



In Christ Alone

A Simple Explanation of the Church
and Christian Faith

This booklet is an adaptation of:

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The Narrow Way Simply Shown

*In Christ Alone: A Simple Explanation
of the Church and Christian Faith*

Adaptations include:

- Replaced references to Trinity Lutheran Denver, CO, with St. Timothy Lutheran Huber Heights, OH.
- Removed URL hyperlinks.
- Revised Homeschooling section.
- Removed Classical Lutheran Education section.
- Removed Author's Biography

First published by Ad Crucem 2023

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First edition

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Preface

We welcome visitors and would love to discuss the many opportunities worshippers have to receive God's blessings of salvation and life together at St. Timothy Lutheran Church.

Divine Service is every Sunday at 10:30 AM.

If you have no church here in the Dayton area, join us. If you have not been baptized, be baptized here. If you have not received Holy Communion in a long time or perhaps ever, learn the faith to receive the Lord's Body and Blood here. Call the church, email the pastor, and come to Christ's altar here to be with Him now and always.

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The Christian Faith

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

What Christians Believe and Do

Almost every church claims to believe the Bible or practice Jesus's ways. How can you distinguish between what God teaches and what people have made up? Our Lutheran Church boils down what God teaches into a brief form called the Small Catechism. You can check out the entire Small Catechism at: <http://catechism.cph.org/> You can learn more about the Lutheran Church on page 23.

What is the Bible?

The Bible is where God's truth about Jesus Christ is made known. The Bible is God's Word and contains sixty-six distinct books written over a thousand years, all with some human author and a single divine Author, the Holy Spirit. If we read Paul's letter to the Romans, we read the Holy Spirit's words. If we are reading Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish, we are reading the Holy Spirit's words. If we read Moses's account of the world's creation, we read the Holy Spirit's words.

Since the Holy Spirit has written all these things through the human writers He chose, the Bible is inerrant (it has no mistakes) and infallible (it will not mislead us). Since God Himself is totally trustworthy, His Word is also

totally trustworthy.

How Should I Read the Bible?

You should read the Bible as it wants to be read: as God's Word centering on the person and work of Jesus Christ our Savior. In the Old Testament God promises a Savior and the New Testament tells of the Savior who has come.

Look at the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24, to see how Jesus Himself read the Bible. When people were confused about what God was doing and what His Word meant, Jesus explained that the Bible is centered on who He is and what He has done in His death and resurrection so that the world might be saved through Him.

When you read the Bible, read as much as you can at a time. Don't read one verse and then put it down. That's like watching one minute of a movie per day. You'll never understand what's happening and never finish it all! An internet search for one of the following reading plans will help you get more deeply into the Bible:

1. Professor Horner's Bible Reading System
2. M'Cheyne's Plan

Two Great Doctrines: Law and Gospel

The Bible teaches two great doctrines above all others and including all others: **the Law and the Gospel**. The Bible teaches God's Law in each book but does not teach that a sinner can be saved by keeping the Law. God's holy Law always accuses sinners. However, His holy Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born in human flesh, died on the cross, and rose from the dead to save sinners and reconcile us to God. We will unpack this further in

the next section.

The Law – What God Wants From Us

God has never wanted less than all of us. The Bible has two big commands that God gives us: to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Everything is summarized in those two commands. Our sin – everything we do against God’s Word – separates us from Him. Because of our sin, everyone dies. The Bible says: “... the wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23), and “... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)

Three Uses of the Law

God’s Law works in three ways when we hear it or read it:

1. It **sets a boundary or curb to bad behavior and sin** so that when we hear that we will get in trouble for doing something, we don’t do it. In the same way that the curb keeps your car from running over someone on the sidewalk without consequence, the law curbs sin so that it doesn’t destroy everything.
2. It works as **a mirror to show us our sin** and make us aware of our blemishes and stains we could not otherwise see. Sometimes we do not know the existence of , let alone its consequences, until God’s Law makes it known.
3. It works as a guide to **show us how we should live**, what we should do or not do so we do not invent “good deeds” for ourselves but instead do those things God would have us do.

The Law doesn’t change and always accuses us since we’re

sinner. Its best summary in the Bible is the Ten Commandments.

The Gospel – Who God Is

The Bible also teaches a way of rescue: the Gospel or Good News that Jesus Christ was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead to give us life and forgiveness. There is no hope for sinful men except in Jesus Christ, His work, His death, and His resurrection. In Him, we have every hope of mercy and peace from our heavenly Father. Christ's death for us – in our place – has removed the power of sin and death over us. In Him, we have life and peace with our heavenly Father.

The Bible teaches this Gospel or Good News in each book, and only faith in this Gospel Good News can save us from certain death and the punishment of sin in Hell. This Gospel is the heart, soul, and purpose of Christ's church. In this Gospel, God opens to us the truth and reality of His heart and desire – to save sinners from death and Hell through the blood and resurrected life of Jesus Christ. It is the reason the Church exists and the sum and substance of what St. Timothy Lutheran Church believes and preaches.

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are a summary of what God wants from all of us. Since He wants us to love Him and to love our neighbors just like we already love ourselves, each commandment can be categorized as a specific way to love God through honoring Him and honoring His will.

The Commandments are sometimes divided into two

different “tables” or “tablets” because Moses was given two tablets of stone on to which God wrote the Commandments.

1. **The First Table** is composed of the first three Commandments that especially talk about the love of God.
2. **The Second Table** comprises the last seven Commandments that focus on how we should love our neighbors.

Whichever Table you might list them on, the Commandments all have a positive and a negative side:

1. **The First Commandment** – Worship only the true God and don’t worship any false gods.
2. **The Second Commandment** – Use God’s Name the right way. Don’t use it as a swear word to cover your own lying or to find out something you shouldn’t know.
3. **The Third Commandment** – Set aside time for God’s Word, especially on Sundays. Don’t use the time God has given you for anything less than His truth.
4. **The Fourth Commandment** – Honor your parents and the other authorities God has placed in your life. Don’t destroy the family through what you do or say, or how you live.
5. **The Fifth Commandment** – Protect innocent life, and do not take the life of any innocent person through what you do or what you fail to do to care for him.
6. **The Sixth Commandment** – Protect marriage. Don’t think, say, or do anything that destroys your marriage

or anyone else's, your chastity or anyone else's.

7. **The Seventh Commandment** – Protect property, and don't take something that belongs to someone else, whether the way you got it looked right or wrong to anyone.
8. **The Eighth Commandment** – Protect other people's good names, and don't say things, even if true, that are useless gossip.
9. **The Ninth Commandment** – Protect other people's possessions, especially their real estate, and don't let your heart be ruled by obsessing over things that belong to someone else.
10. **The Tenth Commandment** – Protect other people's family, job, and whole life, everything that makes their lives worthwhile, upbuilding, and good. Don't allow the sinful desires of your heart to keep you from loving your neighbor.

Sin and Death

All the evils we see in the world are the result of our sins, the sins of others, or the fact that God's good creation was corrupted by the sin of Adam and Eve. Sin includes every thought, word, and deed against God's Law, His will for His creatures.

The Bible teaches that the first sin of our parents, Adam and Eve, has passed on to us a defect called "original sin," a spiritual genetic disease every human has that inevitably brings death to us all. Along the way to death, we commit sins – often more cunningly the older we get. Those sins, called "actual sins" or "sins of omission and commission," are all acts of rebellion against our Creator and symptoms of the

underlying disease leading us to death.

Death was not part of God's original design in creation. If sin could be taken away from us, we could be saved from death. If death could be taken away from us, life would look entirely different. Imagine how wonderful it would be not to fear death anymore!

The Gospel is the good news that in the death of Christ, our death has been defeated; by the blood of Christ, sin's stain has been washed away, and through baptism into Christ, you die with Him now so that you will live with Him forever.

Orders of Creation

Life is not random. The Creator of all life is not Himself random and disorderly. He is a "God of order," so the life that He has made also has an order. Birds cannot become pine trees. Oceans do not turn into azaleas. Boys do not turn into girls. Women do not become men.

These realities are called the orders of creation. We may deny them and try to fight against them. We can say that they are old-fashioned or silly. We can declare war on anyone who says they are real or exist. That won't change anything. No amount of screaming will turn the bird into a pine tree. No amount of denial will change the Atlantic into an azalea. No social media post or politician's speech will make boys into girls or women into men.

Created life, including each of us, can either conform to its created design or push against it. When we conform our thoughts, words, and deeds to God's orders, we live a better life than when we push – vainly – against them. When we expect to get pine cones from a pine tree and to see a boy grow into a

man, we find wisdom. When we expect otherwise, our foolishness leads to all kinds of destruction.

Table of Duties

One of the best places to learn about the orders of creation is the collection of Bible passages found in the Small Catechism – also known as the Table of Duties found here:

<https://catechism.cph.org/en/table-of-duties.html>.

This puts together how and why churches, families, workplaces, and governments should function.

If you read the Table of Duties, you'll find that the Bible is especially clear about how each of the different parts of life – the home, the local church, the workplace, the courts, and so on – is accountable to the one true God. Even if someone is doing evil and getting away with it now, he won't succeed forever. Even if someone is being lazy or foolish or wicked now, he will one day answer to God for all those things. Life is a serious thing because we live it in God's presence, whether we acknowledge that fact or not, and one day we will all surely know that we must answer to Him, however much we now deny that.

Marriage

The institution of marriage was established by God at creation as the lifelong union of one man and one woman. Marriage has three purposes: the procreation of children, faithfulness to one's spouse, and the symbolizing of Christ's union with His church. Marriage can, therefore, only be between one man and one woman since God Himself has only one Bride, the holy Christian Church. Therefore, sexual activity outside of marriage

violates God's will for our lives. Also, marriage cannot be between two people of the same sex or multiple people simultaneously because God did not establish marriage to be that way. He established what we acknowledge and honor, not what our hearts might desire. We support and protect marriage so that God's will might be honored and the children He has given us might be protected. Learn more about our church's teaching on marriage at: <https://www.lcms.org/social-issues/marriage>.

Sex and Gender

We are not free to be whatever we would like. God created two sexes: male and female. Whether a person is male or female is an objective reality created by God at conception and cannot be changed. If we were free to be whatever we would like, we would be greater and more powerful than God Himself. Since we plainly are not God, we do not have such control, and cannot even keep ourselves alive without His help every moment. We might playact as something we are not, but we cannot become other than what He has made us. To see a video that is helpful to understand this topic better, type in the following link on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BdhNUUyyLk>

Abortion

No one has the right to take an innocent life. The Bible recognizes that guilty men can be punished for certain crimes with death, but no child may be punished for existing. We cannot support, vote for, or practice abortion because we

cannot support, vote for, or practice murder. Murder is the taking of innocent life, and abortion is the taking of an innocent life that has no ability to defend itself. Learn more about our church's teaching on abortion here:

<https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/c512EZbl0cthKgPaXVcN4TB7RmXOPNVE>

Christian Freedom

Christians are free from the regulations and traditions of men. We do not regulate one another in things that the Bible has left free – ceremonies, times of the year, and drinking or not drinking alcohol. Christian freedom must be maintained because it means that God's Word is supreme in all things, so we are silent wherever and whenever God's Word is silent. Wherever and whenever God's Word speaks about the evil of being drunk (not the "evil" of drinking alcohol) we must speak. You can hear Martin Luther's teaching on Christian freedom at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEXUhtNG9M>

The Ecumenical Creeds

This Gospel is summarized in the oldest of our church's confessions – the three Ecumenical Creeds. A "creed" is something that someone or some group believes, and "ecumenical" means worldwide. Any Christian can and should believe what these three creeds teach:

1. the Apostles' Creed, and
2. the Nicene Creed, and
3. the Athanasian Creed.

You can find all three creeds at:

<https://bookofconcord.org/ecumenical-creeds/>

The oldest creed is the Apostles'. We find it used at baptisms in Rome a couple of centuries after Jesus's resurrection. We still use the Apostles' Creed at baptisms and on many Sundays throughout the year. It teaches the basics of who God is – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and what He has done and does to create us, redeem us, and make us holy so that we can live with Him forever.

The second-oldest creed is the Nicene Creed, which resolved disagreements in the church about who Jesus is and who the Holy Spirit is. It is about 1,700 years old, and we say it most Sundays and festival days at Trinity. It clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is the true God and man and that the Holy Spirit is not some kind of power or force but the Third Person of the Holy Trinity and the One who makes us spiritually alive through the Gospel.

The newest creed is the Athanasian Creed, which is only 1,400 years old. It was written to combat the false teaching that Jesus was not truly God in the same way His Father is. The people who believed this were called Arians, and their beliefs are similar to modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. We say this creed once a year on Trinity Sunday in early summer because it teaches us clearly who Jesus is, what He's done for our salvation, and what we must believe to have eternal life.

What is the Lutheran Church?

The Lutheran Church contains many different bodies, all of which base their teachings and practice to some degree on the work of the 16th century reformer Martin Luther. However, there is a wide variance in particular beliefs of each body when it comes to the authority of Scripture and the commitment to

Lutheran confessional writings when defining matters of doctrine, history, science, human sexuality, women's role in the church, and church fellowship.

Our church is a member of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS). The word "Synod" comes from Greek words that mean "walking together." Many churches do not have a confession of faith. If they have a faith statement, it is often not very long or clear. So you never know what you will get; it probably depends on who is preaching that week.

What is a Confessional Church?

Our congregations are confessional. A confessional church is one that clearly tells you what it believes, teaches, and does. We hold to a shared confession that the Bible is without error in all that it says, that the Lutheran Confessions are a correct explanation of the teachings of Scripture, and what level of agreement is necessary to join together in one church body.

Our confessions are listed within the 1580 Book of Concord found here: <https://bookofconcord.org>. What we believe drives what we say and do, and you can see what we believe. We need confessions because almost every church says it believes in Jesus and that the Bible is true or at least helpful. Confessions make clear what we mean when we say that, so you don't have to wonder, and they hold us accountable for what we're doing or saying. We don't need confessions or creeds because the Bible isn't clear. The Bible is very clear – that's how we can write a confession because we know what the Bible says. We need confessions because human beings aren't clear and can be erratic and often change their minds. Confessions hold us on course, keep us biblically grounded, and let others know what our church is all about.

How Does God Save Us?

God saves us from our sin, death, and Hell through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. He made atonement for our sins through the blood He shed on the cross, and gave up His life for ours when He gave up His spirit at the end of His crucifixion. That message is brought to us through the preaching of the Gospel, whether we hear it first when we are very young or when we are much older, and it is faith in that Good News that alone saves us.

Since that has to do with God's work for us and God's message preached to us, we say that God's salvation or rescue is entirely His doing. Theologians call that idea "monergism," from the Greek word meaning that only one Person is doing the work. The work of saving us from everything that threatens us, terrifies us, or would destroy us today or forever is up to God and depends alone on God.

If everything depends on Him, then our salvation is all grace – a free gift, a present for which you don't have to do anything to get. Our salvation is His to do and ours to enjoy eternally.

How Many Religions Are True?

There are thousands of different beliefs and practices worldwide that can be called "organized religion." There are even more private beliefs and practices that people do on their own that you could also call "religious." Are those all the same? Do they all get you to the same place?

No, they don't because they can't. All religions other than Christianity can be summarized as follows: do this so you can be saved, or fixed or however they express the goal of what they believe and do. Every other religion than Christianity can

be summarized as a religion of the law – maybe not God’s law as we read it in Scripture but some kind of command or rule. You might be using healing crystals to overcome something horrible that happened to you or washing before Friday prayers in a mosque. The idea is always the same: do something to get something.

Christianity is the only true religion because it is the only religion of the Gospel. It is not defined by what you do or don’t do. God’s Good News is that everything necessary for salvation from sin, shame, death, and Hell has been done and brought to you in Jesus Christ, the world’s Savior. Christianity is the only religion you can rely on. It’s the only true religion. You can learn more about the two kinds of religions here: <https://wolffmueller.co/basics/>

How to Pray

Most people pray but not as often as they should. When we pray we should not just simply tell God what’s going on. He already knows. In prayer, we should put our lives in God’s hands, giving Him our worries and frustrations and sadness and hopes so that we know He is taking care of others, as He cares for all of us and loves us for the sake of His Son. We pray in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and know that He hears us.

Pray regularly – that means using some standard like “brush your teeth twice a day” or “change your oil every 5,000 miles.” Set the alarm on your phone for the same two times every day. Fold your hands and give thanks before every meal you eat. Make it a rule, set a standard, follow it, and that will make it easier to pray not only twice a day or at every meal but all the time since any time is a good time to pray. You can follow

Martin Luther's advice for prayer here:

<https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/daily-prayers/>

Lord's Prayer

The pattern for all Christian prayer is in the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught to His disciples when they asked Him how to pray. You don't have to pray only the Lord's Prayer, but your priorities for prayer are set in the Lord's Prayer.

Above all things, pray for God's Name, Word, and Kingdom to be honored and extended in your life and throughout the world. Pray first for faith and a holy life, for people to trust in Christ for their salvation, and for the church to flourish everywhere. Then pray for yourself and your neighbors, for the things you need for this life, for forgiveness and the power to forgive others. Pray to be kept from temptations that seem too hard to withstand, and pray to be kept away from Satan and his evil work, from demons and their lies. Find out more about the Lord's Prayer here:

<https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/the-lords-prayer/>

How to Pray with Your Family

If you have a family, you should learn God's Word together and pray together. Do this at least once daily to see the best growth in knowing the Lord. As you spend time in His Word, God will bless your lives with His peace and goodness.

Sit down together, maybe at a meal, read a paragraph or a chapter of the Bible (starting with the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John), say the Apostles' Creed, and pray the Lord's Prayer. This will change your family in ways you don't expect and will be wonderful to see and live.

You can find more about praying with your family here:
<https://resources.lcms.org/multimedia/video-how-to-do-family-devotions/>

Or here:
<https://www.whatdoesthismean.org/devotions.html>

God With Us

God is not far away from us. He wants to be near us and came into this world to be Immanuel or “God with us.” There are three ways that He comes near to us in His church through: Holy Baptism, the Office of the Keys, and Holy Communion.

Our church looks the way it does and worships the way it does because we believe God is actually with us in worship – not far away, not waiting to come down if we get worked up enough, not wishing He could be with us but unable to come to us. No, He is with us and for us and blesses us Himself when we gather in worship.

Baptism

Coming into the Christian church happens through Holy Baptism, a sacrament connected to God’s Word that Jesus Himself set up. He told His disciples to baptize everyone in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism means “washing.” The Bible shows us the only baptism you need: a baptism of water and the Spirit of God, Who comes to you in Baptism. That’s why we call it “Holy Baptism,” because God’s Spirit comes to us and fills us as the pastor pours water over us and speaks the following words of God to us: “I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

See what the Small Catechism says about Baptism here:
<https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/the-sacrament-of-holy-baptism/>

Who Needs It?

Every believer must be baptized if he hasn't already been baptized with water in God's triune Name. A baptism without God's Name is not a baptism. A baptism without water is not a baptism. There is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" in the Bible, and everyone needs to believe the one faith, and needs to receive the one baptism.

If you have not yet been baptized or don't know if you have, please email or call us as soon as you can.

Infant Baptism

At St. Timothy, we baptize people of any size, including the littlest ones. We do this because we believe what the Bible says about baptism: everyone needs it ("You must be born again of water and of the Spirit"), and "everyone" or "all nations" includes infants.

Think about it this way: only sinners die. If babies did not have the spiritual disease of sin – what we call "original" or "inherited" sin – they they would not die. If someone can die, he should be baptized, no matter how young he is or how much he understands. If babies can die, babies should also be baptized to receive God's salvation from death.

Think about this, too: babies are the model for faith in the Bible. Jesus said that no one could enter God's kingdom unless he became like a little child. Little ones are God's model for faith. Far from not believing or not understanding, they are the

ones we need to imitate as we trust in God our Father. God only has children, not adults. So children, the littlest among us, are the model for faith and every baptism.

No matter how young or old you are when you're baptized, you're baptized as God's child, His little one for whom He cares and whom He carries in His everlasting arms.

How We Baptize

In in the Bible's original Greek language, Baptism means "wash with water." However, it does not say precisely how someone is to be baptized apart from the Triune Name and some amount of water. You could be immersed in water, like in a river or a big tub. You could have water sprinkled on top of your head. You could be washed like you'd wash a cup. What matters is not how much water is used but that we use water and God's Word. That's what Jesus commanded – water and the Word – so that's what we absolutely must do. Other things can be to the discretion of individual pastors and churches.

Why Pastors?

In LCMS church services, you will see men up front (in what we call the "chancel") who read God's Word, preach, and celebrate Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Those are our pastors who have been trained to do those things and to do them well. All that they do is what Lutherans call the "Office of the Holy Ministry," the duties God has given to some men in the church to benefit the whole church. In God's Name, they forgive the sins confessed to them, speak God's Word, and administer His Sacraments. In this way members receive God's care through His ministers.

See what the Small Catechism says about forgiveness and the ministry here. - - - - -

<https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/how-christians-confess/>

The Office of the Holy Ministry

The Office of the Holy Ministry is called the Office of the Keys. God gave two keys to His church, which the ministers use in God's Name. One key is the binding key, when the pastor proclaims to an unrepentant sinner that he is not forgiven as long as he does not repent. The other key is the loosing key, when the pastor proclaims to a repentant sinner that he is forgiven all his sins for the sake of Christ's death and resurrection.

Both keys are necessary to God's church, so He gave us both of them for the ministers to use. They are also serious, as the minister must know clearly what is sin and what is not, and what God says and does not say in Scripture. This is why we take the Office of the Holy Ministry so seriously, requiring our pastors to be well-schooled in Scripture and doctrine and to hold fast to the Bible and our creeds and confessions in the Book of Concord.

Confessing Our Sins

We confess sins in three different ways:

1. To God privately, we confess all our sins, including the ones we don't remember. Both our pastor and the Bible remind us constantly that for Christ's sake, we are forgiven.

2. To one another, we confess our sins against one another, as Christ commanded us to do in the Lord's Prayer and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Both our pastor and the Bible remind us that if God has forgiven us for Christ's sake, we also forgive, for Christ's sake, those who have done and said evil against us.
3. To the pastor, we confess sins that trouble us. This is not absolutely commanded in Scripture, so it is not required of anyone. It is there for our comfort, not to burden us. If we confess sin to the pastor, he cannot say anything about it to anyone. The sin dies in his ear.

After we confess, God forgives that sin for the sake of Jesus Christ, and we are free of the burden of those sins that trouble us. You can find out more about the confession of sins from the Small Catechism [here](https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/how-christians-confess/).

<https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/how-christians-confess/>

Communion

The focus and climax of every Sunday and festival service at St. Timothy is Holy Communion, also called the Lord's Supper, Eucharist, or the Sacrament of the Altar. In Holy Communion, the Lord Jesus Christ comes to us Himself. When the minister speaks Christ's words of institution, the communicant receives the very body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the earthly elements of bread and wine. It is a profound mystery that is received by faith in Christ's Word and command. See what we teach about Holy Communion [here](https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/the-sacrament-of-the-altar/).

How Jesus is With us in Holy Communion

Many churches do not believe Jesus is physically present in Holy Communion. Other churches believe He is present, but have very complex explanations of how that happens. Our teaching is that Christ's body and blood is present in Holy Communion because He says so. Jesus says:

“Take, eat, this is My Body.”

(Mt 26:26 [cf: Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24])

“Take, drink; this is My Blood.”

(Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24 [cf: Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25])

You may find Internet articles calling that teaching “consubstantiation.” We don’t call it that because what we teach is not an opinion or a philosophical idea. We teach simply what Scripture says, as we do in everything else. If God’s Word says it, that settles it.

Who Should Receive It?

Anyone who repents of their sins and trusts in these words of Christ – “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins” – should receive Holy Communion. If you repent of your sin and trust Christ, you are a Christian. If you are a Christian, you should be a member of a Christian congregation, accountable to it and its pastor.

At St. Timothy, we observe the historic practice of “closed communion” (sometimes called “close communion”). Both phrases mean the same thing: our pastor admits those people to the altar to commune who believe and live in accordance with our congregation’s teachings. We don’t practice “open communion,” meaning anyone who shows up can take

communion regardless of what they believe or how they live. When you kneel at an altar, you are saying “Amen” to whatever is believed, taught, and confessed at that altar. We practice “close” or “closed communion” (not open to everyone and anyone) out of love for our neighbor to ensure they do not receive our Lord’s body and blood in an unworthy manner. (see 1 Cor 11:27).

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The Church

WHAT TO EXPECT IN CHURCH

The Divine Service

Our Sunday service is called the “Divine Service” because in it God serves us with His gifts of Word and Sacrament, and we respond to Him in thankfulness and praise. The service is “divine” because we meet with, hear from, and receive life from our great God and Savior. It is not so much that we have something to give Him as He has so much to give us. That’s why we go to church – the Divine Service.

God’s Gifts

In the Divine Service, God gives us His gifts. He speaks to us and is with us, just as Isaiah predicted that He would be Immanuel, “God with us,” when He was born for us in Bethlehem.

Preaching and How to Listen to It

The Bible is God’s Word. Our pastor teaches what the Bible says and encourages you in the life that Christ gives you. In preaching, God’s ministers unfold the meaning of God’s Word, not their opinions, wills, or preferences. In the sermon, you will hear Law and Gospel – God’s truth applied to your life so that

you might have hope for now and forever in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper and How to Receive It

In the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, our Lord Jesus Christ is physically present for us and with us just as He promises, "This is My Body...This is My Blood." That's why our church takes the Lord's Supper so seriously – God Himself is present. That's why:

1. We *ask* guests and inquirers to talk to our pastor or and elder before receiving the Lord's Supper.
2. We *prepare* ourselves by confessing our sins and receiving God's forgiveness early in the Divine Service.
3. We are *silent* and *attentive* when Christ's Words of Institution are chanted.
4. We *kneel* to receive the Lord's Supper.
5. We say "*Amen*!" when the pastor serves us Christ's Body and Christ's Blood.

Sacrament and Sacrifice

In the Divine Service, God is with us, and we are with Him. Whenever the family gathers (the Father with His children) everyone has something to give, something in which the other delights. When God gives to us, that is called a "*sacramental*" act, and when we give something to God, as a child might give a poorly drawn picture to his loving father, that is called a "*sacrificial*" act.

The way to tell the difference between the two in the Service is to look at which way the pastor is facing.

- **If he is facing toward the congregation**, as when he forgives our sins in Christ’s Name, reads the Word of God to us, preaches God’s Word in the sermon, or feeds us with Christ’s Body and Blood in Holy Communion, those are the *“sacramental”* acts, where God is giving us Himself and all His gifts.
- **When the pastor is facing toward the front of the church** (called the “chancel,” at the center of which is the altar), like when he is praying on our behalf or presenting the congregation’s offerings, that is a *“sacrificial”* act, a small sacrifice of our prayers or our gifts for the sake of God and His work.

Why the Liturgy?

The order the Divine Service follows is called the “liturgy.” It’s a simple, clear, and ancient way that Christians have worshipped for centuries. We follow the historic liturgy because it helps us worship in an orderly fashion. We could organize things in other ways, but the liturgy keeps us on track: God’s Word and the Sacraments are kept at the center where they belong. Our personal preferences, opinions, and interests have little to no place in the liturgy, and that’s a good thing.

What the Service Means

The whole Divine Service is built on the Bible. If you look in our hymnal (the book we use for worship) you will see that each part of the Service references one or more Bible passages that explain from where in Scripture that part comes. These passages explain why we are confessing our sins, why the pastor is singing, and what Baptism is.

The Service is divided into two major parts:

1. The Service of the Word, where the Bible is read and preached.
2. The Service of the Sacrament, where Holy Communion is celebrated and received.

Service of the Word

The Service of the Word, the first part of the Divine Service, features:

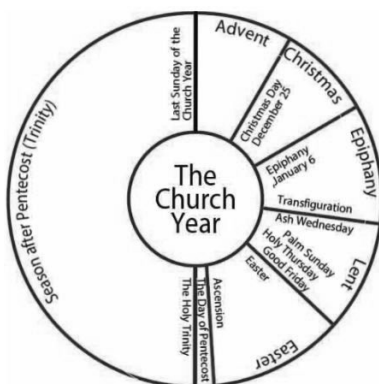
1. **Confession and Absolution**, where God hears and forgives our sins through the pastor whom He's sent to us.
2. **Hymns of Praise and Humility**, such as the Kyrie and Gloria in Excelsis.
3. **Psalms** fitting for that day's readings, such as the Introit and Gradual.
4. **The Old Testament reading**, which is connected especially to the Gospel of that day.
5. **The Epistle reading**, which is sometimes part of the day's theme, as at Christmas or Easter, and sometimes is a continuous reading of a New Testament letter.
6. **The Gospel reading**, which always centers on the words and works of Christ Himself and interprets the other two readings.
7. **The Sermon**, where the pastor explains and applies one or more of the Scripture lessons.
8. **The Offering and Offertory**, where we bring gifts to support the church's work.
9. **The Prayers of the Church**, where we ask God for His blessings and mercies on all.

Service of the Sacrament

The Service of the Sacrament, the second part of the Divine Service, features:

1. **The Preface and Proper Preface**, where the pastor's chanting and our song ask God's blessing on the congregation and retell what God has done, especially in that season's focus.
2. **The Sanctus** ("Holy" in Latin), where we sing the ancient song from the Jerusalem temple and the welcome song that the crowds sang when Jesus came into Jerusalem. We, too, welcome Jesus as He comes to us in Holy Communion.
3. **The Lord's Prayer**, which Jesus taught us Himself.
4. **The Words of Institution**, which Jesus used to establish the Lord's Supper in His Church.
5. **The Agnus Dei** ("Lamb of God" in Latin), which John the Baptist used to describe Jesus as God's Sacrifice for our sins.
6. **The Distribution of Communion**, where we receive Christ's Body and Blood.
7. **The Nunc Dimittis** ("Now Depart" in Latin), the song that elderly Simeon sang after he saw the child Jesus. We sing it after we have received Jesus in Holy Communion.
8. **Prayers after Communion**, that it would bless our lives.
9. **The Benediction**, where the pastor gives the same blessing to the congregation that the ancient Israelite priests gave thousands of years ago (Numbers 6).

The Church Year and Its Symbols



Our congregation follows the Christian church year to order our life together and focus on the Divine Service. The Christian year has two parts, divided roughly in half into semesters or half-years:

1. **The Semester of Christ** from Advent through Easter (winter and spring).
2. **The Semester of the Church** from Pentecost through the Last Sunday of the Church Year (summer and fall).

In those semesters or half-years, there are smaller seasons:

- The Semester of Christ has Advent when we focus on Christ's coming, Christmas when we celebrate His birth, Epiphany when we hear of His revealing to the whole world, Lent when we prepare for His suffering and death, and Easter when we rejoice in His resurrection from the dead.
- The Semester of the Church has Pentecost when we hear of the Holy Spirit's coming to the church for the world's sake and when we learn how to grow in our Christian life.

Each season has its own color (see the picture above) that goes with its focus:

- **Advent** is blue for the hope of Christ's coming;
- **Christmas** is white for Christ's purity and beauty;
- **Epiphany** is green for our growth in knowledge of His revelation;
- **Lent** is purple for repentance and sadness over sin;
- **Easter** is white for Christ's victory over death;
- **Pentecost** is red for the fire of God's Spirit;
- **Trinity** is green for continued growth in our Christian life.

There are special days throughout the year with their colors, such as Ascension and Reformation. The day's color links it to another day with similar colors, readings, and themes.

The church and her ministers are dressed along with those seasons. The different pieces of furniture and the pastors will be covered in the colors of the day or the season so that the whole focus for that day is on Christ and His Word, not on how nice the minister's suit looks or whether his jeans are too tight.

The church's coverings (called "paraments") and the ministers' clothing (called "vestments") also have symbols on them that go with that season or day.

The crucifix reminds us of our sins and still more of Christ's love that He would die for us, taking away the sin of the world. It puts in front of our eyes what Paul put in front of his churches' eyes:

"For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Cor 2:2)

All the church's art helps us to hear the Gospel more clearly and to know the Bible better.

Music

Music is central to the life of the Christian Church, taking to heart Martin Luther's view,

"In summa, next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits... Our dear fathers and prophets did not desire without reason that music is always used in the churches. Hence, we have so many songs and psalms. This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God." (Luther's Foreword to Georg Rhau's Collection, "Symphoniae iucundae")

Luther adds,

"Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching. I have no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the devil and makes people happy; they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and the like. Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honour. I would not exchange what little I know of music for something great. Experience proves that next to the Word of God, only music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart. We know that to the devil music is distasteful and sufferable. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues." (Bainton, R. H. (1999). *Here I Stand: A life of Martin Luther*. Abingdon Press. 266-267)

The Lutheran Service Book (LSB)

The hymnal we use in our worship is The Lutheran Service Book (LSB). This hymnal contains the historic liturgy as it has been handed down by Christians in the West through the ages. As the liturgy is sung at the various church services, Christians will recognize and share in various portions of the Scriptures and various prayers of the biblical saints.

We pray according to the ancient prayers that needy sinners cried out to Jesus, and that have been sung, chanted, and spoken since the beginning of the Christian Church in what is known as the Kyrie, “Lord have mercy.”

With John the Baptist, we anticipate and sing Christ’s arrival bringing with Him the forgiveness of sins in the words of the Agnus Dei.

With Mary, the Mother of God, we sing the words of the Magnificat, praising the Father in heaven who knocks down the proud and raises up the lowly.

Every Sunday includes the songs of the angels as they gave glory to God for the birth of Christ (the Gloria) and a bit of Palm Sunday as with the children waving branches, we sing their ancient song “Hosanna in the highest,” and pray for God to intervene in this world with salvation.

The Psalms (Introit)

In nearly every worship service we sing a portion of one of the Psalms from the Bible. Called the “Introit,” it marks the entrance of the pastor into the chancel area and often expresses the thought of the day in various thanksgivings, emotions, and needs of Christians. These are songs that Jesus knew by heart, and sang with His disciples and family. They are first to be

understood as coming forth from God's lips so we can sing them to one another's ears and back again to the Father's ears in heaven, who loves us and delights in hearing His people's prayers.

Lutheran Hymnody

“Come, let us sing a psalm, and drive away the devil.”

– Martin Luther

All song lyrics teach something. Using descriptors such as taste, touch, sight, sound, smell, movement, and emotions, the writer brings the listener into an experience, awareness, and/or idea. Years later, the music and lyrics spark memories of where you were and what was happening when you first heard the song. Music for the sake of entertainment has a place in society and may be enjoyed by Christians.

Hymns (hymnody), Psalms, prayers, and spiritual songs have been sung by the Christian Church from its beginning. During medieval times, congregational singing faded away as only priests and choirs would sing in Latin. At the time of the Reformation, the people in the pew did not sing. Martin Luther re-established congregational singing by translating the liturgy and hymns into the language of the common people, and encouraged the people to sing, including the children. Hymns were not written primarily to give the people words to praise God but to teach the people right doctrine about Christ through music.

The Lutheran Service Book contains many of Luther's hymns, more ancient hymns still than these, and contemporary hymns written by various authors and people you could even meet today. Our hymnody preaches and teaches God's Word to

His people so they can sing and proclaim it until they die.

Easter is a particularly joyous time for Christians to join in singing such hymns as “Come You Faithful, Raise the Strain,” “Jesus Christ is Risen Today,” or “At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing.” Even those outside the church sometimes recognize church music, as you regularly hear Bach’s cantatas or various Latin portions of the liturgy sung at public concerts.

From young to old alike, our members at St. Timothy Lutheran love to sing, whether their voices are trained or untrained, strong or weak. We encourage one another to be brave and not give up on the fight for Christian faith and crying out with other Christians wherever they may be found for Christ to come quickly and grant us salvation, taking us with Him to heaven.

Hymns to Know and Learn

Indeed, next to the Word of God, our experience confirms that music deserves the highest praise. The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming the Word of God through music. Here are a few hymns that are particularly meaningful to many Lutherans:

- **Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me** (LSB 754):
A treasure of comfort, this hymn teaches that afflictions are good because they teach us to seek and love God and His Word all the more. The final stanza of this hymn was prayed by its author, Paul Gerhardt, on his deathbed.

- **A Mighty Fortress Is Our God** (LSB 656): Known as the Battle Hymn of the Reformation, this Lutheran favorite is based on Psalm 46, which Christians often prayerfully sing in the face of disaster. Written by Martin Luther, it was most likely penned sometime between 1527 and 1529, during a time that an epidemic hit Wittenberg, and Luther became seriously ill.
- **Holy, Holy, Holy** (LSB 507): Originally composed for Trinity Sunday, this beautiful hymn is easy to memorize and celebrates the Triune God in all His glory using the words of the cherubim themselves. Written by Reginald Heber and based primarily on Isaiah 6:2-3 and Revelations 4:1-11.
- **We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God** (LSB 941): Also referred to as The Great Te Deum, this hymn is a versification of the Te Deum laudamus set in the LSB composed by Stephen Starke.

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Christian Education

Homeschooling

Many of our families homeschool their children because the primary responsibility for education is always with parents. God has given children to parents, not to schools or governments. Parents are free to use schools or governments if those would be helpful to their children, but the responsibility for education is with parents and no one else. If schools or governments can't or won't teach our children God's Word, we must teach our children God's Word.

If schools or governments can't or won't stop teaching evil things, we have to teach our children those good things that no one else will. St. Timothy's Friday homeschool co-op exists to help families teach their children God's holy Word and every other good thing that will help our families and our children. We are here to help you and your family learn what the Lord wants your children to learn and how to teach them what they should learn. You aren't alone. We are here to help you carry out the tasks God has given you as parents.

You can connect with St. Timothy Lutheran Church at:

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www.sttimothy Lutheran.net

<https://www.facebook.com/sttimothyhh>

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