



What Do Lutherans Believe?

A Short Summary

Our Faith

We believe in God who is identified as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As Father, God is the creator of all that exists. As the Son of God, Jesus Christ, became human to suffer and die for the sins of all people and rose from the dead as the ultimate victor over death and Satan. As the Holy Spirit, God creates and sustains faith through God's Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

We believe in the Biblical teachings of Martin Luther that inspired the Reformation of the Christian Church in the 16th century. The teachings of Luther and the early reformers can be summarized in three short phrases: *grace alone, Scripture alone, faith alone.*

Grace Alone: God loves all the people of the world, even though they are sinful, rebel against Him and do not deserve His love. However, God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world. It is Jesus' victory over sin, death and hell that offers the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe.

Scripture Alone: The Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals the Law which shows us our sin and the Gospel which shows us the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Bible is the sole source and guide for Christian faith and teaching.

Faith Alone: By His suffering and death as the substitute for all people of all time, Jesus purchased and won forgiveness and eternal life for all. Those who hear this Good News and believe it have the promise of eternal life. God creates faith and nurtures faith in Jesus through the Word of God and the Sacraments.

Baptism

We believe what the Bible teaches. This is simply that a person is saved by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe baptism is one of the miraculous means of grace (together with God's written and spoken Word) through which God creates and/or strengthens the gift of faith in a person's heart. This faith needs to be fed and nurtured by God's Word (Matt. 28:18-20), or it will die. Although we do not claim to understand how this happens or how it is possible, we believe that when an infant is baptized God creates faith in the heart of that infant. This faith cannot yet, of course, be expressed or articulated, yet it is real and present all the same (see Acts 2:38-39; Titus 3:5-6; Matthew 18:6; Luke 1:15; 2 Timothy 3:15). Lutherans do not believe that only those baptized as infants receive faith. Faith can also be created in a person's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's (written or spoken) Word. Baptism should then soon follow conversion (cf. Acts 8:37) for the purpose of confirming and strengthening faith in accordance with God's command and promise. Depending on the situation, therefore, Lutherans baptize people of all ages from infancy to adulthood. We do not believe that baptism is ABSOLUTELY necessary for salvation. The thief on the cross was saved, as were all true believers in the Old Testament era. Mark 16:16 implies that it is not the absence of baptism that condemns a person but the absence of faith, and there are clearly other ways of coming to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit (reading or hearing the Word of God). Still, baptism dare not be despised or willfully neglected, since it is explicitly commanded by God and has His precious promises attached to it. It is not a mere "ritual" or "symbol," but a powerful means of grace by which God grants faith and the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord's Supper / Communion

We believe Scripture teaches that the Lord's Supper is a precious gift of God in which Christ gives us His true body and blood (in a miraculous way), together with the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Because the Bible teaches that this Sacrament may also be spiritually harmful if misused, we ordinarily commune only those who have been instructed in the teachings of our church and who have confessed their faith in these teachings.

Marriage

The earthly estate of marriage is a divine institution. It is therefore subject to certain divine requirements which remain in effect until the close of this age regardless of the social customs, civil laws, or ecclesiastical rites which may come to surround it. That God Himself established marriage and pronounced it good also means that He created it for the good of humanity. He is at work in marriage to accomplish His purposes. In marriage God intends to provide for (1) the relation of man and woman in mutual love (Genesis 2:18; (2) the procreation of children (Genesis 1:28); and (3) the partial remedy for sinful lust (1 Corinthians 7:2). Both the fourth and sixth commandments presume and support these purposes of marriage in human life. Decisions about specific aspects of the wedding service are decided upon by the pastor as they work together with couples who wish to be married in the church.