

The Church of the Abiding Savior, Lutheran Who we are and what We believe

Congregations

ELCA congregations are centers for evangelical mission, where people of faith celebrate, learn and connect with one another and others around the world through service and weekly worship. We are a church that belongs to Christ. There is a place for you among our nearly 10,000 congregations across the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. We are the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. For us as the ELCA, this faith comes through the good news of Jesus Christ and gives us the freedom and the courage to wonder, discover and boldly participate in what God is up to in the world.

Scriptures, Creeds, Confessions Scriptures

A cradle that holds the infant Jesus, Baby blankets that clothe the newborn Christ, Lutherans often use these well-known metaphors from Martin Luther to describe the Christian Scriptures and their importance. These simple metaphors clearly and profoundly describe both what the Scriptures are and what is their purpose. Simply stated, the Scriptures tell about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to present Jesus to all who listen to or read them. That is why Lutheran Christians say that the Scriptures are the "source and norm" of their teaching and practice. As the Gospel writer John wrote, "these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Obviously, the Scriptures that are collected into a book or Bible describe and speak about many other things — everything from the creation of the world to the world's end. Because these writings originate from a time period that spans about a thousand years and come to us in a variety of handwritten manuscripts and fragments, they have been studied carefully with all the tools of research that are available. This research continues to enrich understanding of the Scriptures and their message. Despite the diversity of viewpoints and the complexity of the many narratives contained in the Scriptures, Lutheran Christians believe that the story of God's steadfast love and mercy in Jesus is the heart and center of what the Scriptures have to say. Creeds Like the Scriptures, the three ecumenical creeds — the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed — are written documents. They originate from the earliest centuries of the Christian church's history, a time when theological and philosophical questions about the identity of Jesus were widely debated among Christians. All three creeds affirm that God is fully present in Jesus, that Jesus Christ is both God and human (not a semi-divine or superhuman creature that is neither). These three creeds are called ecumenical because they are all accepted and used by the overwhelming majority of the world's Christians. All three are affirmed in the Lutheran confessional writings and in the ELCA's governing documents. Although these three creeds, like the Scriptures, are written, most Christians experience and use them, spoken aloud with other Christians in worship. Along with many other Christians,

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Lutherans use the Apostles' Creed at baptism; it is also the Creed most often used in basic Christian education (as in the Small Catechism). Lutheran Christians often use the Nicene Creed at festivals like Easter and Christmas and during seasons of the year related to those festivals. Some Lutheran congregations recite the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday (the Sunday after Pentecost) because of its focus on the relationships between the persons of the Triune God. Lutheran Confessions On many occasions in the 16th century, Martin Luther and other evangelical reformers were asked to give an account of their teaching and practice. In response Philip Melanchthon, one of Luther's colleagues, wrote, "We must see what Scripture attributes to the law and what it attributes to the promises. For it praises and teaches good works in such a way as not to abolish the free promise and not to eliminate Christ." Although the writings that comprise the Book of Concord engage a range of issues regarding teaching and practice, they do not address every question or topic. Rather, they focus on the Scriptures' purpose: to present Jesus Christ to faith. The Book of Concord includes seven writings composed by Luther and others. Lutheran churches around the world have affirmed these writings, and the ELCA affirms them in its governing documents. Lutherans most often use them in teaching — for example, when the Small Catechism is used in basic Christian instruction, or when the Augsburg Confession is used to teach women and men preparing for ministry.

This is Christ's church

There is a place for you here. We are the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person — questions, complexities and all.

Luther and Lutheranism

Martin Luther (1483-1546)



Martin Luther was eight years old when Christopher Columbus set sail from Europe and landed in the Western Hemisphere. Luther was a

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young monk and priest when Michaelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel in Rome. A few years later, he was a junior faculty member at a new university in small-town Germany, intently studying the Scriptures, "captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans."

In these days Luther was tormented by the demand for righteousness before God. "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God." Then, in the midst of that struggle with God, the message of the Scriptures became clear, like a long-shut door opening wide. When he realized that a "merciful God justifies us by faith ... I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."

What Luther discovered is the freedom of Christians trusting God's mercy in Christ. As he later wrote, "Faith is God's work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. This faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that believers would stake their lives on it a thousand times."

This discovery set Luther's life on a new course —both his own life and his public service as a preacher and teacher. When a church-endorsed sales team came to the Wittenberg area in October, 1517, Luther was concerned that the promotion and sale of indulgences undermined the promise of God's unreserved mercy in Jesus and the faith that trusts that promise. His *95 Theses* or *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* became the first of a life-long stream of books, sermons, letters, essays, even hymns in which he expressed his confidence in this life-giving promise from God, the Gospel, and its liberating implications for all of life in church and society.