

Lutheran Foundations: A Confirmation Curriculum[©]

Lutheran Christianity

The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish

Year 3, Lesson 1:

Confirmation, The Bible, Lutheranism, & The Catechism

CONFIRMATION

In Baptism, God claimed you – and your parents made some promises about how they would raise you. When you go through the rite of Confirmation – sometimes called the Affirmation of Baptism – God is still the driver, God still has you, God will still do all the things that need doing that you can't do. BUT now you have the opportunity to take on the promises about how you are going to live from your parents. You aren't a baby anymore! You are a big kid now!

So, our job between today and the day you get confirmed, the day you affirm your baptism, is to get you ready. We need to teach you the basics of the Christian faith so that you can sensibly make these promises. Today you don't know enough... We have to fix that! Together!

Here is the critical portion of the Rite of Confirmation from Evangelical Lutheran Worship (that's the cranberry-colored hymnal at your church)

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God, the powers of this world that rebel against God, and the ways of sin that draw you from God?

Response: I renounce them.

Do you believe in God the Father?

Response: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Response: I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

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

AFFIRMATION

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

Response: I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.

So that's where we are headed...

One last thing: Confirmation for a Christian is sort of like pre-algebra for someone who wants a career in math. It is the very beginning of what you need to know and practice as an adult Christian. It is not the end. It is not graduation! We will be covering the very basics of the faith. We are trying to bring you to the place where you can sensibly promise to start working to stay on this path yourself!

THE BIBLE

*"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me;
it has hands, it lays hold of me...
a simple layman armed with Scripture
is to be believed above a pope or a cardinal without it."
—Martin Luther*

What is the Bible?

"Most Americans, religious or not, have heard of and read part or even all of the Bible. It is arguably one of the most often referenced books — or set of books — in our culture. In its most basic definition, the Bible is a diverse collection of writings, divided into two main sections:

- The Old Testament, which tells the story of God's relationship with and work on behalf of the Hebrew people.
- The New Testament, which shares the story of Jesus, God's Son, and his teachings, death and resurrection, as well as the experiences and faith of the first followers of Jesus

But its meaning — and its significance to the Christian faith — is far more complex and profound. As Lutherans, ELCA members believe that the Bible is the written Word of God. It creates and nurtures faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and points us to Jesus Christ, the living Word and center of our faith. And in reading the Bible, we are invited into a relationship with God that both challenges us and promises us new life.”

-- From the website of the ELCA

This year we are focusing on the New Testament, the second part of the Bible. The New Testament has 27 books about Jesus and the early church. It contains 4 Gospels, a book of history, and a bunch of letters from Christian leaders to people and congregations all over the ancient world. It wraps up with a book of Apocalyptic Literature, the Book of Revelation

What do Lutherans Believe about the Bible?

We tend to try to understand the Bible, we don't spend much time or energy defending it. We figure it doesn't need much defending. It is demonstrably self-authenticating and it has proven impossible to suppress...

For Lutherans, the Bible is all of the following:

1. The Written Word of God
2. A Book, or more properly, a collection of books, to be read using ordinary literary rules (genre, setting, context, purpose, tense, redaction, etc). In addition, we are committed to honoring the plain meaning of words and we seek to understand how the initial writers and readers of any part of the Bible would have understood those words.
3. A Book written in other languages and arising from very different cultures and then translated into English
4. A gift from God
5. A book which points to Christ (The Manger and swaddling clothes which hold Christ -- Luther)
 - i. It is NOT Divine (The Master pointing to the moon...)
 - ii. It is NOT to be worshiped
 - iii. It is NOT a textbook providing answers for questions of
 - a. History
 - b. Anthropology
 - c. Physics
 - d. Biology
 - e. Geography

Why are there so many translations?

1. The Bible was written a long time ago. Those words are (mostly!) nailed down. But English is a living language. The meaning of words is always changing and evolving... so we have to update our translations

2. We keep finding new fragments of the ancient Bible. Sometimes we find enough proof to change what we think the original Bible said.
3. There are different ways to translate.
 - a. Word for Word
 - b. Meaning for Meaning
 - c. Thought for Thought
 - d. Paraphrase
4. Some translations try to come in at a specific reading level and so they might use words that aren't quite right from a translation perspective, but which are necessary to simplify the text...

Which translation should you use?

That depends on a couple of things: What do you want to use it for, and how well do you read? You need a Bible for this class. There is probably one at home. If money is tight, use that one! Or you could pick one up at Goodwill for less than a dollar... But if you want to buy a Bible, or if someone is willing to buy one for you, talk to me and I will help you find a "good fit" for what you want to do...

If you want to learn the Bible Stories in the FASTEST & EASIEST way possible, get a Bible Story Book. This is how my parents taught me the Bible stories. For our class we will be using the Egermeier's Bible Story Book. First published in 1922 and substantially updated in 1963. The language in that update is now 61 years old and some of it needs to be updated again, but it is the best book I know to get your head around the top 300 or so Bible Stories.

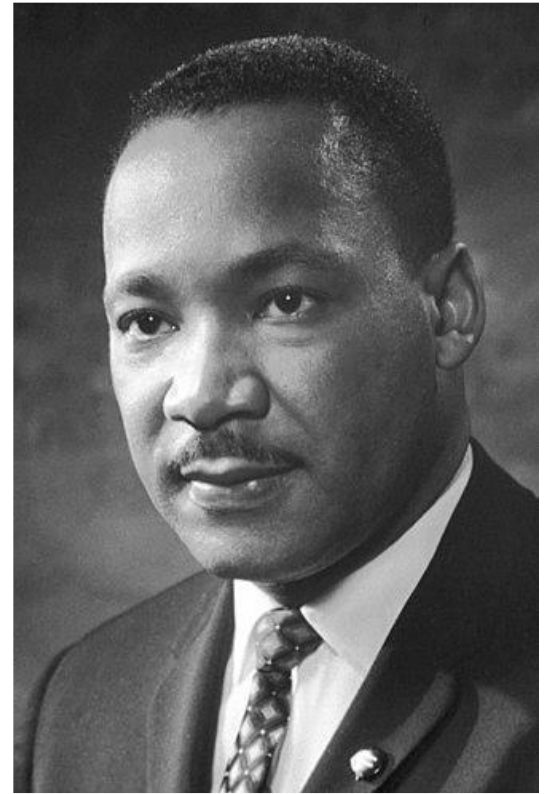
LUTHERANISM

We are just going to touch this today! Lutherans are a kind of Christian who believe and teach that we are saved by God's Grace (alone!) through Faith (alone!) in Jesus Christ (alone!). Don't worry TODAY about those alones... just open a file folder in your head for each of them – and add another file folder titled "Scripture Alone". We are going to spend the next 3 years filling those folders!



We follow the teachings of a guy named Martin Luther. This is Martin Luther. He was a German Monk and Priest who wanted to reform the Catholic Church. He was born in 1483 and began his public reformation work in 1517. He is NOT Martin Luther King Jr.

This is Martin Luther King Jr.. Martin Luther King Jr. was an American born in 1929 and assassinated in 1968. He was a Baptist preacher and a champion of the Civil Rights movement. He was a great American. But he is not who we will be talking about for the next 3 years. Both great men. But two different men. Lutherans respect Martin Luther King Jr. We follow the teachings of Martin Luther. Which brings us to...:



THE CATECHISM

Catechism comes from an old Greek word that means “Questions and Answers”

Martin Luther – the German guy – wrote 2 catechisms: The Large Catechism and The Small Catechism. The larger one is, well, larger... We are going to be spending A LOT of time in the Small Catechism this year. It is the bare bones basics of what Lutheran Christians believe – a Lutheran spin on what we think is NECESSARY for anyone to believe to sensibly call themselves a Christian.

For 500 years, the Small Catechism has been the intergenerational string that held all Lutherans together. Every single Lutheran my age or older MEMORIZED the whole thing and went through public examinations in front of the whole church to prove that we knew it cold.

Your church probably will not make you do a public examination – but take it from an old guy, it would do you a world of good to memorize the catechism. It’s like having guardrails for your head and soul. You will be much more prepared to resist false teaching and preaching. You will be much better prepared to live a faithful life.