

WHO ARE THE LUTHERANS?

I ran across a “tract” this week that explains who we are all about! Did you ever wonder? I thought it was interesting and want to share it with you.

Lutherans Center Their Faith in Jesus Christ

Lutherans look like people around the world - - for indeed they are! They represent the world’s largest Protestant group. The 58 million Lutherans can be found on every continent. They worship in hundreds of languages.

In the United States, there are about 9 million Lutherans. They are African-American, Anglo, Asian, Hispanic, Indian.

Lutherans build their lives on Jesus Christ. They believe Jesus Christ is the only, perfect, son of God. They believe that Jesus died for them and for every person in the world. And Lutherans believe that Jesus rose from the dead and lives for them - - and for all people who believe in him as their Savior.

Jesus brings people close to God. Lutherans believe their lives - - today, tomorrow and in eternity - - depend on Jesus.

Lutherans live with a sure hope of eternal life because of Jesus Christ. They know they’re not perfect, that they stumble and fall in their daily walk with God. But they also know that their forgiveness has been won and paid for by Jesus Christ and when they repent and seek forgiveness, God will forgive them because of Jesus.

And, they want to tell others about that hope!

Lutherans hold beliefs that are shared by many Christians:

- God is three persons in one: the Father, who created and sustains the world; The Son, who lived as a human being, died, and rose from the dead; And the Holy Spirit who works God’s will in the world.
- The Bible is God’s word, spoken through human writers.
- Sin exists in every person. It is the cause of the bad things people do to each other.
- Everyone will have existence after death - - either in heaven or hell - - forever.
- God has a plan to end the world, when he will judge everyone - - both living and dead.

Lutherans proudly display the sign of the cross, a symbol used by all Christians. The cross symbolizes the terrible death that Jesus suffered as punishment for their sins. Lutherans prefer a cross that is empty - - with no body on it - - because the empty cross is a symbol of Jesus’ victory over sin and death.

Lutherans take their name from Martin Luther. He was a German priest who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1500's. Luther's writing and teaching sparked the Protestant Reformation.

Through his study of the Bible, Luther helped the Christian Church rediscover the truth that God is loving and that he offers forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift because of Jesus Christ.

Luther taught that people - - no matter how hard they try - - cannot **earn** God's forgiveness or a place in heaven. It is a **gift** that people receive through faith in Jesus Christ.

Lutherans often refer to three "solas" (Latin for "alone") as a summary of the faith that gives them hope:

- **Grace alone** - - God loved the world, though we do not deserve his love. He sent his Son to love the unlovely and save the ungodly.
- **Faith alone** - - Jesus has provided for our forgiveness and life; those who hear this promise and believe it, have what it offers. People don't "get" faith; God gives it as he gives us his promises.
- **Scripture alone** - - The Bible is the only source that shows God's will and the only basis for faith.

Lutherans talk about Law and Gospel. The Bible gives the Law, showing God's expectation of people and the terrible consequences for not following his commands. But the Bible also reveals the Gospel - - the "good news" of God's love and forgiveness.

Lutherans have other distinctive beliefs:

- They view Baptism and the Lord's Supper as the means by which God gives people his grace.
- Local churches, or congregations, are the central community for faith and practice. Congregations choose a trained person to be their pastor.
- They share their faith with individuals. Collectively, they sponsor mission programs worldwide.
- They care about people in need - - providing hospitals, help for children and families, and worldwide relief for the hungry, homeless, and helpless.
- Their worship style, which includes a lot of music and singing, is often "liturgical," following the worship form handed down from the early Christian church. It is often expressed in contemporary forms.

DEATH AND DYING

As we go into the Lenten season, we will be reminded about Christ's death and resurrection. How does death and dying pertain to us?

As Christians we have a unique perspective on death, a perspective that is radically different from the world around us.

The Bible teaches that death is not an annihilation in which we cease to exist. The Scriptures teach that death is the separation of our eternal soul from our mortal bodies. Our bodies rest in the grave, awaiting the final day when soul and body shall be reunited. At the moment of death, our souls, and the souls of all those who die in faith, immediately are in the presence of Christ, and will enjoy His presence, peace and joy until the great day of the resurrection of all flesh.

It is popular to think of death as something that is "natural". Some people even are heard to say, "death is a friend". Nothing could be further from the truth! Death is a horrible reality. It is the enemy we each face at the end of our lives. Death is the awful curse that fell on creation through the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Through that sin, death came into the world and so death spread to all of humanity because all people sin.

God did not create human beings to die, but to live - - to live forever and enjoy Him forever. Death was not part of our created nature, but only something that came about as a result of the sinful disobedience of our first parents - - a sinful disobedience that has been passed down to every human being since that time.

Scripture clearly indicates that Christians too must pass through death to life. We learn that our body is actually dead right now because of sin ("The body is dead because of sin" Rom. 8:10). And so Christians too must die.

The sting of death and sense of God's judgment is a horrible punishment on those who have no faith in Christ as their Savior. They face, at the end of their life, only the prospect of an unknown future, or a terrifying vision of eternal damnation. However, the death of a Christian is not death in as full a sense as it is for the non-Christian. For the Christian, eternal life and joy follows death, for our Lord Jesus Christ is the One who walks with them through the "valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23).

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil." These familiar words of Psalm 23 chart the direction for a Christian individual or family facing the reality of death. Here God identifies our greatest enemy in such times - - fear. Since none of us among the living has ever tasted death, we respond to the prospect of death (whether our own or that of someone we love) with fear. Fear is natural.

Now, if fear is the enemy, who is our ally? The Psalmist continues: "For thou art with me; thy rod and staff, they comfort me". Jesus, our Good Shepherd, the One who laid down His life for the sheep, is our companion on the dark, winding road that leads through the valley of the shadow of death. The journey is not optional. Sooner or later each of us, no matter how old or young, will walk that path. This will happen until that day when Jesus comes again - - when, at the last trumpet, the faithful will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

But here is the important part: I walk through the valley. The One who is with us in that journey, who leads us on, bears the scars of death in His living body. He was dead, but now He lives forevermore. All who believe and are baptized will be saved; they have a share in His victory over death. Christians, therefore, are able to see death not merely as an unfortunate reality to be endured, but as a defeated enemy. The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting are the sure and certain realities promised to all who remain faithful unto death.

For the unbeliever, there is the “second death” (Rev. 20:14) in which his or her soul is immediately in the presence of Satan and immediately begins to suffer the torment of eternal punishment in hell, from which there is no possibility of escape. On the day of judgment, their body joins the soul in hell.

Those who trust in the redemption won by Christ our Lord pass from death to life. This is why the Bible uses so many comforting images to describe the death of the child of God. Here are some phrases the Holy Spirit uses to describe a Christian’s death: being gathered to one’s people; departure in peace; departure and being with Christ; a turning away from the evil to come; sleep; rest; passing from death to life; deliverance from all evil; and finally, “gain”.

Gain? How can death be gain? When a baptized child of God passes through death - - son or daughter of God who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God - - then death is gain. Through death the children of God pass into an eternity of joy and peace with their heavenly Father.

Each Christian, therefore, may rejoice in the life that Christ has won and gives to him or her through the Word and Sacraments. When we die, our souls await the final consummation of all things on the day Christ returns. We shall receive glorified bodies that are free from tears, pain, sickness and age - - perfectly renewed and glorified resurrection bodies.

In these new and glorified bodies, we shall spend all eternity in heaven, enjoying the presence of God and all His saints, forever and ever. The overwhelming joy of this truth is almost too much for us to even begin to comprehend, but it is true!

Christians face death as they face life - - with their eyes fixed firmly on Jesus. We cling to the promises of His Word, which, when facing death, seem even more wonderful and powerful. One of the most beautiful promises our Lord gave to us is found in John 14:2 -3 where he says, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

We realize that no matter how our lives may end, there is one thing of which we can be absolutely certain. We shall pass from death to life, from this life to the life beyond, with our Lord. And there we shall rejoin all of our loved ones and others who have gone before us trusting in Christ their Savior.

Christians should not hesitate to cry. Our Lord wept at the tomb of His friend, Lazarus. We too find ourselves in tears at the pain of our loss. But we do not sorrow in the same way as those who have no hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess. 4:14). We look forward to a grand reunion with loved ones who have died in faith. Still, we miss them. The separation can seem overwhelming at times. This pain is part and parcel of grieving; it is to be understood, not resisted.

Grieving for most people is a journey. It is a journey from the initial pain of parting, toward healing and reconciliation with our loss. The pain gradually subsides, but the loss remains. Grief has many dimensions and may seem unpredictable in its ebb and flow; yet in Christ we find strength along the way. For in this journey we are not alone.

Christians find that family and friends are God's gifts to help them bear the pain of loss, which at times seems unbearable. Such company is important in dealing constructively with grief. It must be consciously sought out by those who mourn. Most who mourn find it very helpful to tell the story of the death of those they love to family and trusted friends. The repeated narrating of that story brings release and insight into the joy and sorrow of the parting. Friends and family will want to lend a listening ear and heart for such telling and retelling; it is a rare privilege to be entrusted with such treasures, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Above all, Christian mourners will turn to the worship fellowship of the church and the rich comfort of God's holy Word and Sacrament for healing along the path of grief. For Jesus Christ abides within His church through His sacred means of grace. Through these channels He bestows the riches of His forgiveness, life and salvation now, and to all eternity. One day we too shall stand with that great multitude of heaven who hears these blessed words: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).

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EASTER = = = = God's Love

It is barely past six o'clock in the morning, but I am fully awake and filled with anticipation. It seems unusually dark outside as I drive to church this morning; it is even darker inside the church. I enter the building in silence and quietly find an empty seat near the front. Once seated, I have time to reflect on the events that have taken place over the past week, the events that the Christian church has been celebrating for nearly two thousand years. I feel excitement growing inside me, and just as I am about to burst, I notice the sun's rays beginning to trickle through the stained-glass windows along the southern sanctuary wall. I hear the rustling of choir robes as the members rush in to take their places. There is one last moment of silence.

"He is risen!" someone shouts. Simultaneously, the black veil that has covered the gigantic cross at the altar is removed. All the lights come on. And there is an awesome brass fanfare that leads into the choir anthem. After the anthem, the pipe organ swells into the opening hymn. Between the organ, congregation, and brass ensemble, sound fills the towering space of the church. Some even manages to escape the walls, filling the surrounding neighborhood with the joy of this great day.

The service ends and people make their way to the fellowship hall in the basement for breakfast. I linger just a little longer. The brass fanfares and joyous hymns still seem to echo in the arches of the vaulted ceiling. As I walk toward the front of the sanctuary, I notice that the Easter lilies fill every space around the altar. Nearing the Communion rail, I see that not all of the buds are open and some are just beginning to bloom. I think about the new life begun today. As I turn toward the choir loft, I look directly at the side of the huge cross nearly three times my height. The black cloth with which it had been draped lies at my feet. I cry as I sit down near the veil. I have come to a fuller understanding of the all-encompassing love God has for me. He is always there for me to turn to because He is no longer dead.

My stomach rumbles as I get up to go downstairs to eat. As I reach the back door of the church, I am aware that it is once again quiet, and the lights have been dimmed almost to the point of being out. I take one last look at the cross, which seems to have a slight twinkling to it. It is my symbol for the center of life. I am assured and forgiven in God's unending love.

Written by Cindy Wriedt
Concordia Publishing House

DID YOU SEE IN THE PAPER where postage rates are increasing? Although the 44-cent price of a first-class stamp won't change, the heavier letters (such as newsletters) will cost more. The price for each extra ounce will rise from 17 cents to 20 cents. These new rates become effective April 17, 2011. If you know of someone that is not in church but you can deliver the newsletter, please do so. Newsletters will continue to be mailed to those members residing in a nursing home or are homebound. If you live out of the area but still want to know what is happening at Trinity, please go to our website which is: www.trinity-vm.com. Thank you for your help!

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER FOR MARCH AND APRIL 2011

March 2, 2011 Mary & Martha meet; Men’s Club meet;
 March 5, 2011 Family game night at 6 pm.
 March 9, 2011 Ash Wednesday; supper at 6:30 pm; worship service at 7:30 pm
 March 12, 2011 Set clock AHEAD 1 hour before going to bed – daylight savings time;
 March 16, 2011 Lenten Service at 7:30 pm with coffee and cookies after service;
 Elders’ meet following service;
 March 23, 2011 Lenten Service at 7:30 pm
 March 30, 2011 Lenten Service at 7:30 pm
 April 6, 2011 Lenten Service at 7:30 pm;
 Mary & Martha meet; Men’s Club meet after service;
 April 13, 2011 Lenten Service at 7:30 pm; Elders meet following service;
 April 20, 2011 Church Council meet at 7:30 pm
 April 21, 2011 Maundy Thursday Service with Holy Communion at 7:30 pm
 April 22, 2011 Good Friday Service at 7:30 pm
 April 24, 2011 EASTER BREAKFAST at 7:30 a.m. Worship service at 9:00 a.m.
 April 27, 2011 Quarterly Voters’ Assembly meet at 7:30 pm.

MARCH BIRTHDAYS		APRIL BIRTHDAYS	
Daniel Ory	8	Carli Clifton	4
Jean Johnson	10	Corey Jamison	6
Jake Ziemann	10	Fern Kneuper	8
Joe Funaro	12	Teresa Algreen	13
Monte Hopkins	13	Wayne Kinney	15
Glen Harvey	15	Dennis Ziemann	24
Marilyn Smith	15	Randy Golightly	26
David Ziemann	15	Francis McAllister	29
Inez Marquardt	15	Kendra Koch	30
Frieda Jensen (90!!)	17		
Ted Albrecht	21		
Margaret Koch	22		
Mildred Brott	24		
Linda Kamm	31		
MARCH ANNIVERSARIES		APRIL ANNIVERSARIES	
Chris and Julie Jamison	10	Dennis and Barbara Brott	3
Walter and Inez Marquardt	15	Jeff and Diane Koch	3
Kevin and Robin Holcombe	24	Monte and Trish Hopkins	20
Phil and Brenda Clifton	27		

NOTES THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST: **Family game night** is scheduled for March 5, 2011 in the church fellowship hall. The fun and games will begin at 6:00 pm. We are all ready for warm weather, right? It is time to get together with warm friends. Janice says to wear shorts and flip flops! Everyone is welcome.....children are encouraged to come and bring friends as well as favorite games that can be enjoyed and shared. The Merry Makers will provide popcorn and ice cream sundaes. No finger food required! Sign up sheet is in the entry but you are welcome to come even if you miss the sign up! It promises to be a fun time for all ages and gender.

Our prayer list includes: **Dave and Peggy Freligh** in the death of Peggy's mother;
Warren Brott who is recuperating nicely from hip replacement surgery;
Fern Kneuper who is recovering at home from a bout with pneumonia;
Rev. Jordan and his mother, for their health concerns;
Dale Dippold who continues to improve from surgery;
Walter and Inez Marquardt who are in West Bridge Care Center in Winterset;
Eli Horn as he continues his treatment for cancer;
Rusty Daniels who continues to wait patiently for a liver transplant; and
John Westphal family in the death of Mr. Westphal who will be buried at Trinity on March 5th;
Call Committee as they prepare to receive a new list of candidates for Pastor at Trinity;

Thank you to Merlyn Hartz and Jim Koch for serving as Elders the past six years; and a welcome to Kevin Holcombe and Gary Smith in becoming the new Elders.

Thank you to Ted Albrecht for volunteering to mow the church grounds this year. Ted is donating his time in doing this task. When budget time rolls around in October, it will be decided whether to pay cemetery mowing costs from the budget or from the cemetery account.

The Call Committee is patiently waiting for a list of pastoral candidates from Pastor Sieviking and Pastor Dahlke. Word has it that the list should be coming very soon and the committee will begin reviewing a new list of prospects.

Confirmation is going well and Pastor Melz says he has a "good class with good attendance". Since we do not have any students in 8th grade, there will not be a Rite of Confirmation for the young adults this year. There are currently 6 students in the 7th grade class.

Lenten Services will begin with Ash Wednesday service on March 9, 2011. An evening meal will be prepared and served that evening beginning at 6:30 pm. All Lenten Worship services will begin at 7:30 pm. Plans are for refreshments to be served after regular Lenten services beginning with the March 16th service.

Easter Breakfast will be served on Easter Sunday beginning at 7:30 a.m. Worship service will begin at the usual 9 am time. The Men's Club always has a delicious breakfast so mark your calendar to enjoy this time together.

Quarterly Voters' meeting is scheduled for April 27, 2011. All voters are encouraged to attend.