

BACKGROUND NOTES

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**THEOLOGICAL**

**BACKGROUND**

**OF THE**

**LIFE CONCEPTS**

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# BACKGROUND NOTES

Each LIFE Concept Planning Guide contains a summary of the main theological aspects of the concept. The *Background Notes for Teachers* have been written by Pastor David Strelan, theological adviser for LIFE curriculum.

These *Background Notes* with the accompanying reflection/discussion questions and readings are included here because they may be of use

- to aid the principal's or key teacher's own understanding of the concept and the approach LIFE takes to the concept
- as a tool for helping school leaders help staff come to a common understanding of the concept
- as a basis for staff Bible study and discussion in preparation for teaching the concept
- as a basis for parent studies on the concepts being investigated by students.

# GOD CREATES THE UNIVERSE

*God is the creator of all things . . . All that God created was wonderfully designed and intricately connected in a way which would bring glory and honour to its maker.*

*God in his grace continues to work as creator by preserving and caring for the world which he made, providing rich resources and sustaining the wonderful natural orders and design by which creation is held together. (Theological Foundations of LIFE Curriculum)*

(In this concept we do not deal with the creation of human beings. See the background notes for *God created human beings* — also for further comment on evolution.)

All life and all existence begin with the ever-living Creator. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1).

It is not hard to believe that some supreme power created all things. The beauty and order of the universe tell us that. But even the most advanced study of the universe cannot tell us **who** its creator is. We can know the creator only because he has made himself known to us in his word —

especially through the Word who became a human being, God's Son, Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that the creator of the universe is not some impersonal force, but

God, our wise and loving heavenly Father. What makes Christian teaching about creation different from any other is that we view the creation of the universe with the eyes of faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the focus also of the creation story (John 1:2, Colossians 1:15–17, Hebrews 1:2). We really get to know and believe in God as our creator only when the Holy Spirit has led us to know and believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

Our students — and we ourselves — may have many questions about the how and when of creation. We may wonder, for example, about the age of the earth and about how scientific discoveries and Bible statements relate to each other. The Bible does not answer all our questions. It is more concerned to lead us to know the Creator of all things than it is to teach us to know everything about the creation.

The Bible tells us the following quite clearly:

- **GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE OUT OF NOTHING.** The universe is not eternal, matter is not eternal. God created the primeval material — the atoms and molecules (Genesis 1:1,2).
- **GOD CREATED ALL THINGS 'BY HIS WORD'.** They came into existence because God wanted them to and because God used his power (Psalm 33:6). 'The word with which God called all things into being out of nothing is the expression of

his eternal love, his only begotten Son' (Prenter: *The Church's Faith* p 24).

The Bible does not offer scientific explanations of the 'how' of creation; it simply

tells us that God is the Creator. The universe is God's (Psalm 24:1,2).

- **GOD CREATED IN AN ORDERLY WAY.** First, God created 'formless' matter. Then God brought order into creation by separating light from darkness, water from dry land. Then in the creation of life God began with the simpler forms and proceeded to the more complex. Genesis 1 brings out the 'rhythm' and orderliness of God's creative work: in each stage of creation, God speaks, something is created, God sees that his creation is good. At some stage — we are not told when — God created his invisible spirit-messengers, the angels.
- **GOD'S CREATION WAS GOOD.** There was perfect harmony in God's creation. Everything was just the way the Creator wanted it to be. God is not responsible for the disharmony, disorder and evil we observe and experience now.

*Faith in creation is a happy and grateful affirmation of life in opposition to all forms of anxiety concerning life and all forms of denial of life.*

*Regin Prenter, The Church's Faith, p. 25*

- **GOD LOOKS AFTER THE UNIVERSE HE CREATED.** God set up the laws of nature (day and night, the seasons, the laws of physics etc) by which the universe continues to exist in an orderly way. God is not limited by these laws, however; he may use his power to bring about 'supernatural', miraculous events.
- **GOD STILL PRESERVES HIS CREATION**
  - a) by providing for the needs of all creatures, especially human beings (Psalm 145:15,16; Matthew 6:25–34). This includes things like medicine and technology;
  - b) by protecting his creatures, especially human beings (Matthew 10:29,30). The Bible says that the angels have the special work of protecting people (Psalm 91:11,12);
  - c) by making humans caretakers of God's creation (Genesis 1:28, 2:15). We are

to value and preserve the environment God allows us to enjoy.

If God provides and protects, why do some people miss out? Why do some suffer hunger, illness and the like? The Bible doesn't give us all the answers. We know that this was not the Creator's intention. In some cases, suffering is due to the selfishness and mismanagement of human beings. Or it can be the natural consequence of living in a fallen world, a world that has been corrupted by sin. Whatever the cause of suffering, Christians believe that God is always in control. If we trust God as our heavenly Father, who through Jesus has shown that he loves us perfectly, we believe that he will never let anything harm or destroy us.

The Bible tells us about the creation of the universe so that we — and the children we teach — can join in its chorus of praise to the Creator and so that we can trust him as our almighty loving Father (see Luther's explanation of the first part of the Apostles' Creed).

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on the topic of the creation of the universe?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. How would you answer a student who asks: 'How come the Bible doesn't mention dinosaurs? Did God create them?'
4. What do you make of the fact that in Genesis there are two different accounts of creation (1:1 – 2:3 and 2:4 –25)?
5. How do you see the relationship between the findings of science concerning the origins of the universe and the biblical account of the creation?

### FOR FURTHER READING

*Luther's Large Catechism (Book of Concord, Tappert ed pp 411–413; Hebart translation pp 110–113)*

*Luther's Small Catechism (Book of Concord p 344f; Openbook ed p 11)*

*Teaching Luther's Catechism, H Girgensohn pp 131–149*

*Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions B2–5 (statements on interpreting Genesis 1–3 and on evolution)*

*Good Question* ed by Brian Schwarz, Openbook Publishers, *Environment* pp 41f; *Evolution* pp 46–49

**NOTE:** *Living Faithfully in God's Creation* is an excellent set of six studies on Christian life in the environment by Pastor Aubrey Podlich, which would be very suitable for staff Bible studies. Available from the National Lutheran Schools office.

# GOD CREATES

# HUMAN BEINGS

**Note:** See also the BACKGROUND NOTES in *God created the universe*.

The Bible makes it clear that human beings are God's special creatures. Biologically they are related to animals, but they are more than animals. They are the climax and crown of God's creative work. In the creation of humans God most clearly and wonderfully expressed himself. Only of these creatures does God say 'my children' (Acts 17:28,29).

Human beings are unique, different from all other creatures God created. And within the human species each individual person is unique in the sense that, while there are many similarities between human beings, no two human beings are identical.

## GOD CREATED HUMAN BEINGS IN A SPECIAL WAY

Human beings and animals were both formed from the ground (Genesis 2:7 and 19).

The Bible also describes what was special in the case of humans: 'The Lord God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living

being' (2:7). The life that God gives humans is special. Human beings have the 'breath of God' (spirit) in them. They are 'body and soul' — not just physical beings but also spiritual beings.

## GOD CREATED HUMAN BEINGS IN HIS OWN IMAGE

They were like God (Genesis 1:26,27). The Bible does not give us detailed information about this. 'The image of God' does not refer to the physical appearance of human beings. Rather it means that humans were created as beings who were able to relate to God and live in conscious relationship with God. Perhaps we can say that they were able to enjoy the 'godness' of God. They could know, believe in and love God and be aware of God's love for them. Especially 'the image of God' refers to the goodness and holiness (sinlessness) in which human beings were created, which they lost, and which God's Spirit is restoring in people who believe in Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 4:22–24, which talks about being 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' NIV).

## GOD GAVE HUMAN BEINGS SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Genesis 1:28 has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that human beings are allowed to exploit the environment and use the rest of creation for their own purposes. God certainly wanted human beings to enjoy his creation. But at the same time they were to be his agents to take charge of and look after the rest of creation (Genesis 2:15). Their ability to think rationally and to make decisions according to the will of the Creator equipped them for their role.

## GOD GIVES HUMAN BEINGS THEIR ABILITIES AND INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

God created human beings as male and female. The oneness of the two partners is stressed (Genesis 2:20–24). Human sexuality is a good gift of God to be

used not just as a physical function, but as an expression of the closest human relationship. Sexuality and the ability to reproduce are under God's blessing (Genesis 1:28).

God's special creation was humanity. Human beings were formed in God's own image, so that they might live in a perfect relationship with their creator and in harmony with all other created beings.

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We human beings should recognise that any distinctive qualities and abilities we have are gifts of the Creator (see Luther's explanation of the first part of the Apostles' Creed). These gifts do not establish our worth, because human worth does not depend on people's abilities, talents or achievements; nor is it diminished by illness, handicap, age, or failure of any kind. It certainly has nothing to do with race, colour, gender or anything else that distinguishes one human being from another. All people are of equal worth because they are creatures of God whom he loves equally (Acts 10:34: 'God does not show favouritism', NIV). This is shown most clearly in God sending his Son to be the Saviour of all people without exception.

Because human beings are God's special creatures, whom he not only created but also redeemed, they all have great worth and value in God's sight. The life of every human being is sacred, and our Creator demands that we value human life as he does.

## HUMAN BEINGS ARE SPIRITUAL

God created humans as spiritual beings, beings who are able to relate to God and to respond to God's revelation of himself. We sometimes talk about every human being having a 'God-shaped hole' — a part of their being that can be filled only by God (Acts 17:27, 28; Romans 1:19,20). Humans seem to have an instinctive awareness of the existence of a Supreme Being. They have a 'natural knowledge' of God. Creation suggests the existence of a creator. God's operation in nature and human history point to his existence. So also does human conscience — the awareness of right and wrong.

The existence of various religions shows that human beings have a natural religious tendency and that they want to live in harmonious relationship with God — whatever their understanding of the deity may be.

As Christians we acknowledge that 'natural' religion is the human reaction to God's revelation of his power and wisdom. However, we also believe that only in Jesus Christ do human beings come to know God and live in harmonious relationship with him as our loving and merciful Father (John 14:6).

**Note:** The question of evolution is relevant to this unit and also to the unit on the creation of the universe. The Lutheran Church of Australia's statement on creation and evolution is in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*. The following is an excerpt:

While evolution as usually understood is . . . clearly contrary to Scripture, it may be asked whether each and every form of evolutionary speculation must be ruled out on biblical grounds. Actually Scripture says very little about the mystery of the 'how' of creation, and where Scripture is silent the church cannot dogmatise. If in such areas Christian thinkers suggest the possibility of some form or aspects of evolution as God's means of creating, then differences of opinion about such views should be treated as non-doctrinal and therefore not divisive of church fellowship. The clear limits of this sort of speculation are the authority of Scripture generally, and the historicity of Adam and Eve in particular . . .

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. In what ways is the Christian view of human beings at odds with the beliefs generally held in society (perhaps also in the families of your students)?
4. Is it appropriate to emphasise the uniqueness of each person at a time when there is a strong tendency towards individualism (eg 'You are the most important person in the universe'.)?
5. How do you explain the existence of various religions? Why is the idea that 'everyone finds their own way to God and salvation, no matter which path they take' (sometimes called 'universalism') not compatible with Christianity? What attitude should teachers of Christian Studies take towards non-Christian religions?

### FOR FURTHER READING

Luther's explanation of the first part of the Apostles' Creed in the Large and Small Catechisms

Image of God: *Book of Concord* (Tappert) pages 102:18; 510:10

Sex as God's creation: *Book of Concord* p 240:7

Natural knowledge of God: *Book of Concord* p 562:22

Evolution: *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia* B4

Ethical issues re human life (birth control, abortion etc): *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia* Section H

Other religions: *Good Question*, ed B Schwarz, Openbook Publishers, p 101

# GOD CREATES HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The basic meaning of 'relationship' is 'connection'. There are various relationships or connections between human beings, such as physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual or social. Other parts of school curricula (eg Health, Society) deal with aspects of human relationships. Taking this up in Christian Studies gives the opportunity to stress that human relationships are God's design and gift.

The Bible tells the story of human relationships — at their best and their worst. Read, for example, the stories of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and their families.

**FOR HUMAN HAPPINESS** God created human beings to live in happy and harmonious relationships with each other (Genesis 2:18–25). Human relationships were meant to flow out of, and to be blessed by, a perfect relationship with the Creator. God intended that relationships at various levels should be of mutual benefit to human beings. For example, marriage is intended to give the opportunity for a man and a woman to commit themselves to one another, to love and care for and trust one another. Family relationships are meant to give children a safe and healthy environment in which they can grow and mature and develop their own identity. Social structures are part of God's providence for the welfare of all members of society, including agencies for law and order (government, police, courts etc), various occupations, each of which contributes to the wellbeing of society (eg doctors, farmers, teachers, cleaners etc).

The Bible recognises considerable diversity in human relationships. For example, various social, political and economic systems are depicted, with no one system being held up as a divinely ordained model.

Human beings relate to each other at various levels of closeness. Each of us is related to every other member of the human family, but God has placed us in closer relationship to some people than to others. Our relationships change, eg parent-child relationships, friendships. The closer the relationship is between people, the greater are the mutual benefits, but also the responsibilities.

God created humans as social beings to live in harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships.

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**RELATIONSHIPS PROTECTED** God's will for human relationships is expressed in the second table of the Ten Commandments, which God has given to preserve and protect human relationships in a fallen world. Jesus summarised these commandments in the law of love: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22:39). The commandments spell out what love means in various relationships: for example, in the family, community and workplace (fourth commandment), in marriage and sexual relationships (sixth commandment), in every relationship with the neighbour (fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth commandments).

**BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS** Because we human beings are sinful, none of us are capable of living in perfect and truly healthy relationships. The natural self-centredness of fallen human beings leads to disharmony, conflict and the breakdown of relationships at various levels and in various ways, eg marriage breakdown and divorce (Matthew 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12), wars (James 4:1,2), family strife (eg

Joseph and his brothers, David and Absalom), prejudice and bigotry (James 2:1–9; Galatians 2:11–14), sexual abuse (Amnon and Tamar, 2 Samuel 13), and other 'acts of the sinful nature' (Galatians 5:19–21).

## RESTORED RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus came to restore the broken relationship between human beings and God and at the same time to redeem all human relationships. God calls all people to recognise and repent of their sins against other human beings. God has forgiven these sins for Jesus' sake and gives new life as his children to all who trust in Christ. This means that for Christ's sake God offers forgiveness and healing to all of us when we fail in our relationships — to husbands and wives, parents and children, teachers and students. The restored relationship between us and God makes it possible to begin to live in harmonious and loving relationship with other people.

**JESUS MAKES A DIFFERENCE** The New Testament is full of examples of the difference Jesus makes to human

relationships, eg Jesus' acceptance of social outcasts, little children, women; Jesus' teaching of God's will for human relationships (Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5); the coming together of people of various national backgrounds at Pentecost; the removal of Jew-Gentile barriers in the early church (Acts 10, 15). Note that Jesus did not overthrow the political or social systems of his day. He and his apostles taught that authority in society and nations comes from God for the welfare and protection of citizens. The people of God have the duty to 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' (Matthew 22:21; see also Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

St Paul did not advocate the abolition of slavery or the dismantling of other social structures, but reminded his readers that their relationship 'in Christ' transcends and transforms every other relationship (Galatians 3:26-28).

**GOD FIRST** While as Christians we are to value relationships, preserve useful structures, and respect and obey lawful authority, we must not 'idolise' them, that is, put them before our relationship with God.

Jesus said that we must not allow any human relationship to stop us from following him (Matthew 10:34-37; Luke 9:59-62; 14:26). If any human authority tries to make us go against God's will, 'we must obey God rather than any human authority' (Acts 5:29).

Christians sometimes have to wrestle with the question: When do we have the right — even the responsibility — to refuse obedience to human authority?

The so-called 'Table of Duties' in Luther's Small Catechism (called 'Christian Responsibilities' in the Openbook edition, page 39) gives examples of the New Testament teaching concerning various relationships, eg church leaders and church members, government and citizens, husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. Note how in passages such as Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 and Colossians 3:12 – 4:1 relationships between Christians flow out of their relationship with the Lord.

The inability of human beings to live in healthy, God-pleasing relationships does not mean that we should stop striving for or advocating such relationships. For example, the fact that so many marriages fail and end in divorce does not mean that we should no longer point people to what God's intention for marriage is. But it does mean that as Christians we should not be judgmental towards those who fail even as we do (Matthew 7:1-5). Rather, as people entrusted with the gospel of God's grace, we are to be agents for forgiveness, healing and restoration of human relationships.

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. How does teaching about relationships in Christian Studies relate to teaching on this subject in other curriculum areas? What are the distinctively Christian aspects of this subject?
4. How should Christian teachers speak about marriage and family relationships when some (many) students come from broken marriages and homes?
5. To what extent should Christians be involved in efforts to change social, political and economic structures?

### FOR FURTHER READING

Augsburg Confession and Apology, Articles XVI and XXIII;

Explanations of the Ten Commandments (especially the fourth) in Luther's Small and Large Catechisms

*Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the LCA* : Marriage and Divorce; Involvement of the Church in Social and Political Problems; Marriage and De Facto relationships

*Good Question*: Church and society; Social justice; Civil disobedience.

# GOD SAVES PEOPLE FROM SIN AND EVIL

**THE ORIGIN OF SIN** God could have created human beings as creatures for whom sin was an impossibility, but he did not want human beings to be puppets or robots. He gave them free will. Before they sinned, human beings could choose to obey or disobey God.

God put one restriction on Adam and Eve's life in the garden: they were not to eat the fruit of one tree (Genesis 2:15–17). The devil tempted them to question why there should be any restrictions at all. Why shouldn't they be on the same level as God? The first sin set the pattern for every sin — human beings wanting to be God, doing what they want instead of what God has commanded.

Sin is not just wrong actions, thoughts, words or feelings; it is above all a condition, a spiritual disease that infects every human being (Romans 5:12; John 3:6). The first (original) sin contaminated the whole human race; it corrupted human nature completely (Ephesians 2:1–3). By choosing to disobey God, human beings lost their free will; now we are by nature 'free' only to choose to go against God. The sinful nature we inherit from our parents is not just neutral towards God; it is actively opposed to God (Romans 8:7). We can never live up to the standard of goodness God expects: perfect love for God and for all people. As history and our own experience teach, any human being is capable of the greatest wickedness (Matthew 7:17).

**THE EFFECTS OF SIN** The fall into sin brought into the world guilt, disharmony, suffering, and death —spiritual, physical and eternal. It resulted in **broken relationships**

- **with God.** Adam and Eve tried to hide from God because they knew they were guilty and were afraid God would punish them (Genesis 3:7–10). Their sin put a barrier between them and God so that they could no longer live in fellowship with him. We are totally unable to do anything to repair our broken relationship with God.
- **with ourselves.** Guilt, bad conscience, fear, insecurity, despair and every other negative aspect of human personality can be traced back to the fall into sin.

- **with other people.** Note how Adam and Eve fell out with each other as soon as they fell out with God. They were ashamed of their nakedness in front of each other. A pattern of blame, disagreement, strife, self-centredness, hatred, anger and violence was soon apparent (Cain and Abel [Genesis 4], Flood stories [Genesis 6 – 9]).
- **with nature.** Nature now tends to work against human beings (Genesis 3:17–19), and we exploit nature instead of faithfully managing it as God's servants.

**GOD DEALS WITH SIN** As God had warned Adam and Eve, the moment they sinned they began to die physically, but they also plunged themselves into spiritual death (separation from God in this life) and eternal death (separation from God forever).

But God loved the human beings he had created. The Old Testament tells how God graciously rescued his people again and again. Through the events of their history and through his prophets, God encouraged his people to look forward to the time when he would send a Saviour to forever rescue them and all people from sin and its consequences.

**WHY JESUS?** Because God is holy and just, he cannot simply shut his eyes and ignore human sin. God's demands have to be met. The penalty for sin has to be paid.

God planned to send someone to take the place of all human beings. The Saviour had to be

- a perfect human being, uncontaminated by the original sin and guilt;
- willing to take on the sin and guilt of the entire human race;
- willing to pay the penalty for all the sin and guilt of the human race;
- able to overcome death and all the consequences of sin.

No ordinary human being could meet these requirements. God so much wanted to save the world and bring people back to life with him that he sent his own Son (John 3:16). Born as a human being, but perfect, free from sin and guilt, Jesus Christ lived for us human beings

God is not responsible for sin and evil. Everything God created was good. It is the fault of human beings that God's creation has been ruined by sin and evil. The story of the Fall (Genesis 3) explains why there is sin and evil in the world and in us.

the perfect life we are supposed to live. He also took the blame for our sins and was punished instead of us. He defeated Satan and death for us by rising again from the dead (2 Timothy 2:9,10). For Jesus' sake God has forgiven the sins of the whole human race completely and unconditionally. Everyone who repents of his/her sin, trusts God's mercy and believes in Jesus has the forgiveness of all sin.

**ETERNAL LIFE** Jesus reconciled the human race to God so that God's original intention for human beings could be achieved, namely, that we can live forever in perfect harmony and fellowship with God. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life (John 3:16) as a present reality (John 3:36; 5:24) and as a future hope (1 John 3:1–3; 1 Peter 1:3–9).

Eternal life is one of the gifts God gives in baptism. All who believe in Jesus and are baptised are given new life as children of God (Galatians 3:26,27), and are no longer under the control of sin or under the threat of the law

and judgment, but live under God's grace (John 3:18; Romans 8:1,2)

If we believe in Jesus we also have the certain and 'living' hope that life with God will continue beyond death. We will not 'perish'. Not even death can snatch us out of the Father's hand (John 10:28,29). We will still be in fellowship with God — which is what 'heaven' or 'paradise' means (Luke 23:43). Our 'perishable' bodies will be raised to life again to be like Jesus' glorious body (Philippians 3:20,21; 1 Corinthians 15:35–57).

The Bible uses picture language (eg in Revelation) to describe the bliss of heaven, which is beyond all earthly experience and human imagination (1 Corinthians 2:9). We will no longer be subject to the restrictions of physical laws (time and space; compare with Jesus' body after his resurrection) or to the things that now spoil our life — sin, evil, suffering, sorrow (Revelation 21:3–4). There will be only perfect joy (Psalm 16:11).

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. Comment on the following:  
*Adam and Eve together are the human race as God created it and as it turned away from its Creator — the human race as represented in every one of us. The story of Adam and Eve . . . the man and the woman, is the story of all of us and not only of two people who lived long ago in a day with which we have no connection . . . We know them well, not from archaeological excavations, but from ourselves. (The Church's Faith, Regin Prenter pp 52, 53)*
4. 'There is no person so bad and sinful that his or her sins have not been forgiven.' Do you agree or disagree? Does this mean, for example, that God has forgiven the sins of people who go to hell?
5. Eternal life is both a present reality and a future hope. Do you think that in our church's teaching we emphasise both aspects sufficiently? Do we, for example, talk too little or too much about heaven? . . . too little or too much about life with God here and now?

### FOR FURTHER READING

Augsburg Confession  
Article II (Original Sin),  
*Book of Concord* p29;  
Apology pp 100–107;

Article XVIII (Free Will), pp 39,40;  
Apology p224–226;

Article XIX (The Cause of Sin), pp  
40,41;

Article IV (Justification), p 30;  
Apology pp 107–168.

Also Article I of Smalcald Articles  
and Articles I–III in the Formula of  
Concord.

Luther's Large Catechism and  
Small Catechism: the Second Part  
of the Apostles' Creed.

*Good Question*  
pp 76,77 (Jesus' death);  
p 80 (Life after death)

*Doctrinal Statements and  
Theological Opinions* I 1–3 (the  
body-soul question)



# GOD SAVED

# PEOPLE THROUGH JESUS

*(Note: There is naturally some overlap between this concept and the RESCUE concept. The Background Notes for RESCUE [God saves people from sin and evil] should be read as background also for this present concept.)*

Jesus and the good news of his saving work are central to every LIFE concept. In this concept, however, we have a special opportunity to tell the story of Jesus. Our aim will surely be to help students meet Jesus — not just as a figure from ancient history, a character in a book or the centre of a set of doctrines, but as a real living person.

The four Gospels give us a portrait of Jesus, each highlighting certain features, but all confronting readers with the questions: Who is this Jesus? What is the point of his story? One of the most important ways for teachers to prepare to teach this concept is to read at least one of the Gospels with these questions in mind.

**TRUE GOD** Jesus is true God. This is what makes Jesus unique. He is more than a great teacher, wonderful model

and inspiring spiritual leader. He is the Son of God ‘from eternity’. That means, there has never been a time when Jesus did not exist as God’s Son (‘the Word’, John 1:1–3).

Jesus is ‘God incarnate’, that is ‘God in the flesh’ (John 1:14). If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus (John 14:9). He shows us the power, glory, wisdom of God, and especially the love of God (John 1:17,18).

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD** When Jesus began his ministry, he announced that the kingdom of God was here. In his person the loving, saving rule of God had come to human beings. Jesus taught people about God’s kingdom. In parables about the kingdom he told people what it is like when God rules with his grace. People were impressed by Jesus’ teaching (eg the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 – 7); he obviously knew what he was talking about. Jesus’ miracles were ‘signs of the kingdom’. God’s loving rule was in action when Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, forgave sinners and accepted outcasts.

It is important that we and our students recognise Jesus as truly God. This means that it is no mere mortal but God himself who is our Saviour. The Son of God ‘humbled himself’; he did not always and fully use his divine qualities (power, glory etc). In order to save us, ‘*he gave up everything and became a slave, when he became like one of us*’ (Phil 2:7). So great was his love for sinful human beings, that the Son of God put himself through all the misery, pain, and suffering of sinful human existence and through hell itself (Matt 27:46) in order to rescue us from sin and its consequences.

**A REAL HUMAN BEING** Jesus is truly human. We need to be sure of this. The Son of God became a human being **for us**, to take our place — to live the perfect life we are supposed to live but can’t, to take our sins on himself and pay the penalty we deserved. As a human being he died our death and went through the hell of being forsaken by God.

## CONCEIVED AND

**BORN** It was a truly human foetus that spent nine months in Mary’s womb, and — despite the haloes on the Christmas

cards — it was a truly human baby whom lowly Mary gave birth to and nursed. The big difference was that he was born without sin; he did not inherit the sin and guilt of his human parent.

Jesus lived a truly human life. He developed physically and mentally (Luke 2:40). He went through normal human experiences. He got tired, he was hungry and thirsty, happy and sad, pleased and angry. The one difference was that he never thought, did or said anything wrong. His life was perfect; he obeyed his Father in absolutely every respect, even though he knew all the time that this would mean sacrificing his innocent life to pay for the guilt of the whole human race.

**SUFFERED AND DIED** Jesus’ suffering and death were real. He felt what any of us would feel. In Gethsemane, for example, he was ‘deeply distressed’ and said: ‘*I’m so sad that I feel as if I’m dying*’ (Mark 14:34). He felt the shame of the soldiers’ mockery and the pain of their scourging, the weight of the cross,

Jesus opened the way to God which had been blocked by sin. That way is now open for all people through him.  
Jesus is the Saviour who shows us the loving heart of God.  
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the agony of crucifixion and the torture of being forsaken by his Father.

**ROSE AGAIN** Jesus' resurrection was real. The same human body that suffered, died and was buried became alive again. More than 500 eyewitnesses said they saw the risen Jesus, and they were ready to die for what they claimed. In the forty days after Jesus' resurrection his followers saw how Jesus' body was no longer restricted by the physical laws of time and space. Jesus' self-humbling for us is over. Now he is in an 'exalted' state; he always and fully uses his attributes (power, glory etc) as God.

Jesus' resurrection is central to the Christian faith. It shows that he is truly God, that God has accepted Jesus' perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that death can no longer hurt human beings as the punishment for sin.

### AT THE FATHER'S RIGHT HAND

Still today Jesus is God in human flesh. A human being — one of us — is forever at God's right hand, as the advocate who intercedes for us, as the Lord who rules all things for our benefit. We can follow him through suffering, death and resurrection to live forever with bodies that will be glorified like his (Phil 3:20,21; 1 John 3:1–3).

**FAITH IN JESUS** To believe in Jesus means more than just acknowledging that what the Bible says about Jesus is true. It means **trusting** Jesus as our only hope of being rescued from our guilty condition and from the punishment we deserve. More than that, it means living and dying with the confidence that because of Jesus God is always for us and nothing can separate us from God's love (Romans 8:31–39).

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. Discuss:
  - a) Christians (and Christians schools) can regard the fact that many children have never heard of Jesus, or know very little about him, as a plus rather than a minus.
  - b) How should teachers of younger children handle the difficulty children often have when we talk about Jesus as both God and a human being?
4. Comment on the following:
  - a) The great thing about Jesus' death was that it was **God** who died for us. The great thing about Jesus' resurrection was that it was **a human being** who rose again from the dead.
  - b) We Christians often say 'Christ **died** for us. Christ **rose again** for us.' We sometimes forget also to say: 'Christ **lived** for us'. All the time Jesus spent on earth was important for our salvation.
5. Discuss the appropriateness of using Christian creeds or Luther's explanation of the second part of the Apostles' Creed in worship if there are non-Christians in the class/school.

### FOR FURTHER READING

Luther's explanation of the second part of the Apostles' Creed in the Large and Small Catechisms

Augsburg Confession Art II (*Book of Concord* p 29)

(See also the index of the *Book of Concord* pp 657–659)

*One in the Gospel*, by Friedemann Hebart, Openbook Publishers, chapter 12: *And there's no other God*.

*Good Question*, ed B Schwarz, Openbook Publishers, p 71: *Was Jesus God?*; p. 76 *Jesus' death; Reality of the resurrection* p 110.

# GOD HELPS PEOPLE

# BY THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the Nicene Creed we call the Holy Spirit ‘the Lord and giver of life’.

In this unit we focus on the Spirit’s life-giving and life-transforming work, which he does by means of God’s word and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion.

**A PERSON OF THE TRINITY** The Holy Spirit is not just a divine force or power; he is a divine ‘person’ who has his own identity in the Triune God together with the Father and the Son. We can’t see the Holy Spirit, but we certainly can see the effects of his work.

**POWER** The word ‘power’ is often used in the Bible in connection with the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit is at work, great things happen. In the Old Testament we are told that the Spirit was at work in the creation of the world. We also read how people were changed radically when they were anointed by the Spirit to be God’s special servants, as judges or kings or prophets. They spoke and acted by the power of the Spirit.

In the New Testament we read that Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. At his baptism Jesus was anointed ‘with the Holy Spirit and power’ for his ministry as the Messiah. Jesus promised his followers that after he left them the Holy Spirit would come to them to be their ‘comforter’, helper and guide, who would lead them into all truth and remind them of everything Jesus had taught them and make it all clear to them.

**PENTECOST** The story of Pentecost — the coming of the Holy Spirit — is the story of people being changed by the power of the Spirit. The sound of the mighty wind and the tongues of fire were signs of the Spirit’s powerful presence and operation. He transformed Jesus’ disciples from ignorant, doubting, fearful followers into people of strong faith who boldly witnessed to the truth about Jesus as the promised Messiah. Through the preaching of the disciples, the Spirit changed the hearts and lives of thousands of people as they confessed their sins and were baptised in

the name of Jesus, whom they acknowledged as their only Saviour.

## THE SPIRIT CREATES FAITH

The Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Jesus. No-one can ever come to faith without the Spirit’s powerful work (1 Cor 12:3). In our natural sinful condition we human beings do not have the power to accept Christ, come to God, or live a life that pleases God. By nature every human being is anti-God and spiritually dead (John 3:5,6; Ephesians 2:1; 1 Corinthians 2:14). The Spirit leads people to recognise their sinfulness and spiritual helplessness and to repent and believe in Christ as their Saviour. This change is so radical that the Bible describes it as ‘conversion’ and as ‘new birth’ — being born again (John 3:3–8; Titus 3:5,6).

When the Spirit brings people to faith in Jesus, he changes their lives. He makes people holy not only in their status before God (‘justification’) but also in their lifestyle (‘sanctification’). The Spirit’s power produces ‘fruit’: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’ (Gal 5:22,23). He also gives spiritual gifts (such as prophecy and teaching) which empower God’s people to serve God and one another (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11).

Even if we are Christians, our life can never be perfectly holy; we are always sinners and saints at the same time. But by the Spirit’s power we can grow in holiness (Ephesians 4:22–24; Romans 12:1,2).

Luther sums up the powerful life-changing work of the Holy Spirit:

‘I believe that on my own I can never come to Jesus Christ my Lord, or believe in him, no matter how hard I try. But the Holy Spirit has called me to Jesus by the good news about him. The Spirit has led me to know and trust Jesus, made me holy, and kept me in the Christian faith.’ (Small Catechism: Explanation of the Third Part of the Apostles’ Creed. Openbook Publishers 1996)

God has sent a Helper to call us  
back to him through the good news  
that Jesus is the Saviour  
from sin and death.  
The Helper is the Holy Spirit.

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**WORD AND SACRAMENT** Lutheran theology emphasises the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit does his powerful work through God's word and the sacraments (baptism and holy communion). God's word and sacraments are 'means of grace' — ways the Spirit uses to bring us God's undeserved love and forgiveness. Whenever God's word — both law and gospel — is preached or taught or read, the Holy Spirit is at work. This is not always sudden and dramatic; more often the Spirit is at work quietly and unobtrusively.

**BAPTISM** The Holy Spirit does his powerful work in the sacrament of baptism. The word of God which is used with the ordinary water of baptism gives this sacrament the power to wash away all sins and to give people new life as children of God. Baptism is the Holy Spirit's special way of bringing God's grace even to infants and of creating saving faith in them.

Because the Holy Spirit is at work in baptism, this sacrament is not just a 'sign' or 'reminder' of God's grace; it really changes people. Baptism is the Spirit's way of linking us with Jesus' death and resurrection. In baptism the Spirit 'drowns' our old sinful nature and resurrected us as new people.

**HOLY COMMUNION** Holy communion is the sacrament the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen our faith in Jesus as our Saviour. Once again, the Spirit works through the word of God that is used in communion — the words of Jesus spoken as we receive the bread and wine: 'This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.' As I commune, the Spirit helps me believe that Jesus died also for me, that he has truly paid the price to wipe out my sins and guilt.

In holy communion we remember Jesus. But this is a special kind of remembering. Jesus' death on the cross — his giving his body and shedding his blood for us — is brought into our time, into our lives. The sacrament also points us forward to Jesus' coming at the end of time; it is 'a foretaste of the feast to come'.

If we want the Holy Spirit to do his powerful work in us and in the children we teach, we must appreciate and faithfully use the means the Spirit has chosen: word and sacraments.

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. If the Holy Spirit wants all people to come to faith in Jesus, why don't all people believe? How do Matthew 22:1–14; Matthew 23:37–39 and Acts 7:51 relate to this question?
4. Indicate and explain your reactions to these statements:
  - *In the church today we have moved from not enough to too much emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit.*
  - *Every Christian is a born again Christian.*
  - *All Christians are charismatics.*
  - *We shouldn't put too much stress on baptism in our teaching, as unbaptised children may feel left out.*
  - *God will take to heaven babies and others who die before they have a chance to be baptised.*
  - *You should go to communion only when you feel that you are properly ready.*

### FOR FURTHER READING

*Who the Spirit is:* Augsburg Confession Article I (Book of Concord pp 27,28)

*The Spirit's work:* Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism: the third part of the Apostles' Creed.

*Baptism:* Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism; Augsburg Confession Article IX (p 33); Apology IX (p 178)

*Holy Communion:* Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism; Augsburg Confession Article X (p 34), Article XXIV (the Mass, p 56); Apology X (p 179); XXIV p249–268) Formula of Concord VII (pp 481–484).

LCA Doctrinal Statements:  
*Mutual Recognition of Baptism (Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches); Pastoral Practice in Reference to Holy Baptism; Concerning the Sacrament of the Altar; Infant Communion; Baptism of Children of De Facto Relationships*

# GOD HELPS PEOPLE BY HIS WORD

God does not leave us to work out for ourselves such important things as who God is, what kind of God he is, what he wants from us, how he feels towards us, and what he does for us. God graciously communicates with us. The 'word' of God is God's self-revelation; it makes God known to us so that we can honour, love and trust him as our God.

## THE WORD IN VARIOUS FORMS

The word of God has come and still comes to human beings in different ways (Hebrews 1:1). God spoke through prophets, who did not preach their own messages, but proclaimed the warnings and promises of God 'as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21). God's ultimate word — his most complete revelation of himself — was in the form of his own Son, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:1,14). Then Jesus' followers (apostles, evangelists, prophets etc) proclaimed the word of God as they had learnt it from Jesus and as they were led by 'the Spirit of truth' (John 14:26; 16:13).

*The Holy Spirit gave the word of God to people to speak and to write, so that today we have God's revelation of himself in the Bible.*  
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## GOD'S WRITTEN

**WORD** So that we and all people of all times can know the word which God spoke through the prophets and apostles and through the Word who came in human flesh, God has also given us his written word, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Holy Spirit inspired people to write the Bible. We cannot explain exactly how this inspiration happened. It was not some kind of 'dictation', but the writers wrote in their own style; we can recognise their pet words and expressions. 'The holy writers whom God used retained the distinctive features of their personalities (language and terminology, literary methods, conditions, knowledge of nature and history as apart from direct revelation and prophecy)' (*A Consensus Statement on Holy Scripture* A.2.3). Yet at the same time what they wrote was God's word.

**HUMAN AND DIVINE** So the Bible is both human and divine. We cannot separate the divine and human, however, or say that some parts are less the word of God because they seem to us to be contradictory or because they deal with everyday matters that don't seem to have much bearing on our relationship with

God (eg 2 Timothy 4:13). Rather, we should humbly marvel that 'it pleased God to give us his word under, or in the garb of, the human word of the biblical writers' (*Theses of Agreement* VIII 9).

**ULTIMATE AUTHORITY** The Bible does not merely **contain** the word of God; it **is** the word of God. Because the Bible is the word of God, it is true and should be the ultimate authority for what we believe and teach and how we should live. Lutherans say: 'The word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine and . . . no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but . . . everything must be subjected to it' (*Book of Concord* page 505). Luther said: '. . . the word of God shall establish articles of faith and no-one else, not even an angel' (*Book of Concord* p 295). This does not mean that the Bible is

some kind of supreme textbook, which gives us the answer to all our questions on any subject.

## PURPOSE OF THE

**BIBLE** In the Bible God makes known his marvellous plan for saving the fallen world. God

called Abraham and gave him the promise that he would be the father of God's chosen people through whom God would bless all people. God rescued his people Israel from slavery and made his gracious covenant with them. Israel was not faithful to God, yet God remained gracious to them and preserved a 'remnant' from whom the promised Saviour would come.

God's saving plan reached its climax in the coming to earth of his Son, Jesus Christ, to live, die and rise again as the Saviour of all people. Jesus is the focal point of the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments. The Bible's chief purpose is to lead us to Christ, to 'make (us) wise enough to have faith in Christ Jesus and be saved' (2 Timothy 3:15 CEV). 'The essential purpose of Scripture is to reveal the Son and his work so that (human beings) might have salvation' (*Consensus Statement* Attachment I, Part I, b).

**LAW AND GOSPEL** Lutherans see law and gospel as the central teachings of the Bible. The law of God tells us what God wants us to do and not to do and what kind of people

God wants us to be. It is the bad news that shows us our sins and our need of a saviour, because we are helpless to save ourselves. The gospel is the good news that tells us that through Christ God has acted to save us out of undeserved love.

While all Scripture is the authoritative word of God, not all statements in the Bible are of equal value and importance. For example, while Old Testament dietary laws or family tree details have their place in the total message of the Bible, they do not have the same importance and value for us as do statements about Jesus' resurrection.

**IS THE BIBLE TRUE?** How do we know the Bible is true? Ultimately, this can't be proved but must be accepted by faith. When the Holy Spirit leads people to faith in Jesus as their Saviour, he at the same time gives them the confidence that the Scriptures — which Luther called the 'swaddling clothes and manger' where we find Christ — are indeed the word of God.

The Bible makes use of various literary forms in order to present God's word to people from differing generations, cultures and the like. For example, there are narratives, parables, pictures, visions, poetry and symbols. Some things we are meant to take literally, other things are obviously figurative.

**INTERPRETING THE BIBLE** Some basic guidelines for interpreting the Bible are:

- Let the Bible interpret the Bible. Look at clearer Bible passages to help interpret more difficult passages. Any interpretation of a particular Bible statement must agree with what the Bible teaches as a whole.
- Take the literal meaning of a passage, unless there are clear indications the passage is meant to be understood figuratively (eg the literary style).
- Look at the context and historical situation. What were the circumstances in which the Bible passage was written?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to recognise, accept and apply what the Bible passage says to you today, especially in terms of law and gospel.

### **FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION**

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. The Lutheran Church has often prided itself as being 'the church of the open Bible'. How appropriate is this title? How would you assess the place the Bible occupies in the Lutheran Church?
4. What aspects of the Bible give you most difficulty? How should we respond to apparent contradictions in the Bible?
5. How can you tell whether something in the Bible is to be taken literally or figuratively? Give examples of Bible statements that you consider are in 'picture language'.

### **FOR FURTHER READING**

Formula of Concord, Rule and Norm, *Book of Concord* pp 464, 503–505;

*Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia:*

A17: Theses on Scripture and Inspiration

B1: The Theses of Agreement and Inerrancy;

B 9–14: A Consensus Statement on Holy Scripture.

*Good Question*, ed B Schwarz, Openbook Publishers p 18: *How do Christians know the Bible is true?*

*Masterplan* by Dr V Pfitzner, Openbook (an overview of God's plan of salvation in the Bible)

# GOD HELPS PEOPLE PRAY

**WHAT IS PRAYER?** Prayer is communicating with God. Christian prayer is an expression of the relationship God has restored with people through Jesus Christ. It is a conversation with God that God initiates; we talk to God because he has spoken to us and invites us to speak to him.

Christian prayer flows from Christian faith. It is based on the gospel of God's love and acceptance for the sake of Jesus Christ. We don't pray in order to get close to God; we pray because God is already and always close to us and invites and encourages us to communicate with him by our words and thoughts, and even just by our deep longings (Romans 8:14–17, 26,27). Note also how already in the Old Testament people of faith, such as Abraham, Moses and the psalmists, spoke with God very intimately, sometimes even 'argued' with God).

God says to each person who believes in Jesus: 'You are my child. I love you. Come and talk to me about any and every part of your life' (Psalm 50:15; Matthew 7:7,8).

## ASK, THANK,

**PRAISE** We can talk to God about anything and everything in our prayers. We praise and thank God for all that he is and all that he does for us. We ask for things we need for our spiritual and our physical life. God encourages us also to pray for other people (1 Timothy 2:1,2; Matthew 5:44).

Our Father wants us to pray regularly, in any situation and at any time (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18): in public or private (Matthew 6:6), in stillness and isolation or in busyness and turmoil.

**IN JESUS' NAME** We can't talk about prayer without talking about Jesus. Jesus alone makes prayer possible. It is through Jesus that we have access to the Father (John 14:6; Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19–22). Jesus has removed the obstacles and barriers that stop God from hearing prayer, namely, human sin and guilt. We are children of God 'through faith in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:26).

Jesus tells us that we should pray 'in his name' (John 16:23). This is like Jesus giving us his

credit card and his pin number to draw on God's account. To pray in Jesus' name does not mean just tacking Jesus' name onto our prayers as some kind of magic formula. It means praying with faith in Jesus Christ, approaching God with Jesus' credentials instead of our own.

We ask 'for Jesus' sake' — not because of who we are or what we have done, but because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us.

**DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?** God promises to answer every prayer that comes from faith in Jesus (John 14:13,14; 15:7; 16:23; Matthew 7:7–11; Psalm 50:15). So Christians can pray with complete confidence.

God's answer might be something he **does** (eg healing, protecting, forgiving). Often God wants

to use us ourselves as his agents for answering our prayers. Or God's answer might be something he **says** (eg encouraging, reassuring [eg 2 Corinthians 12:7–10]). This does not mean that we

When the Holy Spirit leads people to faith in Jesus, he makes it possible for them to pray. Christian prayer is an expression of faith in which we speak to God with the confidence that he will hear us for Jesus' sake.

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should expect some direct message from God in answer to our prayers (although, of course, God can answer this way if he chooses). But in many instances God's answer to our prayers is already available to us in the things he says to us in the Scriptures. This is one of the reasons why prayer should always be closely linked to reading and hearing God's word.

Christians believe that God answers prayer in his own way and in his own time. Often God's method and timing are better than what we had in mind. Sometimes we see his answer right away. But often we recognise God's answer only when we look back some time later. Because we trust our Father's love and wisdom, we leave it to him to decide. He knows best what we need (Matthew 6:32b).

As Girgensohn has pointed out, in actual fact God has already answered all our prayers in Jesus, even before we pray. 'He himself [Jesus] and what is given and promised in him, is the ultimate answer to all prayer'. (*Teaching Luther's Catechism* p 208f, Muhlenberg Press 1959)

**NOT A MEANS OF GRACE** Some Christians tend to make prayer a 'means of grace', for example, when they say: 'We get God's love (and forgiveness) by praying for it'. Lutherans reject this. God gives these and other blessings to us through his word and the sacraments. It is **God's answer — not our praying** that gets these blessings for us. (Note Luther's explanations of the first four prayers in the Lord's Prayer).

**'YOUR WILL BE DONE'** As Christians we know that God's will for us (what God wants for us) is always 'good and gracious'. This gives us the confidence to ask unconditionally for those things we know quite clearly that God wants for us — spiritual blessings, such as forgiveness, faith, the gift of the Spirit. However, when we don't know precisely what God wants for us (for example, physical blessings such as health, work, happy families), we say: 'Father, give us these things if it is your will'.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER** We learn much about prayer from Jesus' example and teaching. The gospels frequently report that Jesus spent time in prayer (eg Matthew 14:23; and especially his prayer for his disciples [John 17] and his prayers in Gethsemane and on the cross).

The Lord's Prayer teaches us how to pray. For example, we pray as children talking to a loving Father. We get our priorities right: first, things about God ('Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done . . .'), then things about us ('Give us this day . . .' etc). We say 'our', 'we' and 'us' because we are praying not just for ourselves, but also for others.

The Lord's Prayer is like the framework for our prayers. We fill in the details which might be different each time we pray.

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on the topic of Christian prayer?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3.
  - a) Does prayer change us or change God or both?
  - b) Why do some Christians pray to the saints?
  - c) Does God answer the prayers of non-Christians?
4. What is the difference between Christian prayer and non-Christian prayer? between Christian prayer and New Age-style meditation?
5. Is it appropriate to speak about 'the power of prayer'? Does the 'power' lie in the prayer or in the one who answers prayer?

### FOR FURTHER READING

*Small Catechism, Large Catechism* The Lord's Prayer

*Teaching Luther's Catechism: The Lord's Prayer.*  
H Girgensohn, Muhlenberg Press, 1959

*Does prayer work? Good Question* : p 106 ed B Schwarz, 1995 Openbook

*God for us* pp 44–46 D Strelan, 1988 Openbook

# GOD CALLS PEOPLE TO SERVE

God calls us and all people to serve at various levels and in various ways: by helping individuals, families, and people in our various communities (school, church, regional, national, world). We are to serve unselfishly and without thought of reward. This goes against our natural self-centredness which asks 'What's in it for me?', and looks for recognition from God and/or other people.

It is true that we don't have to be Christians to be able to do good things for other people. If we wanted to, we could train students to perform acts of service without any reference to the gospel of Christ. We could condition them to serve simply by telling them this is what they ought to do, by rewarding acts of kindness and showing disapproval of selfishness. However, our teaching about serving would then be legalistic moralising, little different from the teaching students might get in non-Christian schools.

Christian service flows from a person's relationship with Christ. For our sake Jesus 'made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant' (Philippians 2:7). He 'did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many'. In his kingdom the servant is greatest (Mark 10:35–45; John 13:1–17).

By giving himself for us in humble service, Christ has set us free from the slavery of selfishness so that we can serve God and other people in self-giving love (agape). By means of the gospel the Holy Spirit transforms us, giving us a new heart and a right spirit, so that we can truly love God and our neighbour. As Jesus said, 'a good tree produces good fruit' (Matthew 7:17); the branches are fruitful because they grow from the vine (John 15:1–5). We are not saved **by** good works, but we are saved **for** good works (Ephesians 2:9,10).

Christian service is an expression of the self-giving love which we have experienced from God and which God has 'poured' into our hearts (Romans 5:5). 'We love because God loved us first' (1 John 4:19).

**SERVE IN OUR CALLING** Christians serve by attempting to meet the needs of others (eg the poor, sick, disadvantaged and oppressed) in their local and wider communities. This includes sacrificial giving, personal involvement in charitable work, and working with others in the churches and community to change factors which contribute towards the misery of others.

God's love inspires Christians to serve others also in their daily calling, for example as parents, children, teachers, students. 'Christians view their calling, their job, their occupation as the chief way in which they can serve, help and benefit their fellows' (H

Hamann, *On Being a Christian*

p 61). It is not too early to teach students this view of their future occupations.

Even the smallest and 'lowliest' act of service that is done in faith is acknowledged by God. In the parable of the last judgment the king says: 'Whenever you did it

(gave food, drink or clothing, welcomed strangers etc) for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me' (Matthew 25:40; see also 10:42).

**PEACE AND JUSTICE** We can serve other people by striving to establish and maintain peace and justice for all. Peace (shalom) does not mean only the absence of war; it also means wholeness and well-being. Justice includes upholding the rights of every individual person. Christians' motivation in striving for peace and justice flows from the gospel, which proclaims Jesus as the one who has brought peace and righteousness into our broken world. He is the 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9:6) through whom we are reconciled to God and to one another.

We don't have to be Christians to be concerned about peace and justice, and being concerned about these things certainly doesn't make us Christian. But the very fact that we are God's people in the world means that we can and should take the lead in serving the world in this way. The Bible says: 'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for

God calls us to walk with him in the way of love and service . . . There are many people in the world whose lives have been wrecked by brokenness of many kinds. Disciples love them, stand beside them and bring the healing and help of Jesus into their lives and work for justice in society.

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the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Proverbs 31:8,9 NIV).

As Christians we are God's gifts to the world because we have been entrusted with the gospel. This is the power that can change human nature, so that peace, reconciliation and justice become realities.

**GOD'S SPECIAL AGENTS** The Bible encourages Christians to see themselves as God's servants who are sent to serve the world for God. They are to bring God's kingdom — God's loving rule — to people by their words and deeds.

Already in the Old Testament God's people were supposed to see themselves as his agents or representatives in the world. By what they said and what they did as God's chosen people they were to present God to the world (eg: 'I will . . . make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth'. Isaiah 49:6). Prophets had a special role as God's spokespersons to tell their own and other nations God's warnings and promises.

In the New Testament Jesus sent his disciples out as his 'special agents', giving them 'power and authority' to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and drive out demons in his name (Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–16). Later he told them to go to 'all nations' (Luke 24:47; Matthew 28:19,20). They were to be his 'witnesses' (Acts 1:8), who would tell the world what they had seen and heard. They were 'apostles' — people who were sent out, commissioned to speak and act for God (eg Mark 3:14). They were 'evangelists' — people who had good news to tell. Paul spoke of himself and other Christians as 'Christ's ambassadors' (2 Corinthians 5:20) to whom God had given 'the ministry of reconciliation'. They were people on a mission, sent to carry on Jesus' peace mission (John 20:21).

All Christians are witnesses who are called to testify of God's love (1 Peter 2:9). They do this individually and corporately (eg as a congregation or school) when they tell other people the good news about Jesus. But the loving and serving lives of Christians — their response to the gospel of Jesus Christ, are also a powerful witness (Matthew 5:13–16).

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. Students sometimes say: Why should we help people who are poor? It usually is their own fault; either they are lazy or they have not used their resources and opportunities wisely. How would you respond to this?
4. 'The church should concentrate on preaching the gospel and leave issues such as reconciliation to secular bodies.' Comment. Discuss to what extent, if any, the church should be involved in social justice issues.
5. Explore the concept of your school as an 'embassy' for Christ in your community.

### FOR FURTHER READING

- Explanations of the Ten Commandments in Luther's Small and Large Catechisms
- Formula of Concord, Article IV: Good works (*Book of Concord* pp 551–558). See also Friedemann Hebart's commentary on this in *One in the Gospel* (chapter 6: *Fruits on a Good Tree*).
- On Being a Christian*, H Hamann, Lutheran Publishing House, pp 58–63: *Freed to love others; Freed in our view of work*.
- Good Question*, ed Brian Schwarz, Openbook Publishers: *Poverty, Social Justice*.
- Statement on Poverty* LCA Commission on Social Questions (includes discussion questions)
- Human Rights Doctrinal Statements of LCA* (Vol 2)
- The Servant Congregation* by Ian Rentsch (available through National Schools Office)

# GOD CALLS PEOPLE TO BE JESUS' DISCIPLES

## LEARNERS AND FOLLOWERS

The main focus of this concept is on the relationship between Jesus and those who believe in him.

The word 'disciple' means 'learner'. Disciples of Jesus learn from him about God and themselves and their life as God's people. Jesus as rabbi (teacher) reveals to his pupils the 'secrets of the kingdom of heaven', often by means of parables (Matthew 13:11; 11:25–27). The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is an example of Jesus' disciples learning from their teacher. Jesus teaches them such things as what it means to be under God's gracious rule, how to live as God's people, and how to pray.

Disciples are also 'followers'. They identify with their Lord and Master and go where he goes. They trust him to lead them. They obey his directions.

## 'I CHOSE YOU'

It was customary in Jesus' day for men who wanted to learn the law of Israel to apply for admission into a rabbi's school. Jesus' disciples, however, did not choose him as their rabbi; Jesus took the initiative and did all the choosing (John 15:16). His choice was not based on their merit, past performance, or future potential. He selected most unlikely people: nobodies from the backblocks of Palestine, uneducated fishermen and hated tax collectors (Matthew 4:20–22; 5:3; 9:9; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; compare with the choice of Israel in the Old Testament [Deuteronomy 7:6,7]). Jesus' choice of twelve disciples (= twelve tribes of Israel) suggests that his followers were the chosen people of God in the new covenant. In addition to the 'inner circle' there were many other disciples (Luke 6:17). Unlike other Jewish rabbis, Jesus also had female disciples, for example, Mary, who 'sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said' (Luke 10:38–42; see also Luke 8:1–3).

When Jesus lived on earth, he called people to follow him. He wanted to show them God's way and to prepare them for a new life of service as God's forgiven people.

Responding to God's call to follow Jesus as disciples changes people's lives. It makes them channels of the life and love of God.  
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**COST OF DISCIPLESHIP** To be a disciple of Jesus requires total commitment. When Jesus commanded 'Follow me', people had to leave everything: their professions, possessions and families (Matthew 19:27–29). Disciples have to count the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14:25–33). Often the commitment Jesus demands of his followers seems harsh (Luke 9:57–62; Matthew 10:37; John 15:18–25), but because there is no real life apart from Jesus, we dare not let anything or anyone come between us and him. Following Jesus means saying no to one's old self, giving up all earthly security and being ready to suffer for the sake of the Lord (Matthew 16:24–26).

## FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

Unworthy sinful people can become disciples of Jesus only because he comes to them in grace (undeserved love) with the forgiveness of their sins (Matthew 9:9–13; Luke 5:8,10b). Forgiveness is at the centre of the life of Jesus' disciples. God's forgiveness is unmerited, unconditional and absolute. When God forgives, he also forgets (Jeremiah 31:34). (Note how in Jesus' parable about forgiveness the master takes pity on his servant and wipes out the huge unpayable debt. Matthew 18:21–35).

The weaknesses and failures of Jesus' disciples (their desertion, Peter's denial, etc) remind us that disciples live only by God's grace and forgiveness. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the forgiveness he has won for all people (Matthew 6:12).

Forgiveness is the mark of Jesus' disciples in their relationships with other people. Forgiveness does not come naturally or easily to any human being. Our natural inclination is to demand justice and seek revenge, even though we ourselves have been shown mercy (Matthew 18:21–35). The more closely we follow our Lord, and the more we draw our life from him (as branches in the vine, John 15:1–5), the more we will be like our Father in heaven and be merciful and forgiving to those who sin against us (Matthew 5:38–48; Ephesians 4:32;

Colossians 3:12–14). It may not be possible for us to forget completely a wrong that has been done to us, but when that wrong comes to mind, we are to forgive it again and again, even ‘seventy-seven times’ (Matthew 18:21,22).

## VALUES AND ETHICS FOR

**DISCIPLES** Following Jesus includes living by values and ethics that are different from those of the rest of society. The natural human tendency is for each person to follow self-interests and to ask: What’s in it for me? The humanistic approach is to ask: What’s best for the human race as a whole? Jesus gives his disciples a different basis for their values and ethics — the guiding principle for his own life on earth: What is the will of the Father in heaven? What does our Father want us to value? How does our Father want us to act?

The law of love is fundamental for disciples. Jesus taught that the ‘greatest commandment’ is: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ and: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37,38). The Ten Commandments spell out what it means to love God and other

people. For example, it means valuing God above anything or anyone else (see also Matthew 6:19–33), using God’s name with respect, honouring and obeying parents and other representatives of God, regarding human life as sacred, being faithful in marriage, not being jealous.

The law of love and the Ten Commandments are ‘moral absolutes’, that is, they can never be put aside (Matthew 5:17–20); they apply in every situation. However, the application of these moral absolutes may vary from situation to situation. Jesus’ disciples are called to listen carefully to his word and the word of Scripture generally, so that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they have ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 2:16). St Paul appeals to Christians ‘in view of God’s mercy’: ‘Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will’ (Romans 12:1,2).

### FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. Discuss the concept of commitment as an essential feature of discipleship. How does the commitment to Christ of modern Christians (church members) compare with the commitment people show to work, sport, education and other aspects of life?
4. Comment on the following:
  - a) ‘Christians live by grace.’
  - b) ‘Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.’
  - c) ‘I can forgive, but I can’t forget.’
5. Are Christian schools meant to **reflect** the values of society or to **shape** them? How do you think the parents of your students would answer this question?

### FOR FURTHER READING

Explanations of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer in Luther’s *Large Catechism*

‘Disciple’ in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, A Richardson

*One in the Gospel* F Hebart, chapter 7: *Saints and Sinners*

*The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Ethical and Social Issues section in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the LCA*

# GOD GATHERS CHRISTIAN

# PEOPLE INTO THE CHURCH

**WHAT IS THE CHURCH?** When the Bible talks about church, it does not mean a building or a worship service or an organisation created by human beings. The church is people — the people of God. The Greek word for ‘church’ in the New Testament is ‘ecclesia’, which means ‘an assembly’ and has the basic idea of a group of people who are ‘called out’ to form God’s special community. In the Old Testament the people of Israel were God’s special people called out from all the nations, set apart (‘holy’) to receive God’s gracious blessing and to be a blessing to all nations. In the New Testament this privilege is given to Christians (1 Peter 2:9,10).

In the Apostles’ Creed we say we believe in *the holy Christian (catholic) church*. This church is made up of people whom the Holy Spirit has brought to faith in Jesus as their Saviour.

The New Testament uses several pictures to teach us about the church.

- The church is the ‘body of Christ’, in which Jesus is the head and each believer in Jesus is a member (Romans 12:4,5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27).
- The church is a family (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15).
- The church is a living temple in which Jesus is the cornerstone and Christians are the bricks which have been laid on the firm foundation and support each other (Ephesians 2:20–22; 1 Peter 2:5).

The vine (Jesus) and the branches (people joined to Jesus by faith John 15: 1–7) and the shepherd and his sheep (John 10) are other pictures of the Christian church.

**THE OUTWARD CHURCH** We can talk about the church in a wider and a narrower sense. In the wider sense, the Christian church is the outward organisation that is made up of all people who call themselves Christians. This includes people from every Christian denomination and congregation. But not all people who call themselves Christians are genuine believers in Christ. The parable of the weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13: 24–43)

reminds us that in every denomination and every congregation there are hypocrites as well as true believers. We can’t tell who are believers and who are hypocrites, so we are not to try to do the sorting out that God will do in the judgment.

## THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

In the narrower sense the Christian church is only those people who genuinely are Christians, believers in Christ as their Saviour. They are ‘holy’ people (‘saints’) because by faith they have the forgiveness of sins. At the same time, they are sinners. This means that there will never ever be a perfect church; it will always be an assembly of people who live only by God’s gracious forgiveness. The Lutheran

Confessions say: *‘The church . . . is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in (people’s) hearts . . . The following phrase, “the communion of saints”, seems to have been added to explain what “church” means, namely, the assembly*

*of saints who share the association of the same gospel or teaching and of the same Holy Spirit, who renews, consecrates and governs their hearts’ (Book of Concord p169).*

When we describe this church as ‘catholic’ (universal), we mean that it exists all over the world — wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are used according to Christ’s command. A Christian congregation — Christians gathered around the word and sacraments — is the church of Jesus Christ in a particular locality. There are members of the holy Christian church in every Christian denomination and congregation. Through the gospel and sacraments the Holy Spirit *calls people to Jesus, brings them together into the church, leads them to know and trust Jesus, makes them holy, and keeps them with Jesus in the Christian faith (Third Part of the Apostles’ Creed, Small Catechism, Martin Luther).*

When the word of God is taught or proclaimed and when God’s special gifts of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated, the Holy Spirit is present and active to build up the family of God. This family is called the church. (Theological Foundations of LIFE curriculum)

**THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH** There is only **one** holy Christian church. Jesus' prayer that his followers 'may be one' (John 17:21) has been answered: there is only one 'communion of saints'.

How, then, do we explain the lack of unity in the outward church — the fact that Christendom is divided into a large number of different denominations? This is due to the failings of human beings. Various denominations arise as human beings do not agree in their interpretation and application of the word and will of God. Every denomination must constantly check its teachings and practice against what the Bible says. At the same time every denomination should acknowledge that the Good Shepherd has his sheep not only in one denomination but wherever the Shepherd's voice is heard (John 10:16). All denominations should be prepared to dialogue with each other on the basis of Scripture, with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will lead them to know and understand the truth of God more clearly (John 16:13) and so bring them into greater outward unity.

The Lutheran Confessions stress that different ways of doing things in the church do not destroy the unity created by the Spirit.

*The true unity of the church is not harmed by differences in rites instituted by [human beings] (Book of Concord p 174) . . . It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies instituted by [human beings] should be observed uniformly in all places (Book of Concord p 32).*

**THE SURVIVAL OF THE CHURCH**

The history of the Christian church is full not only of examples of great faith but also of stories of human frailty and shortcomings. It is a miracle of God's grace that the church has survived in the face of countless threats from inside and outside. As we Christians today struggle to be God's faithful church and wonder about its future in an indifferent and hostile world, we can hold on to Jesus' promise: 'I'll build my church, and death itself won't have any power over it' (Matthew 16:18).

**FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION**

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on this topic?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. Jesus promised: ' . . . I'll build my church, and death itself won't have any power over it'. What church was Jesus talking about? all denominations together? one particular denomination? no denomination?

What evidence is there of Jesus' promise being fulfilled today when the church often seems to be ineffectual and struggling for survival?

4. How does the reality of the average Christian congregation in Australia today compare with the ideal of Bible pictures, such as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12), the holy temple (Eph 2: 19–22; 1 Pet 2:4–10), the shepherd and his flock (John 10:14–16, 27,28)?
5. How does/should Christian school and Christian congregation relate to each other? Can a Christian school be considered a Christian community in its own right?

**FOR FURTHER READING**

There is a good summary of Lutheran teaching about the church in the Theses of Agreement V, *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions* A 6–11.

*Book of Concord*: Augsburg Confession Articles VII and VIII; Apology Articles VII and VIII; Smalcald Articles XII; Large Catechism, Part 3 of the Apostles' Creed.

*Good Questions* : Why don't church denominations work together? (p 29); Do I have to belong to a church to be a Christian? (p 31)

# GOD GATHERS CHRISTIANS

# TO WORSHIP HIM

## WHAT IS CHRISTIAN WORSHIP?

The word 'worship' is related to 'worth-ship'. Worship deals with the question: What is of worth? In worship God's worth is proclaimed or revealed and God's worth is acknowledged.

**GOD COMES TO US** In the first instance Christian worship is God's revelation of himself by his word and actions. In worship God comes to his people and reveals his worth to them by what he says (the word) and by what he does (the sacraments). The focus of Christian worship is the Lord Jesus Christ because through Jesus God most clearly shows his worth to human beings as the God who loves us, accepts us, forgives us and cares for us.

**WE RESPOND** The second aspect of Christian worship is our response to God's words and actions. We recognise and acknowledge God's worth. Our response indicates what God is worth to us; we show by our words and actions that we believe God is worthy of praise, honour, loving obedience and willing service. We can pray to God for mercy and for all our needs. At the same time we acknowledge our own unworthiness (confession of sins).

We sometimes call our worship 'divine service' because in worship God serves us and this prompts us in turn to serve him. This highlights an essential difference between Christian and non-Christian worship: in non-Christian worship the initiative tends to be with the worshippers who try to establish the connection with their god and demonstrate their own worthiness by the earnestness and intensity of their prayers and other ritual acts (contrast the worship of the prophets of Baal with that of Elijah, 1 Kings 18:16–39; also the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14).

**WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE** The basic pattern of worship outlined above can be seen already in the Old Testament. When people like Noah and Abraham build altars and 'call on the name of the Lord', this follows some gracious action of God (saving Noah, calling Abraham). In the Old Testament times the

special places of worship were places where God had 'appeared' — made himself known. Although the people of God knew that God could not be confined to a building (2 Chronicles 6:18), God nevertheless instructed them to erect first the tabernacle and later the temple as his 'house' where he would graciously come to be with them. The Israelites were also given special times for worship. On the sabbath day they were to put aside their work and remember the mighty work of God as their Creator and Rescuer (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15). Every day by their sacrifices they were to honour the God who had set them apart to be his own covenant people. There were also special worship festivals which focused on God's merciful deliverance (eg Passover, Day of Atonement).

In worship God comes to his people to strengthen them, prepare them to be his servants, and encourage them to love one another and share his gifts.

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The New Testament begins with Jesus and his disciples observing the worship pattern of Israel. However, like the prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus called for worship that

was not mere empty ritual but was sincere devotion (Matthew 6:5–13; 15:1–9), 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). As God in human flesh, Jesus himself is the New Testament tabernacle and temple — the 'place' where God's glory is fully revealed (John 1:14; 2:19–21). Jesus promised his followers that he would be present even when only two or three of them came together in his name (Matthew 18:20). Christian worship is not restricted to certain rituals at particular places and times (Colossians 2:16). The sabbath having fulfilled its purpose, Sunday came to be observed as 'the Lord's day'. On this day Christians celebrate God's supreme work of deliverance through the death and resurrection of Christ. Luther explains what the third commandment means for Christians:

... we should not despise God's word or refuse to hear it. Instead, we should recognise that God's word is holy and be glad to hear and learn it. (*Luther's Small Catechism*, Openbook edition 1996)

The 'church year', arranged around the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost,

helps Christians to celebrate the mighty works of God for the salvation of all people.

For God’s people all of life is worship — listening to the word of the Lord and responding in service to him and to other people (see Romans 12).

**FORMS OF WORSHIP** The essentials of Christian worship consist in God coming to people through word and sacrament and people responding through adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. There are various ways of worshipping. Over the years many Christians have valued a set liturgy which they believe maintains the proper focus of worship. The value of good liturgy is that it allows worship to be carried on ‘in a fitting and orderly way’ (1 Corinthians 14:40), and enables the church to confess its doctrine clearly. The danger some Christians see in set liturgy is that it can easily become mechanical and thoughtless routine.

The Lutheran confessions stress, however, that neither liturgy nor any other form or style of worship is commanded by God. For example:

*We further believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offence but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church.* Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration Article X, 9.

Christians are free to choose in the area of forms of worship. Decisions about worship forms, however, must be made in genuine concern for the welfare and unity of the body of Christ and in Christian love for all members of the body. In all our worship — whether in our congregations or schools or classrooms or homes — our concern must surely be to use forms that best help us and fellow Christians (young and old) to recognise, express and respond to God’s worth revealed in Jesus Christ.

**FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION**

1. What questions do the Background Notes raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on the topic of worship?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3. More important than teaching children **forms** of worship (eg to understand the liturgy) is to teach children to **worship** (to understand what worship is all about). Comment. What can be done to enrich the worship in your school?
4. How do we handle the problem of children saying that worship is boring? (See *Good Question*, ed B Schwarz, Openbook Publishers, p 132)
5. Should worship be compulsory in a Christian school? Is it appropriate to expect non-Christian children (including children of other religious backgrounds) to participate in Christian worship?

**FOR FURTHER READING**

- Our Lutheran Heritage* (What is distinctive about Christian worship particularly from the Lutheran point of view?) by EW Janetzki in *Praise God in His Sanctuary* Vol II
- A Lutheran Approach to the Theology of Worship* (LCA Commission on Worship) in *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions* Vol 2
- Luther’s Large Catechism: The Third Commandment*
- Augsburg Confession* VII, XV, XXVI.40ff; XXVIII.30 *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article IV, 49

