



I BELIEVE



A Study on the Sacraments



I Believe: The Sacraments

Sacrament comes from the Latin word for “mystery.” It is a word the church uses to describe that which is:

- Instituted by Christ
- Conveys forgiveness and life
- The Word joined to a physical element

“Sacrament” is not a Biblical word, but a word the church has long used to describe such holy things. Lutherans recognize three sacraments that specifically fit this three-fold description—(1) Baptism, (2) Communion, and (3) Absolution.

We believe that the Sacraments are a “means of grace,” a connection point into the divine story. The Holy Spirit is at work in these means in order to swoop down and carry us into a much larger grand narrative. These touchstones are ways in which we “join in” God’s story.

This guide has been put together to:

- Teach what Lutheran-Christians believe about the means of grace
- Point you to scripture as the source of what we believe
- Facilitate conversation with others

We hope this guide will be beneficial in your own walk of faith as you learn more about God’s Word and His means of grace.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Pastor Travis Ferguson at tferguson@christlamesa.org.

Holy Baptism



The sting of death is drowned by Baptism. You go into the water, bearing your sins, but then the name of Jesus is invoked. You go into the waters dead in sins, but you come out as righteous.¹

BAPTISM GIVES A NEW IDENTITY

What does it mean to have a last name (family name)? How has your family name been an identifying factor in your life? Have people assumed things about you, positively or negatively, based on your last name?

READ JOHN 3:1-5

Jesus talks with Nicodemus about re-birth. About new life. In essence, Jesus talks to Nicodemus about being part of a new family – and that family is called the Church. What are the challenges and opportunities with entering into a new family?

¹ Paraphrase of Cyril of Jerusalem, "The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem," in S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. R. W. Church and Edwin Hamilton Gifford, vol. 7, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 17.

READ TITUS 3:4-7

What stands out to you in the words St. Paul uses to describe salvation and Baptism? Notice how St. Paul puts the focus on *Christ's* work, not on *our* work. How might that change the way you appreciate and remember your own Baptism?

READ ROMANS 12:4–8, 1 CORINTHIANS 10:17, 12:12–13, AND EPHESIANS 4:4–5.

The Nicene Creed says we believe in “One Baptism, for the forgiveness of sins.” That means two things: (1) We believe that when baptized in an orthodox² Christian tradition in the name of the Triune God, we have no need to be baptized again, and (2) we believe that Christians, regardless of denominations, are baptized into the body of Christ. How do the verses above describe identity in that body of Christ?

BAPTISM IS FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Most everyone has had experience with a friend whose actions hurt. One of the most hurtful actions a friend can do is dredge up the past and throw it in your face. Can you share an experience where this has happened to you (or, if you're really brave, an example of when you've done this)?

² An “unorthodox” tradition would refer to those traditions that are not really a part of the Christian Church, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, etc.

READ ACTS 2:36–39 AND COLOSSIANS 2:11–13

In Acts, how does St. Peter highlight the connection between Baptism and the forgiveness of sins? In Colossians, what does St. Paul say concerning Baptism and forgiveness? How do these verses show us that Jesus will not dredge up the past and throw your sins in your face?

Christ won't dredge up the past and throw your sins in your face. What are the relationships in your life that need to embrace this practice? Where do you need to live out this Baptismal charge more than you are now (i.e. in your marriage, with co-workers, etc.)?

BAPTISM COMES WITH A PROMISE

When is a time where someone has *broken* a promise they made with you? How did that make you feel? When is a time where someone has *kept* a promise they made with you? How did that make you feel?

READ ROMANS 4:13-25

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther frequently used an analogy of a bride and groom when he talked about faith. When a bride and groom make their vows or promises, they create a new future together: "I will be with you from here till we die ... in sickness and in health." They speak these promises to each other to call forth and strengthen the faith of their beloved: "You will not go through life alone." Promise and faith belong together. God

made a promise with Abraham in Genesis. As unbelievable as that promise may have been, Abraham had faith that God would stick to His word... and God did. How do you see promise and faith working together in your life?



To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act. ³

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS⁴

Q: What does the word “baptize” mean?

A: Baptize typically means “to wash with water,” whether by immersing, pouring, or sprinkling. Christian Baptism refers to washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the institution of Christ. See Mark 7:4

Q: Who is to baptize?

A: Normally, pastors – Christ’s called ministers – are to baptize, but in an emergency when no pastor is available, any Christian could/should baptize. See 1 Corinthians 4:1

Q: Why should babies be baptized?

A: Babies are included in the words “all nations.” See Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38-39. Babies are also sinful (even though they’re cute). They need what Baptism promises as well. See Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12, 18-19, and John 3:5-6. Finally, the Holy Spirit is able to work faith in babies. See Psalm 22:9-10, Psalm 71:5-6, Matthew 18:6, and Matthew 21:16.

All are in need of God’s grace. Babies and children fall into the same sinful category as adults (Psalm 51:5; Romans 6:23). What is needed for the adult is also needed for the infant, and that grace is given without respect to age or intellectual capacity. Some rightly point out that some who are baptized as babies grow up to reject their

³ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 457.

⁴ Some explanations come from *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 286-295.

Lord. Yet this reality is as real for those who are Baptized as adults.

Baptism establishes a relationship beyond intellectual comprehension. Baptism is not an intellectual assent to a doctrine or belief, nor is it a psychological activity, although the faith initiated in Baptism will mature to include these components. In Baptism God establishes a relationship with children that saves, without requiring the psychological activity – even though psychological activity is part and parcel of adult response to God’s action. An infant is helpless, completely dependent, and unable to even choose when to change his/her diaper, let alone salvation. And this is exactly the posture at which God acts to save us, whether infant or adult. When we sleep or are in a coma, when our mental capacities are undeveloped—as in infants—or wear out—as in the senile—God still maintains the relationship he has established through his Baptismal Word, whether we can respond or not.

Scripture and the Early Church indicate the inclusion of infants. While there is no specific Scripture commanding or forbidding infant Baptism, there is evidence of its inclusive nature. Historically, the Church has believed that infants are naturally included in the “all nations” of Matthew 28:19. The “family” of the jailer at Philippi was baptized (Acts 16:33). Baptism’s correlation to infant circumcision (Colossians 2:11) strongly suggests that the Church was practicing Baptism at the same time as the Jews practiced circumcision (eight days old).

Parents should not deny Baptism to their children any more than they should deny them other vital needs. The necessity of Baptism, however, does not mean that children who are stillborn or die before they are brought to Baptism are lost. We commend such children to the gracious care of their Maker and Redeemer, trusting His mercy and love even when we do not understand His will or work.

Q: What does God do in Baptism?

A: God forgives sins. See Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16

God rescues from death and the devil. See Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 1:13-14, and Colossians 2:11-12.

God gives eternal salvation. See 1 Peter 3:21 and Titus 3:5-7.

Q: Is it possible for an unbaptized person to be saved?

A: Yes. Only unbelief condemns. Those who believe the Gospel and yet die before Baptism are not condemned, because they “have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). However, faith does not negate or despise what the Lord promises and gives in

Baptism. The unbaptized should not delay in receiving Baptism. See Luke 23:39-43. Although Christ had not yet instituted Baptism, the thief on the cross was saved through the word of Christ.

REMEMBERING YOUR BAPTISM

Baptism is a “one-time-only” sacrament in regard to the fact that you are only baptized once in your life. This, of course, differs from the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Absolution which we engage in week after week. The challenge, then, becomes remembering your Baptism for the rest of your life. Here’s some helpful suggestions for remembering your Baptism:

1. When you wake up each day, your first trip is probably to the bathroom. When you get to the sink, splash some water on your face and say out loud: “I am a baptized child of God, and Jesus loves me.” Each day we rise from sleep, we take a moment to remember that because of our Baptism, we have been raised with Christ from the dead, and pray to live out the day ahead in newness with Him.
2. When you were baptized, you probably received a certificate of Baptism. Framing the certificate or the church’s bulletin from that day, and displaying it on a nightstand, bureau, or another place you will see it daily, can serve as a great reminder. While it may be tempting to put the certificate or Baptismal candle in a special place in the garage for safekeeping, displaying it where you will see it regularly can remind you daily of who you are in Christ Jesus.
3. Most people celebrate birthdays with a cake, a song, etc. Our Baptismal birthday should be no different. Your Baptismal birthday is a great time to remember the day where you became a part of Christ’s family.

Communion



The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened and that it may not succumb in the struggle but become stronger and stronger. ⁵

As an opening note, Communion is also referred to as The Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the Mass, and Sacrament of the Altar.

What does the word "sacrifice" mean to you? Where have you seen "sacrifice" happen in your life or someone else's life?

READ EXODUS 12:1-28 (take turns reading)

In the story of the Passover, we hear of a sacrifice. Sacrifices, throughout scripture, and throughout life, bears the brunt of someone else's problem. How do you see the Passover connecting with Jesus' sacrifice?

After the blood of the lamb was spread over the doorway of the houses, the Israelites were commanded to cook and eat the meat. In doing this, they remembered that this animal took the brunt of their problem. They remembered that by the blood of this animal, they were saved from death. Since we're on the topic of food, what would you consider as a "food for your soul"? What food can always make you feel better after a bad day? What memories are attached to that food?

⁵ Robert Kolb et al, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 469.

READ JOHN 6:51-59

Jesus had just fed over 5,000 people (not including women and children) using five loaves of bread and two fish. After he fed them, he went to the other side of the sea. The crowd followed Him. He knew they were after more food. He says to them: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (John 6:27). He goes onto talk about eating His body and drinking His blood. If Jesus was talking metaphorically, why would people get so mad about His words? How do these verses point towards the cross? How do these verses point towards the sacrifice that Jesus makes?

READ MARK 14:22-25 AND JOHN 13:1-20 (*take turns reading*)

On the night that Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, He turns the tables. St. John says that Jesus washes their feet. Matthew, Mark, & Luke all record Jesus instituting Holy Communion. He points out, in a very real way, that He is becoming the Passover Lamb – the perfect sacrifice without blemish. Notice that Jesus does not give any additional explanation on His use of the word “is.” Neither does He say that what’s before Him is *no longer* bread. How can we believe that what we eat and drink in Communion is His body and blood while simultaneously being bread and wine? Do you ever struggle in this belief?



But suppose you say, “What if I feel that I am unfit [to take Communion]?” If you choose to fix your eye on how good and pure you are, to wait until nothing torments you, you will never go.⁶ Fix your eyes instead on how good Christ is.

⁶ *Ibid*, 472–473.

FURTHER EXPLANATION

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther said: “The bread and wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ.” He went on to say: “Such a mystery cannot be grasped except by faith and is revealed alone in the Word.”⁷ To say more than the Word indicates is to step out of bounds. N.T. Wright, a former Anglican Bishop, writes: “We must see the Eucharist as the arrival of God’s future in the present, not just the extension of God’s past into our present. We do not remember a long-since dead Jesus; we celebrate the presence of the living Lord.”⁸ We embrace the mystery every time we take Communion.

Some other helpful points as we think about this:

- We take Jesus at his word. “This is my body.” “This is my blood.” The context in which Jesus spoke these words and ate this meal was his last meal with his disciples before he would be crucified. The mood is somber and serious, with little room for jokes or riddles. Here we take Jesus literally. The Gospel in which Jesus frequently speaks in metaphor is John, the one Gospel that does not contain a last supper account.
- God uses created elements to convey his mercy. God is in the business of creating and re-creating. Jesus is God “incarnate,” in the flesh. In the same way, he likes to convey himself in real things.
- As God and man, Jesus’ divine nature is shared with his human nature, allowing a supernatural presence whenever and wherever he wills.

In Christianity, there are typically three prevalent views of the Lord’s Supper:

- *Transubstantiation/Consubstantiation*: The bread and wine *become* the body and blood, leaving no trace of bread and wine. This understanding is held by the Roman Catholic church.
- *Remembrance Meal*: The bread and wine stay the way they are, and the meal is simply remembering the Last Supper. This understanding is held by many Reformed Churches, including Baptist and Non-Denominational Traditions.
- *Real Presence*: The bread and wine, after the Words of Institution have been said, become the body and blood of Christ while still being bread and wine. Jesus is truly in the sacrament, just as he said, but wine and bread are still there as well.

As Lutheran-Christians, we believe in the “Real Presence.” One Lutheran theologian said: “The Lutheran teaching does not make the bread imaginary bread, nor does it make the body of Christ an imaginary body. It teaches a true, essential bread and the true, essential body of Christ in the Sacrament because the words of institution state both.”⁹ He went

⁷ *Ibid*, 508.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 274.

⁹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, electronic ed., vol. 3* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 298.

onto say: “As water and the application of water are a part of Baptism, so bread and wine and their reception are the earthly element of the Lord’s Supper. As we do not venture to substitute some other fluid for water in Baptism, so neither in the Lord’s Supper do we dare to substitute for bread and wine.”¹⁰

SHOULD YOU TAKE COMMUNION IF...		
Question	Scripture	Yes or No
You don’t believe you’re sinful?	1 Corinthians 5:11, 13; 1 Corinthians 10:20-21	
You are sorry for your sins?	2 Corinthians 7:10-22; Psalm 38:18	
You <i>hate</i> someone and don’t want to see a reconciled (restored) relationship?	Matthew 6:15	
Don’t believe that Jesus died for you?	1 Peter 3:18; John 14:6	
You believe that Jesus’ body and blood are present in the Eucharist?	Matthew 26:26-28; John 6:51-55	
You experience doubts in life?	Mark 9:24; John 6:37	

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 353-354.

Absolution



Now properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin, and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven, and grace is obtained through Christ. ¹¹

What comes to mind when you hear the word “forgiveness”? In what relationships or situations have you experienced forgiveness?

READ LUKE 15:1-32 (*take turns reading*)

What stands out most to you in the story of the prodigal son?

Can you think of a time where you “ran away” from God?

¹¹ Robert Kolb et al, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 44.

The father in the story runs out to meet his son and embraces him before he's even able to speak a word. What does this tell you about God and His will?

READ PSALM 32:5, LEVITICUS 5:5, JAMES 5:16, and 1 JOHN 1:9

Throughout scripture, we are called to confess our sins. Usually we do this corporately in worship, and then hear the pastor, speaking on behalf of Christ, pronounce forgiveness. We also believe in the practice of private confession and absolution – a more intimate and personal way to hear of God's forgiveness. What is scary about confessing? What is comforting?

In what relationships do you need to proclaim forgiveness in, as God proclaims forgiveness to you? What bitterness, hurt, or situation are you holding onto and not letting go of? Pray that the Spirit of God would lead you to give others the same forgiveness God gives to you.



When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts should firmly believe that God really forgives us for Christ's sake."¹²

¹² Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 211.

FURTHER EXPLANATION¹³

Q: What is Confession?

A: Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

In the Large Catechism, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther expounds on this, saying:

[...] As I have often said, confession consists of two parts. The first is our work and act, when I lament my sin and desire comfort and restoration for my soul. The second is a work that God does, when he absolves me of my sins through the Word placed on the lips of another person. This is the surpassingly grand and noble thing that makes confession so wonderful and comforting. In the past we placed all the emphasis on our work alone and were only concerned whether we had confessed purely enough. We should therefore take care to keep the two parts clearly separate. We should set little value on our work but exalt and magnify God's Word. We should not go to confession as if we wanted to perform a magnificent work to present to God, but simply to accept and receive something from him. You dare not come and say how upright or how wicked you are. If you are a Christian, I know this well enough anyway; if you are not, I know it even better. But you must do it for this reason: to lament your need and allow yourself to be helped so that you may attain a joyful heart and conscience.¹⁴

Q: What sins should we confess?

A: Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?

Q: What is the Office of the Keys?

A: The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. In John 20:22-23, we read: "The Lord

¹³ Some explanations come from *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*

¹⁴ Robert Kolb et al, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 478.

Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" In the Church, the "Office of the Keys" is held or exercised by the pastor. The Pastor doesn't forgive by his own authority, but acts in place of Christ.

Q: How should we look at the Absolution spoken by the pastor?

A: "People are diligently instructed how comforting the word of absolution is and how highly and dearly absolution is to be esteemed. For it is not the voice or word of the person speaking it, but it is the Word of God, who forgives sin. For it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command."¹⁵

When the pastor absolves sins – that is, says, "I forgive you all your sins" – he speaks with Christ's authority and on His behalf. Therefore, we can firmly believe that God Himself has completely forgiven our sins. See John 20:23, Luke 10:16, and Matthew 18:18.

Q: What is the benefit of private confession? If I confess to the pastor privately, can I be sure that my confession will remain confidential?

A: In private confession, the Christian has a safe place to name his or her sins so that they are no longer carried alone. The absolution is spoken specifically to the person confessing. There can be no mistaking to whom these words of Jesus are addressed: "I forgive you all your sins."

In the Rite of Ordination, the pastor promises before God never to divulge the sins that have been confessed to him. Never means never, for God Himself in Christ has removed these sins. See Psalm 103:12.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 72.