painful business, personal matter and political minefield, how the womb affects people.

Deeply despised and even abhorred by the nation to consider pregnancy or address
procreation.

Best keep your concentration centered on what you can control.

Autonomy, entitlement: that counts as true humanity.

Indulgence, gratification: this constitutes the good life.

So crave and conspire at the expense of the competitors.

Acquire and consume, brandish and discard to the detriment of adversaries.

Provoke opponents, threaten enemies, seduce and delude, swindle and slander.

Winners demand losers and both deserve it.

Get yours.

Oh, you will get yours.

You're gonna get yours.

What goes around comes around.

Call it karma, cycle of life, fate, law of nature, programming, or God.

You see, you never outgrow the womb.

No one ever really escapes the womb.

You bend it but never break out.

You stretch, but you don't cut loose from or slip clear of its grip.

Whatever monster you make of yourself,

you only summon the greater beast, and it barrels all the faster after you.

The next dog will eat too, and the bigger fish also gets its feed.

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Fearful womb keeps claim on you still.

He who works us over within the womb retains title and tether.

This womb world will contract, collapse, and last long after you.

But He doesn't just have the whole world in His hands.

He goes and puts His whole heart in this world.

Womb means over and around, yes,

but also and even more so among and alongside,

hidden in the shadow of His hand and concealed securely in His quiver.

The Wombing and Wombed One who eclipses and overwhelms us

does it with gentleness, humility, and servanthood.

And He is barreling toward us to deliver and swaddle, not shackle and devour.

He stampedes at us, not to crush but to cushion and clutch, incubate and cradle.

He chases us down for rescue rather than retribution and embracing instead of imprisoning.

Far bigger than us His fearful looms, but bigger yet than that His wonderful comes.

The wonderful descends so immense that we get a smiling face with the iron fist,

and after the boot heel, a heart broken open and pouring out.

His fearful stands so vast and massive that only His wonderful surpasses it,

only His generous demeanor exceeds His gigantic dimensions.

Bigger than the descendants of Jacob or the remnant of Israel,

broader than the nations and their coastlands,

the Wonderful Womb One encompasses the peoples from afar even unto the ends of the earth.

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This One John recognizes and confesses Lamb.

Lamb of God and Lamb for You,

He of womblike bounty and wombful extravagance,

from every direction, on all sides, around any corner, and with every step of the way,

more than we could ever ask or even imagine good,

He stays.

The Lamb stays.

This Lamb of God stays as handmaid and safeguard, sacrifice and substitute.

Jesus wombly lambs on our behalf to absorb our repercussions and ingest our consequences.

He lamblly converts punishment to compassion, turns fury to forgiveness,

births from worry nothing less than wonder

by making of it occasion and instrument for divine mercy.

Lamb and Womb of God C-sections a crucifixion-shaped, sinner-sized egress from the grave
itself

with Son of God force and Savior flair.

Behold your Chaperone and Escort.

Come and see our Companion and Attendant,

whose womblike wonderworking inaugurates us ladies and lords of the domain,

anoints us princes and princesses of the palace and enthrones us kings and queens of the
castle!

Settle and nestle, then.

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Entrust and enjoy.

You know, you see, you feel this whole womb world belongs to Him,

Heavenly Father and Holy Child.

Daily bread, the plentiful sustenance body and being, self and fellowship, heart and whole
life,

our daily bread imparts an abundance of evidence that He is ordering it all toward you.

Jesus Christ abides as ceaseless reason

and endures as never-ending reservoir for this womb-wonderful,

and resurrection to immortality in the paradise festival everlasting the inevitable outcome.

Believe and delight that He wrings glory from struggle and ripens distresses into blessings
that sculpt when we only expect them to pulverize.

Inhabitants and inheritors of this greater womb are we all.

And this reality has appropriately positioned us, privileged and gifted us even,
to advocate for our neighbors still located in the lesser wombs.

Eagerly receive them as sisters-in-waiting and brothers-to-be,

not a single one of them at any time, in any way, or for any reason

at all less fearfully and wonderfully, purposefully and precious made than you and me.

Find it entirely fitting to put words to it, in congregation and in community.

We Christians know nothing but praying, confessing, reciting, testifying, conversing, and
counseling

to and for and about the Womber and His wombing.

If it fills us, it will surely overflow us,

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with insistence and even forgiveness toward them that would wage war on or in wombs.

May we make it to the moment when wonderful overtakes fearful for every one

as the Lord God has graciously made it so for us. Amen.