

Pastoral Letter – Reformation Sunday

What Do Lutherans Believe?

Whether a “life-time” Lutheran or you’re a “seeker” looking for answers, the following questions and answers bear witness of our faith as Christians.

One of the earliest declarations of faith in Christian history is the “Apostle’s Creed.” Forms of it are used today by Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and many non-denominational churches. Its name comes from the early tradition that each of the twelve apostles dictated part of it after Pentecost. As a result, the statement is traditionally divided into twelve articles. Our ministry affirms each assertion:

1. *“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.”*

There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). He is our Father (Matthew 6:9) and reigns over the universe as the Lord Almighty (Revelation 4:2-11). He created all that exists as Father (Genesis 1:1), Son (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17), and Spirit (Genesis 1:2).

2. *“And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord.”* “Jesus” means “Savior”

(Matthew 1:21), the one who came “to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). “Christ” means “Messiah” (John 1:41), the one anointed by God to rule the nations (Psalm 2:1-9). He is God’s “only Son” (Matthew 3:17; 16:16). He is “Lord,” our Master and King (Revelation 22:20). He came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17), and will consummate it at his return (Revelation 19:16). He calls us to extend his Kingdom (Matthew 10:7) by leading all people (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8) to make him their King.

3. *“He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.”*

Jesus chose to leave heaven for earth (Philippians 2:6-7) to be conceived physically by the power of the Holy Spirit in the body of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:34-35). His Incarnation was the miracle by which he became Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

4. ***“He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.”***

Jesus’ physical life and death (Luke 23:46) are documented by the Scriptures and by Roman and Jewish historians as well. He came to be “the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:2), dying in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21) to pay the penalty for our sins and purchase our salvation (Romans 5:8-9).

5. ***“On the third day he rose again from the dead.”*** Jesus’ physical resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10) is the miracle which proves his divinity (1 Corinthians 15:12-20). He rose again as he promised (Matthew 16:21), proving that God’s word is authoritative (Matthew 28:18), trustworthy (Matthew 5:18), and relevant today (2 Timothy 3:16-17). His rising was the central affirmation of early Christian preaching (Acts 2:29-33; 17:31).

6. ***“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.”*** Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:9) further proved his divinity. He is now “at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34).

7. ***“He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”*** As Jesus ascended to heaven, so he will return visibly to earth again one day (Acts 1:10-11). Christians do not know when Jesus will return (Matthew 24:36), so we must be ready for him to come today (Luke 12:40).

8. ***“I believe in the Holy Spirit,”*** The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:4, 9). He indwells every believer at salvation (Romans 8:18; 1 Corinthians 3:16). His gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13) are still operative today. We are called to submit to his leadership and seek his power for service every day (Ephesians 5:18).

9. ***“The holy Christian Church, the communion of saints,”*** The Church was founded by Jesus (Matthew 16:18) and is his body for ministry today (1 Corinthians 12:27). All believers (1 Corinthians 12:13) from all time (Hebrews 12:1) are part of the universal Church.

10. ***“The forgiveness of sins,”*** We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift from God (Romans 6:23). We must each receive this gift personally (John 3:3) by confessing our sins to God (Proverbs 28:13) with repentance (Acts 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7:10), asking Jesus to forgive them (Luke 11:4) and trusting in him as our Lord and Master (Romans 10:13). When the Holy Spirit calls us to faith, he makes us a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and holds us in his hand forever (John 10:28). As believers, we continue to confess our sins to God and seek his forgiving grace (1 John 1:8-10). Since the results of sin are death (Romans 6:23), those who refuse God’s offer of salvation in Christ are separated from him forever in hell (John 3:18; Revelation 20:15).

11. ***“The resurrection of the body,”*** Jesus’ resurrection assures us of eternal life with him (1 Corinthians 15:22). Believers never die (John 11:25-26). At the moment of physical death, we are instantly united with Jesus in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

12. ***“And life everlasting.”*** Christians will spend eternity with God in imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 53-55), worshipping him forever (Revelation 5:13). Jesus came to give us abundant life now (John 10:10) and eternal life with him in heaven (John 14:1-3). These statements constitute “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). They form the theological foundation for all that our ministry does to extend God’s Kingdom around the world (Habakkuk 2:14).