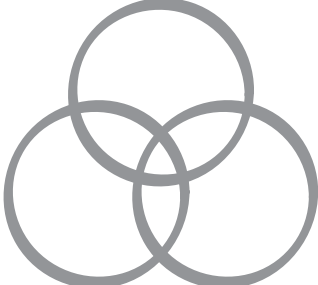


The Apostles' Creed



FOUNDATIONS IN FAITH



The
Apostles'
Creed

FOUNDATIONS IN FAITH



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INTRODUCTION

The Foundations in Faith series is an introduction to the truths of God's Word as presented in Luther's Small Catechism.

Why Study the Catechism?

In the Early Christian Church, God's people confessed their faith and witnessed to the world in brief creeds. "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). These passages from the New Testament, along with others, gave believers short, concise statements of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. In time, the Church wrote and adopted new creeds to explain more fully the basics of the Christian faith.

The Church also wrote and adopted catechisms as summaries of the major doctrines of Holy Scripture. At first, catechisms were tools for teachers. With the invention of the printing press, catechisms were printed for pastors, teachers of the faith, and parents to use within the congregation and at home.

Luther's Small Catechism, published in 1529, covers the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine. In Luther's words, the catechism "is a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scripture" (Large Catechism, Preface). It is a summary and guide for believers as they learn and reflect on the truths of God's Word.

The Foundations in Faith series explores Luther's Small Catechism in four parts: The Ten Commandments, The Apostles' Creed, The Lord's Prayer, and The Sacraments. The study guides may be used in any order (although the sequence in the catechism is preferred) and are designed as an *introduction* or *refresher* course for congregational or personal use. Ideally, participants will learn how the catechism presents God's Word in a clear, understandable way, in order to bring God's people to faith in Christ and to a daily life shaped and empowered by Word and Sacrament.

May God bless your study of His Word in the catechism!

1

THE FIRST ARTICLE: GOD OUR MAKER

Pray Together

O God, almighty and all-merciful,
once chaos gave way before Your command,
and Your creation stood forth
structured, wonderful.
Yet You have spoken a Word more powerful,
Your Word of love, Your Son,
and You have made us Your children through Him.
Let it work in us,
that Word implanted in our midst,
Your creative Word,
and let us bring forth fruit for You.
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Discover

Through faith, we know God as Creator of the universe, our Maker, and our Preserver. In love and mercy, our Father provides for us as we trust and follow Christ.

Introduction

Henry Ward Beecher, pastor and writer in Civil War New York City, displayed a beautiful globe in his study. Robert Ingersoll, the famous agnostic, praised the globe with its various constellations and stars of the heavens. “Who made it?” Ingersoll asked his host.

Beecher paused for a moment and then (with tongue in cheek) replied: “No one made it; it just happened!”

- Describe, in your own words, the grandeur of the universe.

- How does the grandeur of the universe reveal the work of the Creator?

The Catechism

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther writes: “What do you mean by these words, ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth’? Answer: ‘This is what I mean and believe, that I am God’s creature.’” [LC II 13]

1. Describe, as completely as possible, what is included in “Maker of heaven and earth.”

2. How does Luther’s explanation acknowledge that we are, from head to toe, God’s creation?

3. What other individual and unique features has God given you?

God is our Maker. The Father Almighty created all things out of nothing by the power of His Word. The psalmist writes, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. . . . For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:6, 9).

God also created angels—spirit beings who are His messengers and servants. Angels were created holy and good, but some rebelled. Good angels are numerous and powerful; they serve God and help human beings. Evil angels are also many and powerful; they hate God and seek to destroy God’s purposes and work.

Still more important than angels, though, is the creation of human beings.

God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and He created them with the ability to create others. Thereby, He has a part in creating each person. Adam and Eve were created in God's image: they knew God perfectly, they were righteous and holy, and they were content to live according to God's will.

But when they sinned, Adam and Eve lost the image of God. They lost the ability to know and please God. In His mercy, God promised a Savior. Jesus overcomes the curse of sin and through His death and resurrection has made us God's forgiven, renewed people. In Christ, God is restoring His image in His people, but only in heaven will we fully know and please God.

The Catechism

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? . . . He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

7. List ways that God "richly and daily" provides for your "body and life."

8. How does Luther in his explanation emphasize God's *constant* and *personal* care toward His people?

9. Which material blessings are you most grateful for today?

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” (Psalm 8:4).

Martin Schmidt writes in *The Best of Portals of Prayer*,

If we want to know what David felt as he asked the above question, all we have to do is look up at the sky some clear night. . . . So many twinkling stars, so far away in the deep vastness of space! How tiny and insignificant we feel: mere pinpricks in the seemingly endless universe! How can the great Creator of it all, busy with countless soaring galaxies and each galaxy’s numberless orbiting and rotating star systems, know about us here on earth? How can He have any time, any concern, for us, such seemingly small beings?

And yet, God does know us, each one of us—knows all about us! And God cares! As awe-inspiring and humbling as are the heavens, with sun and moon and stars, we are most amazed by God’s love for us. So great is that love that He sent His only Son in grand fulfillment of David’s Psalm 8—to leave heaven’s glories and to spend some time a little lower than the angels, as one of us on this tiny globe, to die for our sins and to rise again for our salvation [which we will discuss further in the Second Article]. (p. 314)

In Christ, God cares for us and provides us with His rich blessings: life now and life eternal.

God’s Word

Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And He went up on the mountain and sat down there. And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

Then Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” And the disciples said to Him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, He took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks He broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And after

sending away the crowds, He got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan. (Matthew 15:29–39)

10. What human needs did Jesus encounter as He traveled during His ministry?

11. How does Jesus show His compassion for the world's most *basic* needs?

12. How does Jesus' goodness in feeding the crowds remind you of His goodness in the Lord's Supper?

A Verse a Day

Sunday: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)

Monday: By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (Hebrews 11:3)

Tuesday: For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. (Ephesians 3:14–15)

Wednesday: And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:28)

Thursday: I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. (Psalm 139:14)

Friday: Bless the LORD, O you His angels, you mighty ones who do His word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all His hosts, His ministers, who do His will! (Psalm 103:20–21)

Saturday: Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24)

2

THE FIRST ARTICLE: GOD OUR DEFENDER AND SUSTAINER

Pray Together

O Lord, give us light
to see You steadily
and see You whole in all Your world;
give us wisdom to fear,
to obey,
to trust You around all corners,
down all streets,
in all shadows,
across all puddles,
in Your world,
ruled by Your almighty and all-giving hand,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Discover

Through faith, we know God as our Rock, our Fortress, and our Deliverer. In love and mercy, our Father defends, guards, and protects us as we serve Christ and one another.

Introduction

Two artists each produced a painting to depict the idea of peace. One painted a picture of a quiet lake beside a mountain. Not a breeze was stirring. Not a ripple disturbed the quiet waters. All was silent.

The second artist painted a roaring waterfall with a mighty oak hanging over it. On a limb bending over the turbulent waters, nearly in reach of the rising spray, was a tiny bird sitting unper- turbed on her nest. In the midst of the mighty roar, surrounded by danger, the bird was secure.

- Which picture best portrays your life today: the calm, quiet lake or the roaring, raging waterfall?

- Which picture, in your view, best portrays the idea of peace? Share your reasons.

The Catechism

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? . . . He defends me against all dan- ger and guards and protects me from all evil.

Everyone lives with danger. In many different places, through every age and experience, life has risks.

In his Large Catechism, Luther notes that “God the Father has not only given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but He daily preserves and defends us against all evil and misfortune. He directs all sorts of danger and disaster away from us. We confess that He does all this out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind Father. He cares for us so that no evil falls upon us.” [LC II 17]

1. What is the greatest danger you face in life? In which ways are you daily threatened by evil?

2. Describe how a loving and good parent defends, guards, and protects a beloved child.

3. In what ways does God defend, guard, and protect His people in their many needs?

God's Word

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. . . .

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." (Acts 12:1, 5–11)

4. What kinds of opposition did the early Christians face as they witnessed to Jesus?

5. Describe Peter's reaction to his release from prison.

6. How does God work His power and grace for His people today?

How does God defend us? This devotion from *Words of Promise* explains how:

God has three ways to keep us safe from all harm and danger in life. First, He moves many troubles and dangers away from us so that we don't even come into contact with them. Second, He turns evil into good. We can in all truth affirm that God uses everything for some good. Third, Christ promises to lift us out of this vale of tears into heaven. This assurance comes through faith in Jesus Christ, who died to take away our sin. He rose from the dead on the third day and ascended to heaven to prepare a place for us. Therefore we pray with trusting hearts, "Lord, thanks for everything!" (p. 162)

Whatever may come our way, we are "more than conquerors" through Christ.

The Catechism

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? . . . All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

God is good; we are unworthy of His rich grace. God is merciful; we have no merit to expect—or to ask for—His kindness and compassion. Yet God blesses! God gives, takes care, provides, defends, guards, and protects in His fatherly love. Think about these questions:

If God is almighty, what could I need that God could not give or do for me?

If God created heaven and earth and is Lord over everything, who, then, could deprive me of anything or do me harm?

If God is God, He can and wants to do what is best for me. Since He is my Father, He will do all this gladly.

7. Describe how perfect goodness and mercy come together in Jesus Christ.

8. How do you thank and praise God?

9. In what ways is it a blessing to serve and obey God?

God's Word

After He had finished all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to Him elders of the Jews, asking Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with Him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have You do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." And Jesus went with them. When He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to You. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turning to the crowd

that followed Him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. (Luke 7:1–10)

10. How does the centurion show his humility before Jesus? his faith in Jesus?

11. How does Jesus’ healing ministry reveal God’s *fatherly* and *divine* goodness and mercy?

12. How do you show your gratitude to Christ for His goodness and mercy in your life today?

A Verse a Day

Sunday: The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Psalm 145:15–16)

Monday: Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6–7)

Tuesday: My times are in Your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! (Psalm 31:15)

Wednesday: Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. (Matthew 10:29–30)

Thursday: As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him. (Psalm 103:13)

Friday: I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. (Genesis 32:10)

Saturday: Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever! (Psalm 118:1)

3

THE SECOND ARTICLE: JESUS OUR LORD

Pray Together

O God, the Savior of us all,
when Your Son walked among us,
He looked on and loved all people.
He took on Himself the sins of every age.
He died for us all,
and rose again for all of us,
that we might all,
each in our call,
live for Him and serve Him
all the days of our life. Amen.

Discover

Through faith, we know Christ as Lord, true God and true man. In love and mercy, Jesus has redeemed us with His sacrificial death on the cross.

Introduction

Years ago, an Oxford instructor asked a student to see him after the lecture. The young man wondered what he had done to attract such attention. As the student approached the podium, he asked. “You wanted to see me, sir?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Sanctuary,” the instructor replied. “I wanted to say . . . what a very beautiful name you have.”

- What names—family, friends, places—are beautiful to you?
- What associations do the following names evoke for you?
Washington, Gettysburg, Hollywood, Einstein

The Catechism

[I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord . . .

The Second Article focuses on *Jesus Christ*—who He is and what He has done for us.

In many respects, His name is everything. Jesus means “He saves.” Christ means “the Messiah,” that is, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King.

By confessing “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,” we acknowledge that He is the true God who has come into the world to be our Lord.

In the Large Catechism, Luther writes:

Now, if you are asked, “What do you believe in the Second Article about Jesus Christ?” answer briefly,

“I believe that Jesus Christ, God’s true Son, has become my Lord.”

“But what does this mean to become Lord?”

“It is this. He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. For before I did not have a Lord or King, but was captive under the devil’s power, condemned to death, stuck in sin and blindness.” [LC II 27]

1. Jesus is God. Describe, as completely as possible, His divine nature.
2. Jesus is true man. Describe, as completely as possible, His human nature.
3. What associations does the word *Lord* evoke for you?

God's Word

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:43–51)

4. What assumptions does Nathanael make about Jesus' origin?

5. In what ways does Jesus demonstrate His divine nature to Nathanael?

6. Describe how Jesus “bridges” heaven and earth.

Jesus is both God and man. His divine nature and human nature are united in one person.

It was necessary for Jesus to be

true God, so that His life—perfect obedience, suffering, and death—might be a ransom for all people.

true God, so that He might be able to overcome death and the devil for us.

true man, so that He might live in our place under the Law and fulfill it for us (His active obedience).

true man, so that He might suffer and die in our place because we failed to keep God’s Law (His passive obedience).

The Catechism

[I believe] in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . .

What does this mean? . . . [He] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death . . .

Kenneth Schueler writes in *The Best of Portals of Prayer*:

New implies something we have not experienced before. For the Christian, newness is not turning a page on a calendar. Newness is wrapped up in a person: the new man, Jesus Christ. God gave Him to the world so that we might experience what we have never experienced before—life.

The name Jesus means Savior. Life that is separated from its Creator is not life; it is not even a poor imitation of life.

The Scriptures call this life “death.” But Jesus is the Savior from death. He becomes part of our death. He empties Himself of His relation to God. That is what the cross means. But the resurrection introduces a truly new thing, not just hope of life after the grave but the hope of life before the grave and in spite of the grave.

In Jesus God’s new creation has begun. We who believe what God has done in Jesus have also been raised from death to life. We are saved to experience what we have not known before—life. Baptism gives us a new name. We are Christ’s, sons and daughters of God. (p. 1)

7. Describe ways we are, by nature, “lost and condemned.”

8. “Salvation is free, but it is not cheap.” Explain.

9. How does the cost of salvation affect your priorities? your use of time and finances?

God’s Word

And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If You wish, I will make three tents here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terri-

fied. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.” (Matthew 17:1–9)

10. What do Moses and Elijah represent? What does their appearance reveal about Jews?

11. Describe the disciples’ fear.

12. How does the transfiguration show Jesus as “God’s only Son, our Lord”?

A Verse a Day

Sunday: She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

Monday: And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Tuesday: And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

Wednesday: For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:10)

Thursday: Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

Friday: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Saturday: But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4–5)

4

THE SECOND ARTICLE: JESUS OUR SAVIOR

Pray Together

O God,
You have given Your people
a future and a hope—
hope fixed and grounded
in the resurrection of Your Son,
who lives and reigns forever.
Keep us in that hope, Father!
Teach us the loose hold
on Your present gifts,
that we may not lose the greater gifts
You hold in store.
In His name we pray. Amen.

Discover

Through faith, we know Christ as Savior, crucified yet risen from the dead. In love and mercy, Jesus rules His Church and has prepared a place in heaven for His redeemed people.

Introduction

The Duke of Wellington, the British general of the Battle of Waterloo (1815), sent news of his victory over Napoleon Bonaparte back to England. A series of relay stations, one within sight of the next, had been set up to send messages between the British army and England. The message to be sent was this: “Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo.”

Because of fog across the channel, the people of England received only “Wellington defeated.” Later, after the fog cleared,

the full message was sent again and received. England celebrated when the nation heard the rest of the story.

- Tell about a time when a disappointment in your life turned into a blessing.

The Catechism

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? . . . [He] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

Jesus is Messiah—the Anointed. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil to set them apart for God’s service—proclaiming His Word, offering sacrifices for sin, ruling His people.

Jesus is the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King.

- As Prophet, Christ proclaimed God’s Word in His earthly ministry, proving His divine authority and power with His miracles (especially His resurrection).
- As Prophet, Christ proclaims His Gospel today through His Word—the Good News that He is the Son of God and the world’s only Savior.
- As Priest, Christ fulfilled God’s Law perfectly—He actively obeyed His heavenly Father in every way.
- As Priest, Christ offered the final, once-for-all sacrifice—Himself on the cross! He willingly yet passively obeyed His heavenly Father to death.
- As Priest, Christ prays for us before the heavenly Father.
- As King, Christ rules the universe with His almighty power, rules His Church with His grace, and leads His redeemed people home to glory.

1. What did Jesus preach during His ministry on earth? What and how does He preach today?
2. Describe, as completely as possible, what Jesus has done and still does for us as our great High Priest.
3. What comfort do you have in knowing Jesus rules the universe? rules His Church?

God's Word

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, He is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to Him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed His last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they followed Him and ministered to Him, and there were also many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15:33-41)

4. Describe, in your own words, the darkness of "forsaken by God."

5. How does the centurion represent the true verdict on Jesus' death?

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride. (LSB 425:1)

6. In what ways is the crucifixion our one treasure and hope in life?

The crucifixion, death, and burial are final steps in the state of humiliation. In His earthly ministry, Jesus did not always or fully use His divine powers. His miracles over nature, over sickness, and over the forces of evil all witness to the fact that He is God, but Jesus refrained from using His almighty power as He journeyed to the cross.

The state of humiliation includes

- His conception as a human being in Mary's womb.
- His birth.
- His suffering—trial, beatings, mocking.
- His living a perfect life under the Law of God.
- His crucifixion and death.
- His burial.

Throughout His life, Jesus endured poverty, ridicule, and persecution. He experienced great pain as He was tried and convicted. He died the shameful death of a despised criminal. He was buried in a borrowed tomb.

All this, Luther notes, to “redeem me, a lost and condemned person.”

The Catechism

[I believe] in Jesus Christ . . . The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? . . . That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,

just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true.

“Christ is risen!” From the Day of Resurrection to the present, God’s people have greeted one another on Easter morning with words of Christ’s victory over death, hell, and Satan.

Jesus’ resurrection marks the beginning of His exaltation: As true God and true man, He now fully and always uses His divine powers.

The state of exaltation includes

- the descent into hell—not to suffer punishment, but to proclaim His victory over all enemies.
- the resurrection appearances—after three days Jesus rose and showed Himself alive to His disciples and remained with His followers for forty days.
- the ascension—Jesus returned bodily into glory, to prepare a place for His redeemed people.
- His “sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.” Jesus is present everywhere and rules over the whole universe, over His Church, and in heaven.
- the Lord’s return in glory to judge all people—the living and the dead.

7. Describe, as completely as possible, the victory in Jesus’ resurrection.

8. In what ways are Paul’s words true: “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14)?

9. What joys do you have in living under Christ and serving Him in “everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness”?

God's Word

Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come, see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead, and behold, He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see Him. See, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me." (Matthew 28:1-10)

10. How would you describe the guards' fear? the women's fear?

11. What assurance does Jesus give His disciples in His resurrection appearances?

12. What difference does the resurrection of Jesus mean for you as you face fear? face hardship? face death?

"He is risen indeed!" The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is our source of comfort and hope. The Easter victory proves:

Christ is the Son of God.

The heavenly Father accepted His sacrifice as the atonement for the sins of the world.

His teaching is true.

We, too, will rise to eternal life in Jesus.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” (Matthew 17:5)

Monday: For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He has made Him known. (John 1:17–18)

Tuesday: He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Wednesday: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Thursday: For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Friday: “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55–57)

Saturday: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

5

THE THIRD ARTICLE: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Pray Together

Let Your Spirit blow, O Lord,
and make our faith burn steady and clear,
a flame upon Your altar.
Let Your Spirit make us strong,
to walk as Your Son walked on the earth,
through ministry to death,
through death to life and glory
at Your right hand.
Through Christ we pray. Amen.

Discover

Through faith, we know the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier, who brings us to Christ and keeps us in God's salvation. In love and mercy, the Spirit works through the Word and Sacraments to create and nourish our faith.

Introduction

Gasoline is a remarkable source of power. A spark in a refinery storage tank can create a massive fireball, unleashing a force equivalent to hundreds of pounds of TNT.

Yet gasoline in an engine can power a car to travel 65 miles an hour safely or propel a lawn mower to sculpt a baseball field.

In both instances, gasoline is power: one is explosive; one is harnessed, channeled for a purpose.

- Describe a spectacular display of power you have seen.

- Describe an ordinary, everyday display of power you have seen.

The Catechism

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. The Spirit is not a power or energy but is a person—true God with the Father and the Son. All throughout Scripture, the Spirit has divine names, possesses divine attributes, and does divine works.

The special work of the Spirit is to sanctify: to make holy by bringing individuals to Christ, working faith in their hearts, and empowering them to live as God’s redeemed, holy people.

The Spirit works through the Gospel, as St. Paul writes, “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

1. Describe the human condition apart from Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. What can human reason and strength accomplish in life?
What can they not accomplish?

3. How would you apply each phrase to your life: called me by
the Gospel . . . enlightened me with His gifts . . . sanctified
and kept me in the true faith?

God's Word

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." (John 3:1-15)

4. In what ways does Nicodemus misunderstand Jesus' words?

5. What does Jesus teach about the new birth?

6. Describe how Baptism connects you to the cross and the resurrection.

The Gospel is Christ crucified and risen from the dead. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts to trust Christ as our only Redeemer. All the blessings of the Gospel—forgiveness, life, salvation and much more—are given *by Christ through the Spirit in the Word and Sacraments*.

The Spirit also works renewal of our whole life: as Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, our attitudes, desires, and behavior are changed (Ephesians 3:16–17). The Spirit pours out His gifts on God's people, equipping and empowering us to serve Christ and one another.

The Catechism

I believe in the Holy Spirit . . .

What does this mean? . . . In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

The Holy Spirit *calls, enlightens, and sanctifies* each believer individually! But the Spirit also *gathers* us together in the Church, the Body of Christ. God's people trust in Christ, study His Word, bap-

tize, partake of the Lord's Supper, and serve not in isolation but in community. As Martin Luther notes in the Large Catechism:

The Spirit has His own congregation in the world, which is the mother that conceives and bears every Christian through God's Word. Through the Word He reveals and preaches, He illumines and enkindles hearts, so that they understand, accept, cling to, and persevere in the Word. [LC II 42]

7. For what purposes does the Spirit gather God's people together?

8. In what sense is "this special community" visible? invisible?

God created the New Testament Christian family in a very special way. He poured out His Holy Spirit in a miraculously visible way. The spectators, when they viewed the apostles, saw what looked like tongues of fire on their heads. They also heard them speak foreign languages. Above all, they heard the Gospel message proclaimed with unusual eloquence and power. Before the day was over, a small nucleus of disciples had become a large congregation.

The Holy Spirit's work continues today. He calls sinful human beings to faith and forgiveness in the Gospel. He gives His gifts of life and salvation in Baptism, and forgives, renews, and strengthens God's people through the Lord's Supper. Whenever the Word of Christ is proclaimed, the Spirit is at work to *save*.

God's Word

[Peter said,] "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 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. For the promise is for

you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:36–47)

9. How does St. Peter describe entry into the Church?

10. What does the Church do together as the Body of Christ?

11. In what ways has your congregation been a blessing to you?

Richard A. Mazak has written in *The Best of Portals of Prayer*: “[The] Holy Spirit is with all of us all of the time. And the Spirit gives us all of Jesus’ blessings—faith, forgiveness of sins, eternal life” (p. 189).

In a remarkable, perhaps spectacular display of power at Pentecost, the Spirit worked to forgive sin and give life to people.

In ordinary, yet equally powerful ways, the Spirit works through Word and Sacrament to forgive sin and give life to people.

Throughout history, God’s people have prayed at the celebration of Pentecost: “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your love. Alleluia.”

Come, Holy Spirit, into our hearts.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Peter 4:14)

Monday: And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Tuesday: Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Wednesday: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)

Thursday: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23)

Friday: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19–20)

Saturday: In whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:21–22)

6

THE THIRD ARTICLE: FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL LIFE

Pray Together

O Lord,
we do not always have the courage
to take You at Your Word,
to give You what is Yours,
that You may open the windows of
heaven and pour down on us
Your overflowing blessing.
Help us to believe that Your heart
is as great and good
as Your strong Word,
and in the riches of Your glory in Christ
You will supply our every need.
In Him we pray. Amen.

Discover

Through faith, we know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. In love and mercy, God has called us into His Church, forgiven us, and promised us eternal life and salvation.

Introduction

On September 8, 1974, Gerald Ford signed one of the most important proclamations of his presidency.

Therefore I, Gerald Ford, President of the United States, pursuant to the pardon power conferred upon me . . . have granted and by these presents do grant a full, free, and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon . . .

By invoking his executive privilege under the Constitution, President Ford sought to bring healing and peace to a troubled nation.

For nations and communities, friends and families, the adage is true: “Forgiveness is our deepest need.”

- Forgiveness is hard to practice. Agree or disagree? Share your reasons.

- What problems—in relationships, in business, and for individuals—do you see when forgiveness is denied?

The Catechism

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? . . . In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

What’s so special about the Church? Forgiveness!

In his Large Catechism, Luther writes:

Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. So even though we have sins, the grace of the Holy Spirit does not allow them to harm us. For we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin. This is because God forgives us and because we forgive, bear with, and help one another. [LC II 55]

Forgiveness means that in Christ God has declared pardon to sinful human beings. God is merciful; He wants to show His compassion and tenderness to His creation. In Christ’s atoning sacrifice—His death on Calvary—God fully, freely, and absolutely demonstrates His love and forgiveness. Our sins are charged to Christ; His righteousness is given, credited, to us.

1. Define sin. What other words describe sin and its effect on our lives?
2. Why is it difficult for many people to acknowledge, “I am a sinner”?
3. “Daily and richly forgives.” How does the Gospel encourage you as you live in our unforgiving world?

God’s Word

And when He returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And He was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:1–12)

4. What, according to the men, is the paralytic's deepest need?
What, according to Jesus, is the paralytic's deepest need?
5. How does Jesus demonstrate His divine power and authority over every aspect of life?
6. In what ways does forgiveness change us to live as new people?

John F. Johnson wrote in *The Best of Portals of Prayer*,

Just imagine how the doctors and nurses in your local hospital would react if you walked up to the bed of a paralyzed patient, placed your hands on the still body, looked into the person's eyes, and said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Whoever heard of such a thing?

Such surprises entered the hearts of those in the city of Capernaum who saw Jesus do that very thing to a man who was paralyzed. They expected the miracle-working Christ to deal first with the paralyzed limbs that condemned this man to a bedridden existence.

"Son or daughter, your sins are forgiven." Is that what we expect from Jesus Christ today? Does that word take us by surprise, too, when we consider all of the social and emotional problems that plague the world?

Christ's first word is forgiveness because only that word penetrates to the root of our problems. We are in confusion and perplexity because we are adrift from God. That is why the greatest word of all remains this declaration of Christ: "Son, your sins are forgiven"—forgiven because He died for them. (p. 48)

The Catechism

I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? . . . On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. At the Last Day, His resurrection holds a remarkable promise for believers: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

7. What kinds of expectations about the Last Day and eternal life have you heard recently?

8. In what ways does the resurrection of the dead at the Last Day reveal God’s power and victory?

9. What comfort do you find in Christ’s promise to raise you at the Last Day?

At the Last Day,

- Believers will rise with glorified bodies and enter eternal life in heaven with God.
- Unbelievers will rise to eternal death—to shame and torment in hell forever.

God's Word

[Jesus said], "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him."

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:1-9)

10. In your own words, what fears and concerns do the disciples express to Jesus?

11. How does Jesus answer His disciples' fears and concerns?

12. What comfort and joy do you have as you anticipate eternity with Christ?

Eternal life is ours—now! Through faith, we know and have God's promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation. When we die, our soul will be immediately with Christ. At the Last Day, we will stand—body and soul—in the presence of our Lord.

"This is most certainly true."

A Verse a Day

Sunday: If You, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness, that You may be feared. (Psalm 130:3–4)

Monday: But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Psalm 86:15)

Tuesday: In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace. (Ephesians 1:7)

Wednesday: And that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47)

Thursday: Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28–29)

Friday: But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20–21)

Saturday: And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

LEADERS NOTES

The format for each session is similar. For notes on how to guide participants through the parts of the Study Guide, see session 1.

As you prepare to lead the session,

- read the Study Guide and answer the questions as fully as possible.

As you prepare for your time together,

- arrive early to make sure the setting is comfortable.
- greet participants by name.
- introduce participants to one another.
- thank participants for their time and commitment.
- keep in mind that sometimes participants may be reluctant to share their thoughts about some issues. Help participants see that God's solid Word guides us as we apply Law and Gospel to our lives. In Christian love, we can discuss difficult issues, even though at times we may differ on how God's Word can be applied to our lives.

1

THE FIRST ARTICLE: GOD OUR MAKER

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session. In general, spend 5–10 minutes on the Introduction questions.

Allow participants to write down and share aloud their answers.

- Answers will vary, but may include the billions of stars and galaxies visible on a clear night, mountains, rivers, waterfalls, natural phenomena, diversity of species, etc.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion. Note that *by faith* we know God as Creator.

The Catechism

Read the First Article and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraph and questions on the truth that God is our Maker.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. Allow participants to describe specific parts and aspects of God's creative activity: constellations, galaxies, canyons, mountain ranges, oceans, etc. The answer, of course, is "all things are included in the phrase 'Maker of heaven and earth.'" If time permits, read Genesis 1 and 2. Other Scripture texts (e.g., Psalm 104), detail God's creative power and splendor.

2. Luther's explanation focuses on our basic composition—body and soul—as well as individual features: eyes, ears, members, mental faculties, and senses. In short, Luther was affirming that he, like all human beings, was a unique creation of God, and all that he was and had came as a result of God's gracious gift of life.

3. Encourage participants to reflect on the unique identity and features—physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual—that God has given in His goodness and grace.

The many, many evidences of a "divine planner" should undergird our *faith* in God as Creator, but we should not speak of "absolute proof" (as people generally define "proof" today). Until recent centuries, it was generally held that God exists, though some may have had mistaken notions and not really known the true God. But today, there are many who question God's very existence. You may want to ask: If you were God, what kind of world would you create? How much control would you keep? How much would you reveal about yourself? These questions are helpful, especially when people say there is no God or that God is cruel or unfair (forgetting, of course, the fall of Adam and Eve into sin).

Invite a participant to read the paragraphs on "God is our Maker."

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. David confesses that God is majestic over all His creation. God's name, His truth, and His power are far beyond humankind. His praise and grace surpass all human knowledge. Yet in mercy, God created not only the universe but also human beings.

5. David confesses that human beings are the highest of all earthly creatures. The language of the psalm reflects the glory and honor of Adam and Eve, God's perfect creation, and the authority and dominion over the earth that God gave the first people. After the fall, however, Adam and Eve lost the image of God. Yet humankind remains the crown of God's earthly creation.

6. Allow participants to share their responses. Answers may include the ways God provides for His creation, the ways He blesses humankind with technology, inventions, and research (e.g., medical advances) to foster life and care for the environment.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the First Article again and the excerpt from Luther's explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Accept all responses. Encourage participants to see, as Luther did, the many ways God personally gives us His blessings in Christ.

8. Luther's explanation emphasizes God's constant and personal care by the many personal pronouns: I, me, and my. For Luther, all life was a gift of God; only through God's constant, personal care can we live day to day.

9. Accept participant responses.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

10. Jesus observed all kinds of human need: sickness, poverty, isolation, hardship—the needs seemed endless. In mercy, He took time to help people in their difficult circumstances.

11. One of the basic needs was food: the people were hungry. By providing bread and fish for the thousands gathered, Jesus shows that He is the gracious Lord, who will meet all our needs.

12. Jesus' goodness and love in feeding the crowds for their journey in life is a reminder of His goodness and love in feeding the Church with His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. If time permits, encourage participants to identify similar language in the miracle and the accounts of the Lord's Supper (see, for example, Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

This may be the opportunity to discuss miracles. If God is God, is it not logical to assume that He can intervene and do what is beyond the “usual,” “natural,” or “expected”? Note that Jesus performed miracles to show that He was truly God. In other words, God does not promise to perform miracles in our lives just for our personal benefit. Could it be that God does occasionally perform what is obviously a miracle, thereby to remind people even in this day that God exists and that it still is His world? Non-Christians may attribute miraculous healing just to the inherent healing powers we have. But where did those powers come from? Furthermore, note daily miracles that we experience—how our body functions, “normal” healing, protection that obviously must come from angels, and other “unexplainable” events.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

2

THE FIRST ARTICLE: GOD OUR DEFENDER AND SUSTAINER

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session. In general, spend 5–10 minutes on the Introduction questions.

Allow participants to write down and share aloud their answers.

- Answers will vary. Accept participant responses.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the First Article and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on God our Defender.

1. Accept participant responses. Encourage discussion of the evils that God's people face in this world.

2. Encourage participant responses. Answers may include watching out for potential sources of trouble and danger, steering children away from danger, intervening in dangerous situations, etc.

3. God defends His people in many ways. Sometimes He keeps them safe in the midst of tragic circumstances (e.g., safe through storms, tornadoes, fires, etc.). At other times, God works in His power and grace to remove dangers, to open new opportunities, or to provide “shelter” for His children. At times, God allows His children to experience tragedy and death. But we are not defeated; God brings us through hardship and death to His everlasting care and protection in heaven.

At times, we see examples of “miraculous” help and protection from God. More often, we do not think of God as playing a role in keeping us from harm or healing us. Although we cannot “see” God in our lives, is that reason to deny His existence or His help?

God’s Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. The Early Christian Church faced opposition from religious leaders, from their fellow citizens, and from secular rulers. The apostles and other disciples were imprisoned, often beaten, and sometimes executed. (For a description of Saul’s [Paul’s] persecution of the early Christians, see Acts 9:1–19 and Galatians 1:11–24.)

5. Peter is, in a sense, astonished by his miraculous release. St. Luke notes that Peter “did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision” (v. 9). Although Peter had witnessed Jesus’ many miracles and His resurrection from the dead, Peter still doubted God’s power to work His plan.

6. Accept participant responses. God works His power and grace to preserve and defend His people individually and His Church corporately.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the First Article excerpt and Luther’s explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. God’s goodness and mercy is revealed fully in Jesus Christ (which we will discuss in the Second Article). God is the Lord who wants to bless His sinful people; He is good, loving, and generous with His gifts. He is also merciful, compassionate, and understanding of our weakness and failures. Encourage participants to see God’s “fatherly, divine goodness and mercy” demonstrated, first and foremost, in Jesus.

8. Accept participant responses.

9. Encourage participant responses on how we, as God’s forgiven, redeemed people, can serve and obey Him in Christ’s strength.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your responses.

10. The centurion shows his humility before Jesus by first sending a delegation of Jesus' own countrymen; as a Gentile, and a Roman soldier, he likely did not feel "worthy" to approach Jesus. The centurion then sent friends to request that Jesus not trouble Himself by walking to the centurion's house. Most of all, he simply trusts Jesus' power; he needs no spectacular display or personal visit to know that Jesus in His mercy can and will heal the servant.

11. Like a father looking after his children, Jesus wants to heal people in their needs. As God, Jesus has the power to heal. He demonstrates a genuine fatherly, divine heart.

12. Accept participant responses.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

3

THE SECOND ARTICLE: JESUS OUR LORD

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary, but may include beloved spouses, parents, children, dear friends, places where participants were born, grew up, celebrated a special event, etc.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion on these names of people and places with significant impact on history and our world.

The Catechism

Read the Second Article and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the meaning of the Second Article.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. Jesus has divine names: God, Lord, Savior, Immanuel (John 20:28; Matthew 1:21–23). Jesus possesses divine attributes: He is eternal (John 1:1–2); unchangeable (Hebrews 13:8); almighty (Mat-

thew 28:18); all-knowing (John 21:17); present everywhere (Matthew 28:20). Jesus does divine works: He forgives sins; He created the universe (John 1:3); He preserves the world (Hebrews 1:3), and will judge the world (John 5:27; Matthew 25). Jesus also receives divine honor and glory (John 5:22–23). Accept participant responses that affirm Jesus' deity.

2. Jesus is truly a human being: He has a human body and soul; He has feelings and needs (sadness, anger, thirst, hunger); He was born, grew up, ministered, preached, taught, suffered, and died.

3. Accept participant responses. Jesus is the Lord who saves us, watches over us, guides us, strengthens us, and so forth.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. Nathanael assumed that because Jesus came from Nazareth that Jesus could not be the promised Messiah. (Nazareth was considered an insignificant village of Galilee, with little or no religious, social, or political status.)

Note that the Church confesses in the Nicene Creed that Jesus is "very God of very God." "Very," derived from a Latin word, means "true."

5. Jesus knows Nathanael even before He meets or speaks with him. Similarly, Jesus knows people before they talk to Him (e.g., the Samaritan woman), and He knows what will happen before it happens (e.g., John 11: the death and raising of Lazarus). Jesus also reveals that heaven and earth meet together in Him: He is the God-man, the divine Savior of the world.

6. Accept participant responses. Jesus, the eternal God, comes down from heaven to be born as a human being, to live among His creation, and to die and rise again so that all believers might live with God forever.

For unbelievers and even for some Christians, it may be hard to believe that Jesus is God and at the same time true man. Again we must remember that if God is God, He can do anything. This "bridge" between God and earth has not occurred more than once and will not occur again. But that is not a logical argument that it could not and did not happen. We are not expected with our reason to understand how God could be born as a human being. God expects us to believe what He has revealed about Himself.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the Second Article excerpt and Luther's explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Accept participant responses. We are “lost” in the sense that we cannot find our way, we are separated from the Father by our sinfulness, we are alienated from one another, etc. We are “condemned” in the sense that we are guilty before God and deserve His just punishment; we live—by nature—in slavery to sin, death, and Satan; we are like prisoners who await sentencing; etc.

8. Accept participant responses. Salvation is a gift from God, given by God freely, willingly, and without any merit or worthiness on our part. But salvation has a tremendous price: the death of God’s Son.

9. Accept participant responses.

God’s Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your responses.

10. Moses and Elijah represent God’s revelation through His Law and His prophets. They typify, then, God’s complete, reliable testimony to His saving purpose in Jesus.

11. Accept participant responses.

12. At the transfiguration, God again proclaims Jesus as His Son (see also the Baptism of Jesus: Matthew 3:13–17). But Jesus is also our Lord, the Savior who went to the cross for our justification. In Him, we have the hope of eternal glory in heaven.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

4

THE SECOND ARTICLE: JESUS OUR SAVIOR

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the Second Article and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on Jesus' threefold office.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. Jesus preached the Good News of the Kingdom: He is the Messiah, sent by God to redeem His people from their slavery to sin and to restore them to life and salvation through His death and resurrection (see, for example, Luke 4:14–30). Today, He preaches through His Word, whenever the Scriptures and the Gospel are read, taught, proclaimed in worship by His ministers, etc.

2. Accept participant responses. For summaries, review the bulleted points under "Prophet, Priest, and King."

3. Encourage participant discussion on Christ's rule in the universe and His Church.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. Accept participant responses. Jesus knew and felt the shame of abandonment, agony, and betrayal.

5. The centurion speaks truthfully in the midst of many false witnesses and mockers: Jesus is the Son of God.

6. The cross of Christ is the true treasure of every believer. St. Paul's words are especially poignant: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." (Philippians 3:7–9)

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the Second Article excerpt and Luther's explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Jesus' resurrection brings us victory over sin, death, Satan, and hell. Encourage participant responses that highlight the confidence and strength we now have because of Jesus' victory for us.

In the Third Article, we will discuss in greater detail the significance of Jesus' victory over sin. In fact, the key to understanding the Gospel and the key to understanding the very essentials of the Christian faith grows out of the death and resurrection of Jesus and how this relates to our lives today and in the world to come.

8. Christian preachers cannot speak of new life, triumph over death, hope for eternal life, and joy if Christ is dead. Christian faith is hollow and meaningless if all we worship is a crucified teacher and prophet.

9. Encourage participant responses. Full and perfect service to Christ will begin in eternity. Our service to Him on this earth is a natural response of thanks that Christ has redeemed us from the power and guilt of sin, but our sinful nature keeps us from perfect service. That service should never be thought of as an attempt to "pay" Christ for what He has done. We could never repay Him.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your responses.

10. Accept participant responses.

11. Jesus gives His disciples not only assurance that He is alive but that He has conquered death—He will never die again. He is the same Lord who walked with them during His ministry, but now in His glorified body He is the triumphant Savior who will guide, empower, and accompany their ministry in His name.

12. Accept participant responses.

The idea of Christ's resurrection and our own resurrection defies logic, but it becomes understandable when we remember that God is God and therefore all-powerful. It is noteworthy that every attempt from the time of Jesus (such as the attempt to bribe the guards at the tomb) to the present day to refute the resurrection of Jesus has failed.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

5

THE THIRD ARTICLE: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary, but may include explosions, fireworks, military campaigns, etc.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the Third Article and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the Holy Spirit.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. The human condition apart from Christ is that "I am spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God." No human being has any power to come to God in genuine repentance and faith.

2. Answers may vary. Human reason and strength are remarkable gifts from God to accomplish much good, but they cannot do anything to save us or to make us acceptable to God.

3. Allow participants to apply each part of Luther's explanation to their own lives (e.g., God called me by the Gospel in my Baptism, or I am kept in the true faith when I hear the pastor's sermon and believe the Gospel, etc.).

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. In general, Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus' words because he focuses on earthly, physical reality. He does not understand the nature of the new birth—"born again" or, better, "born from above." He demonstrates, in a sense, our natural inability to believe in Jesus apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

5. Jesus teaches that the new birth comes through "water and the Spirit," that is, through Baptism. The Sacrament of Baptism is "visible Gospel." The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel, connected with the water, to create saving faith in Christ.

6. Through Baptism, we are connected to Christ's saving work. As time permits, encourage participants to read and reflect on Romans 6:1–11.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the Third Article excerpt and Luther's explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. The Holy Spirit gathers us together to hear God's Word in worship, to partake of the Sacraments, to study the Word, to plan and carry out our mission and ministry, to join in fellowship, to maximize our service to the community and world, etc. Allow participants to reflect on their unity together in their congregations.

It seems easy to believe in God as Father (even non-Christians can believe in a God). Jesus lived on this earth and was seen by the people. But some may find it more difficult to believe in God the Spirit. The Spirit is real. The Spirit is also indispensable because the Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus as Savior. Just as important, the Spirit keeps us in the faith. Some mistakenly think that once they have come to believe in Jesus and are in the church ("in the club"), all their problems are solved because they have "insurance."

8. The Church is visible in the sense that it includes the whole number of believers who trust in Christ, believe His Word, and confess the Christian faith, among whom, however, are also unbelievers (that is, individuals who may join a congregation but do not, in their hearts, believe in Christ or sincerely confess the Christian faith). Although we also use the word *church* to refer to an organization, strictly speaking the Church consists of all who are true believers, and only God can judge who they are. Therefore the Church is really invisible.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your responses.

9. People enter the Church through faith and Baptism.

10. Encourage participants to reflect on St. Luke's description of the Church's life and ministry in Acts 2.

11. Accept participant responses.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

6

THE THIRD ARTICLE: FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL LIFE

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary. Most participants will agree that forgiving is difficult.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the Third Article and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on forgiveness.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. In general, "sin is every thought, desire, word, and deed which is contrary to God's Law." Sin is disobedience, rebellion, rejection of God's will, and hostility to God. A helpful distinction is that sin includes "original sin," that is, the state of total corruption we inherit from Adam through birth, and "actual sin," that is, all of our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds that violate God's commandments.

2. Accept participant responses. To acknowledge “I am a sinner” is difficult for some people because it shows human beings to be imperfect, broken, and weak.

Learning to forgive is important. Cf. Matthew 6:15. If we do not forgive, we put ourselves in the place of God. In effect, we are saying we understand all the circumstances, we have God’s perfect perspective, and we have a right to judge (but cf. Romans 12:19). Even if someone does not ask for forgiveness, we should in our heart forgive him or her. Furthermore, if we do not forgive, we are really the prisoner. Forgiving sets us free. Forgiving is not easy. It may take a long time.

3. Accept participant responses.

God’s Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. For the men who carried the paralytic to Jesus, the deepest need was bodily healing. For Jesus, the deepest need was forgiveness and a right relationship with God.

5. Jesus not only forgives sins by His divine authority and power, He also heals the man. Jesus is Lord over every aspect of life—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

6. Accept participant responses. Forgiveness with God through Christ affects our hearts, minds, and bodies and empowers us to live as confident, joyful, forgiving people.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the Third Article excerpt and Luther’s explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Answers will vary but may include speculation about signs of the Last Day and many New Age ideas about immortality, channeling, communication with deceased persons, etc.

8. The resurrection of the dead at the Last Day reveals that God is the almighty Lord, the Savior of His redeemed people, and the Judge of all who reject His truth and love.

9. Accept participant responses. Ask what it would be like not to have that assurance. Do people live, feel, and act differently if they do not believe in God, the work of Jesus Christ, the powerful force of the Spirit, and the joy of the Last Day?

God’s Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your responses.

10. The disciples express their fear that Jesus is going away and they don't know where He is going. They also want to see the Father "in person" before Jesus leaves, but they do not realize that to see Jesus is to see the Father.

11. Jesus assures the disciples that He is the way to heaven, the one truth who brings forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He also assures the disciples that He and the Father are one.

12. Accept participant responses.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.