

The Israelites were overcome with joy. The Lord had delivered them! He had snatched them out of the hand of Pharaoh just as He had promised Moses. He had led them through the Red Sea on dry ground as Pharaoh and all his host were buried in a watery grave.

**Exodus 15:21** And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

It was a day of victory; a day of release for the captives. God had shown strength with His arm and given the sons of Jacob a new beginning as His chosen people.

It would not take long, though, before that new beginning was spoiled, just as it didn't take long for Noah and his family to spoil the new beginning after the flood. The people began to wonder how they would survive out in the wilderness.

Like newborn babes, hungry for nourishment, the newly redeemed Israelites soon began to notice their hunger pangs.

But instead of inquiring of the Lord, instead of trusting in Him to provide for them, they began to grumble against Moses and Aaron.

**Exodus 16:3** “The people of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Naturally, the people were hungry. They were in a wilderness, without food, without water. And for a while, they thought that they had it better back in Egypt as slaves. But the Lord was merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

He promised to rain down bread from heaven for them so that they could eat and be satisfied. The Lord heard their grumbling, and though they deserved to die, He responded with love.

**Exodus 16:12** “At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning, you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.”

And that is exactly what happened. Problem solved! God was faithful to His promise.

**Exodus 16:13-15** “In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. <sup>14</sup>And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.”

Bread from heaven. God provided for their physical hunger. He fed His newborn children so that they would not go hungry in the wilderness and die. But it didn’t sustain them forever. They would die eventually.

It offered no lasting benefits. And there was a reason for that. This miraculous feeding was meant to teach them something about what God would do in the future.

This was a sign, the full significance of which would not be revealed until the coming of *the* Son, Jesus Christ.

St. John records for us Jesus’ own interpretation of these events: **John 6:48-51** <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup>This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

So, this miraculous feeding of the Israelites pointed to the coming of the Christ and the gifts of salvation that He would bring. God would, in the fullness of time, rain down bread from heaven once again for His people.

He would give them His Son. **John 6:33**: “For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Christ is the new and greater manna, for He comes not merely to satisfy your physical hunger. He comes to satisfy those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness”

For it is He alone that can satisfy the hunger of your souls. Whoever eats of this bread—Jesus Christ—will live forever. For His flesh and His blood will nourish and strengthen the soul unto eternal life.

“Sir, give us this bread always,” begged the disciples (John 6:34). And so, He does. Every time you are gathered around His gifts of Word and the Lord’s Supper, Christ feeds you with heavenly manna, just as He fed the Israelites in the wilderness.

He feeds you with holy food.

As you feast on the salutary gift of Christ's body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins, the Lord gives you the spiritual nourishment that your souls need for the journey.

Jesus knows that you need such nourishment. He knows that the journey through the wilderness of this world is long and sometimes difficult. He sees your daily battle with your sinful flesh. He knows your physical ailments.

He knows your propensity to grumble at the gifts that God gives, just as the children of Israel did long ago. There is a part of you that thinks that what God has done for you is not good enough.

We need to confess our sins, because we too grumble against God and live with unbelief.

**1 John 1:9** "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There is a part of you—a sinful part—that longs to return to your spiritual Egypt, to the captivity of your sins. But He is merciful. He is slow to anger. He abounds in steadfast love

He died for you because of his great love. He covered all your sins for all time with His death, and the shedding of His blood. He rose from the dead after 3 days so you can receive the gifts of salvation, and life and forgiveness.

He does not want you to be faint and grow weary on the way to your heavenly home. And so, He comes week after week, as host and meal, inviting all of you battle-weary sinners to commune at His Table, until that day when you finally reach the heavenly promised land.

Now is not the time to grumble, to long for the days of your captivity as Israel once did. Now is not the time to complain that God is not answering your prayers the way you expect.

Now is not the time to worry that you might not appreciate this salutary gift if it is offered too frequently.

Now is the time to receive in faith the gifts that our Lord wants to give. Luther understood the benefits of the Lord's Supper and said: "On this account it is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man.

For by Baptism, we are first born anew [John 3:5]. But, there still remains the old sinful nature of flesh and blood in mankind.

There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and of the world that we often become weary and faint, and sometimes we also stumble [Hebrews 12:3].

Luther writes: "The Sacrament is given as a daily sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself [Psalm 23:1–3] so that it will not fall back in such a battle, but become ever stronger and stronger" (Large Catechism V 23–24).

Manna from heaven; life-giving bread—given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. That is your spiritual sustenance as you wander through the wilderness of this world.

That is the Lord's salutary gift to you—a gift that is undeserved, to be sure, but one that comes from your loving and faithful Lord. Amen.