

# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



SOLA SCRIPTURA P.8

SOLA GRATIA P.9

*Sola Fide* P.10



*"That I may...proclaim Your wondrous works." (Psalm 26:7)*

# God Hears

*Dear Members and Friends of our ELS:*

**H**ave you had the chance to view the new Luther movie, *A Return to Grace*? If not, no doubt you will be seeing it this fall. It is even slated to be shown sometime on PBS. There's a touching scene in the movie where Luther's friend and cohort, Philip Melanchthon, is very sick and close to death. Strong, even insistent, prayers are offered. Melanchthon's health improved.

When Luther went home to his wife Katie, he said to her with great joy, "God gave me my brother Melanchthon back in direct answer to prayer." Melanchthon, restored to good health, went on to be of great assistance to Luther in the work of the Reformation.

God hears the intercessory prayers of believers. *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective* (James 5:16). In fact, the intercessory petitions God is most interested in pertain not only to the healing of the body, but also to that of the soul.

Do we have some friend on our mind whose spiritual life is waning or on the verge of eternal peril? God loves to answer prayers, so may we persist in our requests!

Luther once was asked if somebody else's faith would ever secure salvation for a person needing conversion. He is recorded as saying:

*By all means! In fact, the faith of one person may obtain another's whole conversion. Accordingly it is said that Paul was converted and saved by Stephen's prayer (Acts 7:59,60). However, Paul wasn't accepted on account of Stephen's faith, but Stephen's faith obtained faith for Paul from God and by this faith he was saved in God's sight. (Table Talk, LW 54:453)*

In the same recorded conversation, Luther made reference to what Augustine's mother did:

*She prayed to God that her son might be converted. But nothing seemed to help. . . But when our Lord God came along he acted effectively and made such an Augustine out of him that he's now called an ornament of the church. (p. 454)*

How many dear souls will be in heaven one day as a result of persistent prayers offered by some Christian friend or relative? Oh, it is always through the Means of Grace alone, Word and Sacrament, that God creates and sustains faith. Yet fervent prayers offered by believers often move the Good Shepherd – the sole author and finisher of faith – to call back with His saving Word a straying sheep and keep it on the pathway to life everlasting. God loves to restore sinners through the holy life, the atoning death, and the glorious resurrection of His Son! Jesus says: "I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

O God... graciously help those who are assaulted by the devil and who are in peril of death. (ELH, p. 48)



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# LUTHERAN SENTINEL

JULY-AUGUST 2017



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## SPOTLIGHT ON HOME MISSIONS

# Cristo Rey Lutheran Church

Bell Gardens, CA



Los Angeles is a large city. In 2016, it grew to over four million inhabitants. Its greater metropolitan area has an estimated population of over eighteen million people. Los Angeles is also a diverse city. Thirty-seven percent of the population is estimated to be foreign-born. Only forty-one percent of the population speaks exclusively English in their homes. In fact, Los Angeles was recently named the city with the most native Spanish speakers in the world second to Mexico City, Mexico.

Our synod recently started a mission revitalization project in one of the Los Angeles Gateway Cities, Bell Gardens. Bell Gardens also has a large and diverse population. An estimated sixty thousand people live in this 2.4-square-mile city. Over ninety-seven percent of these people are Hispanic or Latino.

This means two things. First, there is no shortage of people to reach in our community with the good news. Second, our work is clearly cross-cultural with focus on Hispanics and Latinos. Fortunately, the principles of the Lutheran Reformation help guide us in our mission.

Martin Luther's principles of maintaining continuity with much of the Roman Catholic church works to our advantage. For the most part, our target audience has strong cultural ties to Catholicism. Many in our community view any denomination outside the Roman Catholic church with skepticism. The more we can showcase our common ground, the more opportunities we create to evangelize.

For example, historical orders of worship, liturgical music, and traditional vestments are attrac-

tive to our target audience. The use of confession and absolution, the recitation of the creeds, and the praying of the Lord's Prayer allow our guests and new members to feel comfortable.

Showing respect for the various saints and the Virgin Mary, very important cultural and spiritual figures in our community, can also build bridges. Instead of immediately communicating that we don't worship saints, we explain that through Jesus Christ, we are all saints in God's eyes. When we are accused of "not believing" in the Virgin Mary, we affirm that we believe God's own Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, was born through her. Working to build common ground helps us build an audience for the Gospel.

However, another set of principles from the Lutheran Reformation provides us with even more guidance. A focus on Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and Scripture Alone are at the core of our work. Thanks to the Reformation, we can communicate God's undeserved love to people who never knew it existed. We can share that simple faith in Jesus is the difference between heaven and hell. We can show people that our teachings are all based on God's Word alone.

The forgiveness of sins and the certainty of eternal life through Jesus Christ is a message our community needs and wants to hear. Thanks to Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation, it's a message we get to share.

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## QUESTION:

**Q Will people from other Christian denominations be in heaven and if so, does it really matter to which denomination we belong?**

## ANSWER:

In the absolution pronounced following the confession of sins, pastors often quote Jesus' last words before His ascension: "*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16).

The great truth of the Reformation is recorded by St. Paul in Ephesians 2:8: *By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is a gift of God.*

Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He earned heaven for all sinners. This happened when He was born and lived the perfect life on behalf of those who fail to live according to God's commands. It happened on His cross when He paid the debt we all earned by our sin. It happened in the empty tomb by which He proclaimed that justification to the world. *It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification* (Romans 4:24-25).

Our Lutheran Church teaches that all those who repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus as Lord and Savior shall be in heaven. We confess to believe in the Holy Christian (or catholic) and Apostolic Church. We do not teach that only Lutherans will be saved. People from other Christian denominations who believe in the Savior will be in heaven.

Denominations are not all the same. It matters what denomination we join since they do not all teach the same things about Jesus and what He has done to save us. Some hardly teach Jesus at all.

Five hundred years ago, Dr. Luther battled his own beloved church. Indulgence salesmen hocked their goods in nearby parishes. The story is told how Luther confronted one of his own parishioners because of drunkenness. The bold fellow waved an indulgence as his claim to forgiveness. We don't need to imagine

the danger of attending a church that directs poor souls to something other than Jesus for forgiveness and grace.

Today, even denominations that claim to follow Dr. Luther allow false teaching to permeate their confession. False teachings and practices are allowed in addition to the Gospel of Jesus.

Jesus, in the Bible, warned His followers to beware of false prophets and false teaching. Jesus told us to continue in His truth. The Bible commands us to unite together in the truth as proclaimed in Holy Scripture only with those that properly confess and teach the Scriptures. It is God's will that we avoid those who proclaim false doctrine. We are to oppose denominations that allow false teaching. This is God's will. (See Matthew 7:15, John 8:31-32, Romans 16:17, II Timothy 1:13-14, I John 4: 1, I John 5: 10-12.)

When we unite with a church or denomination, we unite with its confession. We expect that those who belong to the Roman Catholic Church believe its teachings, even the false doctrines. Those who are Methodist, Baptist, etc., believe and confess the teaching of those denominations, including the false doctrines.

There are many reasons it is important to join only with those who teach the Bible in all its truth and purity, especially the good news that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for our justification. This is God's will.

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# APOLOGETICS

"TO DEFEND A PERSON OR THING"

THIS ISSUE

PART 4:

## Evangelism, Apologetics, and the Reliability of the New Testament

### Our Challenge

Many in our secular culture have been trained to think that the Bible's history, miracles, and description of Jesus are unreliable and even ridiculous. They consider a biblical Christian to be ignorant, unable to think rationally. Consequently, the Gospel doesn't even make it onto the unbeliever's radar screen.

Apologetics can respectfully challenge and help him set aside his "unreliable and ridiculous" mindset toward the Bible so the saving Gospel can then be explained, defended, and considered. We see an example of this in Acts 26 where Paul is labeled "out of his mind" and "insane," to which he replies, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus. What I am saying is true and reasonable." Paul then continues to make the case for the historical reality of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, which "did not happen in a corner" immune from investigation.<sup>1</sup>

### Why People Think the New Testament Is Unreliable

Unfortunately, many have bought into this falsehood: *Textual criticism* (scholarly historical research) *has confirmed that the New Testament does not accurately represent the real historical Jesus*. Specifically, they argue with these points:

- *The original New Testament writings no longer exist*
- *All we have are copies of the originals (or copies of copies...)*
- *None of the copies date earlier than the 2nd century*
- *These copies contain thousands of differences (called variants).*

All this, they say, makes it impossible to believe we have anything close to the originals and thus no reliable history or description of the actual Jesus.

The result has been numerous "scholarly" books (and movies and documentaries) to "prove" that

Jesus could not be who the New Testament claims while also stating with an air of infallibility that the real Jesus was a mere man who, over several centuries, grew by legendary proportions until he became equal to God the Father.

### Defending Reliability

But many have responded with honest and accurate research<sup>2</sup>, revealing the lack of scholarship in hostile approaches and making a clear case for a reliable New Testament record. Here's how objections can be answered:

#### "The originals don't exist."

True. But textual criticism has well-established tests that determine the degree to which the existing copies reflect the originals. Almost every single New Testament textual critic (including non-Christians) puts the accuracy of the existing copies at 98-99.5%. That is, if one were to compare the copies to the originals, they would be an almost perfect match.

<sup>1</sup> In talking to the non-Christian, we are not initially trying to establish the Bible's inerrancy. That can come later. Instead, we want him to hear *what* that inerrant Word says *about the historical person and work of Christ*, for it is this message that creates faith (Romans 10:17). But to get him there, we may first have to establish that these accounts are historically reliable and therefore worth hearing (Acts 26:25-26).

<sup>2</sup> For example, F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Eerdmans, 2003); John Warwick Montgomery, *History Law and Christianity* (NRP Books, 2014); Craig Parton, *The Defense Never Rests* (CPH, 2003).

### “There are so many variants.”

Yes, human scribes are human. They made mistakes and changes while copying, resulting in thousands of variants. The question is not the number, but the kind of variants. “In nearly every single case, discrepancies between copies are due to spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, different renderings of proper names, substituting proper names in place of pronouns, and changes in word order – none of which affect the text’s meaning.”<sup>3</sup> For example, replacing “He” with “Jesus” for clarification is a variant, but changes nothing.

### “What about the time gap?”

The time gap between original New Testament writings and the oldest copy is fifty years or less, while the time gap for other ancient writings<sup>4</sup> is far greater – 200 to 1,350 years. Scholars rarely question whether the copies of these other writings reflect what was originally written; they remain convinced. How much more so with the New Testament where the time gap is so minimal that many of the originals were likely circulating side by side with early copies, allowing for comparison.

### “The Telephone Game!”

People like to compare the number of New Testament copies written over several centuries to the Telephone Game. In this game, a message is whispered from one person to another, so by the time the message is finally heard and retold by the last person, the message has changed significantly, resulting in some good laughs. Here is supposedly a solid argument that older accounts and copies of the life of Jesus must be quite different from the original ones. But there is one major problem: There are no differences between the earliest and latest copies. Whether they are from 125 A.D. or 550 A.D., they are identical in everything they say about the words and works of Christ. There is no evidence that Jesus “evolved” over time.

### “Ignored letters and gospel accounts.”

Yes, there are other writings, such as *The Gospel of Thomas*, that the Church has rejected that give a different understanding of Jesus. But they are ignored and rejected for an obvious reason. None of them *originate* earlier than 250 A.D. That is,

they could not have been written by the apostles, their companions, or eyewitnesses of the real Jesus. These other accounts (with a different Jesus) are rejected because they clearly are not reliable compared to what was “*handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses*” (Luke 1:2).

## Beginning with a False Assumption

It is important to note that antagonistic scholars begin with a flawed assumption or belief, forcing them to ignore the clear reliability of the New Testament. The assumption is this: *Miracles cannot happen*. Beginning here, they have no choice but to argue that the New Testament is inaccurate and filled with myths, even though the historical evidence, including eyewitness records, testifies otherwise. And try as they might, they cannot point to any historical record or evidence that challenges the records known as the New Testament. There is nothing from the 1st century that even suggests that the real Jesus is something other than what Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter consistently put forth, men who provide supporting evidence.

Thus, textual criticism – sound historical research – does not undermine reliability at all. The exact opposite is true: The historical records we call the New Testament faithfully report what the apostles actually saw and heard regarding Jesus. Christ and the apostles defended biblical truth, including its history, and they dismantled opponents’ objections.<sup>5</sup> They have instructed the Church throughout history to do the same with gentleness and respect.<sup>6</sup> We can say to the unbeliever, “Let me respectfully challenge you in your false worldview, and let me lovingly make the case for the reliability of the New Testament record. And ultimately, what I want you to understand is who Jesus really is, what was done to Him and by Him, and what all this means for the rebellious sinner who repents and believes: complete and free forgiveness.”

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<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Pierson, *Making the Case for Christianity*, ed. Corey D. Maas and Adam S. Francisco (CPH, 2014), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Like the writings of Homer, Plato, Tacitus, etc.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Matthew 9, 15, 22; Mark 2, 3; John 8, 9; Acts 4, 5, 9, 17, 22, 26.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

## SCRIPTURE ALONE:

## SOLA SCRIPTURA

As Lutherans gather to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation (October 31, 2017), it is quite fitting to reflect on the three Latin solae (anglicized solas), “**By Scripture Alone, By Grace Alone, and By Faith Alone**” (Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, et Sola Fide). Even though these “Reformation Principles” or the “Exclusive Particles” do not represent the sum totality of the Christian faith, they have long helped Lutherans confess Holy Scripture’s inner core.

It may come as a surprise to hear that the three Latin solas were not coined by Lutheranism. The solas can already be found in the theology of the High and Late Middle Ages. Still, it was not until the advent of the Lutheran Reformation that the proper Biblical meaning of the three solas would be fully restored and their hermeneutical (interpretative) significance be elevated. The frequency with which each Latin sola occurs in the writings of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and the Lutheran Confessions varies. Nevertheless, all three Latin solas are found in the writings of Luther and the Book of Concord, along with other Latin and German equivalents. The concepts underlying the solas, moreover, permeate the thought of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. That said, the three Latin solas do not seem to appear together as a collected unit for summarizing Lutheranism until the nineteenth century. It should also be noted that while all Protestants claim to hold to the three solas, they do not understand them the way that Lutherans do.

Luther’s Sola Scriptura rediscovery was not limited to the reassertion of the final sole authority of Scripture, but also the sole re-creative (performative) power of Scripture (i.e. it works faith in a person’s heart and strengthens it). Thus, it is just as important for Lutherans to confess this so-called performative understanding of God’s Word as it is the sole authority of Scripture. The former is even less understood by the twenty-first century than the latter. For instance, many today defend the inerrancy of the Bible as a channel of sacred information (e.g. the veracity of the six-day creation), but far fewer believe that the same Word that brought forth the creation has the same power to create faith (regeneration) in a child’s heart.

As Luther zeroed in on his great rediscovery of passive righteousness through God’s performative Word, he was opposed by pope, magisterium, tradition, and even church councils. Many in medieval times believed that Scripture was the only source of doctrine; many also believed that the pope and magisterium could err and had. However, they also believed that councils and tradition were the proper interpreters of Scripture and that councils and tradition had not and could not err. What would make Luther so controversial after the 1519 Leipzig Colloquy was not that he used the words Sola Scriptura, but that he would show that even tradition and council had at times actually departed from Scripture and therefore Scripture was the final arbitrator of truth. Furthermore, Luther maintained that Scripture is subordinate to no interpreter; rather, Scripture was its own interpreter.

While the Radical and Reformed Reformations also claimed to hold to Luther’s Sola Scriptura, they reinterpreted it to mean that any practice not found in Scripture must be rejected. As a result, crosses, religious art, hymns, musical instruments, etc., were removed from their churches. Often Radicals and Reformed also reinterpreted passages of Scripture they did not find conducive to reason or human intuition. This is why they denied the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. Finally, the Radicals and the Reformed sought the Holy Spirit and His grace apart from Word and Sacrament.

In Luther’s last years, he had time to unpack the performative nature or power of God’s Word. He found this very important to teach because of the comfort it provides. The book of Genesis reminded him that if God’s Word was able to bring forth all things by the power of His Word, then God’s Word also has the power to declare the believer’s forgiveness, life, and salvation a reality as well. Let there be light!

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FULL ESSAY LINK:

<http://els.org/download/Sola-Scriptura.pdf>





## GRACE ALONE: SOLA GRATIA

**B**atman is my favorite superhero, but Batman is self-made. Bruce Wayne studied and trained for years, and he still studies and trains in order to be the Bat Man. So cool!

Captain America's pretty cool, too. Steve Rogers was a nice guy who was just too small to join the army. But when he was injected with a serum that amplifies his innate goodness, he went off to help defeat the Nazis.

Spiderman's cool also. A radioactive spider bite, which should have gone badly, made him into the wittiest kid in New York City. Superman's got innate powers because his native sun was different from what ours is. Thor...well...Thor's a god. He's the son of Odin. (I tried his long hair look when I was in high school, but it didn't work.)

I'm not like Thor, Superman, Spidey, Captain America, or Batman. While these guys made great stories and pretty good movies, the truth is I really can't identify with any of them.

I am Tony Stark.  
Tony Stark, a man with shrapnel embedded in his chest, working its way toward his heart, about to slice and dice him to death any minute now. That's me. Except my shrapnel is sin. Sin is so deeply embedded in my flesh that it can't be removed, not through surgery and not by therapy.

I am Tony Stark.  
And Tony Stark's a self-centered jerk. His morals are weak. He lies and he can't commit to his girlfriend, Pepper. Truth be told, I'm a lot like that. I'm naturally self-centered and love myself more than anything else.

I am Tony Stark.

- *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me* (Psalm 51:5, ESV).
- *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh* (Romans 7:18, ESV).
- *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* (Romans 7:24, ESV).

But if you know Tony Stark's story, then you know that even though he should be dead, he isn't, and the fact that I'm writing this is proof that my sin hasn't damned me even though it should have. For Tony Stark, it's a device called a "magnetic field generator" or "arc reactor" embedded in his chest that has stopped the shrapnel's movement.

For me it is grace. God's grace has stopped sin in its tracks.

It is grace and grace alone. You can't tamper with grace; you can't add anything to it, not my past works or my future promises. Grace only works when it is grace alone—sola gratia.

Grace not only saves me, it empowers me. Even though I'm a sinful jerk by nature, grace empowers me to be kind and loving. Tony Stark becomes Iron Man. I've become God's Own Child. Of course, it's not me, but God's grace He's given to me.

*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8, ESV).

By grace I'm saved and by grace I live. I wake and dress and serve my neighbor. An arc reactor saves Tony Stark's life and makes him Iron Man. Grace alone saves me and makes me a child of God.

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FULL ESSAY LINK:  
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## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE:

*Sola Fide*

“What if this were not in Scripture? What if God had not chosen to reveal this? What if this were left out or omitted?” Applying such questions to sola fide, “by faith alone,” demonstrates why this solus is so essential and really an abridged version of the entire doctrine of justification.

Whether it is “by faith,” or “through faith,” as the means of receiving the promise of the Gospel, this completes the picture of God’s justification of a sinner. Faith is the means by which Christ (through the Spirit) presents the person to God reconciled, clean and holy, blameless and without blemish, without fault and above reproach in the sight of God, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

### **Faith Alone: Finding a Context**

You say you have faith and yet you feel guilty or you feel worthless. This is where we must learn again what justifying faith is. It is not simply, “Do you believe all the articles of faith are true?” It is about having confidence before God. It is about having a good conscience. Too often, our confidence is based not upon the solid foundation of Jesus’ work for us, but upon our own achievements, progress, or recognition from others.

What we want to do about it is usually to work harder, try harder, or find measurable improvement. A troubled conscience is knowing we have failed.

A terrified conscience is knowing that we will be judged by God to be lacking. Yet it seems we hardly ever seek rest for our conscience in God’s promises. We seek everywhere else.

The article on Justification in the Apology addresses the solution repeatedly:

*Consciences cannot be set at rest through any works, but only by faith, when they take the sure ground that for Christ’s sake they have a gracious God. This whole doctrine can only be understood in the conflict of the terrified conscience. (AC XX:15, 17)*

*Consciences never are at rest unless they hear God’s voice clearly promising the forgiveness of sins. (Ap IV:257)*

*A terrified conscience is eventually quieted when it takes hold of Christ as Mediator and believes the promises given for His sake. (Ap XII:64)*

The task of the Church is to impart to sinners the clear message that they are so important that Christ came down from heaven for them. They are of great value and worth to God and pleasing to Him for Jesus’ sake. This is the reason to come to church: for a good conscience to be delivered as Jesus’ blood is sprinkled on wounded consciences through the Gospel.

This is true confidence – not the feeling of confidence, but concentrating upon the blessed fact of God’s favor that is delivered in the Means of Grace, the unchanging word of the Gospel (Absolution) and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) that declares God’s unbounded love for you.

**Sola fide** is not a slogan. It is a lifeline.

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## Distinguishing *Law & Gospel*

“We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things.... The gospel sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law...and says, ‘This is what God has done for you.’”

**MARTIN LUTHER** (LW, AE, vo. 35, p. 162)

Lucas Cranach the Elder painted “*Law and Grace*” in 1529, supposedly under the direction of Martin Luther himself. It has been hailed as one of the most influential images of the Reformation because of its clear proclamation of Justification by Faith. It serves as a powerful sermon of the Reformation preached in paint form.

On the left half, one sees images of pain and despair, which result from the breaking of God’s Law. At the top, Christ is seated upon the globe as the righteous judge of the world. He observes as Adam and Eve fall into sin. He oversees the discipline of the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness. Moses and the prophets are standing at the trunk of the tree pointing the sinful man to the commandments. The man knows that God’s Law condemns him and throws his hands up in despair as Death and the Devil drive him toward the fires of hell. It is a bleak and frightening

scene. There is no hope or life in the Law—emphasized by the dead tree branches overhanging the scene.

But great comfort is found for the viewer as he beholds the scene on the right! The branches of the tree are filled with leaves and life. In the background, the angels are bringing the Christmas Gospel to the shepherds in the fields. John the Baptist is pointing the man to Christ, whose blood is streaming forth with a dove, symbolizing the power of the Holy Spirit, to cover the man with Christ’s righteousness. Above the open and empty tomb, the risen Christ holds a victory banner and points the viewers to the victory that they now have waiting for them in Heaven. Below the Cross, a meek lamb, also holding the banner of victory, tramples upon a defeated Death and the Devil.

The boxes at the bottom of the painting include descriptions of the image and Scripture references that help to explain and distinguish between the Law and the Gospel. It is a painting that was not meant to be interpreted in different ways, but in one clear way: That salvation does not come through the Law, but from the Good News of God’s grace for us found in Christ.

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# SYNODSYNOPSIS

the 100<sup>th</sup>  
**Annual Convention**  
 of the  
 Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*“Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done:  
 Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide”*

**JUNE 18-22, 2017**  
 MANKATO, MINNESOTA

**Summarized from ELS Convention**

## President’s Message

June 19, 2017

How can we do justice to celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation? When our synod’s Centennial Committee looked at appropriate ways to honor back-to-back anniversaries (the 500th now and the ELS’s 100th in 2018), it felt a significant way to wed the two was to implement a synod-wide Bible study, *Proclaiming God’s Truth*. Certainly, this is a way for us as a synod to express gratitude to God and to grow in our faith and understanding of His precious Word.

At our convention, we also observed the benefits of the Reformation by focusing on what is known as the “three great *solas*”—Scripture alone, Grace alone, and Faith alone. But what are we doing with it all? The clear teachings God has set forth in His Word, as they are so plainly presented in Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms and as further expounded in the Lutheran Confessions, are not intended to be simply boxed up and opened in the confines of our own homes or in the perimeters of our own church walls. Others desperately need to hear what we have been privileged to know and believe. The words of the apostle Peter, underscored often by Luther, remind us that we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to

God.” And for what purpose? In order that we might “declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

So we say: We want to get the Word out! Our existence as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is for this purpose. May we always keep before us, in our collective windshield, the driving mission of our Lord. Our synod’s agencies—Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary; Bethany Lutheran College; our seven sponsored foreign mission fields; our boards and committees through which we carry out the work of our church body; the schools and congregations served by our teachers and pastors; the youth leaders and our young people who plan and carry out Christ-centered activities; and, yes, even our many meetings like this one—are intended to bring the Greatest News ever to fall on human ears to all people who we have the privilege to influence. We desire to point sinners to the Savior, for “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7).

With this in mind, it is fitting to express sincere thanks to the congregations, pastors, teachers, and individual members of our synod for their prayers and contributions this past year. In 2016, we exceeded the adopted congregational giving portion of our budget. Truly this is something for which we give special thanks to God! We pray also that the same generosity will continue overflowing with thanksgiving as we strive to carry out the goal of our Anniversary Offering in support of the work of the Board for Home Outreach.

Three significant facts give us great optimism, strength, and comfort as we move forward with our endeavors to proclaim God's Word when and where we are able:

**1. We have God's assurance that He has us believers remain on this earth—even now in our set locations—for the purpose of serving the overall growth of His kingdom.**

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).*

**2. We, within our varied vocations in life, are merely servants of the Lord as we support (whether clergy or lay) the advance of His Gospel. It is our gracious and mighty Lord alone who works the results.**

*The apostle Paul wrote: I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6, 7).*

**3. We have the most potent weapon to combat every enemy of the Christian faith, and yet this same antidote is the most soothing balm for every sin-laden conscience: the saving Gospel of Christ!**

*By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you (1 Corinthians 15:2). God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has given to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19).*

The Lutheran Reformation has had a profound impact. We are justified freely by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Romans 3). But the powerful impression left by the Lutheran Reformation is not only theoretical or dogmatic. It is *personal*. It is our *life-blood*. For the Lutheran doctrine is the true confession of what already was once delivered to our world in the writings of the Lord's prophets, apostles, and evangelists.

Let our convention ring with praise for the great blessings we have received! Let us go forth from this hall to our parishes with renewed zeal to teach the simple truths of Luther's Catechism. Let us also trust God to give us the necessary conviction to "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

REVEREND  
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# PHOTOS of

## the 100<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod





# CATECHISM *in*



## BAPTISM

In the movie *Moana* (2016), a young woman sets off on an epic voyage across the sea to save her people who are suffering on an island cursed with death. Along the way, she discovers who she truly is. It's more of a story about Moana's internal conflict in finding her self-identity than it is about any of the external battles she faces. Combined, this makes for a great and compelling story.

Apart from the water (which totally didn't get the credit it deserved in the film because it literally saved Moana),<sup>1</sup> what does Moana have to do with Baptism? Well, nothing. But, it seems, many view Baptism as the spiritual equivalent to Moana's journey to discover her identity.

### OUT OF CONTEXT

Identities result as a product of the society in which we live and the relationships we have with others, but usually require a person to take up an identity actively. For instance, a person born in Wisconsin will naturally be prone to be a Packers fan. If however, all their friends are from Minnesota, they might begin to choose a new

identity and eventually put on a Vikings jersey. Or, a person like Moana who is born on an island of people afraid of the sea but has a grandmother who teaches her to love the sea, must now actively choose how to solve this identity conflict. A person can wear multiple identities at the same time, some even in conflict with others.

For many, Baptism is seen as that step of actively taking up an identity. Once a person of the world, by choosing Baptism, they can now identify with Christ. Baptism, like Moana's journey across the sea, is seen as a crucial part of an individual's faith journey. They can now wear the jersey of "Christian." This makes for a great and compelling story. But is Baptism really like this?

### IN CONTEXT

The reality is, it's more. "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Baptism doesn't just give us a new identity like a sports jersey or a new title would. No, Baptism actually kills and buries our old identity and give us a new one. The identity that was killed? That's the old Adam with its sins and evil lusts. The new identity? That's the new Man which shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

<sup>1</sup> As a metaphor of baptism, for a more theologically correct, but definitely less dramatic version of Moana, check out the YouTube channel How It Should Have Ended.



This identity is different because it's not temporary or self-chosen or one of many conflicting worldly identities we may have. It is no more self-chosen than a dead person choosing to be alive again. This identity is given to us by God, through the death and resurrection of His Son. It is our whole self, the reason why God calls us His children. Baptism washes away everything that once marked us as an enemy of God and conflicted our identity. It delivers us from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

But how can something as simple as water do this? This is where most people go wrong with Baptism, failing to give it the credit it is due. Water is physical. How can it do something spiritual? If it doesn't actually do anything, then the water in Baptism must simply be the sign of a decision a person has made to take a new identity for themselves. Baptism even may be something a person may need to do over and over until they are assured of their choice in their identity.

The Bible doesn't understate the power of Baptism however, explaining how it isn't something that we do, or even something the water does by itself. Rather it is the Word combined with the water: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

Because Baptism is the power of God through the Holy Spirit working through the Word and the water, it is much more than a sign or step in a person's faith journey. Faith isn't a journey where one has to wonder how far they need to travel to come to God. When a Christian has traveled to the font, God has come to them and united with them. They now have the identity of Jesus: pure, holy, and righteous. Faith is the assurance that "Baptism has the strength divine to make life immortal mine." Because Baptism is God's work, there are no doubts in its validity.

"Our Baptism abides forever," writes Luther in the Large Catechism (LC V:77). "Even though someone should fall from Baptism and sin, still we always have access to it." Baptism is a reality, our whole identity, not an

## OUT OF CONTEXT

An event  
 that is your choice of identification with Jesus  
 because it is your work  
 and means simply that you are committing yourself to God.

## IN CONTEXT

*what baptism is:* A reality  
*what baptism does:* that joins you to Jesus  
*by what power:* because it is God's work  
*what it means:* and means you have a new identity in Christ.

event that is over and done with. It's a good thing too, because the world, our flesh, and the devil constantly try to conflict us and make us give up our identity. The Old Adam still comes forward when we sin, and if he is unrestrained, would overcome us.

Baptism is something we live in. It is the power to subdue the Old Adam, which is done through repentance. "Repentance, therefore, is nothing other than a return and approach to Baptism. We repeat and do what we began before, but abandoned" (LC V:79). Baptized into Christ is our entire identity. Baptism forms and shapes everything we do, it gives us the power to stand firm against sin, Satan, and death, and it carries us from our island of misery and death to our paradise of eternal glory.

REVEREND  
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 CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH, ULEN, MN &  
 GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH, CROOKSTON, MN  
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In Your blest body let me be / E'en as the branch is to the tree / Thy life my life supplying  
 P. NICOLAI



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07/01/2016 — 06/30/2017

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## REFORMATION VOCAB

### evangelical | ēvanʹjelək(ə)l |

Last issue, we covered the very common Bible word “Gospel” – the good news of the Christ who is the eternal Power to save sinners.

The word “evangelical” is very closely related to the word “Gospel” (“Gospel” being the English translation of the Greek word *evangel*). If Gospel is the powerful Word that rescues from sin and gives a good record to our terrified consciences, then “Evangelical” properly serves to identify one(s) who is/are planted in that good news and continually fed and nourished by it. A synonymous phrase St. Paul uses is “**heirs according to the promise** (*the Christ*)”

Sometimes, however, words slowly lose their original sense and meaning and take on new ones. That seems largely to be the case with the word “evangelical” in the American Christian landscape of the 21st century. A quick Google search of “evangelical” yields as its top search suggestion “evangelical vote.” “Evangelical” predominantly serves to describe a demographic of the voting populous that is very concerned with social issues. Concerns for social issues are certainly not wrong concerns for Christians to have... but also NOT *the Evangel - The Gospel*.

The Reformation was born from the Holy Spirit unearthing The Gospel (the Evangel) to Luther and the confessors after him. For us to be *heirs of the Reformation* is for us to be *heirs of the Gospel – Evangelicals* in the most organic sense of the term. To be a Lutheran is to be Evangelical. It is to confess a Gospel that precedes our birth – that God “*knew us in Christ before the foundations of the world*” (Ephesians 1:4). It is to relish a *Good News* that permeates our whole life – enlightening us from our old-man darkness, sanctifying and keeping us with Christ in His family, *the Church* (Apostles Creed, 3rd Article Explanation). It is to cling to a Gospel that even delivers us a blessed death (Lord’s Prayer, 7th Petition Explanation).

You might say being an *Evangelical Lutheran* is a redundancy. But if it is, it is a Gospel-drenched redundancy that must never get lost on us.

REVEREND  
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