

Welcome to Christ Evangelical Lutheran



We're glad you're here. We'd love to see you again.
We pray that Christ our Savior will richly bless you
with His Word in the time you spend with us!

We've put this booklet together to help answer some questions visitors may have about who we are, what we believe, and why we are here. We hope you'll find it useful. We're happy to answer any questions you may have in person and to provide you with more information about our parish, the Bible, or the Lutheran Faith.

What's in the Book?

- p. 2 I've Got Some Questions
- p. 3 Who's That Guy up There in the Robe?
- p. 4 What Are the Sermons Like?
- p. 9 I Hear the Pastor Sends Email Devotions. What Are They Like?
- p.10 Why Do You Do All that Weird Stuff in Worship?
- p. 19 What Are Inquirers' Classes Like?

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I've Got Some Questions.

Where did Christ Evangelical Lutheran come from?

We're definitely not new to the area. Begun in 1903, Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church (Evangelische Lutherische Christus Gemeinde zu Swan Creek) exists for the same purpose that it was begun: to proclaim the complete and unaltered gospel of Jesus Christ to those gathered within its walls and the community outside them. Who could imagine that a gathering of seven men in the home of Frederick Nehmer July 26, 1903, would one hundred years later still be producing fruit, namely, a thriving congregation of more than 350 souls. Two church buildings and twelve pastors later, we at Christ are just as eager to serve the Shields and Saginaw area with the pure gospel of Jesus Christ as those seven ambitious families who established our congregation with their own sweat, time, treasures, and talents. One hundred years have passed since Christ Lutheran opened its doors to its community. Lord willing, they'll stay open for a hundred more!

Why the name?

First, we preach Christ, God made man for us and our salvation. Second, we are evangelical because the Gospel predominates in our worship and teaching. Third, we are confessionally Lutheran because we believe that God saves by grace through faith, which is created and sustained through Word (the inerrant Scriptures, preached and read) and Sacrament (Baptism and Holy Communion). Fourth, we are a church, that is, an assembly of God's saints (though we are still sinner/saints this side of heaven), called out of the world to be His special people, gathered around His promises in Word and Sacrament.

When do you worship?

We celebrate God's service on *Sundays* at 9:30AM and *Mondays* at 7:00PM. During Advent and Lent, we also gather on *Wednesdays* at 7:00PM.

What about Bible Classes and Sunday School?

We offer Adult/Youth Bible Study on *Sundays* 8:30AM. Sunday School for the little ones is at the same time. We also have Bible classes on *Wednesdays* at 10AM and on the 4th *Saturday* of the month at 9:30AM. Some of the topics we've covered in the last few years are: the Gospel of St. John, the Revelation of St. John, the Book of Joshua, the Book of Judges, the Minor Prophets, End of Life Issues, Justification and Sanctification, a Survey of Church History, Lutheran Worship, the Augsburg Confession, a Survey of the Lutheran Confessions, Church Fellowship, Church and State, etc.

What denomination are you?

We are Christian first. Lutheran second. As biblical Christians and confessional Lutherans, we join together for ministerial education and missions with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, which consists of about 1,200 congregations and 400,000 members in the United States and many more throughout the world.

How does one become a Lutheran?

People become Lutherans by becoming informed Christians. Many are baptized as infants and then instructed in the Bible and Catechism as children and young adults. Many are baptized as infants in another confession of the Christian Faith and come to embrace the fullness of the Word as it is confessed in the Lutheran Confessions later in life, at which time they are instructed. Others come to the Faith later, and are baptized after instruction as adults. Confessional Lutherans take Christ's Word seriously and that is why it is customary for someone to go through instruction in the basic teachings of Scripture before becoming communing members of a Lutheran parish.

How do I find out about classes?

That's an easy one: ask Pastor Johnston. He regularly offers group classes and individual classes, depending on what you prefer. The classes are built around your schedule and background and are very informal as well as informative. A sample class lesson is included at the back of this booklet.

Tell us some more!

That is what the rest of this booklet is for. We hope you find it helpful! You know where to find us if you have any questions.

Who's That Guy up There in the Robe?



Pastor Johnston was born November 7, 1977 in Livonia, MI. He entered the Church through Holy Baptism on January 8, 1978. Pastor attended St. Robert Bellarmine for grades 1-8. He attended Livonia Franklin High School which he graduated from in 1996. On New Years Eve of 1995, Pastor Johnston was received into the Evangelical Lutheran Church as an adult confirmand after receiving instruction in the faith from Pastor Karl Vertz of Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Livonia, MI. He then studied at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, MN, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2000. Pastor then enrolled in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, WI. He received his Master of Divinity degree from the Seminary in 2004.

During his time at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Pastor Johnston served as a vicar at Eastside Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madison, WI, under the supervision of his bishop, Pastor Kenneth Gast. Like all Wisconsin Synod pastors, Pastor Johnston received a thorough education in the individual books of the Bible, the languages of the Church (Hebrew, Greek, German, and Latin), homiletics (preaching), dogmatics (doctrine), education (teaching), pastoral counseling, etc.

Pastor Johnston was married to Tricia Wolter of Hustisford, WI, on June 30, 2001. They have three small children: Magdalen (4), Nicholas (3), and Isaiah (1), and a fourth on the way. Pastor Johnston began his service here at Christ on July 18, 2004, when he was ordained into the public ministry. He is eager and willing to serve you with Word and Sacrament. You can reach Pastor by phone at 989-781-0980 (office), at 989-781-2885 (home), at 989-980-2995 (cell), or in person at the church.

What Are the Sermons Like?

Good question. Here's a couple to give you a feel for what you'll hear. Trust us, though. It's better to hear them in person.

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY 2007

Passion History Commentary

Sometimes we all just get tired, ready to trade in our crosses, ready to have a church that is less Church and more glory, less testing and more passing, less hospital for sinners and more showroom for saints. Sometimes we don't want Christ's easy yoke instead of the flesh's heavy yoke; we simply don't want any yoke at all. We want the narrow way to be less narrow and the cornerstone less cornering. Sometimes we all just get tired and would prefer a little here and now from the Everlasting Father in place of all His then and forever.

Unfortunately, we should know better. We've not been invited to the circus. We've been called to Christ, the Beggar King, who loses Jerusalem's Messiah Idol to the murderous Barabbas, and rides rental beasts of burden to the torturous tree where He'll bear the burden of all the world. We've been called out of the crowd by Baptism. We've been many times warned that walking behind the donkey can get messy. And at those times when we want a more kingly King and more godly God, we need a swift kick in the backside out of the crowd, back onto the road and behind the donkey.

Now imagine being the One on the donkey. How many had promised Him they'd follow, just to find something better to do when it was time to gather? How many hadn't acknowledged the Bible was good for more than decoration, just to skip His highway and byway Bible classes? How many hadn't even given Him a first sentence benefit of the doubt when He preached before zoning out or packing it in? How many spur of the moment voters assemblies of those claiming to be His disciples hadn't gone the way of that first voters assembly in the wilderness that approved the building of a golden calf in Moses' absence, confusing voting on the color of the carpeting with voting on the character of the Christ? How many hadn't wanted candy instead of medicine, a more sugary spiritual diet, like a patient expecting the hospital to be a shopping mall? And the backs of the heads of those people must have looked eerily and staggeringly similar to our own.

His ministry had been a blip on the map of the church yellow pages of Israel. Many other congregations flourished while His at best languished when it wasn't shrinking, as He labored under open skies, with no roof or pews, gave sermons on mounts, with no air conditioning or microphones. As He prepares to die, He can boast a parish not much more sizeable than the original twelve. Yet He kept being the same Pastor, same Shepherd and Overseer of the greater flock, the Head of the Body that is the Church, because He knew that He had real food for the flock, something to populate heaven and not just pews. He had Bread of Life. He was Bread of Life, maybe not sugar-coated, but sweet nonetheless to those who after experiencing the bitter aftertaste of their sin would develop a hankering for heavenly mercy.

And now it would seem He had His day, finally appreciated, with everyone finally ready to listen and learn, to pitch in and help, just as they pitched down their cloaks to make Him an impromptu red carpet. It would seem. It WOULD seem. But "*Crucify*" was even now in the back of their throats. "*I do not know him*" was already festering in the vocal cords of His boldest disciple. These were the seeds sown on rocky ground that sprout quickly and die, sown among the thorns that grow nicely until choked by the worries and distractions of life.

But that's the thing about crowds: they suck you in; and we are daily bombarded with the mentality of the mob, with sayings and standards that come everywhere but from God. We are by nature consumers, waving palms for the sorriest imitation of a messiah, whether he carries a guitar, a football, or a movie script, while the Messiah rides by unnoticed, or, even worse, momentarily noticed, but then forgotten.

How tired He must have been, how frustrated, ready to hop off that long-prophesied donkey and walk right out of town, to let them all reap what they'd sown! What was it to Him? He'd tried. Lord knows, He'd tried. He'd warned. He'd pleaded. He'd shed countless tears, said countless prayers. At a certain point, wasn't enough enough? Yet our thoughts are not His thoughts.

What does He do? He doesn't let the cheers get to Him. He isn't fooled. He knows the crowd always loves a show, that they are willing to let Jesus be that show for a day, for a season, but that He will be cancelled with time, that this infatuation of this day will not be an everyday thing for most of them. He knows some of

these same mouths that now hail Him as King will soon hail Him as a criminal, as meat for the hungry teeth of the Roman judicial system. He doesn't let the cheers get to Him because He knows the entire Passion History, even before its written, and He has committed to playing the lead but thankless part of Hero. He rides on. He rides on. He rides on through it all. He just keeps riding, not because He wants this all to happen to Him, but because He is afraid what will happen to you if it doesn't. So He rides on through the cheers and to the jeers, the spit, the blows, the lashes, the thorns and mockery, the nails and spear to give you what you need.

Step out of the crowd. Step out and get behind the donkey. The view is not always as nice, but it is real. The road is not as smooth, but it leads to heaven. The fruits are not as finely polished, but they are eternal. The promises may not always seem like enough, but they hold more promise than all the emptiness that fills our to-do lists and to-have lists, than all the sayings and standards that the mobs have made part of our mentality

Cast down your misplaced hopes and out-of-whack priorities, wave your empty pursuits and shallow desires for Him to take them away, and, as this King passes, as this Pastor of pastors rides by, leave them there, and get behind the donkey, and walk to the cross, and see His Body and Blood offered for you to eat and to drink as most powerful medicine, as the remedy for death, as vaccination for Hell. See His death into which Baptism has buried you, and then witness the miracle of His empty tomb, out of which you too walk with Him through water and the Word to new life. Hear Him speak the sweet comfort He still calls out with clear as day in His Word.

Are you tired? Are you frustrated, ready to be done with all, ready for something else? You'll find plenty of people like you in the crowd, but you won't find what you need there. You'll only find what you need behind the donkey. So step out and follow. It may be bloody, but it is the Blood of your redemption. It may be rocky, but the Rock of Ages won't leave you to walk alone. It may be long, but what else can we expect eternal things to be? It may be hard, but it is easier than a constant striving after the perishable, an incessant chasing after the wind. While you may find your fill of trial, at least the only thing empty you'll encounter will be His tomb. They may call it the Passion History, but don't let it be history for you. This is what you need, here and now, and then and forever. This is the past to shape your present and define your future. Amen.

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD 2006

Mark 16:1-8

"And Peter"

This text is full of beautiful words, but there are a few in particular that struck me especially hard as I pondered St. Mark's account of the resurrection.

"Don't be afraid." Those are beautiful words. They sum up the gospel. Don't be afraid, for He said all along this would happen. Death has lost its sting. Christ destroyed it by enduring it. Hell now has no hold on you. Christ descended to slam shut its gates. How could you be afraid? Our Jesus lives! Don't be afraid! These are beautiful words.

"He is risen." Those are beautiful words too. He is risen, and the devil is cast down. He is risen, and sin is buried. He is risen, and death has died. He is risen, and life springs forth from the grave. He is risen! These are beautiful words.

But these still aren't the words I have in mind. The beautiful words I have in mind come next. "And Peter." Those are the words I can't get out of my head. "Go, tell His disciples AND PETER." As I studied this text, those words are what really brought everything this day is about home for me. "And Peter."

Think of Peter. He had betrayed His Lord just a little while after promising to follow Him, even unto death. He had failed the Savior. His big moment of testing came and he flunked. And now it was too late. His Master was dead and buried. There was no opportunity to make things better, to apologize. "But, thanks be to God! Unbeknownst to Peter, His Master was dead and buried no more. He had risen, just as He said, and before Peter could apologize, Christ had already made sure that the good news of His resurrection was announced, not just to all of the disciples, but especially to him. "And Peter."

"Et tu, Brute?" "And you, Brutus?" Those were the words Shakespeare had Caesar speak when he realized that even his best friend was conspiring to take his life. The friendship ended in betrayal. But Christ now has the angel speak His "And you" in a different tone and to a different end. These are words of friendship and love. The friendship did not end with Peter's betrayal. It is born anew through Christ's forgiving love.

The early church and most scholars worth the books on their shelf still today are confident that St. Mark wrote his Gospel based on the preaching of St. Peter. So far as I can tell, the “And Peter” appears only in St. Mark’s Gospel. I find this mesmerizing. St. Peter himself likely preached this “And Peter,” confessing the mercy of Christ shortly after confessing the sin of his betrayal. How beautiful! It makes sense that such a message would stick with St. Mark, because by all accounts he was the same youth, recorded only in St. Mark’s Gospel, who fled naked from Gethsemane when Christ was betrayed, so frightened he left his robe behind when they seized him. In St. Peter’s account of the “And Peter” spoken to the women, St. Mark surely would have heard an “And Mark” as well. And, this Easter, I pray you hear an “And you.”

Have you flunked any of your tests of faith? Have you turned your back on your Master? Have you wavered under pressure, left filled with regret and devoid of hope? “And Peter.” “And you.” The gospel is always personal, applied to specific individuals in specific situations. Your Savior has risen to restore you. He has returned to seek you out and to proclaim good news to you. Though you’ve faltered, He’s remained steadfast in love. He still has use for you. He will not let go of you. “And Peter.” “And you.”

The apostles hadn’t exactly been stalwarts of faith in the past few days. In fact, they remained unimpressively unimpressive up to the point Jesus appeared to them. The women muster up the courage and head out to anoint their dead Rabbi as the big bad fishermen cower and hide. The women brave the prospect of a huge rock and ornery Roman soldiers. It’s a good thing Jesus wasn’t still in His grave or He surely would have been rolling over in it. But still, Christ is sure to have this angel tell the women to “go and tell His disciples and Peter.” Christ does not hold a grudge. In fact, He died to let grudges go. And He sought out those apostles again and sent them out in His name as His spokesmen, as His brothers.

The resurrection is about new life, especially eternal life, but the resurrection is about new life here and now as well. Buried with Christ in Baptism, we now rise to new life in Him who died to give it to us. Where before there was only us involved in decisions and only our own self-interest to motivate us, now there is a new Man and an eternal gratitude.

“And Peter.” Today is the first day of the week, a day for feasting. Death has been swallowed up. Our long awaited salvation has arrived. The Savior wipes away our tears. On the seventh day God rested. On this first day of a new week, the eighth day, God begins creation anew, raising up again what had fallen into sin, beginning our renewal in His image. Death must now give way to life, sin to grace, fear to comfort, sadness to joy, doubt to conviction, despair to hope, punishment to reward, apologies to forgiveness, and confusion to peace.

“And Peter.” “And you.” This is your new day. By Christ’s resurrection, it is the first day of eternal life. Bury your sin in His empty tomb, because there is plenty of room. He isn’t using it anymore. Have you come to the tomb early? Rejoice! Have you come late? Rejoice! Have you come to remember the dead? Rejoice! Have you come seeking the living? Rejoice! Have you come to escape your sin? Rejoice! Have you come to find your forgiveness? Rejoice! Have you come in faith? Rejoice! Have you come looking for something to believe? Rejoice! No matter how you have come, rejoice, for your Jesus lives! He lives and we receive not dead Body andv Blood, but living! He lives, and He lives for you! And you! Beautiful words, aren’t they: “And Peter”? Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY 2006

Hebrews 1:1-4

What Child is this?

What I’m going to say may shock, maybe even scandalize you: There is such a thing as an ugly baby. Trust me, I’ve seen one. Whose baby was it? I’ll tell you; It was.... no, I am just kidding, none of you have had ugly babies; of course, I am talking about other people who go to other churches. But there are ugly babies. Fortunately, it is not just a baby’s appearance that makes it beautiful in a family’s eyes. It is also who that baby is, where it came from, and how it is related to them. Today, we set the most beautiful baby in the entire world before our eyes. I do not know that His appearance was particularly beautiful, in fact, Isaiah says there was nothing too attractive about His appearance, but I do know that who He is, where He came from, and how He is related to us makes Him the most beautiful baby of all.

This Baby is “*the radiance of the glory of God.*” What does that mean? Let me answer a question with a question. How many of you have seen the sun? Most of you, no doubt, honestly think you have seen the sun, but I have bad news: you have seen the light of the sun, but you have not seen the sun, unless you have been to outer

space. While mom may have told you to get your head out of the clouds a few times and a friend may have called you a space cadet, so far as I know, no one here has been to space. You have seen the light of the sun, but not the sun, just as you have seen the effects of the wind, and not the wind itself. In fact, if you did look at the sun itself with the naked eye, what would happen?

I remember in high school that there was some sort of big solar event that happened so that we got to go outside and look at the sun. What was the solar event? I don't know. But I remember we got out of school for it. Isn't that just like high school? So, we went out to look at the sun, but we had to use these high tech devices to do so. We took a piece of paper and poked a hole in it. What can I say; the school budget was tight that year. Why did we need our fancy paper devices? So we didn't burn our eyes.

So also, if we looked directly at God in all His glory without the proper preparation, we would go blind and be ruined. God told Moses as much. But in Christ, we have God before our eyes and He wants us to look to Him. He is the radiance of the glory of God, but in His mercy, He veiled that glory to an extent that we could look at Him with the naked eye. Through Christ's incarnation, we can look at God, and we don't need a fancy paper-with-a-hole-in-it poor man's scientist tool. Christ is God and Man for the expressed purpose that we might see and know God. What a beautiful baby!

Now I used a big word a few sentences ago that some may not know. The word is "incarnation." What is Christ's incarnation? Let's take the word apart. What is the first word you see? "In" would be the correct answer, which is why I am sure you were all thinking it. Christ came into something. Into what? Well, what is a carnivore? Carne is Latin for flesh. A carnivore eats flesh. Christ's incarnation is the event by which Christ, the eternal Son of God, also became the Son of Man. Our salvation hinges on this fact.

As true man, Christ can say that the Father is greater than He is. As true God, Christ can say that He and the Father are One. As true man, Christ can say that He does not know the day or hour of His coming. As true God, Christ can not correct St. Peter when the apostle says Christ knows all things. As true man, Christ can be born of a Virgin. As true God, Christ can also be eternally begotten. As true man, Christ can be the heir of all things. As true God, everything can already be Christ's. As true man, Christ can die. As true God, Christ's death can pay for the sins of the world. I could go on, trust me, I could go on, but I think you get the point. This little human Child before our eyes today is also the eternal God.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us more. He is "*the exact image of God's substance.*" Most of us know what an image is. It is something that looks like what it represents. If we go to a sculptor to get our image fashioned, the sculptor takes a hunk of wood or concrete and gets to work and, afterward, if the artist is worth his chisel, we have a hunk of wood or concrete that looks like us. Yet, our image is still a hunk of wood or concrete, isn't it? You can't talk to it—well, you can't have a conversation with it. It is an image of you, but not the same substance.

Sometimes people tell me that my boys are "a spitting image" of me. Now I don't know if this is because of their rugged good looks, their endearing personality, or their razor-sharp wit, but, needless to say, they mean that the kid looks like me, whether or not that is a compliment. But even my sons, who may be my "spitting image," are not of the same substance as me. They are of a similar substance, but not the same. They have some of Mom's genes, and thank God for that, because otherwise they'd have no German in them, and then they wouldn't be so adorably stubborn.

Christ is "*the exact image of God's substance.*" He is God's face. He is God through and through. He is an accurate representation of Him and He is Him. The Father and the Son, while two separate persons, are nonetheless One God.

When Tricia and I went to Germany, I bought my parents a beer stein with the twelve apostles on it. It was mine. I could have kept it for myself, but I chose to give it to my parents as a gift of love. Now, should I outlive Mom and Dad, it is my inheritance, or at least it better be, which I knew when I gave it to them. But imagine if I did something so amazing that it made my parents so proud that they decided to give me back the stein before they died—say, for instance, I became a pastor. That would be something, wouldn't it, to get back what was originally mine in the first place? So also, except not in a sinful way, Christ always knew that He would receive back all that He gave up to come down to save us according to His Father's will. Christ, as the Son of God, became an heir to all that is God's when He gave up His full enjoyment of those things as the Son of Man. When His saving work was done, He inherited all those things again, receiving them back from the very proud Father for whom He had given up the full use of them according to His human nature.

The writer to the Hebrews also says Christ “*upholds the universe by the word of His power.*” Christ, who died for us, is also He who upholds the world for our benefit. He does not force those who live in it to do His will, and He does not end it when they disobey, but He upholds it in the hope that we might come to know His goodness and grace and, having done so, more fully enjoy this world which He upholds. He is the upholder of the world, and think of how many times we would have destroyed it already if He weren’t.

But so what? What does who Christ is mean for us? What does it benefit me if this Child is God? It means and benefits me everything, because this Child is these things for me, for us. The writer to the Hebrews says, “*After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*” This Child was born to purify us of our sins. He purified our birth by His birth, our everyday life by His everyday life, our worship by His worship, our love by His love, and our death by His death. He paid for our sins by taking our place under God’s wrath, and He got the job done. After all, that is why He ascended to heaven. It was finished. Everything necessary for our salvation was completed.

So now what? The writer to the Hebrews writes, “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son.*” God spoke. God spoke through men and then ultimately “in His Son.” He spoke, past tense. We need not expect any further message. All we need to know about our God and our salvation was spoken in Christ. If you want to see the sun, look at its light. If you want to know God, look at His Son. So now what? God has spoken. Let us do what every polite person does when someone important speaks. Let us listen. Look to Jesus and hear all that God wants you to know, through the prophets, through the apostles, and in His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. He is the heir of all things, and, like a good brother, He wants to share His inheritance with us.

There are ugly babies, but this is not one of them. This is the most beautiful baby of all because of who He is, where He came from, and how He is related to us. He is God. He is from God the Father in heaven. He is our Substitute and Savior. Who has ever seen such a child! And if you think looking at Him is great, listen to Him—it is even better. Amen.

I Hear the Pastor Sends Email Devotions. What Are They Like?

Have a look at a few from a while back:

8/5/06—Psalm 125

*1*Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. *2*As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.

Jesus tells us that faith can move mountains. The psalmist tells us that faith makes one a mountain. Those who trust cannot be moved. Tell my infant son I am a wretch, an unfaithful pastor, a coward, a bad husband, and a lout, but it doesn't matter. When I throw him in the air later today, he will laugh and expect me to catch him. I am Daddy. Daddy catches him. His faith is like a mountain. He trusts, and God bless him, even though what you would tell him would be true. It is hard to trust. The world tells us our Father is everything but good, but loving, but understanding and trustworthy. But what do we care? When the Father tosses us in the air, let us laugh all the same, for when has He not caught His saints? The LORD surrounds His people. Only that which He lets through for our own good can touch us, and, even then, He can toss it out again. Unlike me, He is not any of what the world says He is. He is what He says He is. He is what He has shown us He is in His only Begotten on the cross. He is love, promise, and a steady hand. Do not be moved, because your Father will not falter. Be like Mount Zion. No wind can topple it. No rain can drown it. No army can crush it. Trust, and know that the unmovable One will not let you be carried away.

3/22/07-Matthew 21:12-17

*12*And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. *13*He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

*14*And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. *15*But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, *16*and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

"'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise?'"

*17*And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

It is always a temptation to open the church for business. Markets and churches have for centuries, even millennia, been the center of healthy culture, and more than a few have come upon the idea of mixing them. And more than a few have carried that idea through. And it has never worked out. Buying and selling God's teachings, sacred acts, forgiveness, the very name of the Lord Himself always ends up in the red. The church always loses and the market always wins, because a free market removes boundaries, while the church must live within them. And so it can become hard in some churches to tell in which you are: a market or a church. Is the pastor preaching or hawking the gospel? Are the people singing Christ-centered hymns or catchy jingles? Is the customer always right, or is Scripture always right? Are people gathered to be convinced, or to be convicted and forgiven?

The children in our text came to the church, and the market didn't like it. The children came to sing Christ-centered hymns. The chief-priests didn't want them getting in the way of business. The children were immersed in the Word, and, thus, drawn to Jesus. The chief-priests didn't want to lose their monopoly on convenient interpretation. Thank God for the children, for the faith of nursing babies (yes, baby's lips bearing baby's faith to the Savior's ears).

"Hosanna!" That is the Church's cry. "Lord, save us!" Not, "Lord, sell us," but, "Lord, save us!" He is the Son of David, the long-promised Savior. He is the real deal. He is the priceless Lamb of God, and priceless things ought never be sold. They are adored. And, in Jesus Christ, they are given for free. Hand onto this priceless treasure and join the children in church to meet Jesus. And when we need milk, pencils, or blue jeans, we can head to the market.

Why Do You Do All that Weird Stuff in Worship?

It is normal for the Lutheran Liturgy, which is based on the Western Rite, that is, the ancient way Christians have worshipped in the West, to seem a bit odd, because it should be. The Church is unlike the world. It is those called out of the world, and so how the Church does things will be, or at least ought to be, a little different. Biblically and historically, Christians have held that the primary reason to gather on Sundays is to be forgiven and fed with the good Gifts of God, that is, His Word and Sacraments. We are not here to be entertained. The world can do that better than the Church.

We are here to be washed clean and made new. We are here to meet Jesus. What follows is a simple explanation of why we worship the way we do and what some of the symbols you may see mean.

The Why in Our Worship: Ordinary Words, Proper Meanings, Extraordinary Grace

As a service to our members and our visitors, we have prepared these brief explanations of the worship practices of our Lutheran Church and of the Christian Church as a whole. We hope to provide a rationale for why we do what we do when we do it. We hope to show that much of the content of the liturgy is not only Scriptural, but Scripture itself. We hope that these explanations answer basic questions about what you see and hear as we gather around the Word and Sacrament here at Christ Lutheran Church. We hope as well that you will feel free to come to us with further questions that you may have. For a picture of the worship of the early church, see Acts 2:42-47.

The Pastor's Vestments

Vestments hide the man and emphasize his words and actions in the stead of, by the authority of, and in keeping with his call from Christ. When the pastor baptizes, Christ baptizes. When the pastor distributes the Holy Supper, Christ distributes the Holy Supper. When the pastor preaches, Christ preaches. When the pastor absolves someone's sins, Christ absolves. Christ says to His disciples, "*He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.*" (Luke 10:16).

Our pastor wears an alb and stole. The alb was the common garb of professionals in the Roman Empire at the time of the early church. By the fifth century it had become a specifically Christian vestment. The alb is most commonly white, symbolizing the righteousness of Christ, which the pastor administers in Word and Sacrament and by which alone he, a sinner himself, is able to carry out the daunting and humbling task of the ministry of the Word.

Roman senators wore the stole as a symbol of their office. With time, the stole became a symbol of the pastoral office, and has since been worn by those ordained into that office. While any elder or deacon serving within the divine service may vest in the alb, only the pastor wears the stole, to symbol his responsibility as the overseer in God's service. The stole has also been understood historically as a symbol of the yoke of Christ, to whom the pastor is accountable for his every word and action, and from whom he has received the call to bring the weary and heavy laden into Christ's rest.

The Invocation

(In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit)

As Christian men, women, and children, everything we do is to be done in the name of the only true God. His name was first placed upon us in our Baptism and it is in His name that we serve as ambassadors to those around us. It is a great comfort and encouragement, then, when we begin our service with a reminder of the saving waters of our Baptism and invoke the power of our loving God's name. We are His and He is ours. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? Amen, yes it shall be so. See Matthew 28:19:20; Romans 6.

Confession and Absolution

Reminded of our Baptism and of God's love in the invocation, we now approach Him and confess to Him who and what we are. We are honest, knowing God already knows our sins, but also knowing that it is good and right for us to openly admit them, confident of His forgiveness and mercy. After we tell God who and what we are in and of ourselves, God then tells us who and what we are in His Son, Jesus Christ. God tells us this through the mouth of His called servant, the pastor. We may enter church as a doubting, sin-stained, and scared flock, but we leave reassured, confident, and motivated by God's grace. See 1 John 1:8-10; James 5:16; Psalms 32 & 51; Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; John 20:21-23.

The Sign of the Cross

One of the oldest of Christian symbols, dating back to the second century by some estimates, the sign of the cross is a powerful reminder of our Lord Jesus' love. It was on a cross He died for our sins. It was on a cross that He first gave His body and blood, which we receive in Holy Communion. It was by Christ's cross that God's anger was turned to compassion. This cross was placed upon our head and our hearts at our Baptism.

The sign of the cross is also a confession of the Holy Trinity. All that is true about the invocation is true of this sign as well. We remember our Baptism, we call upon God's power to save and comfort, and we remember that we are His and He is ours. The connection of the pastor's absolution with the sign of the cross is especially appropriate since repentance and forgiveness is really a daily reliving of our Baptism where we first died to sin and rose to life. See Galatians 6:14; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:14, 15.

Lord Have Mercy

The *Kyrie*, or *Lord, Have Mercy*, is the first prayer of our service. In the Common Service it is included in the confession of sins. In the Service of Word and Sacrament it follows the absolution (where pastor forgives us in Christ's place). This prayer is the cry of faith raised to heaven in the confident hope that the Lord is our help in every trial, trouble, and temptation. Really, when you think about it, the whole Christian life is one big *Kyrie*, as we beg God in His grace to look not upon our sin but upon sacrifice of His Son and to grant us what is best for us at that time and place. As Luther said on his death bed, "We are all beggars." Thank God for His generous hands and abundant mercy. See Matthew 15:22; Luke 17:13; Luke 18:13.

Glory to God in the Highest

Renewed and forgiven, reassured and empowered, we now burst into a song of praise to our God. One of the oldest songs of the Church—first recorded use is in the 6th century—*Gloria in Excelsis* is a powerful confession of who God is and what He has done. When we consider these things, how can we not praise him? While the tune may change, the text will never lose its power. What a joy to sing this song with the angels! See Luke 2:14; John 2:29.

Prayer of the Day

The Prayer of the Day is what the Church calls a Proper, that is, a part of the liturgy that varies from week to week, reflecting each Sunday's theme, which is set by the Holy Gospel. As a congregation, we pray that the message of the week may take root in our hearts, that we may live what we hear, and that we may grow in our faith, especially in our faith in and understanding of the specific truth of the Gospel proclaimed that week. This prayer, like all Christian prayer, is offered to the Father through the merits of His crucified and risen Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. See John 14:6; John 16:23.

The Word

Now we dig into the Word of God together as God's flock. The readings for each Sunday are based on a pericope, which is an organization of readings for the church year. Each Sunday, we focus on a different aspect of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, or of His rule in the Church's early history. There are customarily three readings, the first from the Old Testament or the Book of Acts, the second from the Epistles or the Revelation of St. John, and the third from one of the four Gospels.

The Psalm of the Day

The Psalms have always been important to the Church, serving as its main prayer book throughout history. In the Psalms we pray with Christ who also prayed them diligently and fervently. We also pray to Christ, who fulfilled many of the Psalms which were written to point to His coming. The Psalm of the Day is chosen to fit with the theme of the day.

The Verse of the Day

This verse is chosen to express the theme for the day. This verse can be read, chanted by the pastor or a cantor, or sung by the choir. This verse provides a rich opportunity for our meditation throughout the entire week.

The Holy Gospel

It is the Gospel because it is the Good News of Jesus Christ; it is Holy because it is the Word of Christ Himself. The Holy Gospel sets the tone and determines the theme for the day; the Proper (the parts that change from week to week) look toward the Gospel and reflect the theme. We rise for the Holy Gospel as a special honor because the Gospels are a faithful record of what Christ Himself said and did. While all of Scripture is Christ's Word—a revelation about Him—the Gospels are a more intimate and personal presentation of the life and teaching of our Lord. Thus, after hearing of His love and faithfulness in this reading, we appropriately reply, "Praise be to you, O Christ!"

The Creed

As Christians we cannot help but confess what we believe and teach. The creeds are a faithful and beautiful explanation of just that. We can joyfully and boldly declare with Christians from the past, present, and future that we believe in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The creeds were developed in the past to defend against false teaching and to educate those interested in learning the faith. The creeds still serve both purposes today. We traditionally use the Nicene Creed when we celebrate Holy Communion and the Apostle's Creed when we do not. The Apostle's Creed has also historically been the baptismal creed, which served as the basis for catechetical instruction and which the [adult] catechumen would recite at his or her baptism.

Hymn of the Day

The Hymn of the Day is the chief hymn of the worship service. It is closely tied to the Holy Gospel for the Sunday and fits well with the general theme. Often this is a hymn that is more familiar to the congregation. Many churches have a Hymn of the Day selected or suggested for each Sunday of the Church year.

Sermon

The sermon is the eyes of the liturgy. Week after week the liturgy faithfully declares law and gospel to us through its Ordinaries (the parts that stay the same) and its Proper (the parts that vary from week to week), but it cannot do what the sermon can. The sermon takes the truth of the day and applies it specifically and appropriately to the people in the pews. It takes the universal, unchanging, life-changing truths of Word and Sacrament—of the liturgy itself—and drives it home for the people. A good sermon, like the liturgical traditions we have inherited, will contain both law and gospel, properly distinguished and appropriately applied. A good sermon may not always be what we want to hear, but what we need to hear; not what the current world thought has to say, but what God has said. Feel free to talk to pastor about his sermons and how he has done bringing God's truth home to you.

Prayer of the Church and Lord's Prayer

The Prayer of the Church and the Lord's Prayer serve as the bridge between the Service of the Word and the Service of Holy Communion in our worship service. Prayer is an integral part of the Christian life and a

proper preparation for and response to both the message of the Scriptures and the blessings of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The Prayer of the Church is usually a general prayer covering various aspects of our life and the needs of our society. The Lord's Prayer is the prayer Jesus Himself has taught us; it is the ultimate model for all Christian prayer. See 6:5-14; Luke 11:2-4; 1 Timothy 2:1-6.

The Preface to the Sacrament

The Preface dialogue is one of the most ancient and universal elements of Christian worship. As we prepare to receive our Lord's true body and blood, we lift up our hearts to God and thank Him for this gracious meal. The proper prefaces (the part after the dialogue that pastor speaks) vary according to the season of the Church year, as your hymnal notes. These seasonal phrases focus our minds on an appropriate aspect of the life of our Lord, who comes to us in this wonderful meal. Those not receiving Holy Communion are invited to meditate on the words they hear, the hymns they sing, and the promise that they too receive the same forgiveness of sins as the communicants through their faith in Jesus Christ. If you are a visitor and interested in communing in the future, please speak to the pastor about any necessary preparation and instruction before approaching the altar.

Holy, Holy, Holy (Sanctus and Benedictus)

Taken from Isaiah chapter 6, the Sanctus is the song of the angels in the presence of the exalted Lord. It is a song we do well to learn now since we will have the joy of joining their chorus in everlasting life. The *Benedictus* ("Blessed is He who comes") is verse 26 from Psalm 118. The crowds greeted Jesus with this Psalm on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:38). We too appropriately greet him with the same song as He comes to us with that same body and blood with which He entered Jerusalem to die in our place. It is because our exalted Lord is risen and victorious that we can now receive His living body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Knowing what blessings shall soon grace our lips, how can those same lips not shout, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of heavenly hosts; heaven and earth are full of your glory" and "Hosanna," Hebrew for "Lord, save us"?

The Words of Institution

Without the Words of Institution, there is no Lord's Supper. It is Christ's Word, joined with bread and wine, which gives this Sacrament its power and attaches his promise to the elements. Christ, on the night he was betrayed, instituted this Sacrament as yet another way of saying "I love you" and "You are forgiven" to His flock on earth. His words give us the reassurance that what we receive is what He says it is: His very body and blood, given for us, that we may receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. These words, spoken clearly by the pastor, consecrate the bread and wine for use in the sacrament, remind us all of what we receive, and tell us all why we are receiving them ("given for you" and "poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins" "in remembrance of Me"). See Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

O Christ, Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)

The first official use of the Agnus Dei, as far as we know, dates back to the early 8th century. It was in common use, however, for centuries earlier. It was used as the host was broken into enough small pieces for all the communicants. It was sung for as long as necessary. It is taken from the words of St. John the Baptist in John 1:29. In the Agnus Dei, we adore the risen Christ who is coming to us with His saving body and blood.

The Words of Distribution

If you listen carefully during the distribution of Holy Communion, you will hear the pastor speaking words to the members receiving Christ's body and blood. These words, although they vary, usually reinforce the fact that what they are receiving is Christ's true body and blood. These words have become important throughout the years as some have denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. After Communion, the pastor dismisses the communicants (those receiving communion) with a blessing.

The Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis)

Simeon first sang this song after seeing the baby Jesus in the Temple. In Christ, Simeon recognized and praised the blessed fulfillment of God's saving promise, first made in the Garden of Eden. The song appears in Luke 2:29-32. We too can sing this marvelous song of praise and thanks with Simeon for we also have seen the Lord's salvation in Word and Sacrament and received tangible proof that God keeps His promises: Christ's life-giving body and blood.

The Benediction

Luther introduced the Aaronic blessing into our worship service. Before that various blessings may have been used and many times there were no blessings at all. This blessing is taken from Numbers 6:22-27. This was the blessing with which the LORD told Moses to have Aaron bless the Israelites. The Christian Church is the new Israel, the people of God, and it is only fitting that they are blessed in this way as well. As believing children of the heavenly Father, we leave the service confident of God's mercy, grace, love, and blessing.

Symbolism in the Church

Colors

White – symbolizes light, joy, purity, innocence, glory, perfection, the godhead, the Creator, eternity; color of the robe of the glorified Christ and the angels/saints in heaven

Violet/Purple – symbolizes mourning and penitence, humility, suffering, sympathy, fasting; also symbolic of royalty

Red – symbolizes divine zeal, fire, fervor; symbolic of the blood of the martyrs of the church, the truth of Christian teaching as reflected by the blood of Christ, the work and ministry of the church, and also testing, since fire, as with metals, both purifies and consumes, showing what is genuine and what is counterfeit.

Green – symbolizes nature, life and nourishment/growth

Black – symbolizes grief and sorrow; as the absence of color, black also symbolizes death

Blue – symbol of the sky and of hope

Gold – symbolizes royalty, riches, victory

Seasons of the Church Year

Advent:

The season of Advent (a Latin word meaning a “coming” or “arrival”) starts each church year by leading us to consider the three comings of Christ:

1. *His first coming as the Babe of Bethlehem*
2. His second coming on Judgment Day as the returning King
3. His continual coming in Word and Sacrament

Signs, Phrases, and customs associated with Advent:

“Stir Up”: These words begin the Prayer of the Day for each Sunday in Advent.

“Prepare the Way”: This is the message of the Old Testament Prophets who called God's people to repentance and of John the Baptizer who announced Jesus' arrival.

Advent Colors: The blue of our paraments symbolizes the hope of God’s people who trust in their loving, unfailing Savior and King.

Advent Wreaths: The circle of candles represents hope in the Light of the World (Jesus), whom the powers of darkness cannot overcome. Lighting an additional candle each week of Advent reminds us of this truth.

Emmanuel (or Immanuel): is Hebrew for “God with us.” Isaiah the prophet promised that the Lord would come to be with his people (Isaiah 7:14).

Messiah: is the Hebrew word meaning “anointed one,” that is the one chosen to redeem sinners. The Greek translation of this word is “Christ.”

Christmas:

Christmas (a shortened form of the old English term “Christ’s Mass,” the festival worship service for Christ’s birth) and the twelve days that follow are a time which the church celebrates the Savior’s birth—the coming of the Light of the World as an infant. It is our opportunity to celebrate God’s greatest gift to us and the hope that he brings in a world troubled by spiritual darkness.

Signs, Phrases, and customs associated with Christmas:

Luke 2: In Luke chapters one and two the story of Jesus’ birth is told in great detail. Many families hold have the custom of reading this chapter each Christmas.

Angels: appear as messengers of God and in large numbers over the fields of Bethlehem to praise God and announce the Savior’s birth to shepherds.

The Stable: traditionally held to be the humble place for Jesus’ birth. Recreating the nativity scene has been a tradition among Christians since the days of Francis of Assisi.

Candles/Colors: candles of white, the liturgical color for Christmas, signify the Light of the World, our Lord Jesus, who brings the enlightening presence of God among us.

Christmas trees/Wreaths of evergreen: symbols of the life eternal which Christ brings us. Tree lights and ornaments remind us of the gifts brought to the baby Jesus by the magi.

Nativity scenes: help to focus on the spiritual celebration of Christmas. During the 12 days of Christmas, one may introduce the figures of the magi, moving closer to the Holy Child day by day until they arrive on January 6th, Epiphany.

Epiphany:

Epiphany (a Greek word meaning “appearing” or “revealing”—the revealing of God in his Son to the nations of the world) celebrates Christ’s incarnation (God became a man) for all people of the world, whether Jew or Gentile. Epiphany celebrates the discovery that a Savior *has* come, sent by God, to bring righteousness into our world and to reveal the unimaginable depth of God’s love. The magi discovered that revelation in a baby lying in a manger. John heard that revelation in God’s voice at Jesus’ baptism. And a merry wedding party at Cana experienced that revelation in a special gift of wine.

Signs, Phrases, and customs associated with Epiphany:

Luke 2: Simeon’s words (vs.29-32) reveal the true identity and mission of the baby Jesus.

Magi: visit the baby, representing all the nationalities of the world who hear of God’s Son and come to worship him.

The Star: was the celestial sign of a royal birth that drew the magi or astrologers to seek the newborn King.

Light: is an ancient Epiphany symbol. To be “in the light” was to be alive and well in a right relation with God. The New Testament calls Christ the Light of the World.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh: the gifts of the magi point to royalty.

Water and wine: are Epiphany symbols because early Gospel lessons for the day speak of the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God at his *baptism* or the beginning of his public ministry at the *wedding of Cana*, where he turned water into wine.

Lent:

Lent (an Anglo-Saxon word meaning “spring.”) is a long-standing tradition in the Christian Church. Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, traditionally the season of preparation for adult catechumens being instructed in the Christian faith before their Baptism. With time, the emphasis on repentance and contrition, a clear Baptismal theme, became the predominant focus of the season. By 330 AD, what was originally a two-week fast prior to Easter was eventually expanded to forty days. At the time of the Reformation, meditation on the passion of our Lord assumed an even greater prominence in this season, especially in reaction to the work righteous and ascetic excesses that had developed in the Middle Ages. While Lutherans do often still observe Lenten fasts of sorts, including giving something up for the season at times, what we do in Lent has been emphasized much less than what Christ did for us in His passion. By contemplating our Lord’s love for us, we are rejuvenated in our love for Him. Perhaps more than any other season of the Church Year, Lent is a time for spiritual renewal and a return to our Baptism, where we were buried with Christ in death to sin, to be raised to new life in Him by grace. The season of forty days from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday does not include the Sundays in that time. Hence, they are Sundays in Lent, “little Easters.” For this reason the custom of midweek services developed for special devotion to the message of this important season of the Church Year. **The liturgical color** for Ash Wednesday is black or purple. Black is the color of grief and sorrow. Since it is the absence of color, it is also the color of death. Purple symbolizes mourning and penitence, humility, suffering, sympathy, fasting. The custom of imposing ashes observed by many Lutheran churches, like the color black, reminds congregants of their mortality and urges repentance during our quickly fading time of grace.

Signs, Phrases, and customs associated with Lent:

Psalm 51: a Psalm of repentance, just as Lent is a time for repentance.

The omission of “Alleluia”: begins with the Sunday before Ash Wednesday and continues through Easter morning. This longstanding custom dates back to the fifth century. Bidding “alleluia” farewell dates back at least to the eleventh century. We bid “alleluia” farewell in recognition of the penitential character of Lent, when we focus on a reinvigorated reliving of our Baptism in daily repentance and contrition, being buried with Christ to be raised with Him again on Easter.

Mark of Ashes on the foreheads of many Christians on Ash Wednesday. The Jews used ashes as an outward sign of repentance, a practice continued by early Christians, but discontinued by many of the reformers. So, while ashes today may remind us of dust and mortality, it is in keeping with Lent to see ashes as signs for our repentance, turning away from sin and being faithful to the Gospel.

Colors violet and black in churches (violet—for repentance—during most of Lent and black—for mourning—on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).

“Giving up something for Lent” is a common practice in the Christian church. Our meager “sacrifice” serves to remind us of the great sacrifice our Savior made when he suffered and died in our place. It also reminds us in penitence to give up our sinful, self-serving ways.

Easter:

Easter (borrowed from the name of a pagan spring festival and is related to the fact that the sun rises in the *east*) is the earliest and most prominent Christian festival, celebrating Jesus’ resurrection from the grave in triumph over sin and death. On Easter, as in Lent, we reflect upon our baptism, for baptism joins all of God’s people with the death and resurrection of our Lord. The Easter Season is a time to rediscover the certainty of our salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Though Easter is only one season of the church year, we celebrate the joy that is ours through Easter every Sunday of the church Year, for every Sunday is a “little Easter.”

Signs, Phrases, and customs associated with Easter:

“Jesus Christ is risen today...”: This is a quote from the well-known Easter hymn, a Latin carol from the 14th century which was set in English by Charles Wesley in the 18th century.

Alleluia: a Hebrew word which means, “praise the Lord” that appears in the New Testament as part of the grand victory celebrations in the Book of Revelation (chapter 19).

“He is risen!” and the reply, **He is risen, indeed!”** are the ancient and always new shouts of Christian people at Easter.

White is the color for Easter’s joyous celebration, although gold is sometimes the color for Easter Day and the following week.

Butterfly: The butterfly emerging from its tomb-like cocoon symbolizes Christ emerging from his empty tomb.

Easter lily: this flower, shaped like the bell of a trumpet announcing victory, grows from a seemingly dead bulb which is buried in order for it to grow and bloom. Its bloom is shaped like a trumpet.

Pentecost:

The Day of Pentecost closes the Easter season and opens the door to the liturgical **Season of Pentecost**, also called Ordinary Time in some church bodies, dozens of weeks that carry us from Pentecost Sunday back to the First Sunday in Advent. The Day of Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian Church. On this day the ascended Jesus poured the Holy Spirit on his disciples, fulfilling his promise to send another Counselor who would teach them (John 14:26, 16:7). With a lively wind like the creative breath of God in Genesis 1, the Spirit energized the disciples, showing them the meaning of the Old Testament and how Jesus’ life and death fulfilled it. And the Spirit baptized them with power to bring this Truth to the people of the world. In early centuries, Pentecost was another opportunity for those who could not be baptized on Easter. The first half of the Church year from Advent through Pentecost reviews the life of Christ and his saving work for us. The second half stresses the life of the church. Following Pentecost, the Scripture readings tend to focus on Jesus’ teachings and on the Spirit’s work among us. Therefore, Christian preachers often use this season to apply the lessons of the first half of the Church Year to our Christian life

Signs, Phrases, and customs associated with Pentecost:

Pentecost, meaning the 50th day (after Easter), was taken over for Christian use from the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Weeks.

“Tongues” of Fire hovered over the disciples on Pentecost as a sign of the Lord’s presence and power. John the Baptizer talked about a baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire which Jesus would bring. In the Middle Ages, roses were dropped from the rafters to simulate the tongues of fire. Trumpets were sounded to recall the sound of the mighty rushing wind.

A **dove** is the form in which the Spirit of the Lord was seen at Jesus’ baptism, and for centuries artists have shown the Holy Spirit in that form. In the Middle Ages a live dove was set free inside the church to fly off or a carved one was let down by a rope.

Holy Spirit is the gift of the Lord—indeed, the Lord himself. The Spirit is given not just to the disciples but also to “you and your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39).

Baptism and acceptance of new members or confirmands is sometimes part of Pentecost Sunday. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is received through the waters of baptism.

Red, is the liturgical color for Pentecost Day, since it is the color of fire and fervor.

Green is the liturgical color for the Season of Pentecost. It signifies life and nourishment; the basic color of nature.

“A Season for Growing” describes this season, since the Gospel readings tend to include Jesus’ teachings for our spiritual growth.

The Gifts of the Spirit have been given to the Christian community for the common good (1 Corinthians 12).

The Fruits of the Spirit demonstrate that the Spirit lives within us. Paul says they are *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23).

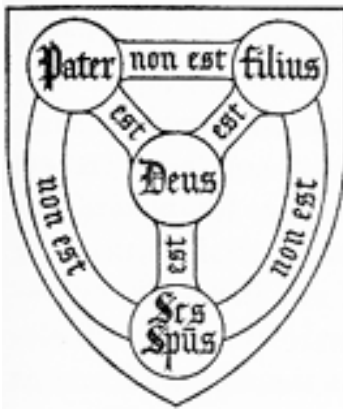
What Are Inquirers' Classes Like?

The classes vary depending on the time you are available, your background, and your schedule, but here is a sample lesson to give you an idea what an average class looks like. There is no homework, and the atmosphere is very informal and open to breaks from the lesson plan for questions and answers on whatever may come to mind.

II. The Invocation

+In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit+

"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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19,20).



Bible Story – Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.



The writer to the Hebrews (1:1-3) says that everything was created through the Son.

How do we see Father, Son, and Holy Spirit active in creation?

Bible Story – Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



Jesus had to receive a sinner's Baptism as He took the place of sinners. As He began His public ministry at His Baptism, we see the same Father, Son, and Holy Spirit active in creation active in our redemption.

What is the significance of the activity of each person of the Trinity in these events?

Trinity

The word "trinity" is not in the Bible. It is a Latin word (the New Testament was written in Greek) that means "three in one." While the word "trinity" is not in the Bible, the teaching is. There is one God in three persons. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. But the Father is not the Son or Spirit. The Son is not the Father or the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father or the Son. The Church came up with the word "trinity" to describe this unexplainable mystery as best it could for our human minds.

What if that doesn't make sense to me?

There is a story told of St. Augustine, that he was walking along the ocean, contemplating the Trinity, when he saw a boy digging a hole in the sand and running back and forth between the hole and the ocean with a bucket. St. Augustine asked him what he was doing. The boy said he was going to put the ocean in his hole. St. Augustine drew the connection between the boy's actions and his own.

Siegbert Becker once wrote, "It is not Christianity that needs to be made reasonable. It is reason that needs to be made Christian."

What do we do when the Faith presents something that reason cannot understand?

What do you think Siegbert Becker meant?

Where does the Bible say any of this?

Deuteronomy 6:4 (the earliest Old Testament creed)—Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Numbers 6:24-26 (the Old Testament Aaronic Benediction, or Blessing)— The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (the Apostolic Blessing)—May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

There are many other passages that teach the truth of the Holy Trinity. More important than trying to wrap our head around the incomprehensible mystery of how the Trinity is possible, it is better to meditate upon the amazing fact that all three persons of the Trinity have worked together in love to create us, redeem us, and preserve us. "Invocation" is a big word we don't use every day, but it is an important word. The invocation reminds us and declares to our visitors into whose presence we have come and in whose name we gather. We are the sons and daughters of the only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has created, redeemed, and preserved us. The invocation is also a reminder of Holy Baptism, when the name of God was placed upon us, together with water, to wash away our sins and set us apart as members of the one holy, Christian, and apostolic Church. We don't "begin" in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We already began in that name in Baptism. We now exist, live, breath, gather, and endure in that name. It is who we are. It is why we are here.

Well, twenty-one pages of information ought to be enough for now 😊. If you have any questions, or would like more information about our parish, the Bible, or the Lutheran Faith, please let us know.

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The church website is also loaded with information: www.christsaginaw.com.