

# WHAT LUTHERANS BELIEVE . . .

*Caring for Today . . . Preparing for Tomorrow*



We don't know where you are in your faith walk, but we understand that questions are worth answering. While it's impossible to address every question you might have, we hope this overview will at least provide a start.

**About the BIBLE:** Everything Lutherans believe comes from the Bible, God's message of love and hope for all people. The Bible is the written Word of God, handed down to us in order to point us to the truth that we are saved from our sin and eternal death by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that the Bible is completely reliable and without error. In it we learn everything we need to know about God's love and His gifts to us.

**About GOD:** There is only one true God - the Triune God - who exists in three separate but equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father is our maker and the creator of all things. By the Father's word, all things were made, and we are His most beloved creation; we are closest to His heart. The Son is Jesus Christ, who came to earth as the perfect "go-between" between God and humanity. He has redeemed us and is the voice to the Father on our behalf. The Holy Spirit calls us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, keeps us in the one true faith, and equips us for living out our faith. He is the whisper in our heart's ear.

**About US:** We all fall short of God's expectations because we are all born "sinful" - and we aren't talking about "sinfully" rich desserts, we're talking about the serious side of sin. Sin can be summed up as all the things we say, think, do, and don't do, that fall outside of God's holy will for our lives and end up separating us from God.

Sin was brought into world when Satan lured the first people God created (Adam and Eve) into temptation through their own free will and weakness, breaking the perfect relationship between God and us. From that point on, sin became part of our very existence. Because God also demands perfect obedience, our ultimate punishment became death.

Yet God is a loving God whose will is not for us to live in eternal punishment. That's why He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live the perfect life He requires and to become our substitute. Christ never sinned - not even once - and then He took our sin upon Himself and died on the cross, on our behalf. When we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, He bears our sin and gives us His forgiveness.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

**About BEING SAVED:** There is absolutely nothing we can do to "be saved" - Jesus Christ has already done everything necessary. In His death and resurrection, everyone who believes in Jesus as Savior has been brought back into a right relationship with God. That means that, on account of Jesus, everyone who believes is "justified," or declared innocent by God. God has done justice to the world's sins; because of Jesus, all who believe are forgiven and will live eternally.

We do not cooperate in our salvation and there is nothing we could ever present to God to make our way into eternal life with Him-not money or even good works. Neither can we really feel it or prove it. We cannot reason our way to salvation, nor can we earn it. All we can do is to believe in Him, trusting that all that is necessary has been done for us through Jesus.

**About FAITH:** It is through faith in Jesus that we receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life - by believing that He has freed us from the guilt, punishment, and power of sin. Faith is a gift worked in us by the power of the Holy Spirit; it doesn't come to us through anything we are capable of, but through what God does for us. We simply receive what is already being offered out of God's great love.

**About GRACE:** Lutherans often refer to grace. The word itself might remind you of the grace period you are given when paying bills - when your debt can be paid without further penalty. God's grace is even more wonderful; that's why it's called "amazing grace." While we deserved to pay the penalty for our sins, God had a different plan. Christ paid the debt and we receive forgiveness and eternal life from Him that is offered out of unconditional love. That's why it's called grace because it is truly undeserved.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God has provided tangible ways through which He delivers His grace to those who believe, assuring us that the sins we commit are forgiven for Jesus' sake. These are called the "means of grace" and are God's Word, holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion). Through these means, God makes Himself known to us in a very personal way: God's Word reveals His faithfulness and love; Baptism is our rebirth and renewal in Jesus; the Lord's Supper is our closest communion with Christ as we receive His body and blood.

**About GOOD WORKS:** Since there is nothing we can ever do to earn salvation, we do not do good works in order to be saved; good works are done out of praise and thanks because we are saved. Such good works include, but are certainly not limited to, serving and caring for the needs of others, honoring and giving respect to those in authority, honoring our vows and commitments, and generally doing what is considered by many to be good and right. It's often said that Martin Luther expressed it this way: God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbor does.

**About LIFE AFTER DEATH:** On Judgment Day - we don't know when - Jesus Christ is going to return. On that day, everyone who has died will be raised and those who are still alive will be bodily transformed. At that time, the final judgment will take place. Those who do not believe will go into eternal damnation in hell and all those who believe in Jesus as Savior will have eternal life in heaven.

