

PARTICIPANT

New Testament

REVISED EDITION



**To Know, To Live,
To Grow**

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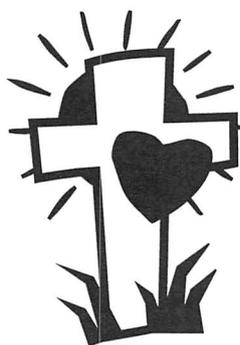
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**To Know, To Live,
To Grow**

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Session 1

John the Baptist

Session Goal

To learn about John the Baptist, how he prepared the way for Jesus' coming, how he was willing to take a stand, and how he was a connection between the Old and New Testaments.

Goals for this Study

- To learn about the life of Jesus Christ through the Gospels.
- To learn about the beginning of the church through the book of Acts and the letters of Paul.
- To learn about Lutheran faith through Martin Luther, the book of Romans, and the sacraments.
- To learn about the Apostles' Creed.

Go around the group, sharing your name and one thing you've made.

- What was it?
- Why did you make it?
- What was hardest about the project?
- What was the first thing you had to do to get ready for the project?

Open with prayer.

Starter Questions

- When have you been promised something?
- What was it like waiting for that promise to be fulfilled?
- Name some times when you were anxious about something.

Read through the goals for this study listed in the margin to the left.

Imagine you had to plan for the coming of the Savior to the world.

- What might the event look like?
- Who would be the leaders in the process?
- How might the people respond to your plan?

Between the Old and the New Testaments, hundreds of years passed, years without a prophet or voice from God. The people had been promised a Messiah or Savior, so they waited and waited, until John the Baptist came with news of this Savior's arrival.

Today we meet one of the most significant messengers in the Bible, John the Baptist. His ministry was short-term, but his role was very important. As you discover more about John the Baptist in this session, try to determine why John was so important in the beginning of the Christian church, what his role or ministry was, and how the people were feeling when he came.

Bible Investigation

Read Mark 1:1-8 and John 1:6-9, 19-23, the stories of John the Baptist.

At the time of Jesus' birth, the Romans ruled much of Europe and parts of the Middle East and northern Africa. Travel was relatively easy, and people in the Roman Empire spoke a common language. Traditionally, Roman officials of this time had someone come before them to announce their coming.

- This story is part of a bigger journey. What does Mark highlight from the Old Testament, and how is it fulfilled? Read Isaiah 40:3-5.

- According to Mark 1:1, who is this Gospel about? Why did he begin his Gospel by talking about John the Baptist and his ministry? _____

- According to John's Gospel, who sent John the Baptist? What role did John the Baptist have and what image is used to describe his role? See also Matthew 11:10-12. _____

- Who did John the Baptist say he was? How did he connect the old and new ways? See also Luke 1:5-25, 76-77. _____

John the Baptist was a descendent of the priest Zechariah, therefore he knew the Jewish customs and practices. It also meant he could be a priest himself. But the people were suspicious of his abnormal actions and they questioned him. The people generally did not adjust well to anything out of the ordinary way of doing things. See John 1:19-28.

- What was John the Baptist doing to prepare the way for Jesus? Who did people think he was? Who was John really pointing people toward?

Washing was one part of the ritual of cleansing when Gentiles converted to Judaism. It was a familiar ritual, but with a far different emphasis than baptisms today. John the Baptist's and Jesus' lives paralleled each other. They were cousins, and both were born, lived, and died about the same time. John's job was to set the stage for Jesus' ministry.

Discussion Questions

- What was John willing to give up?
- What obstacles could have kept John from focusing on his job?
- What do you think his family thought of his actions?
- What does John's story suggest for us today?
- How did John's upbringing help him complete his task?

God called John the Baptist to play a specific role in history. John responded to that call by setting himself apart from the crowd and focusing on what he believed. He did not let the things of the world distract him.

Challenge Questions

- What are you willing to take a stand for? A group of people? A cause? Write an opinion paper about an issue or idea you believe in.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 2

Jesus, Our Savior

Share your name and one of the following:

- Who is your favorite hero and why?
- Tell a story about yourself when you were younger.
- What is your favorite part of the Christmas celebration?

As a group, share the stories you remember about Jesus. What did these stories mean when you first heard them and what do they mean to you now?

Open with prayer.

How Novel

Pretend for a moment that you were given the assignment to write the life story of someone you know very well and care a lot about. Would that be a hard or easy task? Why? Write down the main points you would want to highlight. Where would the story take place? Would you tell all of the story or just part of it? Spend some time reflecting on this assignment.

Starter Questions

- How excited would you be about an assignment like this?
- What are important things to remember when writing someone's life story?

The divine love of God came to us through Jesus more than 2,000 years ago. As Christians, we believe Jesus was a person like any other, and that Jesus was also God. We believe Jesus is our Savior, saving us by teaching us how to live, by healing us, and by dying for our sins and rising on the third day. His story is written in four different ways by four different authors in what we call the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Session Goal

To gain a general understanding of the life of Jesus Christ.

The Story of Jesus

Use your Bible to complete the story. Fill in as much as you can on your own, then go back and check your answers with the group.

Jesus was born in the town of _____. (Matthew 2:1) His mother's name was _____. Her husband was _____. (Matthew 1:16) Jesus was the Savior of the world, the long-awaited Messiah, so when he was born the angels began to spread the good news. The angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds and said, _____
_____. (Luke 2:10-12)

King Herod heard from the Wise Men that a new "king of the Jews" had been born. Herod did not want anyone to take over his throne, so he ordered all young children around Bethlehem to be killed. To protect their child, Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to _____. (Matthew 2:14)

After Herod died, Mary and Joseph returned to their home in Nazareth. When Jesus was 12 years old his parents took him to the temple in _____ to celebrate the _____. (Luke 2:41-42) When his parents were ready to return home they could not find him because he was in the _____ sitting with the teachers, asking them questions. (Luke 2:43-46)

When Jesus was an adult he was baptized in the _____. (Mark 1:5) When he came up out of the river, the Holy Spirit of God came to him in the form of a _____. (Mark 1:10) And there was a voice from heaven saying, _____
_____. (Mark 1:11)

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus went out into the _____. (Mark 1:12) There he was tempted. After that, Jesus began his ministry of teaching, healing, and loving.

When Jesus called his first disciples, he asked them to drop everything and _____. (Matthew 4:19) He wanted them to help him with his ministry. One day, Jesus gave a sermon on a mountain, addressing many people. He told the people about being blessed. "Blessed are the _____ ... those who _____, ... the _____, ... those who _____
_____ ... the _____, ... the _____, ... the _____, ... those who are _____." (Matthew 5:3-10)

Jesus taught people about God. He said God seeks after us like a _____ who goes searching after a lost sheep. (Luke 15:3-6) God is like a _____ who searches for a lost coin. (Luke 15:8-10) Jesus taught people about the most important commandment. He said, _____
_____. (Mark 12:30) Jesus taught people about God's realm of peace and love. In order to enter this realm, we must be as trusting as a _____. (Luke 18:17)

Jesus also _____ sick people. (Mark 1:34) He healed _____. (Mark 1:30-31) He healed _____. (Luke 13:10-13) He healed a _____. (Mark 8:23-25) Even though Jesus was kind and loving, there were some powerful religious leaders who did not like him. These people were called the _____. (Mark 2:24) Jesus had a new vision for life that went against what these people believed. For example, they did not like the way Jesus sometimes disobeyed the laws about keeping the _____. (Mark 2:24) Some of the Roman leaders thought Jesus was trying to create his own kingdom.

Eventually, these powerful people wanted Jesus to die. One week before he was killed, Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds shouted, _____. (Matthew 21:9) On Thursday of that week, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples. He offered them wine and bread and said, _____. (Luke 22:19-20)

After eating the Last Supper with the disciples, Jesus went to _____ to pray. (Mark 14:32) He knew his life was in danger. While Jesus was praying, one of his disciples, Judas, led the chief priests and scribes to Jesus so they could arrest him. (Mark 14:43) Jesus was bound and taken away. The next morning was Friday. Jesus was sentenced to be crucified because they said he was claiming to be _____. (Mark 15:2) They took Jesus to _____ and nailed him to a cross. (Mark 15:22) Jesus looked at those who had put him on the cross and prayed, _____. (Luke 23:34)

After Jesus died, he was put in a tomb and a huge rock was rolled across the entrance so no one could take his body away. On Sunday morning, three women, _____, brought spices with which to anoint his body. (Mark 16:1) And to their amazement, instead of finding Jesus' dead body, they saw an angel who said, _____. (Matthew 28:5-6)
Jesus rose from the dead so that we too can have life!

Jesus' Characteristics

As a group, look back over the story. Make two lists. List the divine characteristics of Jesus. Then list the human characteristics of Jesus.

Challenge Questions

- What are key things you learned from the story of Jesus? How do those things impact your life? What difference does it make that Jesus came to earth? Why is it important that Jesus was both human and divine?
- If you were to tell someone the story of Jesus in your own words, could you do it? What would you include? What parts of Jesus' life would you be sure to keep in the story? What parts are less important? Take some time this week to practice telling Jesus' story to people in your life.

Flash Cards (Optional)

Make flash cards for the books of the New Testament and practice with them.

Assignment

- Memorize the order of the first eight books of the New Testament (Matthew through 2 Corinthians).

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 3

Jesus Teaches Us

Share the answer to one of the following:

- Name your favorite book, television show, and movie and explain why you like them.
- Name your favorite teacher and why you like him or her.

As a group, make a list of the qualities that describe a good teacher. Why are these qualities important?

Open with prayer.

Review

Recite together the first eight books of the New Testament. Then tell one thing you learned last week about the story of Jesus.

Starter Questions

- Which headlines were easier to believe, truth or fiction?
- How do you know when information is true or false?
- Name some sources you trust.
- Name some sources you tend to doubt.

Session Goal

To understand the teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught us how to live in relationship to others, to strive for peace and justice in our world, and to keep our focus on God's kingdom rather than on this earth.

Bible Investigation

God wants to be in a continual loving relationship with us. One of the ways we have experienced this love is in the person of Jesus, who lived more than 2,000 years ago. God came to us in Jesus and saved us. Yet, Jesus also showed us how to live. In this session, we'll discover what Jesus taught us about God and about how we are to live.

Jesus used parables to teach people. A parable is a short story that makes a point by using comparison. For example, when Jesus was trying to tell his disciples what the kingdom of God was like, he told them a story, saying the kingdom of God was like a tiny mustard seed that could grow into a huge shrub where birds could rest (read Mark 4:30-32). A parable is a way of teaching through a story.

Read together Luke 15:3-10.

- Have you ever been lost? How did you feel when you were lost? _____

- How did you feel once you were found? _____

- In these parables, Jesus teaches us about God. In verses 3-7, what does Jesus teach us about God? _____

- Have you ever lost something special? How did you feel about the loss?

- Did you ever find what you had lost? How did you feel then? _____

- Is there someone you would tell if you lost something and then found it again? Who? _____

- In verses 8-10, what does Jesus teach us about God? _____

- From these verses, describe the relationship God wants with us. _____

The Kingdom of God

Through parables, Jesus teaches us what the kingdom of God is like and what God is like. Jesus also teaches us through parables how we can best live. Two important parables about life are found in Luke 15:11-32 (the prodigal son) and Luke 10:25-37 (the good Samaritan).

Form two groups. One group will take the story of the prodigal son and the other the good Samaritan. Read the parable carefully and think about it. In your group, summarize the story in your own words and together figure out the answers to these questions.

- What lesson was Jesus teaching his followers in this parable? _____

- How might this story be used as a guide in the lives of young people today?

- Identify modern-day people who might fit into this parable. _____

When you are finished in your groups, come together as the larger group. Summarize your parable for the group and share your answers to the questions.

Modern-day Parables

Form two groups and make up your own parable. You may write a story, draw a comic or picture, or write a play. Before you begin your parable, think about what message you want to deliver. Possible themes are:

- a person who is miserable because he or she cannot kick a drug habit
- a person living with AIDS who feels isolated from the community
- a homeless person who has no money
- a person who hurts someone else through malicious gossip
- a teenager who discovers she is pregnant
- a 15-year-old whose parents have filed for divorce

As you work on your parables, think about why Jesus might have used parables. Do you think this is a good way to learn something? In the next session, share these modern-day parables with the entire group.

Challenge Questions

- What are messages that people need to hear in our time? What method would you use to tell people those messages? Who would you get to help share those messages?
- Think about a current campaign in your area. It could be someone running for office or trying to pass a referendum, or it could be an anti-smoking campaign or a campaign for literacy. What methods of communication does that campaign use? Is it working? What else is the campaign doing that is effective? How can you learn from this campaign ways to share God's message?
- Who or what influences your decisions? Make a list of authorities and how each influences you.

Assignments

- Memorize the order of the next eight books of the New Testament (Galatians through 2 Timothy).
- Practice with your flash cards.
- Write one paragraph on a lesson Jesus has taught you.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 4

Jesus Heals Us

Share one of the following:

- Tell about a time you or someone close to you was physically sick.
- Tell about a time when your feelings were hurt.
- Tell about a time when you argued with friends. How did you resolve your differences?

As a group, make a list of things that can hurt emotionally. Then list some things that can hurt physically.

Open with prayer.

Review

Recite together the first 16 books of the New Testament. Share your parables from the last session with the entire group.

Servant Project

- How do you feel when you do a good deed for someone?
- Describe an area of service in which you have been active. Why are you involved? What difference does it make in another person's life?

Bible Investigation

In this session, we'll learn about Jesus as a healer. Often when we think of healing, we think of being healed physically. Jesus healed people of their physical ailments, but he was concerned with more than just physical health. Jesus was also concerned with mental health, spiritual health, and healthy relationships between people. Another word for *health* is *wholeness*. *Wholeness* means human completeness. It means being healthy: physically, mentally, spiritually, and relationally.

Session Goal

To understand Jesus as a healer, both in his time and for us today.

Read Luke 8:43-48.

- What was this woman looking for? Did she find it? _____

- Why did Jesus say she was healed? _____

- What kind of healing (physical, mental, spiritual, relational) did she receive? _____

Read Luke 8:27-30.

- What was this man looking for? Did he find it? _____

- What kind of healing did he receive? _____

Read Luke 18:10-14.

- What were these men looking for? _____

- Which one of the men got what he asked for? _____

- What kind of healing did that man receive? _____

- What kind of healing did the other man need? _____

Read Luke 12:13-15.

- Who is addressing Jesus? What did this person want? _____

- What kind of healing was needed in this situation? _____

By these stories, we can see Jesus is concerned about the health of the whole person. Jesus also wants us to be healthy and whole. He wants us to have whole bodies, to be healthy mentally, to live with hope, to have solid self-esteem, to have compassion for others, to have happy relationships, to be in awe of the universe, and to have trust for God. All these things make for wholeness. John 10:10 says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Life

Define *abundant life*. Share your definition with the group.

Challenge Questions

- When you are sick—physically, mentally, spiritually, or relationally—where do you go for help? How does your faith play into your healing?
- What are the primary ways we deal with healing in our world? Is there room for God in the healing process today? Does God desire for us to be healthy? What would God ask us to do to work toward health?
- Do you know of anyone claiming to have been healed by God? What happened? How did God touch that person's life? Do you believe God still heals today? Why or why not?

Assignments

- Write a prayer thanking God for the healing you have received in your life. (This prayer can remain private).
- Memorize the order of the next six books of the New Testament (Titus through 2 Peter).

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 5

Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Session Goals

- **To understand salvation and the new covenant that comes to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.**
- **To discuss the significance of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.**

Share one of the following:

- What is it like to experience the death of a family member or friend?
- How do you feel when you get to do something new—something you have been anticipating for a while?
- Describe pain.

Open with prayer.

Review

Recite together the first 22 books of the New Testament.

Life and Death

As a group, make a list of things that come to mind when you think of life and death. These might be emotions, sensations, actual objects, or anything else you come up with. Some ideas: life—plants, growing, spring, cheery; death—funerals, sadness, crying.

The Apostles' Creed

In the Lutheran church, we have creeds (statements of what we believe). One creed we often recite in worship is the Apostles' Creed, which was written about 400 years after Jesus lived. The First Article of the Apostles' Creed talks about God, our creator. This is what it says:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

The Second Article of the creed talks about Jesus. This is what it says:

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The English translation of the Apostles' Creed is prepared by the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET), copyright © 1970, 1971, and 1975.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Lutherans believe we are saved from our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Today we'll read the story of Jesus' death and resurrection in the Gospel of Luke.

Drama

Write a short play portraying this story. Act out the plays the next time you meet. Keep in mind that there are three important days to remember in your plays:

Maundy Thursday: On this night, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples. He knew he was going to die. So he told the disciples the wine they were drinking represented the blood he would shed for them, and the bread they were eating represented his body which would be broken for them. He told them to remember him as they drank wine and ate bread together, and that his death would establish a new covenant (relationship) with God. It would be a covenant of grace and love. Read Luke 22:14-20. This was the first celebration of Holy Communion.

Good Friday: This is the day Jesus was crucified for our sins. He hung on a cross between two thieves at Golgotha. Many were there, including his mother and several disciples.

Easter: This is the day Jesus rose from the grave. Because of this amazing event, we as Christians know that we, too, will rise from the dead. In fact, every day we can rise with new hope and new life because Easter means we are forgiven and loved by God.

Your play should go from Maundy Thursday through Easter (Luke 22:14-20; 23:1—24:12). The main characters in your play will be: Jesus, Pilate, Herod, Simon of Cyrene, two criminals on the cross, women at the tomb, the crowd, and soldiers. You may also choose to have a narrator. First, read through the story carefully. Together with your leader, write a simplified version of this story. Assign members of the group to each of the roles (some people may have more than one role). Begin working on your play.

Definitions

As a group, define the following words:

- Passover: _____

- Covenant: _____

- Grace: _____

Discussion Questions

- What do the words *Passover*, *covenant*, and *grace* have to do with our Christian life?
- Why is it important to remember the story of Jesus' death and resurrection?
- Why is the day Jesus died called Good Friday?
- What is the most important part of this story for you?

Challenge Questions

- What if you had to tell this story of Jesus' death and resurrection to someone who had never heard it before? What would that be like? How would you do it?
- What would it be like to be one of the disciples who watched Jesus die? What would come to your mind during that time? What would you do next? Whom would you talk with?

Assignments

- Write a personal definition of *life* and *death*.
- Memorize the order of the rest of the books of the New Testament (1 John through Revelation).
- Memorize the First and Second Articles of the Apostles' Creed. See page 16.
- (Optional) As a group, do something for a group or individual who is suffering. For example, you may want to visit a nursing home or hospice, or you may want to invite a person to speak to your group about suffering and/or death.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 6

A Review of the Life of Christ

Share the answer to one of the following questions:

- Tell about a time you attended a funeral. What was it like?
- Tell about a time you attended a baptism. What was it like?
- Tell about a time you attended a wedding. What was it like?

Open with prayer.

Review

Recite together all the books of the New Testament and the first two articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Drama

Perform your play about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Video (Optional)

View the crucifixion scene in a video about the life of Jesus and then discuss it as a group.

The Apostles' Creed

The next session focuses on the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed describes the significance of the Holy Spirit. This is what it says:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

- According to the Apostles' Creed, there are three "persons" of God. Our God is a triune God. Name the three persons of God and discuss what this means to us as Christians.

Session Goals

- **To review the life of Christ.**
- **To introduce the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.**

Session 7

The Holy Spirit

Share one of the following:

- Tell about a time when you felt out-of-it or different from everyone else.
- What foreign language(s) do you know? How did you learn it (them)?
- Have you ever visited a foreign country? What was it like?

Open with prayer.

Review

Recite together all the books of the New Testament and the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed.

Bible Investigation

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared many times over a period of several weeks. Jesus told them they must go out into the world and preach the good news of God's love and forgiveness. Then he promised that he would be with them always (Matthew 28:20). However, after he blessed his friends, he left them in body and ascended into heaven.

Soon after, on the day of Pentecost, there were many foreign people in Jerusalem. The disciples were there too, all gathered together. Suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, and they were filled with the Spirit. To the people present, the Holy Spirit sounded and looked like tongues of fire on the apostles' heads. In addition, people were able to speak in different languages, enabling all the people present to understand the message of Christ's love and forgiveness. Read about this in Acts 2:1-18, 36-42. Take turns reading aloud, each with a unique voice.

Session Goals

- **To understand the significance of Pentecost and the presence of the Holy Spirit.**
- **To discuss the importance of the body of Christ.**

This day of Pentecost is considered to be the birth of the Christian church. The Holy Spirit of God was present at Pentecost, and continues to be present with us in the church today. Jesus kept his promise to remain in the Spirit. When we are baptized, the Holy Spirit becomes alive in us, and we become members of the body of Christ (the church on earth). The presence of Christ is therefore actually alive in us. Read about this in John 21 and Acts 1:1-11.

The Holy Spirit of God was with the people on the day of Pentecost, and continues to be with us today. In fact, the Holy Spirit has always been with us, even before Pentecost. There are many references to the Holy Spirit in other places in the Bible. Look up the following verses and answer the question for each verse.

- **Read Genesis 1:2.** How would you describe the Holy Spirit in this passage?

- **Read Exodus 3:1-6.** How did the Spirit appear to Moses? _____
- **Read Luke 1:26-35.** How was the Holy Spirit present with Mary? _____
- **Read Luke 3:21-22.** Describe the appearance of the Holy Spirit with Jesus at his baptism. _____

Now read 1 Corinthians 6:19. The Holy Spirit of Christ dwells within you. It gives you the power to love, to be just, to work for peace, and to care for the creation. We have seen the Spirit represented in the Bible as wind, fire, water, and a dove. Take a few minutes to think seriously about the Spirit of God within you. What does it look like? Then draw a symbol to represent the power of God within you.

Discussion Questions

Form groups of two to three and discuss these questions. Listen carefully to the others in your group.

- At Pentecost, everyone was able to understand one another regardless of the language spoken. Sometimes in our lives today, we have a difficult time understanding each other, even when we speak the same language. Can you think of a time in your home, school, or church when you thought that someone didn't understand you? Share this experience.
- The wonderful power of the Holy Spirit helps us to listen to each other with compassion. Can you think of a time in your home, school, or church when you felt that someone really cared for you and listened to you with compassion? Share this experience.
- Discuss some of the barriers we have created in our world to divide us from other people. Name three barriers.
- Discuss examples of barriers that have been dissolved recently. Name three examples.

- The Holy Spirit has come to us. We are a part of the body of Christ in the world today. We have great potential for creating health and wholeness (holiness) in the world today. Share a time when you have done something to make the world a better place.

When everyone has finished, come together with the entire group and share your answers to the last question.

Challenge Questions

- Choose one of the issues you discussed above and do something about it this week. If it is about issues in your family, commit to talking with someone about it. If it is about barriers that divide people, work to break down some of those barriers. Remember, great things happen in this world because someone made an effort to change something!
- How do we keep ourselves “filled” like a balloon? How do we know when the Spirit is working in us? Name times you have experienced the Spirit at work in your life.

Assignment

- List three things you can do personally to create health and wholeness with those around you. Do these things in the coming week.

Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Session 8

The Book of Acts

Session Goals

- To become familiar with the book of Acts, and with the beginnings of the Christian church.
- To discuss the risks and rewards of being Christian in the world today.

Share one of the following:

- Tell about a time when you tried to do something for the first time, such as learning to swim or ride a bike. What was it like?
- If you could create a new school, what would it be like?
- Describe your first day of school.

Open with prayer.

Bible Investigation

The book of Acts records the beginnings of the Christian church—the acts of the apostles. This is where we read about Pentecost and the apostles' work in setting up the first churches. An apostle is someone chosen by Christ to spread the good news. Jesus' disciples are referred to as *apostles* after Jesus died because they were no longer students of Jesus. Instead they teach in his name.

Read Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 2:42-47.

- What assignment does Christ give the apostles? _____

- How do they fulfill this assignment? _____

Now read the story of Saul in Acts 9:1-19.

- How did Saul originally feel about the Christians? _____

- How do his feelings change? _____

- How does Saul feel about Christ at the end of these verses? _____

Continue reading Acts 9:20-31.

- How is Saul treated by the other apostles? _____

- Do you think you would have been able to trust Saul? Why or why not?

- Have you ever known anyone who changed as drastically as Saul changed?
How did you react to the change? _____

The Good News

Form two groups.

Group 1: Go through the book of Acts and list all the towns or areas the apostles visited to spread the good news. Plot these areas on a map.

Group 2: Go through the book of Acts and list all the people who helped spread the good news. List one thing that happened to each of these early Christians.

Come together and share your findings.

Discussion Questions

- As a group, name some of the dangers these early Christians faced.
- Why do you think they faced these dangers?
- Are there risks associated with being a Christian in the world today?
Name some of these risks.
- Compare this list with the list you made for the early church described in Acts. Again, why do you think these risks exist?
- Are these risks worth it?
- Name some of the gifts of being a Christian.

Challenge Questions

- Who are people who risk their lives today because of their Christian beliefs? Why might they do that?
- Some people say that we should be a first-century church and have “Acts 2” churches. What do you think that means? Why would people desire to live in such a way? How is that different than our churches today?
- Write letters to people who are suffering in various parts of the world because of their Christian faith. Encourage them in some way. Choose a Bible verse that would give them hope in their suffering.

Assignments

- Wear a cross or some other symbol of your Christianity this week.
- Brother Andrew is someone who has lived his life sharing the gospel in risky situations. Learn more about him and his organization in the book *The Narrow Road* or by visiting www.opendoorusa.org.

Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Session 9

The Letters of Paul

Share the answer to one of the following questions:

- Have you ever received a special package in the mail? What was it?
- If you were trying to get news to people all over the country, how would you do it?

As a group, list all the different methods of communication you can think of.

Open with prayer.

As Our World Turns

On a piece of newsprint, make a list of issues that face our world. When you have completed this list, go back and list names of leaders who are working on these issues. On another piece of newsprint, list suggestions for dealing with these issues.

Bible Investigation

Read Acts 9:1-19. Then read Acts 16:16-38. After his conversion, Saul was known as Paul. Paul became a key figure in the early Christian church. Once a man who tried to kill Christians, he spread the good news to both Gentiles and Jews. Paul was imprisoned many times for his beliefs, but he continued to stand strong as a Christian.

The early Christian churches did not have pastors as we do now. When the churches needed guidance, they used letters to communicate with their leaders, who were often traveling as they spread the good news. This session looks at Paul's letters to the early Christian churches.

Paul's Letters

Make a list of the 13 letters Paul wrote. After the name of each book, list the area and/or person who received the letter.

	<u>Book</u>	<u>Recipient</u>
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____

Session Goals

- **To continue to study the early Christian church.**
- **To become familiar with the letters of Paul and understand the significance of these writings in the world today.**

Book

Recipient

- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____
- 11. _____
- 12. _____
- 13. _____

Paul addressed a wide variety of topics in his letters to the early churches. Spilt the following verses among your group. Read the verse, then share Paul's message with the rest of your group.

- Worship: 1 Corinthians 14:26: _____

- Prayer: Colossians 4:2-6: _____

- Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34: _____

- Love: 1 Corinthians 13: _____

- Stealing: Ephesians 4:28: _____

- Sexual sins: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20: _____

- Family Relationships: Ephesians 6:1-4: _____

- Attitudes: Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 2:5-11; Philippians 4:4-7: _____

Discussion Questions

How do these letters apply to our lives today? Is Paul's advice still true? Go through the same list of issues and talk about what society and the church think about each of these today.

- Worship
- Prayer
- Lord's Supper
- Love
- Stealing
- Sexual sins
- Family relationships
- Attitudes

Challenge Questions

- What would your church be like if it didn't have a pastor? What would change? What would be the same? How would you settle disagreements? Who would teach or preach? Why is it important to have pastors in our churches?
- What is the most important issue you see facing the church today? How is that issue being handled in your congregation? How would you like it to be handled? Who would you talk to in your church to share your ideas? Will you talk with them about this matter? Why or why not?

Assignments

- Write a personal letter to a friend who is experiencing a rough time in his or her life. (You may use a real or an imaginary situation.) As you write, keep in mind the things Jesus might have said to your friend.
- Choose a method of communication. As a group, communicate a message of your choice via this method of communication.
- For the next session, bring a different version of the Bible from your home, or take a look in a Christian bookstore and count the varieties of Bibles there.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 10

Our Lutheran Faith

Session Goals

- **To become acquainted with Martin Luther and Lutheran theology using the book of Romans as a reference.**
- **To discuss the personal meanings of salvation, grace, and love.**

Share one of the following:

- Tell about a time when you felt God's presence in your life.
- How do you feel when you disobey your parents or your teachers?

Open with prayer.

Review

Recite together the Apostles' Creed.

Bible Investigation and Background

This session concentrates specifically on the Lutheran faith, beginning with a brief look at Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran faith.

Martin Luther was born in Germany in 1483. He became a Catholic monk and a professor at the University of Wittenberg. The church had become very corrupt at this time due to the sale of "indulgences" by church authorities. Indulgences were decrees that said a person's sins were forgiven. The selling of these decrees was unjust because the church was getting rich from people buying their forgiveness.

At this time, there was also an emphasis on doing good works in order to be saved. Martin Luther said this was wrong. He said salvation could not be worked for or bought. In 1517, Luther posted a long list of his ideas on the door of the church at Wittenberg. In these Ninety-five Theses, Luther said we are justified before God by faith in the grace of God, not by our works.

Martin Luther's beliefs and actions were considered so radical at this time that he was excommunicated by the pope of the Catholic church in 1521. For the next 10 years, Luther and some other scholars who wanted to reform the church put their ideas into a document called the Augsburg Confession. From these writings the Lutheran church was born. Other denominations emerged as well, and historians now refer to this period of time as the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther died in 1546.

Another important thing Luther did was make God's Word available to the people. He translated the Bible into the language of his people—German—and he wrote hymns and set them to common tunes that people knew. In Luther's time, the priests were the only ones who could read the Bible, so people had to find out about God's work through them, and worship was only in Latin, a language foreign to most people. Today, hundreds of years later, we still are trying to make God's Word accessible for people and make worship meaningful.

The Book of Romans

Much of Luther's thinking about the gospel of Jesus Christ comes from the book of Romans. Basically, the book of Romans tells us that we are not saved by the law or by our works. Rather we are saved by the gift of Jesus Christ who reconciled us with God. It will be helpful for you to clearly understand some words as you read the book of Romans. As a group, look up and define the words below:

- **Gospel:** _____

- **Law:** _____

- **Justification:** _____

- **Sin:** _____

- **Faith:** _____

- **Reconciliation:** _____

- **Righteousness:** _____

Form groups of two to three people. Carefully study the following verses and answer the questions. Use the various Bibles brought in from last week's assignment. Use the definitions of the words on page 31 as necessary.

Romans 3:21-28

- According to this passage, how are we justified before God? _____

Romans 5:8-11

- How are we justified before God? How are we reconciled with God?

- How does it feel when you are apart from God? _____

- How does it feel when you experience problems in a relationship with a friend? _____

- What can Christ do for us when we feel separated from God or from one another? _____

Romans 5:18

- What does this verse mean to you? _____

Romans 8:18-25

- What are some of your present sufferings? _____

- What sufferings exist in the world around you? _____

- Where can we find hope? _____

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

- What is the good news in this passage? _____

Romans 14:7-8

- What is the good news in this passage? _____

Challenge Questions

- Why is it so important that we are not saved by works, but by grace? Have you ever experienced grace in your life? When? How? From whom?
- Martin Luther hoped to reform the church he loved because of his beliefs about the Bible, faith, and grace. Instead, he had to leave it. What would you be willing to risk for your beliefs? Why?
- Following the way of Jesus has its costs. The disciples and apostles knew it. Martin Luther discovered it as well. What are the costs of being a follower of Jesus today? Are Christians today willing to pay that price?

Assignment

- Choose two favorite verses from this session. Write them on a large piece of paper and hang them in a place where you will see them each day. Reread them every morning for the next week.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 11

Holy Baptism

Session Goals

- To gain an understanding of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.
- To discuss the promises of baptism and our connection to Christ through baptism.

Share one of the following:

- Tell about a time you participated in a water fight.
- When were you baptized?
- What are your favorite things to do with water?

As a group, make a list of all the uses of water.

Open with prayer.

Promises, Promises

- Many people make promises to us. How do we know if people will keep them or not?
- Do you trust some people more than others? What makes the difference?

God makes promises, too. This session is about one of those promises.

Bible Investigation and Background

The Lutheran church has two sacraments: Holy Communion and Holy Baptism. A sacrament is:

- a gift to us from God.
- a way the Holy Spirit can come to us.
- a way of being forgiven and reminded that we are loved by God.
- a way we receive the grace of God.
- a way of being connected to other Christians.

A sacrament consists of two parts:

- the promise of God connected to an action.
- something we can actually see and touch to remind us of the grace of God (wine, bread, water).

Baptism

In Holy Baptism, God's words of forgiveness and love are combined with water. Water is a symbol of cleansing and life. Lutherans observe infant baptism because we belong to God from the beginning of our lives. We also believe we need only one baptism, because baptism isn't what we do but what God does. Read what Martin Luther said about baptism in the Small Catechism.

- According to Luther, what benefits do we receive in baptism? _____

- What does God promise us through baptism? _____
- Why do you think God chose water to be a part of baptism? _____

Read Romans 6:1-11.

- What is the good news of being baptized into Christ's death? _____

Luther said that because of baptism, our sinful self has the potential to be drowned through daily repentance, and every day we can be born anew. Repentance means a change from a negative way of being, going in a new direction toward wholeness. Can you think of a time in your life when you have changed some of your thoughts or actions to move in a more positive direction? An example of this might be the decision to forgive a friend who has wronged you. Take a minute to think about this and then share your response with the group.

Read Luke 3:21-22.

- Close your Bible and paraphrase the story of Jesus' baptism. _____

- Name the elements that were a part of Jesus' baptism: _____

- In what physical form was God present? _____

Session 12

Holy Communion

Share one of the following:

- Describe your favorite food. When was the last time you had this food?
- When did you first participate in Holy Communion?
- Do you remember your first communion? What was special about it?

Open with prayer.

Passover Meal

Read Exodus 12. As you read, taste the elements of the Passover meal. Jesus' disciples were partaking in their Passover meal on Maundy Thursday, the day before Jesus' crucifixion. Because of Jesus' words to the disciples, and the presence of the bread and wine, this Passover meal became the sacrament we celebrate as Holy Communion.

Bible Investigation and Background

In Holy Communion, God's word of forgiveness and love is combined with bread and wine. This is a holy meal for Christians. We participate in this sacrament again and again, taking Christ into our lives again and again. Lutherans believe the real presence of Christ is with us in Holy Communion. We believe that when we receive the bread and wine into our bodies, we are also receiving Christ into our lives.

When we receive Holy Communion, we are connected to Christians all through the world, because all Christians are nourished through this meal. All Christians are a part of the body of Christ and at the same time all Christians receive the body and blood of Christ for new life. Take part in serving Holy Communion in a church service. Read what Martin Luther said about communion in the Small Catechism. Then read Matthew 26:17-30.

Discussion Questions

- When was the first Holy Communion celebrated? _____
- When Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant," what did he mean?

Session Goals

- **To explore the significance of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.**
- **To discuss the Passover meal as the historical basis for Holy Communion.**



To Know, To Live,
To Grow

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Jesus of Nazareth
Lord's Prayer
Meaning of Service: Living in Love
My Faith
New Testament
Old Testament
Ten Commandments
What Is a Lutheran?

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