



# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Leaders Guide

## Leader's Guides

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## United in Purpose . . . on Purpose

(Notes for the leader are in bold print.)

### 1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Our synod is blessed with remarkable unity of doctrine and mission. So often, where we hurt one another and damage the Gospel proclamation is in the way we approach disagreements in ministry practice or priorities. The thesis of this study is that our God-given unity is to be acknowledged and nurtured.

In what ways would it be correct to say that unity is a blessing?

***Unity is a gift from God to be treasured by us.***

That unity brings a blessing?

**Psalm 133**

**How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! <sup>2</sup>It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. <sup>3</sup>It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. (NIV)**

**This familiar psalm is quoted here because of the picture it brings to mind of the over-flowing abundance of blessing that comes from living in unity. According to the *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, (footnote for verse 3): "A dew as profuse as that of Mount Hermon would make Mount Zion richly fruitful. So would brotherly love unity make Israel richly fruitful."**

**Aaron was the first high priest. That office represented God's desire to be at peace with His people.**

- 1) Unity brings joy to relationships. (v. 1)**
- 2) The Lord bestows His blessing on those who seek to live in unity (v. 3)**

Is unity an end in itself? Or a means to an end?

**Answers may vary, depending on how one is defining "unity."**

**If our ultimate goal is an outward expression of unity even when real unity doesn't exist, we may well find ourselves ignoring rather than addressing genuine disagreements in doctrine or practice. Unity then becomes the goal.**

On the other hand, true unity is a God-pleasing thing which can result in a united and winsome witness to the world. Unity then is a means toward reaching the goal of bringing people to Christ.

## 2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

### Harmony – What a Prize!

John 17:20-23 (Jesus' High-Priestly Prayer)

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,<sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."  
(NIV)

Why did Jesus pray that His followers would be united?

- 1) Such a feat requires prayer and effort
- 2) It is vitally important to the mission of the church (verse 23b: "let the world know.") Unity in the church is a blessing not only to the church, but also to those who are brought to Christ through the church.

Unity is to be gratefully received and prayerfully achieved .  
(Unitas = unity of the church; Concordia = unity in the church. While unitas is a constant characteristic of the church, concordia is not.) [CTCR document "A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism" p. 7]

### Disharmony – No Surprise!

Acts 15 (especially verses 1-7, 12-13, 19-22)

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup> This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. <sup>3</sup> The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. <sup>5</sup> Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." <sup>6</sup> The apostles and elders met to consider this question. <sup>7</sup> After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe . . .

<sup>12</sup> The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling

about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. <sup>13</sup> When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. . . . <sup>19</sup> "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. . . .

<sup>22</sup> Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. . . .

What steps toward unity did the early church take that can serve as an example for us today?

1. They **faced** the **disagreement** head on.  
**For various reasons, we often choose to ignore disagreements, hoping they will go away. There are times when that can be the best approach; there are other times when it is not.**
2. They **listened** to one another.  
**The word "listen" is used in verse 12 and 13. It is also implied in the reaction of the church in verse 6 to what was said in verse 5. It is also implied by the fact that they had "much discussion" (verse 7).**
3. The leader **led**.  
**After listening carefully, James (the leader of the church in Jerusalem), proposed a solution to the problem which preserved the Gospel proclamation while also addressing the concerns of those from the party of the Pharisees. When the recognized leader of an organization is able to provide a "non-anxious presence" and is willing to take the lead in resolving a conflict, the chances for such resolution are greatly increased.**
4. They took action **together**.  
**Verse 22: "With the whole church . . ." They took the time to come to a resolution with which they could all agree and then acted together on that.**

*And yet . . .* in Acts 15:36-39 we read that Paul and Barnabas split up over a disagreement they had. Why couldn't Paul and Barnabas iron out their differences? Did their conflict help or harm the cause of Christ?

#### **Acts 15:36-39**

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." <sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup> but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia. <sup>39</sup> They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

Why couldn't Paul and Barnabas iron out their differences?

**While Scripture doesn't answer this question, some possibilities include:**

- 1) **There is no perfect unity this side of heaven.**

- 2) They both had strongly held opinions for which there was no apparent compromise.
- 3) They may have been tired from the events of the preceding days. That could have affected their judgment and the amount of energy they'd be willing to expend to resolve this issue.
- 4) They may have been victims of a sinful pride arising from their success at the Jerusalem Council and giving them an inflated view of their own opinions.

Did their conflict help or harm the cause of Christ?

**Acts 15:39b-41**

**Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.**

**God was able to use this conflict to send out two missionary teams rather than just one. Not every unresolved conflict hinders the Gospel proclamation. However, that is not what usually happens.**

### United in Purpose

**Philippians 2:1-5, 13**

**<sup>1</sup> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. . . <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.**

What kind of unity is already and always will be ours? (verse 1)

**We are united with Christ and, therefore, to one another through our faith in Him.**

In this context, what does it mean to “consider others better than yourselves”? (verse 3)

- 1) **Listen to their opinions**
- 2) **Put their needs ahead of your own**

We are united in **Christ** and in our desire to carry out Christ's **mission**.

**While this is true, it is not always enough that we are united in purpose. We can disagree over how we're going to achieve that purpose and those disagreements can derail the entire endeavor. For that reason, it is also necessary for us to make an intentional effort to not let disagreements unnecessarily disrupt unity. In other words, we also need to be united on purpose.**

### United on Purpose

In **Ephesians 4:3**, St. Paul makes this plea: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

What kinds of efforts ought we to make to nurture the unity God has given us? You might wish to allow some discussion before exploring the Scripture passages which follow. Those verses provide some specific guidelines. Note that they are all prescriptive, not merely descriptive, which was the case with the account given in Acts 15.

#### Romans 15:1-7

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.<sup>2</sup> Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.<sup>3</sup> For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."<sup>4</sup> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.<sup>5</sup> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Verses 1 & 2 We are to accept responsibility.  
**Responsibility for unity falls on the "strong." We are to bear with others, seeking to build them up.**

Verse 4 We are to learn from Scripture.

Verse 5 We are to pray.  
**This verse is a prayer.**

Verse 7 We are to accept one another.  
**We are brothers and sisters in Christ. In addition, since He was able to accept us in spite of our great sinning against Him, we also ought to be able to accept those who sin against us. (The parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:23-35 comes to mind.)**

#### Philippians 4:2-3

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Sometimes fellow Christians must intervene.  
**People embroiled in a conflict aren't always aware of the negative effect they're having on others and on the Gospel proclamation.**

#### Colossians 3:12-14

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.<sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

We must practice forgiveness.

**We're not perfect, how can we expect others to be? While this seems obvious, we don't always act as if we know that it's true.**

### **United – At Any Cost?**

**Jeremiah 8:11**

**They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace.**

Do we go along to get along?

**There's a difference between denying a problem and choosing to overlook an offense.**

What kinds of differences break unity?

**Doctrinal**

What kinds shouldn't?

**If the difference doesn't damage a relationship or it isn't harmful to others.**

### **3. OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK** (Quotations from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, © 2005, Concordia Publishing House)

"We beg (Christ) to look upon the afflicted and scattered churches and to bring them back to godly and continuous harmony." (Ap Preface, 19)

**The Confessors understood the importance of unity. They prayed and worked for that. At the same time, we know that they were not willing to seek peace at any cost.**

"For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere." *AC Article VII "The Church"*

**The Confessors clearly stated those things about which there could be no compromise; while also acknowledging that those were all Scriptural and doctrinal in nature. This is meant to be seen as a distinction between what is clearly delineated in God's Word and those practices which, while they may well be beneficial, cannot be insisted upon.**

"We believe that the true unity of the Church is not injured by dissimilar ceremonies instituted by humans . . . . However, it is pleasing to us that, for the sake of peace, universal ceremonies are kept. We will also willingly keep the order of the Mass in the churches, the Lord's Day, and other more famous festival days." *Ap Articles VII and VIII, paragraph 33*

How do the Confessors resist the demand for uniformity while expressing the desire for unity?

**They will not give into such demands, but are willing (even eager) to find common ground.**

#### 4. POINTS TO PONDER

While God gives unity in Christ, that unity needs to be intentionally nurtured and nourished. **We recognize the will of the Giver of this great gift and seek to be true to His desire.**

When disagreements arise in the Church of Christ (as they inevitably will), Christians are to lovingly address them.

**We neither ignore them nor make them bigger than they need to be. We treat others with respect out of a genuine desire to understand them and to resolve the conflict.**

It is possible (even desirable) that we be unique, yet united – not every difference is bad or breaks unity.

**Uniformity in all things is not our goal. God can use our unique perspectives and abilities in service to His Kingdom.**

The way we deal with conflict affects the witness we give to the world.

**This truth cannot be overstated. The greatest threat to Christianity is Christians who do not act in a Christ-like manner.**

#### 5. FOR CONVERSATION

Think of a time you felt at one with someone at church or in a group. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

Think about the implications of the word *harmony* in a musical sense. How might that apply to this discussion? (Romans 12:16 & 1 Peter 3:8-9)

**Choir or band members don't all sing or play the same note, but what they play blends together to produce beautiful music.**

Should we be surprised when disagreements arise?

Can you think of a time you disrupted unity because you did something out of “selfish ambition” or “vain conceit”? (Philippians 2:3)

In our congregations, are we truly united in purpose? In our synod? Are disagreements we experience differences in purpose or practice or priorities or some combination of the three?

What's the difference between saying our mission is to “preach the Gospel” and saying our mission is to “make disciples”? Is it possible to resolve this tension? Is it necessary to do so?

**Either position, taken to the extreme, can be counter-productive.**

**For example, “preaching the Gospel” focuses on the action rather than the results. That action could be done in a way (or even in a language) that doesn't communicate with the audience. And yet, the Gospel has been preached even though nobody understood it or came to faith in Christ as a result of the proclamation. Yet, the mission has been achieved.**

**On the other hand, “making disciples” can become so focused on the result that it employs a “whatever it takes” approach designed to appeal to people rather than faithfully proclaim Law and Gospel.**

**We need both emphases. To hold these two in tension reminds us to endeavor to preach the Gospel in such a way that we do not impede the Holy Spirit's working faith in those who hear it.**

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## This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Leaders Guide

(Notes for the leader are in bold print.)

### FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Every Lutheran pastor knows well that justification is the article on which the church stands or falls. The centrality and importance of AC IV is seared into our brains and into our psyche. It would seem, then, that there is little left to *study*. But there are questions that do arise: Does the doctrine of justification lead people to function with “too much heaven on their minds,” inadvertently enabling a neglect of the rest of God’s created world? Is the notion of justification still relevant to people living in a postmodern age? Does justification trump all other doctrines and leave others (especially “new obedience”) emaciated?

- List as many uses of the word *justify* as you can.
- What connotation does the word *justification* carry in church life and in daily life?
- Which of the above concerns is the most pressing? How great a threat is it?

**The temptation is to assume that justification is a slam-dunk, ‘obvious doctrine,’ with nothing new to be learned. Accordingly, this study will endeavor to explore some facets of the doctrine generally overlooked or unexplored in typical LCMS circles.**

**The quote, “too much heaven...” recalls the complaint of Judas in the opening song of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. It is not uncommon for people to assume that Christianity is all about their own personal salvation, forgetting that Christ’s work of redemption extends to the whole creation. The second question echoes a sentiment made popular already in the 1960s: people don’t care about being right with God—sin doesn’t matter. The final question is frequently manifested in antinomianism of varying degrees.**

**The first two bullets are meant to expand our definition of justification. It should become obvious that the word is used in a wide variety of ways—not all mutually complementary. (One intriguing use not to be overlooked is *justified margins*—margins that are made to fit perfectly....) It is interesting to note that in popular speech *justify* typically carries a negative or “loophole” connotation—the husband trying to justify a late arrival for dinner, etc. The third bullet is referring back to the three leading questions and provides opportunity for participants to begin to consider the importance of ideas that may be new to them.**

## SCRIPTURE SEARCH

The express intention of this study is to bypass the standard and expected “justification references”—already quite familiar—and to consider some verses that add new dimensions to our concept of justification. Obviously, the fundamentals of justification will also be revisited and reasserted. Interesting as the exegetical details may be, this study should move quickly through texts, looking for broad applications and understandings that are present in the scriptural record.

### 1. Colossians 1:13-20

**First, it must be noticed that the fundamental idea of justification is the forgiveness of sins (vs. 14). Many have tried to find other ways to nuance the “basic Christian message,” but the Scripture is clear: it’s all about sin forgiven in Christ. The celebration of the Christological mystery (vss. 15-20) is a delight in itself, but the point of interest in this study is the way that Paul includes all of creation in the work of Christ’s redemption. All things hold together in Christ (vs. 17); and through him, “all things—things on earth or things in heaven” are reconciled to the Father (vs. 20). The whole creation is saved by Christ’s work.**

### 2. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

**This is a classic *sedes doctrinae* for justification, and so a bit predictable, but it is good to note that Paul again ties justification to the removal of the curse of sin. Justification *is* all about individual sinners receiving the gift of forgiveness and so being reconciled to their Creator. What is also worth noting is that Paul declares that in Christ God was reconciling “the world” to himself—and not just a few individuals or a handful of the lucky elect, or even just humanity in general. In Christ, God is winning back the whole of creation. The whole world is the target of Christ’s redemptive work. It is also worth noticing that the assured result of our individual reconciliation with God is that we live as new creatures—in other words, justification absolutely always makes a difference in our living, and if it fails to do so, its legitimacy is seriously in doubt. Certainly, the connection between Ephesians 2:8-9 and Ephesians 2:10 reinforces this intimate connection. Students of Francis Pieper recall his notion of the *nexus indivulsus* that must exist between justification and a life of good works.**

### 3. Romans 8:18-25

**Here Paul completes the picture and leaves no doubt that the whole realm of creation also enjoys the results of God’s redemptive mission in Christ. Clearly, it would be helpful to recall the curse of Genesis 3:17, where Adam inflicts pain and futility on the very ground itself. Perhaps the devastating and all-encompassing consequence of sin is something not often realized or appreciated—our awareness extends little beyond our own skin. Many examples of the creation groaning can be supplied from immediate experiences of those in attendance. (Asking for the group’s thoughts can re-engage participants, but may also demand too much time and run the risk of distraction.) The point here is to remember that this groaning and futility is not normal and that creation itself awaits its return to God’s plan—manifest first at creation and yet to be consummated at the eschaton. When Christ returns in glory, it will be to complete the redemption of his creation. We will feast in a new heaven *and a new earth*. In some**

sense, then, it might provocatively be argued that the best way to “be green” (preserve and protect the creation) is to be absolved; because only when man is again rightly related to his Creator will the creation be rightly related to its Creator, to itself, and to man. Absolution is a foretaste of the eschatological restoration of the whole creation.

#### 4. Isaiah 11:6-10

The image of “natural” enemies living in astounding harmony is so compelling that Isaiah returns to it again (Isaiah 65:25) and countless artists have sought to capture the scene visually and lyrically. It serves here to strengthen the teaching that the Messiah’s salvific activity is for the benefit of the whole creation, and so when he comes (and when he comes again at last), all created things are justified as they are returned to full and perfect conformity to God’s will. This is not to say that individual trees or animals (the family dog!) will be resurrected, but that the creation as a whole will be justified—that is straightened-out and saved from the perversity that had been imposed upon it by man’s sin. The creation will again function as God designed it to function—but much better than before, because with the incarnation God has joined himself to his creation, and nothing will ever be the same.

#### 5. Revelation 7:9-17

It is good to relish the vision of justification’s completion. There is the closest of bonds between justification and the eschatological fulfillment described in John’s apocalypse. At present, it is sufficient to note that the glory and the joy of the saints are possible only in the “blood of the lamb.” Soiled robes must be cleansed; sin must be removed. Justification is forgiveness. Noteworthy is the outcome of the lamb’s mission of restoration: the saints continuously serve their God. What form this service may take is not specified, but Adam’s responsibility within God’s creation establishes a (too often-overlooked) precedent for the goal and outcome for redeemed man as he participates within God’s justified new creation.

### OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

The Confessions attack the notion of work righteousness with appropriate zeal, and as expected present a consistent and compelling argument for justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone (one cannot in good conscience offer a study on justification without including the central confession at some point...). Attention should be given to the repeated assertion that justification is about the forgiveness of sins, and that the gospel itself *is* the forgiveness of sins. The second point is especially valuable in the face of a Christendom that seems content to equate every positive interaction or act of charity with the gospel. The church needs to remember that her message is the forgiveness of sins—justification in Christ—with all of the world-altering realities that result.

But since justification takes place through a free promise, it follows that we cannot justify ourselves. Otherwise, why would a promise be needed? And since the promise cannot be grasped in any other way than by faith, the gospel (which is strictly speaking, the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ) proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ, which the law does not teach.... Therefore it follows that personal faith—by which an individual believes that his or her sins are remitted on account of Christ and that God is

reconciled and gracious on account of Christ—receives the forgiveness of sins and justifies us. Because in repentance, that is, in terrors, faith consoles and uplifts hearts, it regenerates us and brings the Holy Spirit that we might then be able to live according to the law of God, namely, to love God, truly to fear God, truly to assert that God hears prayer, to obey God in all afflictions, and to mortify concupiscence, etc.

Ap., IV, 43 & 45 (KW 127)

**Not to be missed in this passage from the Apology is Melancthon's insistence on the changed life that appears with the work of justification. God's intention is not merely to save a few sorry souls from the fire of hell. His plan is to restore his creation—including his crown of creation—to his design...in other words, the creation, man included, again obeys God's will and does what it was designed and built to do.**

For when we were created by God the Father and had received from him all kinds of good things, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death and all misfortune. As a result, we lay under God's wrath and displeasure, sentenced to eternal damnation, as we had merited it and deserved it.... Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word "Lord" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there.

LC, II, 28 & 31 (KW, 434)

**One could easily multiply passages from Luther that declare the wonder and power of justification. This selection from the Large Catechism highlights the idea of the *return* that is the compelling force behind the doctrine. While justification is the forgiveness of sins, having sins forgiven is not the *telos*. The goal driving the economy of salvation is man's return from devil and death to God and life. The goal is that the creation (and we with it) is put back where it belongs—back in right relationship with God; and of course, the only way that this can happen is via the forgiveness of sins.**

Accordingly, we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God consists in this, that God forgives us our sins by sheer grace, without any works, merit, or worthiness of our own, in the past, at present, or in the future, that he gives us and reckons to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience and that, because of this righteousness, we are accepted by God into grace and regarded as righteous.... We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word "to justify" in this article means "to absolve," that is, "to pronounce free from sin."

FC III, 4 & 7 (KW, 495)

**With utter consistency, this text from the Formula rounds out the list and proves the centrality of the doctrine for all of the Confessions. Pastors should particularly note the critical role that they are called to play as the men placed by God himself to deliver his forgiveness to his people. The pastor is the congregation's "Absolution Man," and it is vital that he fulfill this call with earnest zeal—in spite of the many other demands and expectations placed upon him by people, culture, and church. He is privileged to be the mouthpiece of God. One must resist the temptation to indulge needless fretting over an infringement on the priesthood of believers...obviously, all of God's people have the responsibility of declaring God's truth, including his gospel, whenever and wherever the situation allows or demands. Nevertheless, the pastor is unique in being chosen to do this task for the good of a gathered people—to declare their justification...indeed, to actually do the justifying. Those interested in exploring these ideas further are**

encouraged to consult: Forde, Gerhard, *Theology is for Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

## POINTS TO PONDER

1. Justification is much more comprehensive than merely a handful of fortunate people being salvaged from a dying planet...Christ came to justify, to restore, the whole creation.

**This concept is heavily influenced by the incisive and lucid work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See his *Creation and Fall*. (Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Creation and Fall*. Translated by John C. Fletcher. London, SCM Press Ltd, 1959.)**

2. Justification is still quite relevant to people today...indeed, it always has been and always will be—it is God’s truth...as people learn to find the justification of themselves, their existence and their place in the world, within and through God’s story.

**This idea has been capably and succinctly treated by Oswald Bayer. He writes:**

**“To be recognized and justified; to cause ourselves to be justified or to justify ourselves in attitude, thought, word, and action; to need to justify our being; or simply to be allowed to exist without needing to justify our being—all this makes for our happiness or unhappiness and is an essential part of our humanity.... Not just our own history, nor even world history, but all earthly being, including natural history, might be seen as a battle for mutual recognition, as a problem of justification, justice, and righteousness.” (Bayer, Oswald. *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, pp. 2, 5.)**

3. Justification is the foundation for all that Christians teach and practice, but it must not be made into the ceiling that thwarts and limits the full expression of other Christian doctrines, practices or responsibilities.

**Reinhard Hutter deserves credit for putting the issue this way. “The fallacy of modern Protestant ethics is not that it insists on the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith alone but that it regards this doctrine as a ceiling that has to cover everything instead of the very floor on which we stand.” (Bloomquist, Karen L. and John R. Stumme, eds. *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, 33.) Hutter’s entire essay, as well as one by Robert Benne in the same volume, is quite helpful for those desiring further exploration of this topic.**

## FOR CONVERSATION

1. Reflecting on the themes arising in this study, what one point do you think most needs more attention in the church today? What difference might it make if this truth was taught more consistently and more intently?

2. The task of theology is twofold. Faithfulness in the task is marked by conformity to God's unchanging reality (**truth**) coupled with effective and meaningful application and communication of that truth to the contemporary situation and listeners (**relevance**). Considering both aspects of this responsibility, what specific things might you do to enhance your teaching of the doctrine of justification?
3. If justification is primarily about the declaration of the forgiveness of sins, what are the practical implications for the conduct of ministry when it is remembered that a pastor is God's "Absolution Man" in a given congregation (AC VI)? If justification is forgiveness, what impact does this have on evangelism and "outreach"?
4. A parishioner opines in a Bible class: "I understand that for Luther, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, was a huge comfort and a life-changing reality. People today, though, aren't concerned about being right with God. Luther's 16<sup>th</sup> century issues aren't relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The church needs to keep up with the needs of people today." How do you respond?
5. How does an expansive, robust understanding of justification affect the way that a Christian views the rest of the created realm—specifically, what impact does it have on one's ideas and practices regarding environmentalism and "being green"?
6. Discuss the tension between keeping justification front and center in the church's message and, at the same time, not permitting it to eviscerate and stymie the teaching and practice of other important aspects of the church's doctrine. What's the difference between being the central doctrine and being the doctrine?
7. In closing, pray in your group for the justification of sinners (by name as appropriate) and the justification of the whole creation. Plead God's mercy on the church and its pastors that his truth would be declared with confidence and relevance and heard with attentive joy. Praise Him for grace already given in your own justification.

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# Faithful & Afire

## LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09 This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Leaders Guide

### THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURES

What place do the Holy Scriptures hold in our life together?

#### FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Article II of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states: “The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation: 1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;” (2007 Handbook of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, p. 11).

Dr. C.F.W. Walther wrote:

**Our church has taken for the foundation on which she stands the Holy Scriptures, and on it she stands honestly and squarely; from this foundation she will not depart one finger’s breadth.... That is her character, that is her charge, that makes her a blessing to all Christendom, that is her crown, of which she will not and cannot let herself be robbed (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1871, p. 11).**

Dr. F. Bente warned as follows:

**The entire theological edifice is undermined and hollowed out if it is no longer borne by the inspired, infallible Word of Scripture ... If the Bible is no longer the infallible Word of God but a human, fallible record of the things of which it treats, the *loci classici* and *dicta probantia* [i.e. classical proof passages for a position or doctrine] are no longer of any avail. A veritable deluge of all manner of skeptical questions concerning the origin and content of Scripture is unloosed which cannot be checked and controlled” (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1902, p. 130).**

**(Both quotes are found in “A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” March, 1973, pp. 17-18).**

**Ask the group the questions below. Allow sufficient time for a variety of responses.**

- Do we, within the LCMS, share a common understanding of the nature and place of the Holy Scriptures in our life together?
- Are the Holy Scriptures and our understanding of them as the written Word of God foundational for our unity (*corum mundo* – within the world)? How so?

- Which comes first: faith in the Holy Scriptures as God's inspired, inerrant Word, or faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? **[Note: the Holy Spirit brings us to faith through the Means of Grace: specifically, Baptism and the Word of God, particularly the Gospel; only when we come to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord can we then accept His Word in its entirety as true and infallible.]**
- Within Christendom, is the LCMS confession of the nature and place of the Holy Scriptures unique? If so, in what way(s)? And, if so, how is this a blessing among ourselves and for all of Christendom?

## SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Isaiah 55:11

- **Link this to the Gospel promises of Isaiah 55:3, 5, 12. Even so, the Gospel is a power of God unto salvation. See Romans 1:16-17; 10:17.**
- **The Word is a messenger in Psalm 107:20.**
- **The Word was with God, was God, by whom all things were created, and became flesh (John 1:1, 3, 14).**
- **God's purpose is further defined in Isaiah 46:10-11.**

John 8:31-32

- **Continuing or remaining in the Word of Christ is the characteristic of the true disciple of Christ, the Word which He left for our instruction in the gospels and the epistles: John 14: 16-17, 26; 16:13-14.**
- **The truth here is not philosophical truth but the truth that leads to salvation (John 1:17).**
- **Freedom here is freedom from sin (8:34), freedom to abide in God's house forever (8:35).**

John 10:35

- **The words of Ps. 82:6 are addressed to unjust judges who have abused the power entrusted to them by the word of God.**
- **For the bearer of God's word as "god," see Ex. 4:16.**
- **Jesus testifies to the complete authority and reliability of Scripture: it cannot be dissolved, broken or put aside; it must remain unchallenged, word for word, the eternal truth of God.**
- **If the leaders of the people, through whom the Word of God was delivered to the Jews, were called gods, how much more does Jesus deserve the designation?**

John 20:30-31

- **After recording the evidence for the greatest miracle of all, the resurrection, John summarizes and states the purpose of his Gospel, as well as reason for all of Scripture.**
- **The written word is effective in bringing people to believe in Jesus Christ and thereby have life in His name – causative authority.**
- **The name of Jesus Christ is itself glorious, beautiful Gospel, which gives to believers eternal life.**

Acts 10:43

- **Justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the central message of Scripture – material principle.**
- **All the prophets (Old Testament), and thus, all Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ so that, believing on Him, we may have forgiveness.**

2 Timothy 3:15-17

- **A Jewish boy began formal study of the Scripture at age five; but Timothy was taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother even before that.**
- **The primary reference is to the Old Testament. Yet, some of the New Testament books were already being considered Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).**
- **The primary purpose and central focus of Scripture is to make people wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**
- **The Scriptures have this power because they are the product and instrument of the Holy Spirit.**
- **“God breathed” – God is actively involved in the writing of Scripture, so that what is written is the infallible and authoritative word of God.**
- **As that which is God breathed, Scripture is profitable, useful to serve a normative function.**

Hebrews 4:12

- **God’s truth was revealed by Jesus, the incarnate Word (John 1:14), but has also been revealed verbally, as attested to here.**
- **God’s Word is active in accomplishing His purposes (Ps. 107:20; 147:18; Is. 40:8; 55:11; Jer. 23:29; John 6:63; Rom. 1:16; Gal. 3:8; Eph. 5:26; 6:17; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23; Rev. 1:16; 2:12).**
- **The Word penetrates the totality and depth of a person’s being.**

2 Peter 1:19-21

- **There was no question among either the Jewish Christians or among Gentile converts, that the Old Testament Scriptures were God’s Word.**
- **Peter wants to confirm that the prophetic (forth-telling) word through the apostles is also inspired by the Holy Spirit, even as it is confirmed by the prophetic (fore-telling and forth-telling) of the Old Testament.**
- **That upon which our faith rests is Scripture, the prophetic and apostolic Word. It is self-evident that the apostolic Word stands on the same level with the prophetic Word.**
- **God’s Word is a light and a lamp: Psalm 119:105.**
- **No prophecy originated from the interpretation of the prophet himself, as Peter previously observed is his own case (2 Peter 1:16-19). No prophecy of Scripture arose from a merely human interpretation of things.**
- **In the writing of Scripture, both God and man were active. God is the source of the content of Scripture – it says what God wants it to say. Yet, the human author also actively spoke, using his language and context. Although actively speaking, the author was carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

(Exegetical notes from *Concordia Self-Study Bible* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986]; *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979]; Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923]; R.C.H. Lenske, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 12 Vols. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964].)

## OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

In support of the inspiration of Scripture:

Ap IV, 107-108:

It is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works. Do they suppose that this is repeated so often for no reason? Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares?

What do our Confessions say about how the Holy Scriptures were inspired? Also consider: AC XXVIII, 49:

**If, then, bishops have the power to burden the churches with countless requirements and thus ensnare consciences, why does the divine Scripture so frequently forbid the making and keeping of human regulations? Why does it call them doctrines of the devil? Is it possible that the Holy Spirit warned against them for nothing?**

In support of the infallibility of Scripture:

Preface, Book of Concord, p. 12:

It is furthermore to be hoped that when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools. Consequently the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another....

What do our Confessions say about the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures? What purpose can this serve in the life of the Church? Also consider: LC, IV, 57; LC, V, 76; FC, SD, Summary, 13:

**LC, IV, 57:**

**We do the same in infant Baptism. We bring the child with the purpose and hope that he may believe, and we pray God to grant him faith. But we do not baptize him on that account, but solely on the command of God. Why? Because we know that God does not lie. My neighbor and I – in short, all men – may err and deceive, but God’s Word cannot err.**

**LC, V, 76:**

**If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do....**

**FC, SD, Summary, 13:**

**No one can blame us if we derive our expositions and decisions in the controverted articles from these writings, for just as we base our position on the Word of God as the eternal truth, so we introduce and cite these writings as a witness to the truth and as exhibiting the unanimous and correct understanding of our predecessors who remained steadfastly in the pure doctrine.**

In support of the authority of Scripture:

FC, Ep, Summary, 1-2:

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed." Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. 7: In this way the distinction between Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.

What do our Confessions say about the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and therefore the place of the Scriptures in the life of the Church? Also consider: SA, II, ii, 15; Small Catechism, The Third Commandment; FC, SD, Summary, 9; FC, SD, II, 8; FC, SD, VIII, 53

**Preface, Book of Concord, p. 12:**

**As indicated above, our disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures of God and is embodied in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, correctly understood, and that no doctrine be permitted entrance which is contrary to these.**

**SA, II, ii, 15: This means that the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel.**

**Small Catechism, The Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. What does this mean? Answer: We should fear and love God, and so we should not despise his Word and the preaching of the same, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it.**

**FC, SD, Summary, 9: Here he expressly asserts by way of distinction that the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be put on a part with it, but that everything must be subjected to it.**

**FC, SD, II, 8:**

**The following reasons from the Word of God support and confirm the foregoing explanation of and summary reply to the questions and issues stated at the beginning of this article. It is true that they are contrary to proud reason and philosophy, but we also know that "the wisdom of this perverse world is folly with God" and that it is only from the Word of God that judgments on articles of faith are to be pronounced.**

**FC, SD, VIII, 53: In his Word he has revealed to us as much as we need to know in this life, and wherever the Scriptures in this case give us clear, certain testimony, we shall simply believe it and not argue that the human nature in Christ is not capable of it.**

(All quotes are from *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959].)

## **POINTS TO PONDER**

1. All Holy Scriptures are given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. God, therefore, is the Author of every word of the Scriptures (verbal inspiration). Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, they contain no errors or contradictions, but are in all parts and words the infallible truth of God (infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture).
2. Holy Scriptures not only **contain** the Word of God. They **are** the Word of God in their entirety. There is therefore a unity of the Holy Scriptures so that the same doctrine of the Gospel, in all its articles, is presented throughout all of the Scriptures. This leads to the basic understanding that Holy Scriptures are characterized throughout by unity and truthfulness. Lutherans therefore operate confidently with the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.
3. All of the Holy Scriptures bear witness to Jesus Christ and have as their primary purpose to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Holy Scriptures are rightly used only when read from the perspective of justification by grace through faith and the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.
4. The Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the chief doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as well as the heart and center of the Christian faith (material principle). Holy Scripture is the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines, teachings, and teachers must be judged (formal principle).
5. The content of the Gospel and the terms in which the Gospel is expressed must be taken from the Holy Scriptures alone (*sola Scriptura*). The material principle of Lutheran theology (the Gospel) is derived from the formal principle (the Holy Scriptures).
6. The Holy Scriptures possess both a divine power to make people wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (causative authority) as well as the divine authority to serve as the sole judge, rule, and norm according to which all doctrines should be understood and judged (normative authority).
7. Human reason must never be allowed a place above or beside the Bible (magisterial use), but always subordinated to God's Word – what is referred to as the ministerial use of reason.

**“In connection with the normative authority of Holy Scripture it must be emphasized that human reason in its magisterial use (*usus magisterialis*) must never be allowed a place beside the Bible. In other words, man's natural knowledge of God, even so far as it is correctly retained in his perverted intellect, must never be coordinated with, but always be subordinated to, God's Word. Unless this is done, Scripture is not allowed to stand as the only judge of faith. But human reason in its ministerial, or instrumental, sense or reason as “the receiving subject or apprehending instrument” (Hollaz) must certainly be employed whenever Scripture is used as the norm of faith; ...” (John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934], p. 127.)**

8. Holy Scripture is perspicuous, or clear. It sets forth all doctrines of salvation in words so simple and plain that they can be understood by all persons of average intelligence.

**“When we say that Holy Scripture is perspicuous, or clear, we mean that it sets forth all doctrines of salvation in words so simple and plain that they can be understood by all persons of average intelligence.” (John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934], p. 138.)**

## **FOR CONVERSATION**

**Spend time in groups of 3-5 discussing the following (approximately 30-45 minutes):**

1. What differentiates our confession of the Holy Scriptures as the written Word of God from that of Fundamentalism? How do the Holy Scriptures and the Means of Grace relate? What are some dangers of holding to a Fundamentalist view of Holy Scriptures?
2. Was the “Battle for the Bible” of the 1960s and 1970s within the LCMS settled?
3. If the Holy Scriptures only “contain” the Word of God and are then treated merely as any other human work, to be interrogated by unbridled reason on the basis of historical criticism (the principle of methodological doubt or skepticism, the principle of analogy only to what one experiences in the present, and the principle of correlation to the laws of cause and effect), what impact does this have on the unity of doctrine and practice in our life together within the Synod?
4. Our pastors and lay people may well agree that Scripture is inspired; but there are times, as we deal with a changing culture, where some will say, “But who can know what it means?” How do we relate the perspicuity of Scripture to life in a postmodern world within our congregations?
5. If God works through the means of the Holy Scriptures, what does this mean for the liturgical life in our churches?
6. What things have taken the place of the Holy Scriptures as central in our thinking?
7. What place do the Holy Scriptures have in the teaching and catechetical ministry of your congregation? How can that be improved?
8. Discuss the place of the Holy Scriptures in relation to past LCMS convention resolutions, which included the following declaration: “its conviction that as a result of joint study of the Word of God the Holy Spirit will lead the Synod into all truth, that possible errors ... will be discovered and corrected, that instances of failure to submit to the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures will be evangelically dealt with on an individual pastoral basis, and that the Synod can speak with a voice that is Scriptural, Gospel oriented, truly Lutheran, and that we will continue to ‘walk together’ as a true Synod.”
9. Close with prayers for our use of the Scriptures in our ministry as pastors. Also take time to pray for one another’s personal or ministry needs.

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# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09  
This We Believe, Teach, and Confess  
Leaders Guide

## THE INCARNATION

Who is Jesus Christ and what are the implications of His incarnation?

### 1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Invite discussion about the pivotal role of the Incarnation in the Christian narrative. Without the Incarnation, there would simply be no Christian story.

The Incarnation is pure Gospel, i.e., it displays the Father's merciful heart in the gift of His Son and with the agency of the Holy Spirit. To assist the discussion, invite reflection on two classical renderings of the Incarnation.

The first rendering, *The Annunciation*, is by Fra Angelico (circa 1430-32). See Participants Guide for art. Note for discussion, these features:

- The Garden of Eden in the left panel with the angel directing Adam and Eve out of the garden. Jesus comes as Second Adam to atone for original sin.
  - Before illuminating Mary, the ray of light in which the Holy spirit as a dove is born, crosses diagonally through the garden and connects Jesus' birth to the redemption of humanity.
  - Mary bows in recognition of God's presence through the angel. The angel bows in recognition that God is now present in the virgin Mary's womb.
  - The figure of the Father appears in the form of a bas-relief atop the center pillar in a Renaissance portico.
  - The simplicity of the room and background denote Mary's humility.
- 
- What does it mean that God became incarnate? Rather than a doctrinal abstraction, the Incarnation brings us down to earth. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This means that at a particular point in time and at a specific location, God was fully present in a human body.
  - Does the Incarnation mean that our salvation includes the body as well as the soul?
  - Does the Incarnation mean that one can be fully human and without sin? Or, is sin of the essence of humanity or an attribute derived from the fall of Adam and Eve?

## 2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Discuss the Bible passages in light of Jan van Eyck's *The Annunciation* (circa 1425-30). See Participants Guide for art. Note the following to stimulate discussion:

- The Annunciation is placed in a church to suggest that the church is the Body of Christ.
  - The Holy Spirit descends along a ray of light to Mary. The centrality of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation invites discussion.
  - The Archangel Gabriel, dressed in lavish, embroidered vestments, bears the staff of the gatekeepers, i.e., the angelic protectors of the church.
  - The lilies in the foreground symbolize purity and virginity.
  - The portrait of Mary exhibits pious acceptance. The small book is open to the Latin—"Ecce ancilla Domino"—"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord".
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- John 1:1-14
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Matthew 1:18-25
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Luke 2:1-7
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Colossians 1:15-20
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - Philippians 2:5-11

## 3. OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

Note how the Lutheran Confessions exhibit creedal and Scriptural truths about Christ.

Read the following paragraph from *The Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*. Invite discussion of Christological errors—ancient and modern—identified in Article VIII of the Formula, Epitome.

**VIII. THE PERSON OF CHRIST** – Many objections to the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper are based on faulty understandings. These misunderstandings concern the relationship of Christ's divine and human natures. The issue confronting the writers of the Formula of Concord was

these: Does the human nature of Christ share in the divine attributes so that Christ, according to both natures, is present everywhere, even under the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper? The biblical position, explained in this article, is clearly Yes. The doctrine of the incarnation—Christ the Son of God taking on human flesh—is a powerful comfort and treasure for Christians, and Article VIII explains why. Many ancient heresies about Christ are rejected by this article and along with them the Christological errors of Reformed theology. Appended to many editions of the Book of Concord was a listing of various quotations from Scripture and Early Church Fathers demonstrating that the Lutheran doctrine concerning Christ's two natures is the same as that of the Early Church. A translation of this document, *The Catalog of Testimonies*, is included with this edition (pp.651-75). (See also Apostles' Creed; Nicene Creed; Athanasian Creed; AC III; Ap III; SA I; SA II I; SC II; LC II; FC SD VIII.) *The Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 509.

To invite reflection on the Confessions' view of Christ, discuss Peter Bruegel, the Elder's, *Census at Bethlehem* (circa 1566). See Participants Guide for art. Note for conversation:

- The manner in which the census is located in Northern Europe's wintry landscape.
- The small records office to the left with the Holy Family approaching on the bottom center.
- The mundane and lowly character of the event is illustrated by the way in which the Holy Family is not noticed in the busy activities of the tax office.

The Sacramentarians have asserted that the divine and human natures in Christ are united personally in such a way that neither one has real communion. This means (in deed and truth) that they do not share with the other nature what is unique to either nature. They share nothing more than the name alone. For they plainly say, "The personal union does nothing more than make the names common." In other words, God is called man, and man is called God. Yet this happens in such a way that the divine has no real communion (that is, in deed and truth) with humanity. And humanity has nothing in common with divinity, its majesty, and properties. Dr. Luther and those who agreed with him have contended against the Sacramentarians for the contrary teaching.

We believe, teach, and confess that God is man and man is God. This could not be true if the divine and human natures had (in deed and truth) absolutely no communion with each other.

For how could the man, the Son of Mary, in truth be called or be God, or the Son of God the Most High, if His humanity were not personally united with the Son of God? How could He have no real communion (that is, in deed and truth) with the Most High, but only share God's name?

So we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not merely a man and no more, but God's true Son. Therefore, she also is rightly called and truly is "the mother of God."

(Formula, Epitome, Article VIII, "The Person of Christ,"  
*Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, p. 510)

#### 4. POINTS TO PONDER

**The Incarnation links heaven and earth, creation and consummation, by uniting God and Man in the One Person of Jesus.**

**See Participants Guide for art. Invite discussion by noting the following elements in El Greco's *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1596-1600:**

- **The birth of Jesus is celebrated by the heavenly hosts. El Greco's angels are different ages and sizes to reflect the variety of the multitude of the heavenly hosts. (Luke 2:13)**
  - **The manner in which the light radiates from the Christ Child. His presence is the reason for all the activity.**
  - **The lamb in the foreground—with legs tied—pointed to Jesus' future. He is the One who will offer Himself as a sacrificial victim.**
- Christ is fully God and fully human. What benefits come from this?
  - Christ, according to His human nature, has been given all power and authority. (Matthew 28:18) How is this exhibited in Christ's life?
  - Does the Incarnation "elevate" humanity? Comment on this passage from Chrysostom:

"For he became Son of man, who was God's own Son, in order that he might make the sons of men (humanity) to be children of God. For when the high associates with the low, it does not touch its own honor at all. Instead, it raises up the other from its excessive lowness. So it was with the Lord. By no means did he diminish his own nature by his condescension, but he raised us, who had always sat in disgrace and darkness, to unspeakable Glory." Joel C. Elowsky, Ed., *John 1-10 Ancient Christian Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 40.

How do the two natures of Christ—divine and human—relate to each other?  
Comment on this passage from Cyril of Alexandria:

Two Natures in One Person. Cyril of Alexandria: We do not say that the nature of the Word was changed and became flesh or that it was converted into a whole man consisting of soul and body; but rather that the Word having personally united to himself flesh animated by a rational soul did in an ineffable and inconceivable manner become man and was called the Son of man, not merely according to the will, or being pleased to be so called, neither on account of taking to himself a person, but because the two natures being brought together in a true union, there is both one Christ and one Son. For the difference of the natures is not taken away by the union, but rather the divinity and humanity make perfect for us the one Lord Jesus Christ by their ineffable and inexpressible union. Letter To Nestorius. Joel C. Elowsky, Ed., *John 1-10 Ancient Christian Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 41.

## 5. FOR CONVERSATION

Invite discussion on the comfort and pivotal place of the Incarnation. Questions to consider:

- Can one emphasize some doctrine—justification, predestination, etc.—so much that the beauty of Christ’s Incarnation is marginalized, i.e., is there danger in abstracting and intellectualizing the truths of God’s Word?
- How does baptism relate to the Incarnation? If we are baptized into Christ’s death and Resurrection (Romans 6), are we also joined in some sense to the entire life of Christ? Dogmatically this has been captured in the active and passive obedience of Christ, namely, His righteousness becomes our righteousness.
- See Participants Guide for art. Invite reflection on Sandro Botticelli’s *The Nativity* (Circa, 1500) by noting:
  - The angels with crowns and olive branches signal an epoch of peace between earth and heaven—symbolized by the golden dome.
  - The angels on earth and in heaven point, with the shepherds, to the Christ Child. The Christ Child is the center of the cosmic drama.
  - The angels above and below the Christ Child are attired in the colors of the three theological virtues: white for faith, green for hope, and red for charity.
- Reflect, comment, and visit about the implications of the following quotes for the preaching, practice, and witness of the church:

Chrysostom: Shame on those who attempt to pry into the miracle of generation from on high! For this birth can by no means be explained, yet it has witnesses beyond number and has been proclaimed from ancient times as a real birth handled with human hands. What kind of extreme madness afflicts those who busy themselves by curiously prying into the unutterable generation? For neither Gabriel nor Matthew was able to say anything more, but only that the generation was from the Spirit. But how from the Spirit? In what manner? Neither Gabriel nor Matthew has explained, nor is it possible. Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13 Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 13.

A Time of Peace For Jesus, Who Is Our Peace. Bede: He chose a time of utmost peace as the time when he would be born because this was the reason for his being born in the world, that he might lead the human race back to the gifts of heavenly peace. And, indeed it is written: “For he is our peace, who has made us both one, that is, he who as a kind mediator and reconciler has made one house of God of angels and humanity. Jesus was born in a time of peace, so that even by the circumstance of the time he might teach that he was the very one of whom the prophecy sent before him spoke: “His sovereignty will be multiplied, and there will be no end of peace.” Homilies On The Gospels 1.6. Arthur A. Just, *Luke. Ancient Christian Commentary*, 37.

- Close with prayers of thanks for the incarnation and with petitions for peace on earth, for one another’s families and ministries, and for our celebrations of the incarnation.

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# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09  
This We Believe, Teach, and Confess  
Leader's Guide

## THE SANCTITY OF LIFE What makes life sacred?

### 1. Focus of This Study

“Why is God keeping me around?”  
“What kind of quality of life will he have?”  
“Why would anyone want to live like *that*?”

- We've all heard such questions and statements. Disease or disability, injury or aging—these can cause the members of our congregations, or any of us, to question the value and purpose of a particular life. That's what makes answering the question, “What makes life sacred?” fundamentally important. A Scriptural answer to that question provides a foundation from which to address questions about the value and purpose of life, whether at life's beginning, life's end, or anywhere in between.
- Ethicists sometimes make a contrast between a “quality of life” ethic and an “equality of life ethic.” What's the difference between these two?

**A quality of life ethic assigns value to human life based on certain subjective qualities like sentience, general health, the ability to interact with one's environment, productivity, capacity for thought, etc. An equality of life ethic sees all human life having equal value based solely on the fact that it is human.**

- Which one most closely reflects a “Scriptural ethic” on the sacredness of life?

**The “equality of life ethic” is really the secular counterpart to the “sanctity of life” that we talk about as Christians. But we can move beyond the perspective that human life has moral worth because it's human. We understand an intrinsic *source* of that worth as being imputed from without. Scripture reveals not just that human life is sacred, but *what* (or as we shall see *who*) makes human life sacred.**

### 2. Scripture Search

#### Creation

- Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6

As we look at these passages, then, we are seeking the answer to the question, “What has God done that makes life sacred?” God created human life and human life only in His image. Human life is given stewardship over the earth and its creatures. Immediately, human life receives a sacredness that far exceeds all other life. (See also Psalm 8.)

Of course, sin ravages the image of God (Genesis 3), and Adam is only capable of having a son in his image. (5:3) Humanity quickly goes from being holy and righteous and immortal to being unholy, unrighteous, and mortal. Nevertheless, God still takes into account this original sacredness. (Genesis 9:6) God’s prohibition against taking human life is based on human life being originally created in His image. You may want to point ahead to the Formula of Concord quote below which speaks to the value of humanity as God’s handiwork even after the Fall.

- Genesis 2:7; 2:22

The creation of human life gets special “coverage” with details in Genesis 2. These verses give an intimate, “hands on” involvement of God. Adam is “formed.” The word is used of potters potting pots! The slimy lump of clay takes on form and shape as if coming right out of the potter’s hands. Care must be taken not to overemphasize this as God formed the animals as well (2:19). However, the combination of “forming” and breathing in the breath of life provides an unparalleled picture of the special creation of this handmade, God-breathed vessel.

The creation of Eve also provides a picture of special care and “hands on” involvement. Eve is “made.” The Hebrew word is “to build.” So the picture is more than taking a rib and throwing it in the air and “poof” down comes Eve. Time is taken. Construction is involved.

- Psalm 139:13-16

God tells these two sacred, handmade vessels, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28). He now sets into motion a biological process for procreation. But He does not remove His intimate involvement in the formation of human life from this process. Rather, the psalmist presents a very vivid and delicate picture of God’s hands working and weaving from the very beginning of each life.

These verses contain picturesque Hebrew idioms. “You formed my inward parts” is literally something like: “You made my kidneys.” Since the kidneys were often the last organ removed in the sacrificial disembowelment process, they represented your “inward parts” or even more idiomatic, as the NIV puts it, “my inmost being.” God made the very essence of who you are.

The second half of verse 13 seems to be in progressive relationship to the first rather than synonymous. The idiom here means “to cover” or to “weave a covering.” God creates that which is “us,” our essence, and then covers us by weaving our body. The Bible is not a biology book, but what the Holy Spirit describes here parallels very well embryological development.

Conception takes place in the fallopian tube. That's when we become "us" genetically unique human beings. A few days later we are snuggling into our mom's uterus and produce our placenta and umbilical cord. Cells, which in a very simplistic sense have been somewhat analogous, begin to differentiate. Some become muscle tissue, some become nerve tissue, some become skin, and so forth. You have been there, but now a body is being woven around you and you are being covered! Embryologists have been able to explain and describe in incredible detail how all this comes about. Yet, there is still mystery involved.

The Holy Spirit puts it simply and majestically, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Then He points to the one behind it all, "Wonderful are your works" (139:14).

What makes life sacred? The creating hands of God.

Illustration: Grandma's old, faded, and tattered quilt has value, not because it looks good or because it's useful. The value comes from who made it.

## Redemption

- o Luke 1:26-45

If there is a single verse in the Scriptures that speak to the sacredness of life at life's very beginning, this is it. God loved what His hands made so much that He emptied Himself and became one with them. This happened at His miraculous conception in Mary. The journey to the cross did not begin in a manger. It began in a fallopian tube. The reason for Jesus' holy conception was our unholy one. See also Psalm 51:5 which makes this clear. From Pieper's *Dogmatics*: "Christ passed through all stages of our existence that He might fully remedy our unclean conception and birth."<sup>1</sup>

Every time we confess our faith in Jesus "who was conceived by the Holy Spirit," we not only attest to His divinity at that moment, but to our humanity at that moment.

The Visitation provides insight as well. Following the angel's astounding message, Mary leaves immediately to visit Elizabeth. We can estimate the travel time from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea at around ten days. Jesus would have been a tiny blastocyst about the size of the tip of a pin. He would not yet be fully implanted in Mary's uterine wall. It is this tiny dot Elizabeth refers to as her "lord." It is this tiny dot that causes six-month old John to leap for joy in Elizabeth's womb. The creator of the universe stooping so low as to reside in a womb shows the value He places on all who reside there.

Again from Pieper, "For Scripture says, as already pointed out, not only of the grown man, not only of the adolescent boy, not only of the babe in its mother's arms, but of the embryo in its mother's womb that it is "God the Lord" (Luke 1:43).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pieper, Francis, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis:Concordia Publishing House ,1951) 84

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- Hebrews 2:14-18

To defeat Satan and provide the promised head-crushing blow (Genesis 3:15), Jesus needed to share in our humanity. He needed flesh and blood. This did not happen in some kind of “wave-of-the-wand” supernatural way but—following a very supernatural conception—in a very natural way through cell division, tissue growth, and system formation. The brow that would grimace when impaled with thorns, the hands and feet that would be pierced, the blood that would be shed, the heart that would be stilled, the lungs that would breathe His dying breath all would take shape in the womb as ours did. Our salvation was not procured in a womb, but the body given and the blood shed were. That Jesus was once an embryo should cause all Christians to think about the value this gives to all embryos.

- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Paul speaks here to Christians about the human body and sexual immorality. At the same time, he gives us a general view of the value of all human life. Only Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit, but “bought with a price” applies to all humanity. Jesus died “once for *all*” (Romans 6:10) and was “reconciling the *world* to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). (Emphasis added.) Whether they know it or not, every human being has this intrinsic value, a “price on his head” so to speak.

Illustration: Grandma’s quilt takes on extra value when it needs to be “bought back” by family members because it was placed on the auction block.

Summary of Creation and Redemption: The sacredness of every human life comes from God. Every life is the work of God’s hands in creation, and every life is someone for whom Jesus died. This gives sacredness to the embryo in the Petri dish as well as to grandma in the nursing home.

## Sanctification

- Romans 6:1-4

The above applies to all humanity. Now we look at the sacredness God gives to those He calls by the Gospel and enlightens with His gifts. Point out that God desires this for all those His hands have made and for whom Jesus died. A powerful argument against abortion is that it denies opportunity for God’s call through Baptism.

In baptism God unites us to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. He gives us new life *in* Christ. This intimate unity brings the righteousness of Christ to us. We are covered with it, surrounded by it. Eternal life is assured in Christ and a certain and living hope for this life flows from that assurance.

Given the focus of this study, one way to view this Baptismal life is through the imagery of a pregnancy. Our being in Christ is a very intimate unity. We are “conceived” in Him through water and the Word. His life supports our life. He carries us. He protects us. He nourishes us through Word and Sacrament. We

look forward to being with Him in a whole new way in heaven and at the resurrection. He makes our life sacred.

- Romans 8:31-39

**These verses help answer the question, “So what?” in regard to all that God has done through creation, redemption, and sanctification to make life sacred. If God did all of this, then we have the absolute assurance that NOTHING can separate us from His love in Christ Jesus. This is a powerful and hope-filled message to connect to the life issues. Those who are facing the difficult situation of a crisis pregnancy can be motivated by this message to choose continued life for their baby. It provides hope for those who have made wrong life decisions and are burdened with guilt. It provides comfort and strength for individuals and families dealing with end-of-life concerns. It helps answer questions about life’s purpose for we know that as long as God gives life, He gives that life purpose.**

### **3. Our Confessions Speak<sup>3</sup>**

- “God not only created the body and soul of Adam and Eve before the Fall, but also our bodies and souls after the Fall, even though they are corrupted, and God still acknowledges them as his handiwork, as it is written, ‘Thy hands fashioned and made me, all that I am round about’ (Job 10:8).” (FC Epitome, Article I 466.4)

**As indicated above, this supports the idea that even though the image of God was corrupted, the original work of God’s hands and His subsequent hands-on work of creating life bestow value to human life.**

- “Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; for this reason she is rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God.” (FC Epitome, Article VII 488.12)

**The point here is that the God-man, Jesus, existed from the moment of conception.**

- “It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.” (AC Article II 29:1-2)

**This offers the reason for the above. The God-man began at conception because that is where sinful man begins.**

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<sup>3</sup> Quotations are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

#### 4. Points to Ponder

- The title of this study is “**What** Makes Life Sacred?” However, if you think about it, the question that the Scripture passages really answer is “**Who** Makes Life Sacred?”

##### **What a powerful and positive answer we have—the Triune God!**

- God makes life sacred as its creator. He fashioned Adam and Eve in His image. He still shapes and forms each body and soul and acknowledges human life as the work of His hands.
- God makes life sacred as its redeemer. Christ’s substitutionary atonement paid the price of redemption for each and every human life. Atonement necessitated incarnation which happened at His conception.
- God makes life sacred as its sanctifier. The Holy Spirit calls us in Christ to be and to live as His holy people assured of His grace and love and, therefore, assured that He gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

#### 5. For Conversation

**Encourage the brothers to think of their responses to each of these situations in terms of the three articles of the Creed—creation, redemption, and sanctification. Would one article be emphasized more than others in a particular case?**

- Share with each other how this study on the sacredness of life would apply practically in the following situations:
  1. The couple in your congregation being pressured to abort a Down Syndrome child.
  2. The woman pregnant as a result of rape.
  3. The woman/man who comes to you crushed by the guilt of a past abortion.
  4. The parishioner with Parkinson’s who doesn’t understand why the LCMS would oppose embryonic stem cell research.
  5. Home bound Minnie who says, “What good am I? Why doesn’t God just take me home?”
  6. Grandma in the nursing home who no longer remembers or knows her family.
- Is it appropriate for Lutheran pastors to apply our answer to “What [Who] makes life sacred?” to politically charged issues like abortion, embryonic stem cell research, or physician-assisted suicide in their preaching?

**Pastors are more reluctant to preach on these issues than teach on them in a Bible study setting. Nevertheless, the pulpit does provide appropriate opportunity to connect God’s Word of Life to the life issues being faced by so many of our members. See what the brothers have to say!**

- Discuss these actual answers by Lutheran pastors when asked why they would not address the issue of abortion in a sermon.
  - “I’ve been called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not to address social issues. Politics do not belong in the pulpit.”

**The life issues are more than social; they are spiritual. They provide opportunity to proclaim the Gospel and apply it very specifically. These issues are much more than political. The message of the sacredness of life truly speaks to the very essence of these issues.**

- “There might be a woman in my congregation who has had an abortion, and I would not want to offend her.”

**Would it not be a greater offense to have the message of forgiveness she desperately needs to hear but not apply it to her sin?**

- Discuss ways that teaching the sacredness of life and applying it to the life issues could be integrated into the various educational ministries within your congregation.

**We already have the theology necessary to address the life issues. We just need to make the connection!**

### **Prayer Suggestions**

1. Share with one another any difficult situations involving the sacredness of life going on in your congregation. Offer prayers for those involved.
2. Pray that more and more of Christ’s people will understand the connection between the life issues and the powerful and positive message of the God-given sacredness of life.
3. Pray that Christ’s people would be a strong voice for the sacredness of life and bring their influence to bear upon our society.
4. Pray for opportunities through the various life issues for you and your members to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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# Faithful & Afire

## LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09 This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Leaders Guide

### **The Sacrament of Holy Baptism: What Is the Place of Baptism in the Christian Life?**

#### **FOCUS OF THIS STUDY**

Luther writes that, in baptism, “every Christian has enough to learn and practice all his life.” The challenge facing pastors within the Lutheran order of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, then, is how best to communicate this learning and practicing to those very baptized children of the Heavenly Father. We must reconnect these baptized Christians with the font in such a way that it encourages repentance, initiates spiritual renewal, and links the public worship of the church to their lives.

- How can we encourage our parishioners to remember their baptisms effective and stimulating ways?
- How can we impress upon the baptized the significance of Holy Baptism, the ongoing spiritual vitality of that baptism in their lives, and the implications of being a baptized member of Christ’s church here on earth?
- How, ultimately, do we teach them to continue learning and practicing what God began and continues to accomplish for them at the font of Holy Baptism?

**This reconnecting of baptism to the daily vocation of the believer becomes an even greater challenge in our culture when the church’s worship is in a sacred sphere while work, family, social life, and the like are in a secular sphere. As pastors, it is incumbent upon us to dissolve that contradiction and point out that our families, occupations, and social lives are all part of our baptismal vocation being carried out in the world God has given us. So, learning and practicing our baptism is simply a matter of bringing our baptismal vocation to bear on whatever other vocation God has granted us.**

**In September 2008, Hurricane Ike roared across the Texas Gulf Coast. Baptismal waters are like flood tides and surges that wash away sin. Baptismal waters are like the cleansing waters of the restorative process as volunteers come to wash up and rebuild.**

#### **SCRIPTURE SEARCH**

- Acts 2:38  
*And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations from *English Standard Version* (ESV).

**Peter's call to repentance and baptism is a call to consider two sides of the proverbial baptismal coin: the font is a place where we can both renounce our sinful ways before God and receive the gracious mercy of forgiveness through the same waters. That means we can never separate the need for repentance of sin from the need for trust in God's forgiveness. Repentance and faith are not mutually exclusive, but equally necessary parts of the new life we are granted there at the font.**

**Baptismal floodwaters, Word-connected, drown sin! Baptismal still waters, Word-connected, comfort and inspire faith.**

- Mark 1:9-11

*9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

**When the early church fathers would preach about baptism, they would often reference Jesus' baptism in the Jordan as well as St. Paul's language in Romans 6. Why? While they understood clearly that baptism effects primarily the remission of sins, they also recognized that it provides an identity with God, the Holy Trinity (God Himself providing that identity) along with adoption as His children at the font. Just as all three Persons of the Holy Trinity were actively involved in the baptism of Jesus, so too in our baptism. Indeed, Holy Baptism was for us the initial setting in which we were forgiven our sins, adopted into the family of the heavenly Father, made co-heirs with Christ, and granted the Holy Spirit. While baptism first and foremost provides the remission of sins, it also bestows membership in the body of Christ and the family of God. We, too, with the whole Church have been to the Jordan in Baptism.**

- Matthew 28:18-20

*18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

**The Great Commission is the command we have to baptize in the name of the Holy Trinity, but that command is never given without the responsibility we have for the further catechesis of the baptized. This is why the suggestion by the dear little old lady in a Bible class that we turn on the sprinkler system in the neighborhood, bless the waters in the name of the Holy Trinity, and spray all of the kids walking by is so far off base. Our responsibility is not simply to baptize but to catechize the baptized, to help the new child of God understand the place and responsibilities he or she has in the household of God that is the church. Baptism without subsequent catechesis is quite like baptism without repentance: it is a past act without any abiding relevance for the Christian. The proper making of Christian disciples involves not only a single, unrepeatable Sacrament of Holy Baptism, but the regular, ongoing, didactic and experiential catechesis of the baptized, growing them up in the one faith into which they were baptized.**

- 1 Peter 3:18-22

*18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

**Possibly the most fertile baptismal image in the New Testament is that of the flood waters which saved Noah and his family from a wicked and perverse generation, so much so that it forms the basis of Luther's flood prayer traditionally used in the baptismal liturgy (see *Lutheran Service Book*, p. 268-69.) This lesson first details the redemption we have in the waters of baptism, where God saves us just as He saved Noah and his family. But it also teaches us much about the traditional Christian symbol of the church, represented by the ark, where God's people are protected from hurricane-like winds and waves that so toss our faith about on the chaotic seas of this wicked world. And even more, the dove who descends upon that ark symbolizing God's promise never to judge humanity in the same manner again represents for us quite clearly the coming of the Holy Spirit at our baptism, where God makes peace with us and promises that He will not condemn us on the last and final day, but save us through Christ our Lord.**

- Titus 3:4-8

*4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*

**There is likely no clearer image of baptism to the senses than that of the "laver" or "washing" of regeneration. While Romans 6 and 1 Peter 3 each tackle different dimensions of the salvation conferred on us through baptism, it is St. Paul's language here that gives us a dynamic picture of how baptism effects that salvation. We read that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are regenerated and made a new creation by the waters that cascade over our heads or flow across our bodies. This is no ordinary water, but water empowered by the Word, and so when we see this water poured out upon another, or even when we see water standing in a baptismal font, we are reminded quite clearly that such water represents our own entry into the family of God and the saving benefits of Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

- Romans 6:3-4

*3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

St. Paul's explanation of baptism in the sixth chapter of Romans and the paschal nature of the sacrament leads us quite easily into a discussion of spiritual renewal on the part of the baptized. The language is clear: just as our Lord suffered and died for our sins upon the cross and subsequently rose from the dead on the third day, so too are our sins atoned in those red-blooded waters of Holy Baptism in order that we might not stay in the water but arise to live a new life as the new creation of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the clarion call of sanctification (think trumpets sounding *en chamade* from the organ) in the new life of the Christian is that if we have died to sin through forgiveness at baptism, we ought not live in it any longer and ought not give in to its powers. Jesus has conquered the devil upon the cross and in the tomb and that means sin and death in our lives are conquered; so why would we ever entertain the dominion of sin and death if He has set us free from it?

## OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

- **Small Catechism IV: 12** <sup>2</sup>

*[Baptism with water] signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die daily through contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*

When Luther speaks of returning to our baptism, he always has in mind a daily repentance of sin and a daily affirmation of the mercy God shows to us through Christ. This could take the form of private confession and absolution, as it did for Lutheran churches in the first few centuries after the Reformation. It also could take a number of other shapes, but the chief recognition on our part should be the regular repentance of our sin, for repentance is the logical extension of baptism. Luther enjoins us to repent because that is what baptized people do in order that they might always remember God's forgiveness in their lives and find in God the absolution from the sins which so easily entangle us.

- **Large Catechism IV: 84-86**

*Therefore let all Christians regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time. [Think chrysom, taufkleid, or white cloth laid on the child, or a stole about the shoulders of an adult. See LSB p. 27.] Every day they should be found in faith and with its fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new. If we want to be Christians, we must practice the work that makes us Christians, and let those who fall away return to it. As Christ, the mercy seat, does not withdraw from us or forbid us to return to him even though we sin, so all his treasures and gifts remain. As we have once obtained forgiveness of sins in baptism, so forgiveness remains day by day as long as we live, as long as we carry the old creature around our necks.*

The visible imagery in this text is quite fruitful if we want to teach our people how to live out their baptismal life on a daily basis. Luther reminds us that baptism is not some mere past event to be remembered at a distance, as we might remember our wedding day, but as a present reality that means something significant to us now, quite like your wedding ring that symbolizes the reality of your marriage. Though baptism is not a repeatable Sacrament, it most definitely bears relevance for our spiritual lives today precisely because it identifies us as those who belong

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<sup>2</sup> All confessional citations taken from Kolb/Wenger edition (2000).

to God through forgiveness and not through birth – not according to the flesh of our parents, but according to the Spirit of God. Holy Baptism remains a constant reminder of God's disposition toward us on account of Christ and of the mercy we find at the font through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is not simply a past mercy: it is a present mercy, forgiving, cleansing, and renewing us through the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

## POINTS TO PONDER

1. The font of Holy Baptism is the place where the Holy Trinity passes us from spiritual death to new life in Christ, making us adopted children of the heavenly Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. **We like to explain how the name of the Holy Trinity added to the water makes a baptism valid, but we all too often forget what it makes us: children of the heavenly Father, made acceptable to him through the Son, who was baptized there at the Jordan, and led by the same Holy Spirit descending in visible form upon Jesus at his own baptism. This is also the significance of making the sign of the cross, for in it we remind ourselves that a special mark has been placed upon us, and we no longer belong to ourselves, but have been bought at a price.**
2. The font of Holy Baptism stands as a constant reminder of the sin which is drowned in those waters through the death of Jesus Christ and the new life we have in Him through His resurrection. **We are new creations on account of those blood-filled waters of Holy Baptism, but the Old Adam deludes into thinking this is untrue. That's why the font ever stands before our eyes, as Nikolai Grundtvig says in his majestic hymn, "Built on the Rock." And one of the chief ways we can bring that water to bear upon the lives of our people is by bringing that font into full view, maybe leaving it uncovered and filling it with water for services, so that people can sign themselves as a visible sign of that baptism. Or maybe we simply gesture toward it whenever we speak of baptism or the grave given us there.**
3. The work of the Spirit which begins at the font of Holy Baptism continues through daily repentance of sin and faith in Jesus' promised forgiveness. **We cannot leave our people to think of baptism as some purely past act without enduring consequences for and influence upon us. Baptism is ever at work in us, preaching the Law by reminding us in the face of sin that we were not destined for such a life as the children of God, but also preaching the Gospel upon repentance and confession, promising that Jesus' death overcomes that sin and grants us a life beyond the grave.**
4. The ongoing sanctifying of the Christian depends upon the Spirit-led constant remembrance of the sins forgiven at the font, the new life begun at the font, and the promise of the resurrection bestowed at the font. **Baptism is a microcosm of the entire Christian life. We have been granted the faith by the Holy Spirit and are kept in that faith with the assurance of everlasting life. By holding the faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, even in the midst of suffering, doubt, and death, we will be eternally blessed. The strength to do so is given through the Gospel, which directs our steadfast confession of the crucified and risen Lord into whom we were baptized. He still comes to us in Word and Sacrament as a foretaste of our participation at the wedding banquet of the Lamb, which will have no end.**

## FOR CONVERSATION

**Primer for leaders: The central question facing us is how to bring out the depth and richness of baptism's significance in our spiritual lives. Your goal as leader of the group in the subsequent discussion is to deal with the very real challenges in our ministries that keep our people from recognizing this significance. Be forthcoming with the challenges in your own congregation and your own experiences in order to foster a disarming, open environment.**

1. Since the majority of our parishioners were baptized as infants and, hence, have no visible memory of baptism, what kind of visual symbols can we use to stimulate their imagination? How can we take them back to the font at a physical, tangible, and visible level?
2. How does baptism shape the worship life of your church? How do you draw people back to the font in your preaching, liturgizing, and catechizing?
3. What challenges do you face in pre-baptismal catechesis, be it with parents or adults? What difficulties do they have in understanding the Lutheran doctrine of baptism? What difficulties do you have in communicating the depth and mystery of this Sacrament to them?
4. How do you help the parents of your congregation guide their children into a continual drowning of the Old Adam and the Old Eve? In what specific, concrete ways can you assist them in the process?
5. The Morning and Evening Prayers in Luther's *Small Catechism* may well frame our daily return to the font. We begin in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into whose name we were baptized. In making the sign of the cross, we recall our baptism into the death of Christ, suffered once for all upon the cross (cf. Hebrews 7:27). Surely the sign is also a triumphal marking, for Christ arose to give us life with the Father forever! Then we say the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, just as they were spoken by either the congregation or sponsors for us when we were brought to the font. How can we encourage the use of such Lutheran baptismal piety to shape the prayer lives and private devotion of our people?
6. What practical, liturgical guidelines can you give your parishioners for remembering their baptism on a daily basis for repentance and for returning to the font? Though private confession may sadly not be the option it once was due to our culture, how can you encourage individual absolution and other helpful, even creative ways to call to mind our sinfulness and the gift of forgiveness we have received in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism?
7. What hymnody serves to emphasize the role of baptism in the ongoing spiritual life of the baptized?

**Leaders might take note of the two Baptismal sections in the new *LSB*. First, there is the section containing four hymns for the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Secondly, there is a section of a dozen hymns categorized as "Baptismal Life." Those who prepared the hymnal are making the clear point that Baptism is not only a one-time event to be remembered but also an ongoing inspiration for spiritual life, made obvious by faith and good works. The titles of the hymns in each section are noted below:**

### **Holy Baptism**

- 590** *Baptized into Your Name Most Holy*
- 591** *This Is the Spirit's Entry Now*
- 592** *Dearest Jesus, We Are Here*
- 593** *See This Wonder in the Making*

### **Baptismal Life**

- 594** *God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It*
- 595** *O Blessed Spring*
- 596** *All Christians Who Have Been Baptized*
- 597** *Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying*
- 598** *Once in the Blest Baptismal Waters*
- 599** *O Gracious Lord, with Love Draw Near*
- 600** *Mark How the Lamb of God's Self-Offering*
- 601** *All Who Believe and Are Baptized*
- 602** *The Gifts Christ Freely Gives*
- 603** *We Know That Christ Is Raised*
- 604** *I Bind unto Myself Today*
- 605** *Father Welcomes*

Close with prayer focused on Baptism and your pastoral and personal needs.

### **Closing Prayer**

**O God, who in Jesus Christ instituted baptism, performs baptism, and grants baptism its saving power, open Your church to new dimensions of our baptismal life and of the significance of our new corporate identity as Your very people; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**Prayers may also be shared for the pastoral and personal needs of one another.**

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# Faithful & Afire

## LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09 This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Leaders Guide

### The Sacrament of Holy Communion

#### What is the meaning and what are the benefits of the Lord's Supper?

#### 1. Focus of This Study

The Sacrament of Holy Communion feeds the baptized with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. In communing with Christ's flesh, the baptized receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. At the Lord's Supper, heaven and earth are joined together in Christ as we worship with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. At the sacrament of the altar we have a foretaste of the marriage feast of the lamb in his kingdom which has no end as we participate in that feast by eating and drinking Christ's body and blood. This meal is for all the baptized who confess these things and share a common faith.

- What is the most important gift that the baptized receive in the Lord's Supper?
- What are the pastoral implications for those who are grieving that in Christ they are joined to their loved ones who have passed away and are now in Christ?
- How do we embody in our worship the reality that heaven is on earth in the bodily presence of Christ?
- How is it an act of love to invite to the sacrament of the altar only those who are baptized, confess the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and confess a common faith with us?

#### 2. Scripture Search

**Luke 22:14-38**

**Luke 24:13-35**

**Acts 2:42**

**Jesus' table fellowship is his gracious presence at table, where he teaches about the kingdom of God and shares a meal in an atmosphere of acceptance, friendship, and peace. His usual table fellowship practice combined those three ingredients: his presence, his teaching, and his eating.**

**Each of those components is significant. The presence of Jesus was the presence of God incarnate. In Jesus, God was present with sinners gathered around the table. Jesus' table fellowship was inclusive as God welcomed fallen creatures into his presence. Jesus explained that his table fellowship was itself an expression of the new era of salvation in which all people are invited into the kingdom (Lk 5:33-39, following the inclusive meal of 5:27-32). Jesus' table fellowship was revelatory because the meals proclaimed and celebrated the presence of the King, the Bridegroom among his attendants (5:34). They were also revelatory as Jesus taught about the kingdom. That pertains particularly to the Last Supper/Lord's Supper, where Jesus taught about the significance of the meal itself in terms of his sacrificial**

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death—the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood—and spoke of his future eating and drinking when the kingdom would come in all its fullness (22:16–20). In a striking way the Emmaus meal too was revelatory as the disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread (24:30, 35).

Jesus' table fellowship, as depicted in Luke-Acts, has profound implications for the ongoing life of the Christian church today. Tracing the table fellowship theme through Luke and into Acts reveals how the meals of Jesus' earthly ministry culminated at the Last Supper with the institution of the Lord's Supper and how that Supper became a central element in the worship life of the emerging church. After Jesus broke bread with two disciples on the very first Easter Sunday (Lk 24:28–35), the church had the regular practice (Acts 2:42, 46) of gathering on the first day of the week—the day of resurrection—in order to break bread (Acts 20:7).

The contemporary theological implications of the table fellowship theme center in the Lord's Supper in the context of the church's worship life. Since Jesus' table fellowship consisted of teaching at table as well as eating, his practice set the precedent for the two main parts of the liturgy in the classic shape of the Divine Service: the Service of the Word (teaching) and the Service of the Sacrament (Supper). The biblical motif of Jesus' table fellowship informs the church's understanding of the vital importance of the Divine Service for sustaining her ongoing life in Christ. In the Divine Service, Jesus continues to carry on his ministry of table fellowship. He provides the communicants at his Table with similar but even more sublime benefits than those enjoyed by guests at his earthly meals. Through his Supper and the accompanying teaching of his Word, he preserves his church on earth in the true faith, in communion with all the saints and in eager expectation of his imminent return, when he will usher the faithful into the eternal wedding feast.

During the Galilean ministry, the essence of Jesus' teaching at meals is the kingdom of God that comes through his rejection to the point of death. The climactic meal during the Galilean ministry is the feeding of the five thousand (9:10–17). Here the King rules his kingdom *now* by offering food that fills the hungry (cf. 6:21). While the multiplication is miraculous, the food is just bread and fish; but the constellation of language points forward to the eschatological feast that is *not yet*.

In Jerusalem, on the night when he was betrayed, Jesus, who brings the new wine for new wineskins (5:36–39), transformed the old Passover as he inaugurated the new Meal that would be celebrated throughout the new era of salvation he brings. This is a sacramental meal, in which he furnishes his body and blood. In Jesus' previous meals during his earthly ministry, he was present at table in the flesh. At the Last Supper, too, Jesus is present at table in the flesh, but for the first time he is also present in the Sacrament. At the Emmaus meal, Jesus would be recognized for the first time as the crucified and risen Lord (24:30, 35). In the subsequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper by the church in Acts (2:42, 46; 20:7) and down to the present day, Jesus is present in the Sacrament as the crucified and risen Lord, who gives his flesh and blood for the forgiveness of sins. In the Supper, above all other meals, Jesus' table fellowship with his church is an act of communion and revelation. God has made himself known to the world in Christ, who came to teach about forgiveness, to accomplish that forgiveness through his death and resurrection, and to bestow that forgiveness in the Breaking of the Bread.

The Last Supper, then, is the theological highlight of Jesus' table fellowship. Yet in the literary work of Luke's gospel, the Last Supper is not Jesus' final meal with disciples. Within Luke's table fellowship pattern there occurs one more time as Jesus teaches two disciples on the road to Emmaus and breaks bread with them. There Jesus is present at table for the first time after his crucifixion and resurrection. In the breaking of the bread at Emmaus (24:30, 35), Jesus was *for the first time* recognized by his disciples as the crucified and risen Messiah. The risen Christ, after teaching on the road, breaks bread and in so doing reveals himself to the opened eyes of the astonished disciples as the crucified and risen Lord in fulfillment of the OT promises, just as he had taught them along the road (24:25–27). The reality of his bodily

resurrection is confirmed later the same evening back in Jerusalem when Jesus eats fish in the presence of his disciples (24:41–43).

The evangelist's final word about Emmaus is programmatic for Christian worship until the Last Day: "And they were expounding the things he taught on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:35). Jesus' continuing practice of teaching and eating with his disciples at table has given the church the pattern for its liturgical worship. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7 confirm that from the beginning the church followed the divine pattern through worship that included teaching and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Worship in the NT church is a continuing table fellowship with God that reaches back into the OT and looks ahead to the eschatological wedding supper (Is 25:6–9; Rev 19:6–9), affording a foretaste of the feast to come. Jesus' table fellowship lies at the very heart of the kingdom of God as it is now present in the liturgical life of the church.

Jesus combined teaching and eating to communicate God's kingdom, and his practice of table fellowship gave rise to the classic shape of the Christian liturgy: the Service of the Word (teaching) and the Service of the Sacrament (Supper).

#### A Special Note on Luke 24:28-30

Suffering, preaching, the cross, eating and drinking at Jesus' table—these all belong together for the apostles. So also does "you will sit [future indicative] on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (22:30). This refers not to condemning old, unbelieving Israel, but to the responsibility of shepherding and oversight in the new Israel, the church. This is the Lukan equivalent to Jesus giving to Peter the keys of the kingdom in Matthew (16:19) and his bestowal of the office of the keys upon the disciples in John (20:22–23). The OT judges were saviors and deliverers who led the people of God to repentance and faith (e.g., Judg 2:10–23; the LXX uses the verb "to judge," for their leadership [e.g., Judg 10:2–3]). So too the apostles and pastors in the apostolic ministry will "judge" in the following way: "The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent."<sup>1</sup> Entrusted with the responsibility to apply Law and Gospel, to absolve or retain sins, and to preside at the Supper, the apostles—and those who serve as their successors in Jesus' ministry—will lead the new Israel to gather around the Table of the Lord in his kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

#### Luke 9:28-36

When Moses and Elijah appear with the glorified Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, heaven and earth come together *here on the earth!* For remember, Peter, James and John are also with them on the mount! This "exodus" is the topic of conversation between Moses and Elijah *in heaven*, so now this heavenly conversation continues on the mount of transfiguration *on earth*. In this great moment we have a glimpse of what our future will be. For what happens on the mount of transfiguration is exactly what happens in our liturgy. At the liturgy of the Lord's Supper when the Pastor says to you "lift up hearts" he is telling you that it is now time for heaven and earth to come together because Jesus Christ is present here among us. And so you respond "we lift them up unto the Lord." With Moses and

<sup>1</sup> Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 60; emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup>Just, Arthur A.: *Luke 9:51-24:53*. electronic ed. St. Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1998, c1997 (Logos Library System; Concordia Commentary), S. Lk 22:39

Elijah and all the saints who have died in Christ, we enter, *here in our worship*, the ongoing conversation in heaven about the Lamb who was slain and raised again. This is what our liturgy means when it says, “therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.” Heaven and earth come together here, because the transfigured and glorified Christ is here at the Lord’s table as we are joined with all who have died and risen in Christ.

#### Hebrews 12:18-24

The author of Hebrews comes to a climactic moment in describing his hearers approach to the presence of God on Mt. Zion. To highlight this approach, he compares it to the Israelites who could not approach Mt. Sinai because of their fear of God’s presence that could bring instant death.

By using the perfect tense for his hearers approach to Mt. Zion, it is clear that this movement into God’s presence has already begun here on earth. Clearly Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem is not a specific place in Israel, but is wherever Christ is present according to both his divine and human natures. When Hebrews’ first century hearers ask themselves, “where is this place?” their immediate response must be where Christ speaks for his Father and acts for his Father. That place is the liturgy where Christ’s performative Word brings purification of sins through preaching and the Lord’s Supper. The inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament demands that we consider first that our approach to God’s presence in Jesus begins already now in the church’s life at the sacrament of the altar even as it will reach its consummation when we fully experience Christ’s presence at the heavenly feast.

There can be no argument that this passage refers to the final feast in heaven, especially by the phrase “heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22). But in Christ’s bodily presence among us now, heaven is on earth, so that Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where the exalted Christ now sits at God’s right hand (1:3) exists at the altar where the myriad of angels in festive gathering join the assembly of the firstborn and the Spirits of the righteous who have been made complete. Here God is judge as to who is worthy to enter this presence now at the feast of the Lord’s Supper even as he will judge at the second coming who will be invited to the eternal banquet of the Lamb in his kingdom that has no end. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, pours out the blood of the covenant that speaks better than Abel into the cup of Christ’s blood where a purification of sins takes place through forgiveness. This blood of the new covenant that gives access to the eternal feast first gives access to the Lord’s table here where “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of Sabaoth. *Heav’n and earth* are full of your glory.’”

Hebrews 12:22-24 is the origin of this language from the proper preface that leads to the singing of the Sanctus from Isaiah 6 and Psalm 118. What is most curious about this phrase in the Sanctus is that Isaiah does not include “heaven” in his record of the words of the seraphim, but has only “the whole earth is full of his glory” (Is 6:3 – *ESV*). It is the church that added “heaven” to the Sanctus. The reality of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper demanded that the church acknowledge that heaven and earth are joined together in the breaking of the bread.

### 3. Our Confessions Speak

#### Small Catechism

<sup>5</sup> What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

<sup>6</sup> Answer: We are told in the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sin.” By these words the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation.

<sup>7</sup> How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?

<sup>8</sup> Answer: The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>9</sup> Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

<sup>10</sup> Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.” On the other hand, he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.<sup>3</sup>

**Any discussion of the Lord’s Supper must begin with the Small Catechism that is at the heart of the piety of our communicants. Luther accents here the “for you” aspect of the sacrament, that is, that the Lord’s Supper is how the atonement and resurrection come to us now in our mouths through the eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood.**

**Luther also accents the gifts that come to us through our communion with Christ’s very body and blood – forgiveness, life, and salvation. These words may become meaningless to us until we realize that forgiveness means we have been released from the consequences of our sins, free to live without the guilt and shame they bring -- that the life we are joined to in the Lord’s Supper is Christ’s endless life, so that in him we are already now eternal beings – that salvation means rescue from our enemies, from sin, death, and the devil, so that we might be conquerors in him.**

**Finally, Luther tells us who is worthy to receive this holy sacrament – the baptized, those broken by sin, those who believe that they are truly receiving Christ’s body and blood.**

### **Large Catechism**

<sup>64</sup> In the second place, a promise is attached to the commandment, as we heard above, which should most powerfully draw and impel us. Here stand the gracious and lovely words, “This is my body, given *for you*,” “This is my blood, poured out *for you* for the forgiveness of sins.” <sup>65</sup> These words, I have said, are not preached to wood or stone but to you and me; otherwise Christ might just as well have kept quiet and not instituted a sacrament. Ponder, then, and include yourself personally in the “you” so that he may not speak to you in vain.

<sup>66</sup> In this sacrament he offers us all the treasure he brought from heaven for us, to which he most graciously invites us in other places, as when he says in Matt. 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you.” <sup>67</sup> Surely it is a sin and a shame that, when he tenderly and faithfully summons and exhorts us to our highest and greatest good, we act so distantly toward it, neglecting it so long that we grow quite cold and callous and lose all desire and love for it. <sup>68</sup> We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison which would kill us if we ate of it?

<sup>69</sup> Of course, it is true that those who despise the sacrament and lead unchristian lives receive it to their harm and damnation. To such people nothing can be good or wholesome, just as when a sick person willfully eats and drinks what is forbidden him by the physician. <sup>70</sup> But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems.

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<sup>3</sup>Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 352.

For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils.<sup>4</sup>

**Luther expands here in the Large Catechism what he has already said in a direct and succinct manner in the Small Catechism. He highlights the bodily effects of the sacrament of the altar, that it is, in the words of Ignatius of Antioch, "the medicine of immortality." The dismissal from the table now in *Lutheran Service Book* sends people off into the world knowing that they have been strengthened and preserved "in body and soul" through the holy Supper.**

**Luther also cautions us that it is possible to take the sacrament to our harm if we receive it in an unworthy manner. Jesus commissioned his disciples in Luke 22:28-30 concerning their responsibilities of determining who could sit at table with them in the kingdom of God, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 describes problems in the Corinthian community whereby "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (I Cor 11:29 – ESV). In both Paul's and Luther's cautions, we see pastoral hearts that seek in love to prevent unworthy communicants from harming themselves in body and soul.**

### **Epitome**

<sup>11</sup> "The first ground is this article of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ is true, essential, natural, complete God and man in one person, inseparable and undivided.

<sup>12</sup> "The second ground is: "God's right hand is everywhere. Christ, really and truly set at this right hand of God according to his human nature, rules presently and has in his hands and under his feet everything in heaven and on earth. No other human being, no angel, but only Mary's Son, is so set down at the right hand of God, whence he is able to do these things."<sup>5</sup>

### **Solid Declaration**

<sup>95</sup> "2. The second is that the right hand of God is everywhere."<sup>6</sup>

**In the Epitome and Solid Declaration of the *Formula of Concord* the great Christological truth is set forth that the person of Jesus Christ is present everywhere according to his divine and human natures. This means that the right hand of God, where Christ is now seated according to his human nature, is present at the altar during the Lord's Supper. This affirms the reality that heaven and earth are joined together in his flesh in this holy sacrament, and that this is experienced most intimately by us at the Lord's table in the eating and drinking of his body and blood. This opens us up to see that when we commune with the saints here below, we are also joined with the saints above in Christ.**

## **4. Points to Ponder**

### **Luke 22:14-38**

The institution of the Lord's Supper occurs at a Passover meal unlike any other Passover meal before. This is Jesus' Passover where he interprets it in terms of himself, e.g. that he

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<sup>4</sup>Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 454.

<sup>5</sup>Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 483

<sup>6</sup>Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 586.

is the Passover lamb and that the bread is his body, broken in death on our behalf, and the cup is his blood, poured out for us. This is the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper, the meal that begins the three day sequence of Jesus death, his rest in the tomb, and his resurrection. Jesus gives them instructions in his last will and testament to them on how they will advance the kingdom and the consequences of their ministry, including how they will be determine who is to join them at his table in the kingdom that comes with his death and resurrection.

#### **Luke 24:13-35**

The Emmaus story ends the three day sequence with another meal, the first celebration of the Lord's Supper after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus teaches the Emmaus disciples on the road about how the Old Testament speaks about his death and resurrection, and then breaks bread with them at their home in Emmaus, giving us the two structures of our worship today, Word and Sacrament.

#### **Acts 2:42**

After Pentecost, the apostles continue the table fellowship of Jesus by gathering around the teaching and the breaking of the bread, with prayers. Since then the church has communed with Christ through Word and Sacrament as the means by which it is joined to him and all of heaven at a meal that is a foretaste of our banqueting with after he comes again in glory.

**These passages from Luke and Acts describe how the sacrament of the altar is part of Jesus' table fellowship with his people, that includes the meals during his ministry, the institution of the Lord's Supper on the night in which he was betrayed, the first meal he celebrated after he rose from the dead at Emmaus, and the ongoing celebration of the sacrament of the altar in countless communities since Pentecost. This table fellowship embraces both Jesus' teaching at the table, now called the liturgy of the Word, and the breaking of the bread at the liturgy of the sacrament, where he gives us his body and blood. In both Word and Meal, Jesus is present bodily with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Our table fellowship here is a foretaste of and participation now in the endtime banquet of the Lord that will be our joy when he comes again in glory.**

#### **Luke 9:28-36**

The transfiguration is a picture of how heaven and earth come together in Jesus. On the mount, three disciples, Peter, James and John, come from the earth to be enveloped in Christ's glorious presence with Moses and Elijah, who come from heaven. In Christ, heaven and earth are joined together as the heavenly conversation of Moses and Elijah continues on earth with Jesus' three disciples.

#### **Hebrews 12:18-24**

When we come to the table of the Lord in holy communion, we come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, where through the bodily presence of Christ, we join angels and saints in festal gathering around Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant in his blood, shed on Calvary and offered to us now in a cup that unites all his saints in a blessed communion.

**These two passages from Luke and Hebrews are offered as places where we see how the communion of the saints is at the heart of our holy communion. There is great comfort in knowing that when we come to communion we are joined with our loved ones who have gone before us in Christ. Pastors may center their pastoral care in this great reality, and congregants may receive this great comfort as they have joy inside their tears every time they commune on Christ's body and blood in the sacrament.**

**The phrase concerning the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven speaks with greater clarity than any other phrase in the liturgy to the**

reality of heaven on earth, a reality we call “inaugurated eschatology,” that the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign (“This is the Feast”). We must always remember that when we go to the Lord’s Supper we commune with Christ, and that wherever Christ is, *there is heaven*. And this communion includes all the saints who have died and risen in Christ – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Ruth, Peter, Paul, our grandparents and great-parents – perhaps even our spouses or our children -- and all the saints now living all over the world, and those still to come. After someone dies, it is good to think of them at the Lord’s Supper, knowing that as we commune here below at the table of the Lamb and sing his songs, we do join them since they are simultaneously communing at the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom that knows no end and singing the songs of the Lamb with angels and archangels. In Christ, in that great mystery of our union with him, we are joined to all who are joined to him.

## 5. For Conversation

**These are all commented on in the material already provided.**

- How does our belief that Jesus is always present to us according to his flesh, that is, according to his divine and human natures, affect the way we practice holy communion?
- Discuss what the Small Catechism means when it says that through Jesus’ bodily presence we receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation? What are the true meaning of these gifts, that is, how do they relate to Jesus?
- What does our liturgy mean when it says, “therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying . . .” How does this relate to our confession in the creed that we believe in “the communion of saints”? How are our loved ones with us in Christ? What does this say about what happens to us after we die?
- A visitor comes to your church whom no one in the congregation knows, and he wants to come to the Lord’s table to receive Christ’s body and blood. What should the pastor and congregation do in such an instance? How might this pastoral “practice” be carried out evangelically and in love?
- Discuss the importance of every Sunday communion. What are some of the reasons that congregations do not celebrate weekly communion, and how do we respond to them?
- Does the reality that the bodily presence of Christ at the Lord’s Supper, the creator and redeemer of the cosmos, influence the way we celebrate the Lord’s Supper? How might we receive these gifts, faithful to his presence and reverent to the means by which he is comes to us in body and blood?
- How is it that we may have both joy and sorrow at the same time when we receive Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament of the altar?

Close with prayer for one another’s ministries and personal needs.

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# Faithful & Afire

## LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09 This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Leader's Guide

### The Resurrection of the Body

#### What are the implications of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ

**Note: Commentary for leaders is provided in bold print.**

#### Focus of the Study

The goal of this study is to help the participants to see the centrality and importance of bodily resurrection as the Christian's great hope, especially as this hope is part of the renewal of the creation at the return of Jesus in glory.

The problem that can exist in our church is a sort of *functional* Platonic view of salvation, wherein "dying and going to heaven" operates as the chief goal of Christian existence, while the great hope of the Last Day receives only lip service and no real emphasis. Many things can be attached to this *functional* error; a denigration of the body and/or creation, a sugar-coating of death, and other problems.

#### Questions for Large Group Conversation

1. Is physical death bad or good, *theologically* speaking? Are we consistent in how we speak about it at funerals?

**When one considers the various major topics of Christian doctrine, "death" looms in all of them as an evil thing. So, for example, in the doctrine of creation, physical and spiritual death only enters the creation through the sin of Adam. With regard to the doctrine of man, physical death is a terrible thing that tears our human nature asunder in a way not pleasing to God. In the doctrine of salvation, Christ's physical death was part of the price, the wages of sin, that needed to be paid for our redemption.**

**To be sure, physical death is a mitigated evil, for nothing can completely separate us from the love of God in Christ. Experientially, of course, it can also be seen as "the end of suffering." But death is still an evil, and sickness and other sufferings are just the anticipation of it; they are "death on the way." Far too often, however, we speak of death as "part of life" or "a blessing."**

2. *LSB 596*, "All Christians Who Have Been Baptized," stanza 5, concludes with this claim: "When nothing else revives your soul / Your Baptism stands and makes you whole / And then in death completes you." Since Baptism joins us to the death and *resurrection* of Jesus, can this hymn statement be correct?

This hymn, like a number of our hymns, is ambiguous at best. Is the final goal of our baptismal salvation to be dead, with body and soul separated? Romans 6 proclaims that in Baptism, we are united with the death and *resurrection* of Jesus. The liturgy for graveside committal asks, "May God the Father, who through Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be his temple, keep these remains until the day of the resurrection of all flesh." Many hymns end too soon, with the death of the believer, implying that this is the real goal of our salvation. What we need is one more stanza for these hymns, as in the case of "Abide With Me." Imagine singing this as the last stanza: "And when you come again at last to save / Raise us to life, Lord, bring us from the grave / So then, with all your people strong and free / I will rejoice, for you abide with me."

3. State the over-arching biblical story in 20 seconds or less. What is God's great goal for the creation, and for the human race as the crown of creation? How important, relatively speaking, is "dying and going to heaven" in that over-arching narrative?

**The big picture is that of Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation, from Genesis to Revelation and centered in the work of Jesus. Adam's sin brought death and trouble to the whole creation: "Cursed is the ground because of you." The Second Adam's obedience has brought and will bring life and renewal to the whole creation, most especially to all human creatures who are united with him in Baptism and faith. In the larger picture, "dying and going to heaven" plays only a very small part.**

## Scripture Search

### 1. Romans 8

- o Read Rom 8:1-4. What great verdict is already true for everyone who is in Christ Jesus? Why is that a surprising verdict to hear *now*?

**It is surprising because it's what you would expect to hear on the great day of judgment. The good news is that the verdict of the Last Day is already vouchsafed to believers; there is *now* no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! God condemned sin through the flesh of Jesus, for us!**

- o Read Rom 8:12-17. What back and forth struggle characterizes our lives in Christ now? Who has been given to each of us, and how does He help us in this struggle? As heirs of God and Christ's fellow-heirs, what will we surely experience before we experience glory?

**The struggle between the sinful flesh and the Holy Spirit continues. The Spirit lifts our cry to God, "Abba, Father," and the fear of rejection and condemnation is taken away through the Spirit of Sonship. We know who we are; God's sons and daughter, and co-heirs with Christ. This will, however, mean struggle and suffering in our lives, and we should expect that.**

- o Read Rom 8:18-21. What is the glory to be revealed? When will that happen? What is the entire creation looking forward to?

**The glory to be revealed will be the restoration of the creation, freeing it from the slavery to corruption and for the glorious freedom that God's children will enjoy in the resurrection. Remarkably, Paul says that the creation is looking forward to the time when we will be restored and set free.**

- Read Rom 8:22-25. According to these words, for what *should* Christians be groaning and longing? Honestly, is this the case? If not, why not?

**In remarkably emphatic terms, Paul asserts that Christians are eagerly longing and looking forward to the redemption of their bodies on the Last Day. We now have the first fruits or down payment of the Holy Spirit. But we do not yet enjoy the fullness of the gift; that fullness comes when our bodies are redeemed from all of the effects of sin and death.**

**So, the question is whether Christians today are actually looking and longing for what Paul says we should be. And if we are not, then we should clear out of our minds and hearts everything that is preventing this longing for the great hope in which we were saved, and for which we wait with endurance.**

## 2. I Corinthians 15

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Paul says that these are the matters on which he and the Corinthians all agree. Focus on verses 3-4. What are the Corinthians NOT denying about Jesus?

**There is no evidence that the some of the Corinthians were denying that *Jesus* rose from the dead. Otherwise, Paul would not have used 15:1-11 as the launching pad for his great chapter on OUR resurrection. For that is what the chapter is about—the FINAL resurrection of believers on the Last Day.**

- Now read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. What do the Corinthians seem to be denying? What is Paul's argument to show that if you deny the one thing, then you end up denying the other and destroying the Christian faith? Notice that "dying the going to heaven" is completely absent from this discussion. Read verse 18-19 carefully. Our faith is vain if what will not happen on the Last Day? What does that say about death?

**Some of the Corinthians are denying, in some way, that there is still a resurrection of the dead to come. Paul then argues in an interesting way. Twice he says, "Well, if there is no resurrection of the dead to come, then that means that Christ is not risen, either." Why would that follow, in Paul's thinking? It's because there is really only ONE resurrection, and Christ is the first-fruits of it. Paul shows NO interest in the interim state here. Death is the enemy that must be overcome—first of all, in the case of Christ himself, and secondly, in our case as well.**

- Now read 1 Corinthians 15:20—the whole verse. Paul says that Christ is risen from the dead as “something.” What is it? What teaching is contained in Christ’s resurrection as that thing?

**The entire force of 15:20 is contained in the fact that Christ is risen as *the first fruits of those who sleep*. Remember that the Corinthians were not denying that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had, however, somehow broken the link between Christ’s resurrection and our own. If Christ is first fruits, then there is more to come!**

- Jump down to 1 Corinthians 15:35-49. Here is where Paul tries to explain a mystery, namely, the nature of our future resurrection body. Focus on verses 42-44. Remember that “Spiritual” here does not mean “non-physical”; compare the same term in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. What does Paul mean, then, when he says that the resurrection body will be a “Spiritual” body?

**The term “Spiritual” in chapter 2 and chapter 15 means something like “empowered / directed by the Spirit.” So, the “Spiritual man” is filled with the Spirit, and the “Spiritual body” is enlivened by the Spirit.**

**There are, of course, mysteries about the resurrection body that we cannot understand or explain. Paul’s words, in verses 42-44, however, give a glorious glimpse. Now we, in our bodies, are corruptible (physically and spiritually); then we will be incorruptible. Now we have exhibited and born dishonor; then we will be glorious. Now, we are weak; then we will be powerful. Now we are limited and linked to fallen human nature; then, we will be completely endowed with the Holy Spirit, who is even now the down payment of our inheritance.**

### 3. Romans 13:11-14

- Read Rom 13:11. What does Paul mean, “Our salvation is nearer?” Since that is the case, what is it time for us to do?

**“Salvation” in Paul is both a present reality (Titus 3:5, for instance) and a future one (Romans 5:9). Here Paul is focused on the future, “not yet” salvation at the last day. Again, notice that “dying and going to heaven” plays no major role in his thinking. It is there, to be sure, and (lest I be misunderstood) we DO teach that the Christian’s soul at death goes to be with Christ. But it is not a major item in the New Testament’s theology.**

**Since Christ’s return is drawing near, it is time for us to wake up, spiritually. The rest of the paragraph will talk about what that means.**

- Read Rom 13:12. What is almost here? Paul then says, “Therefore”—what follows in our lives from the eager expectation of Christ’s return?

**The Day is almost here. Paul knew that he could die before it came; read Rom 15:8-12. But he lived in eager hope. It follows that it is time to live differently now, putting off dark deeds and putting on the armor of light.**

- Read Rom 13:13-14. Rather than living in sin, what (or who) are we to put on? How do we do that?

**We are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This already happened when we were baptized; but by faith, we lay hold of that identity each day, put to death the sinful lusts, and live as those who will one day be completely new and completely alive to God.**

## **Our Confessions Speak**

### 1. Ecumenical Creeds

- Recite the Apostles Creed. What is mentioned in both the second and third article?

**It is of some significance that the Creed, in speaking about the Son in whom we believe, confesses that the Son will come from the right hand of the Father to judge the living and the dead. This is at the core of what we believe about the Son. In addition, in speaking of the things of the Spirit, we confess “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” The Last Day comes up twice.**

- Recite the Nicene Creed. What is mentioned in both the second and the third article? According to the final statement in the third article, what are we Christians looking for?

**The same point can be made here that was made regarding the Apostles Creed. Neither Creed, we might add, pays any attention to “dying and going to heaven.” Again, we do not teach soul sleep or soul annihilation. But the New Testament places very little emphasis upon the soul’s condition between the death of the body and the return of Christ.**

### 2. Small Catechism

- Luther preserves this same emphasis in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles Creed. What will Christ finally do for all believers?

**The obvious point is, “And will on the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life.”**

### 3. Augsburg Confession

- Article 16 reads, “It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.” (Kolb-Wengert, 50)

## Points to Ponder

1. Our culture leads us in the direction of a non-corporeal understanding of “salvation.” But the Incarnation, Good Friday, Easter, and the blessed Sacraments all proclaim that God comes down, uses the creation in order to save the whole creation.
2. God’s plan is larger than me and what I get. God’s plan is for the world, and each of us is caught up, dearly loved, into that larger plan.
3. The final goal of our salvation takes place at the coming of Jesus, and not before. The promise of a blessed rest of the soul with Christ at the point of death is a smaller emphasis, in comparison with the great hope. We should place a corresponding emphasis upon Christ’s return, and pay less attention to what, in fact, we know very little about—that is, the soul’s condition of rest with Christ between death and resurrection.
4. The fact that we are waiting for God to renew our bodies, and the whole creation, implies that we are, by the Spirit’s power, to begin already now to manifest that new life.

## For Conversation

1. The promise of Christ’s return and the renewal of the creation, including the resurrection of the body, are absolutely central to the New Testament and its message. Do you think that our faith and hope also have this hope in center stage? Why or why not?
2. “But why should I worry about the resurrection of the body? Isn’t the important thing to just die and be with Christ forever?” Respond.
3. In Holy Baptism, we have already (by faith) begun to live the new life in the Spirit. How can the hope of the fullness of new life motivate us to holy living?
4. “Why is Easter important? I mean, if all God needed to do what to show that his Son’s sacrifice was sufficient payment for sins, couldn’t He have sent an angel to give us that message? What is the real importance of Easter?” Respond.

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# Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09  
This We Believe, Teach, and Confess  
Leaders Guide

## The Trinity

**Who is God, and what does the Trinity tell us about the nature of God?**

### FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

The 2008-09 Circuit Bible Studies focus on what unites the pastors and the priesthood of all believers in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. One of the chief doctrines uniting clergy and laity in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is the doctrine of the Trinity. The Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds instruct the baptized concerning who the Triune God is and what He has done and continually does for His church. They provide our apology or defense as we respond to those who ask about the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15).

The church needs continuous instruction so that spiritual amnesia does not cause her to lose her way. A loud siren calls for an anonymous god in today's America. Any god will do, just don't name it. "Coexist" bumper stickers seem to be everywhere, teaching the unaware that any version of god is equally acceptable and effective: Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Paganism, Wiccan, or Christianity. The Triune God, however, must be named and proclaimed. The scandalous particularity of the First Table of the Law is as challenging as ever!

Important questions must be answered. Among them are these:

- Who really is God?
- How does God reveal Himself?
- From what God has revealed of Himself, what is His nature?
- What are the present temptations to diminish confessing the Triune God within and outside the church?

### SCRIPTURE SEARCH

- Romans 11:33-35  
**God is not to be figured out or proven but feared, loved, and trusted. Consider the "There's Probably No God—Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life" campaign by the atheists in Great Britain. If Paul, who has the Holy Spirit, confesses his ignorance at penetrating the mind of God, how much more so the unbeliever! The doctrine of the Triune God requires absolute humility, bowing before the sacred text of Scripture, and settling for what God has revealed about Himself.**
- Genesis 1 and 2  
**God reveals Himself in His works of creation, accented by His divine delay until the sixth day to create Adam and Eve. His preoccupation with Adam and Eve is prescriptive of His behavior for time and eternity. Their creation not only reveals His absolute power but His focus on His relationship with man and woman. See as**

well the work of all three persons of the Trinity, the Father speaking the Word, and the Spirit hovering over the waters.

- Genesis 3:15  
**Immediately God reveals His nature with the proclamation of rescue, the Offspring of a woman. God does not desire to destroy what He loves. The searching mind must focus here on the Triune God's response to man's rebellion.**
  
- Exodus 34:6-7  
**Who better to teach about the Triune God than God in His own self-description! Fundamentally, the Triune God is merciful and gracious. He is the God of free and faithful saving grace, whose unending loyalty should not be taken for granted (See v. 7).**
  
- Leviticus 20:8; 21:8b; 22:32-33; 17:11  
**The Triune God is holy; His fallen creation is not. The Holy One chooses to sanctify the unholy through His blood. Every person lives in a state of the constant need of purification. Holiness is not inherent to any one. God understands that without His help—His sanctifying blood—all of humanity is completely lost. Instead of tossing aside His creation, He delivers them. Although not explicitly stated, “making holy” is the work of the Holy Spirit. “But God's Spirit alone is called a Holy Spirit, that is, the one who has made us holy and still makes us holy” (LC, Third Article, 36).**
  
- Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 52:13 – 53:10  
**The Triune God revealed Himself—and His plan of rescue—in His Son. God's righteousness was met by labeling His Son the transgressor, as the unholy one. In His Son is revealed the Triune God's justice and mercy.**
  
- Matthew 1 and Luke 3:23-38  
**Follow the genealogy to find the Triune God's manifestation of Himself in His Son. Matthew starts with Abraham and goes forward to the crib; Luke goes the opposite way, back to the first Adam. The lines connect the Triune God to the flesh of Jesus either way, which is the Holy Spirit's intent. Here is the very image of the Triune God (Col. 1:15). “Say, all creation, locate Me here in My Son! Here I am!” Jesus had to remind Thomas of this fact, John 14:6.**
  
- Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2  
**The Father provides the Lamb as the blood sacrifice for cleansing sinners. The Father's provision in His Son is both intensively and extensively perfect, covering each sinner and all sinners' sins. This is the heart of the Triune God. God is driving the verbs.**
  
- Matthew 28:18-20  
**The Father has given His Son the authority to bring all sinners to God through their baptism in the name of the Triune God and teaching them all that He has commanded. The Triune God's pounding passion is more and more sinners upon**

whom Jesus' blood is applied. By inviting the church to participate jointly in the Son's mission, the Triune God reveals His will to work through His church so that all might know Him. The Triune God exercises His lordship precisely in the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

- 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 John 1:7c  
**The preaching of the Triune God's revelation of Himself in the cross—and constantly in His applied blood—is where God is found and where He is working. The Father and the Son are still working (John 5:17) through His church in the preaching and telling of His Word and the administration of the Sacraments.**
  
- 1 Corinthians 6:11  
**The Holy Spirit's work is the application of the Son's work upon the sinner. He is the undercover person of the Holy Trinity who points all sinners to the Son.**

**“For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of Christ” (AC V, 2-3).**

## **OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK<sup>1</sup>**

All quotes are from *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000).

The doctrine of the Triune God is the beginning point for confessional unity. The churches among us teach with complete unanimity that the decree of the Council of Nicea concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three persons is true and is to be believed without any doubt ... They condemn all heresies that have arisen against this article ... (AC I, 1, 4).<sup>2</sup>

**The Triune God's unity is reflected in His church. He is one as is the church. His works as revelation of Himself also become the criteria for the church's striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit. The church must agree on His works as she proclaims those same works.**

The Triune God reveals himself in the Christ, and this Christ sanctifies by the Spirit. Likewise, they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took upon himself human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary so that there might be two natures, divine and human, inseparably conjoined in the unity of one person, one Christ, truly God and truly a human, being

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the Confessions are from *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> God is spoken of everywhere in the Confessional documents. Since Holy Scripture is the correct exposition and revelation of God's nature and works, and the Confessions a correct exposition of Holy Scripture, the Confessions speak of God throughout. See Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, tr. Walter Hansen (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis), 17.

“born of the Virgin Mary,” who truly “suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried” that he might reconcile the Father to us ... He will sanctify those who believe in him by sending into their hearts the Holy Spirit, who will rule, console, and make them alive and defend them against the devil and the power of sin (AC III, 1-3, 5-6).

**The Triune God orders His works around the salvation of sinners. Since His works are geared toward saving, His nature is one of being gracious and compassionate toward sinners. His first and primary impulse is to save; it is who He is. The Pharisees railed at Jesus for His table companions. When they did so, they rejected the very nature of the Triune God.**

The Triune God threatens in order to reveal his true nature of goodness toward His creation. He must strike and punish them so severely that he just cannot forget his anger down to their children’s children ... But as terrible as these threats are, much more powerful is the comfort in the promise that assures all those clinging to God alone of his mercy, that is, His sheer goodness and blessing, not only for themselves but also for their children to a thousand and even many thousands of generations (LC, Explan., 37, 39).

**The Triune God uses every angle to reveal His compassionate nature to sinners. He will strike and punish the resistant and not blow out the weak flame of faith of the believing (Is. 42:3).**

The Triune God’s nature is revealed in his works, in the order of salvation revealed in Scripture. For this reason, if a person wishes to think or speak about the election and *praedestinatio* (or preordination) of God’s children to eternal life correctly and profitably, one should as a matter of course refrain from speculation over the naked, secret, hidden, inscrutable foreknowledge of God. On the contrary, one should focus on how God’s counsel, intention, and preordination in Jesus Christ ... is revealed to us through the Word. This means that the entire teaching of God’s intention, counsel, will, and preordination concerning our redemption, calling, justification, and salvation must be taken as a unity (SD, XI, 13-14).

**Follow His work to understand the nature of the Triune God. Read His actions to know His heart and then apply it to every sinner.**

## POINTS TO PONDER

1. The Triune God is known through His works. His greatest work was done through the Son of God, in His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.
2. The Apostles’ Creed reflects the Scriptures’ revelation of the Triune God’s works; all articles revolve around the work of each person of the Trinity. As God drives the verbs in Holy Scripture, He indeed is driving the verbs in the revelation of Himself in His Son by the Spirit through the witness of Holy Scripture and the Sacraments.
2. The Triune God cannot be found except in the revelation of His Son, the one born of the Virgin Mary. His Son is the expressed Word of God, communicating God’s nature to the world through the written and proclaimed Word.
3. The Triune God is supremely revealed in the unfathomable shedding of blood, the crucifixion of the very Son of God. The preaching, telling, washing, and the partaking of His blood remain the revelation of the Triune God.

4. The preaching of God's blood in Christ—as it reveals the Triune God and His nature—also is the dividing line between Christianity and all other religions. At the same time, it draws or condemns sinners (2 Cor. 2:14-16).
5. The Triune God desires no competition.

### **FOR CONVERSATION**

1. How is the witness of the Triune God muffled in American Christianity today? Within the church?
2. How does Paul's uncompromising and yet engaging approach with the Athenian philosophers apply to the local and the trans-local church? Are his actions consistent with what the Triune God has revealed about Himself in His Son?
3. The Coexist Movement teaches a peaceful existence among all religions. Explore not only how this is impossible with the nature of the Triune God but also how one might engage a person who is wearing a Coexist T-shirt.
4. The three ecumenical creeds were written to address heresies prevalent in the culture at a particular time. What is a current heresy regarding the Triune God? What words in the creeds address this heresy?

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