



## LUTHERANISM

### Lutheranism? What's that?



The Christian faith has many forms. History, geography, language and culture have all shaped the way the Christian tradition is expressed.

All Christian beliefs and practices are rooted in the witness of the earliest followers of Jesus found in the New Testament of the Bible. In the first half of the 1500's, a German monk, priest and professor of Scripture named Martin Luther developed some specific ways of looking at Christian faith and life. His insights continue to guide Lutherans today in the way we understand Jesus, the Bible, the Church, and the central features of a Christian life. Luther did not invent new teachings, but his way of thinking about some parts of the tradition gave a new sense of hope and joy to those who shared them. Specifically, Luther lifted up Paul's teaching in his letters as summing up our hope of salvation: "We hold that a person is justified by faith, apart from works of the law." (Romans 3:28)

Lutherans focus their beliefs, worship and ethics on Jesus Christ. This may seem obvious, but there are many Christians who focus their worship on God the creator or God the Holy Spirit. Some focus on the Bible itself, as a kind of holy object. We believe in the Creator and the Spirit; we are traditional Trinitarians in that respect. We also understand the witness of the Bible to be normative for faith and life. But the heart of all that we say and do is the Son, and the living "Word made flesh," Jesus Christ.

Lutherans focus on God's Grace. We know that the Bible often refers to God's Law and divine judgment and wrath. But we find more emphasis on God's love, mercy, compassion and promise. Grace is God's free gift of forgiveness to all people which is given to us in Christ. We call this great gift the Gospel. We're all about receiving and sharing the Gospel of grace.

Lutherans base their ethics on the needs of our neighbors. There are many rules in scripture, especially the Old Testament, and there are many customs of right and wrong that we are taught as we grow. But we believe that Jesus showed us that neither written laws nor human traditions should be used to harm our neighbors. We are called to do good to all people as much as we are able.



Lutherans love to sing, especially in worship. Our liturgies and hymns are among the Church's most powerful and uplifting expressions of the faith. While we borrow liberally from other traditions, we live out the sense of lively worship reflected in the New Testament and the Lutheran Reformation. In our worship, we hear the Gospel and are equipped to share it.



Lutherans are sacramental. This means that we see the two sacraments of Baptism and Communion as crucial for understanding the whole faith. Baptism is the foundational sacrament, in which infants or adults receive a promise from God. The promise is that we are forgiven any sin and we are given a new life in Christ. Jesus Christ is our risen and living Lord, and in Baptism our lives are connected eternally to his. Communion, also known as the Lord's Supper, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the Holy Eucharist, is the family meal of the baptized. In the bread and cup we encounter the risen Christ and receive again the full forgiveness of any sin. We remember Christ's last supper, experience a present connection to others sharing the meal, and see a foretaste of a banquet that signifies the transformation of all creation.