



Introducing your family, your family of faith! That's what Christa Petzold does in this wonderfully engaging volume of Christian history. This essential resource for Lutheran families interested in communicating the faith to future generations surveys two millennia of Christianity through the lives and times of three dozen Christian leaders from James, the brother of Jesus, to the founders of the LCMS. Encouraging critical thinking through Bible study and discussion questions with applications for life, this overview of the Christian Church is invaluable for parents and teachers of grade-schoolers. The author occasionally uses important technical theological vocabulary and then gives clear and simple explanations, making the text readily readable. As a mother, homeschooler, and pastor's wife, Christa boldly presents "a soft apologetic" for confessional Lutheran children. This is an indispensable resource for all twenty-first century Christian parents and teachers.

*Timothy Maschke, professor of theology, emeritus,
Concordia University Wisconsin*

Root your children in the essentials of their history. In *Journey through Church History*, Christa returns all Christians to the roots of our family tree in a way that nourishes and grounds us in the living faith. The history of the church reminds us that God's kingdom endures forever, and since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we are emboldened to persevere. Parents have the important task of passing down the faith and training their children in resilience. Christa's curriculum will undoubtedly aid in both.

Stephanie Neugebauer, pastor's wife and mom of three

Journey through Church History provides a useful tool for any Christian school. I wish I could have used this book while I home-schooled my children. Author Christa Petzold has transformed a potentially dry and confusing subject into a clear and fascinating study. She gives familiar names like Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Jerome, Augustine, Luther, and Walther a place on a time line and helps readers understand their significance to the Body of Christ. Even if you are no longer a kid or teaching kids, you will appreciate this lively book on church history.

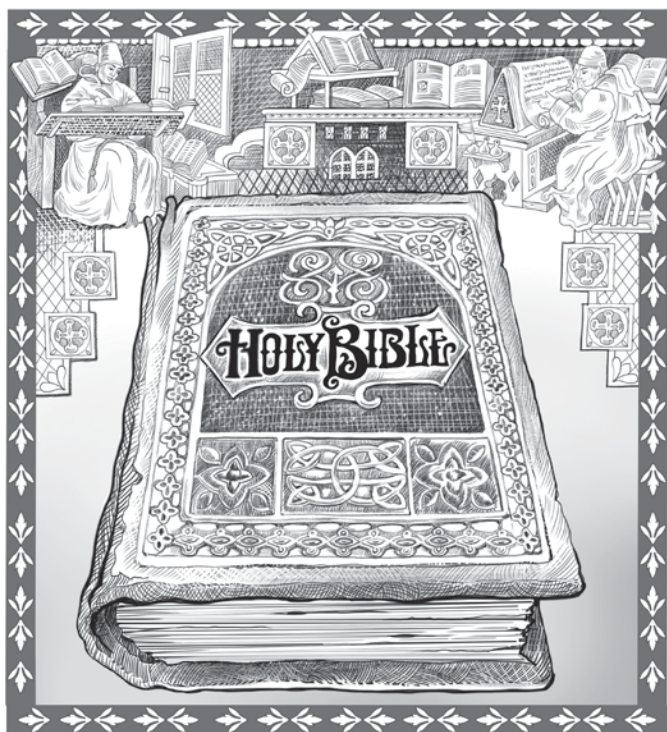
*Sharla Fritz, author of several titles, including
Measured by Grace: How God Defines Success
and God's Relentless Love: A Study of Hosea*

Journey through Church History spans James, the brother of Jesus, through Walther and today, highlighting individuals we can honor and emulate without pretending they were without faults. A lively, conversational tone guides students through theologically significant concepts, like martyrdom and heresy, and churchly developments, like the creeds and liturgy, with Lutheran discretion and grace. The Leader Guide offers educators accompanying Bible studies, vocabulary, and review activities to solidify each lesson. Fortright and sensitive, Petzold has written a candid resource to help us raise our children and students in the faith and continuity of the Christian Church. It's definitely homeschool- and school-friendly.

*Deaconess Mary J. Moerbe, mother of six; lower school dean and fifth-grade teacher at Memorial Lutheran School in Houston, Texas;
founder of LutheranHomeschool.com*

Journey THROUGH Church History

CHRISTA PETZOLD



STUDENT BOOK

*To my grandmother, Jean Thomas.
Thank you for all your love and prayers.*



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A Note from the Author

This book was born of an acute desire to see young people grow up knowing the history of the church. In a world where the church is not always popular, I want my children to feel a sense of connection to the historic Christian faith that has endured for two thousand years. The church has a rich culture and heritage, and as our children grow up in a world where the dominant culture is against Christ, the people they will meet through the study of church history can give them a sense of rootedness—grounding them in a reality bigger and longer-lasting than the popular culture of our time.

As Christian parents, we hope and expect our children will live counterculturally in adulthood. When our children grow up to remain faithful throughout their lives, they will live in a way their peers may not understand, and it is likely to cost them both socially and financially. We must equip them with knowledge, understanding, and encouragement to stand firm in this world, and I believe teaching them church history is one way we can do this.

The people we encounter in these stories stood firm in the faith in the face of great challenges. Learning from their experiences inspires us to do likewise. Awareness of the debates and controversies the church has already faced enables us to avoid falling into theological errors now. Understanding why and how the church came to do certain things protects our young people from falling prey to baseless arguments against the faith. In this sense, teaching church history is a soft apologetic for the church.

Writing a book on church history for young people is a delicate task. Any time someone undertakes to write about history, there will be bias. Books written for children, especially ones about theology or faith, are particularly prone to bias. The act of putting an idea or story in simple words is, in itself, interpretation,

and the more we simplify and interpret, the more opportunities present themselves for the author's views to seep through.

Because of this reality, many of the books available on church history for children contain theological leanings that I do not share. This book is written with the conviction that Scripture is the highest source of truth and authority in the church and that Scripture does not err. It is unashamedly written with the confessional Lutheran child in mind. In this book, when I cover individuals whose teachings vary significantly from the teachings of Scripture, I attempt to point the reader in the right direction as he or she analyzes these important figures in church history. I strive to highlight the strengths and positive examples of all the included church fathers and theologians, even those with whom I personally have some theological variance. All the faithful men and women featured here are worthy of our respect and gratitude.

When it comes to a topic as immense as church history, this book can only serve as an introduction. There are so many other saints and stories that could have been included: St. Patrick, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria, Clement of Rome . . . The list goes on. My hope is that this book gives young people a framework to support their continued study of church history and develops in them an appetite to learn more. I hope that in the years to come, readers will pick up the writings of the church fathers for themselves and come to discover more of the rich history and faith legacy of the Christian Church.





CHAPTER 1

The Beginning of the Church

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed
you a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)

Your Church Family

In the Bible, God tells us that before He formed each person inside his or her mother's womb, He already knew each of us by name. None of us can remember being born, but even before your birth, you had a *history*. You are the person you are today in large part because of the family God gave you. Your family is the way it is because of your parents' experiences and choices,

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because of your grandparents' life story, and because of who your great-grandparents were (even if you've never met them).

You have probably noticed that *every family is different*. Your parents have different jobs or occupations than your friends' parents do, and your family likely has different interests and chooses to do different things than other families. Some families like to take bike rides together. Some families love to read. In some families, the children go to school, while in others, the children learn at home. In our family, we homeschool, read the Bible together in the evenings, eat dinner earlier than many folks, have cats, and love *Star Wars*. The things that a group of people do together—including their beliefs, the way they speak to one another, the way they dress, and the art and stories they tell—are called **culture**. If a family believes in Jesus, goes to church, and makes following God's Word the biggest part of their life, that defines and shapes their family culture.

Just as you were born or adopted into your family, we each become a member of God's family when we are baptized. You may not be able to remember your Baptism, but on that day, you became a part of the church. When we use the word *church*, we sometimes mean the building where we go to worship God and meet together with our church family. But the word *church* also means all the people who have ever believed in Jesus. When we use the word *church* that way, we are talking about people who live all over the world and people who lived long ago. Just as your family has a culture and a history that started before you were born, so does the church.

In this book, we are going to learn about people who are part of your church family but who lived a long time ago. These people are important because what they did, what they experienced, and the letters and books they wrote have shaped the culture of our church family. Just like you and me, they were not perfect. They were sinners, and sometimes they made mistakes. Sometimes they were wrong about things. We remember

them and honor them in the church not because they were perfect but because they studied God's Word carefully and taught it faithfully, even when they were persecuted (threatened, hurt, or killed) for doing so.

Sometimes being a Christian isn't easy. In some times and places, Christians have been killed just because they believed in Jesus. At times, Christians have been told they have to teach and say things that go against the Bible. The stories in this book are of real people who said what was true, even when people around them tried to stop them. These people are part of our faith family, just like the people you see at your church.

The Beginning of Christianity

Let's start at the beginning. The Old Testament tells us the account of God's people, from Adam and Eve, the first people God created, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the Israelites who God rescued from Egypt and led to the Promised Land. It also tells of the kingdom God established for His people under kings like David and Solomon and how the people were unfaithful to God and were sent into exile. All of the Old Testament points forward to the promised Messiah—Jesus. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels, which tell of Jesus' birth, the miracles He did, the things He taught, His death, and His resurrection. After the Gospels is the book of Acts. Acts starts with the account of Jesus ascending into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We can call Pentecost "the birthday of the church." The rest of the New Testament tells us how the apostles (Jesus' disciples) spread the Gospel throughout the known world. It includes letters that the apostles wrote to the churches in different areas offering encouragement and instruction to help them teach the truth about Jesus. The apostles lived about two thousand years ago. After they died, the church continued on. The Holy Spirit has not stopped working in and through His church

CHAPTER 1

Dates in history are divided into two time periods. BC stands for “Before Christ,” and AD stands for “Anno Domini,” which means “In the Year of our Lord” in Latin. When you see AD 30, logically, that should mean thirty years after Jesus’ birth. (However, the monk who first started using this system calculated the birth of Jesus incorrectly, so Jesus was actually born around 3 or 4 BC. Jesus’ death and resurrection occurred in AD 30, when Jesus was thirty-three years old.

since that time, and Jesus promises us that the church will last forever. Nothing can destroy the church.

Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection took place around the year 30, during the time of the Roman Empire. In many ways, the Roman Empire made it easy for the Gospel message to spread quickly. Before the empire, travel from place to place was difficult, and people from different countries did not always speak the same language. But with the entire Mediterranean region of the world under the rule of the Roman caesar, people could easily and safely travel long distances. The Romans built roads that were so well constructed that many of them still exist to this day. Almost everyone spoke Greek, which meant wherever Christians traveled, there was a common language they could use to talk to the people they met and tell them about Jesus.

In the centuries before Jesus came, there had been uprisings and war between the Jewish people and their Roman conquerors. Because of these wars, many Jewish people left their land and moved to other places within the empire. These Jewish people living in areas other than Palestine (the land that had once been the Promised Land) were called the **diaspora**. The word *diaspora* means “dispersed” or “spread out.”

Since the common language of the time was Greek, and the Jewish people now lived throughout the empire, naturally, the Old Testament Scriptures had been translated from their original Hebrew into Greek. This Greek version of the Old Testament is called the **Septuagint**. So, wherever the apostles and the first Christians went, they would find Jewish communities with copies of the Old Testament Scriptures in Greek. Thus, people were familiar with the prophecies about the coming Messiah.

When the apostles came to each new town, they would go to the synagogue and explain how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. (*Synagogue* is the name for the place where Jewish people gather for worship and study of the Scriptures.) Even when they shared the Gospel with the Gentiles (those who were not Jewish), these people were familiar with the God of the Israelites because they already knew Jewish people living in their communities and had heard about their beliefs. In many ways, the diaspora of the Jewish people served to prepare the way for the spread of the Gospel.

James, Brother of Jesus, and the Church in Jerusalem

James, the brother of Jesus, was the first pastor or bishop of the church in Jerusalem. He is author of the book of James in the New Testament, which he wrote “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (James 1:1). James is called Jesus’ brother in the Bible, but we do not know for sure that he was the son of Mary and Joseph. At that time, it was usual for cousins who lived together in the same household to be referred to as brothers and sisters. While James may have been the son of Mary and Joseph, he may instead have been a cousin to Jesus. Either way, it is very likely that he grew up living in the same home as Jesus. If your cousins lived in the same house as you, you might end up calling them brothers and sisters too!

CHAPTER 1

James did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah during the time of Jesus' ministry. We read in John 7:5 that "not even His brothers believed in Him." Imagine yourself in James's position. Imagine you had grown up with Jesus your whole life, living, working, and playing together, doing all the ordinary things that brothers do. Would it be hard to believe that this ordinary, human brother of yours was God? *Probably!* When Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7), James finally believed in Him and came to faith.

The book of Acts shows how the Gospel message spread among the Jewish people and the Gentiles. One of the first debates within the church was whether or not Gentiles who became Christian needed to follow the Jewish laws. The Jewish people followed the laws set forth in the Old Testament. They were supposed to circumcise their baby boys, only eat certain foods, and follow rules about the Sabbath and other holy days.

James proclaimed the truth to the church in Jerusalem: the Messiah that had been foretold was the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles. Scripture teaches us that the Old Testament laws and ceremonies pointed forward to Christ and find their fulfillment in Jesus; therefore, we do not have to keep the Jewish ceremonial laws today. You can imagine, though, that if you had been raised your entire life doing certain things in hopes of pleasing God, these things could be hard to give up. Christians in Jerusalem would go to the temple on Saturdays to keep the Sabbath and hear the Scriptures read, but they would also meet together on Sundays—the day of the week Jesus had risen from the dead—to celebrate Holy Communion and to remember Jesus' resurrection. (From the beginning, Sunday became the day that Christians would meet in remembrance of the resurrection.)

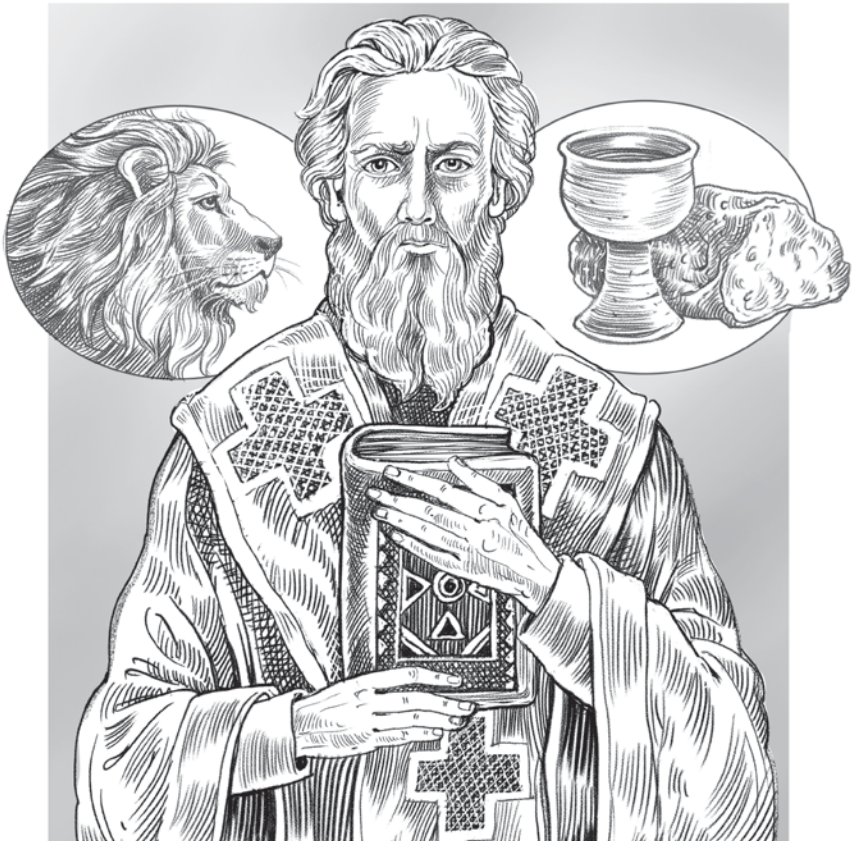
James was **martyred** in Jerusalem about thirty years after Jesus rose from the dead. (A martyr is someone who gives witness to Jesus by dying for the faith.) He led the church in Jerusalem faithfully during that time, teaching everyone how Jesus had come to save both the Jewish people and the Gentiles.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are some of the things your family does that make you different from other families? How would you describe your family culture?

How did the Roman Empire make it easier for Christianity to spread?

What do you think it would be like to grow up with Jesus as a brother?



CHAPTER 2

Ignatius of Antioch: Eager Martyr

The First Generations of Christians

As mentioned in chapter 1, the Roman Empire made it easier to spread the message of Jesus in two ways: travel was safe and fast, and people shared a common language. But the Roman Empire was **syncretistic**, which means that the culture at the time was comfortable mixing together beliefs from many different religions. If someone shared about a new god or a new belief, the Romans would just mix it in with the gods they

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already worshiped and the things they already believed. This challenged the church in two ways.

First, since people were used to adding new teachings to their beliefs, this happened in the churches quite often. People would write new books and claim that they had been written by apostles, or they would say that God had given them a new message in secret and everyone else should believe them. The early Christians spent a lot of time correcting these errors and encouraging the church to only teach the things that Jesus and His apostles had taught and nothing else.

The second challenge was persecution. The Roman Empire kept the peace by letting all the beliefs of all the different people in the empire exist together, but to all these different gods that people worshiped, the Romans added the caesar. To be a good Roman citizen, you had to offer sacrifices to the caesar. If you offered these sacrifices, you were admitting that the caesar was a god. Obviously, Christians could not faithfully do this. Christians boldly declared that there was only one true God, and the First Commandment clearly states, “You shall have no other gods.” This threatened the way of life (or the *culture*) of the empire, so in the first three hundred years of Christianity, persecution was common.

Some emperors would persecute Christians more than others, and some places were safer than others for Christians. But for the first few centuries, the church lived under the threat of persecution. To be a Christian meant living in danger of being tortured or killed. And yet many, many people came to believe in Jesus at this time. (From Pentecost morning, when all the believers could fit in one room in Jerusalem, to the year 300, the church grew to be so large that there were Christians meeting together in every part of the Roman Empire!) All of this happened at a time when being a Christian was not safe.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch was one of the earliest known martyrs and one of the first bishops. In the early church, a **bishop** was a pastor who was the head pastor, or leader, of the church, in a specific city. In each big city, there would be a bishop who would be responsible for all the church gatherings that took place in and around that city. The words *bishop*, *pastor*, *overseer*, and *elder* were all used to refer to men who were pastors, but eventually (by around the 300s), the term *bishop* was reserved for the pastor who supervised the church in a specific area. Ignatius is called bishop of Antioch because he was the head of the church in Antioch, but he may have been given the title later when Christians wrote about him. A historian named Eusebius (You-SEE-be-us)—whom we will learn about later—recorded that Ignatius was the third bishop in Antioch. (Eusebius claimed that the apostle Peter was the first.)

Ignatius was born around the years 30 to 35, so he almost certainly knew the apostles. Some have said that he was one of the little children who sat on Jesus' lap when Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me," and blessed them (see Matthew 19:14–15). We have no way of knowing if this story is true, but isn't it cool to think about how the earliest Christians would have met Jesus or would have heard all about His life straight from the apostles who were with Him?

Ignatius is best known for his martyrdom. He was sentenced to death by the Roman authorities around 107. The Romans were celebrating a great military victory and thought it would be fun to have Christians killed by wild beasts in their **Colosseum** (an amphitheater built in the first century AD) in Rome as part of their celebration.

Ignatius's Travels

Ignatius traveled from Antioch through Asia Minor to Rome as a prisoner on his way to execution. (Asia Minor is the modern-day country of Turkey. Antioch is located at the corner of the Mediterranean Sea at the southern border of Turkey. This journey would have taken months.) As Ignatius traveled, he wrote seven letters to his fellow Christians. These letters are some of our best sources of information about the early church around the year 100. He wrote about the importance of submitting to the authority of the bishops with humility. He warned against false teaching in the church and emphasized how important it is to teach and believe the truth about Jesus and what He did for us. Ignatius encouraged Christians to love one another so that the people who wanted to persecute them would see how loving and kind they were and would know that they were loving because of Jesus' love for them. He also wrote about the **Eucharist**. (The word *Eucharist* comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving and is another word for Communion.) He emphasized that when we receive the Eucharist, we are receiving the same body and blood that Jesus shed for us when He died on the cross.

Ignatius wrote about his journey, recounting his travels both by land and sea while chained to ten soldiers. Would you like to spend months traveling, sometimes by boat, sometimes along dusty roads, while chained to ten soldiers? I think that would make me pretty miserable. If it were me, I think I would want to be rescued! But Ignatius wrote to the Christians in Rome, urging them not to ask for his release. He was willing to die to show how serious he was about his belief in Jesus. He knew that he would rise again one day, so he had no fear of what would happen to him in the Colosseum. He also wrote that, as he traveled through Syria, Christians came to meet him along his route. Some of them traveled a long way to see him.

Early Years of the Church

In the early years of the church, the willingness of people like Ignatius to face martyrdom strengthened and encouraged the faith of other believers. It also served as a powerful witness to those who did not yet believe. We read in the Bible that before Jesus ascended into heaven, He appeared to over five hundred people (see 1 Corinthians 15:6). Those people would have still been living for years and years after Christ's ascension. Many others believed that they were telling the truth because these witnesses to the resurrection were willing to die rather than say that Jesus had not risen.

However, most people didn't believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Some people thought that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb and made up the stories of Him appearing to them. But put yourself in the shoes of one of those first Christians. Suppose you had helped steal Jesus' body and then made up a story about Him rising from the dead. Then soldiers arrest you and threaten to kill you if you don't tell them the truth. If it was truly a lie, don't you think you would tell the truth rather than let them kill you? If the disciples and those five hundred people who saw Jesus had been lying, they would not have been willing to die for what they said. They would have admitted it was a lie to save themselves.

The fact that so many early Christians like Ignatius were willing to die for their faith in Jesus serves as evidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead. It also encourages us in our faith, as we see how sure Ignatius was in his own resurrection. Ignatius had no doubts. He was willing and eager to share how certain he was with the spectators in Rome through his death.

Ignatius was killed by wild beasts in Rome around the year 107. In his letters, he urged his fellow Christians to pray that his death would be a witness to the Lord Jesus and His victorious death and resurrection. The Christians in Rome abided by his

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wishes and did not plead for his release. Through Ignatius, we see an example of courage in the face of suffering and of unwavering faith in Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What were some of the challenges that the first-century church faced?

What do you find surprising about Ignatius's narrative? What do you find inspiring?

Do you think Christians should seek out persecution? Why or why not?