



*Confirmation Workbook*  
**2004**

**Part II**  
**Our Common Faith**



## Basic Books for Further Reading

### Holy Scripture

Fee & Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Zondervan).

*How to Read the Bible For All It's Worth* (Zondervan).

### Our Creed

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Zondervan).

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Inter-Varsity Press).

James Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Inter-Varsity Press).

C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy* (Morehouse Publishing).

Alister McGrath, *What Was God Doing on the Cross?* (Zondervan)

Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans).

Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Image).

Colin Gunton, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge).

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List the various ministries in your church (e.g. Sunday school, youth group, hospital visitation, soup kitchen, worship committee, building committee). Now, note which gifts are needed to do them.

What spiritual gifts do you think you have? Sometimes, others can see our abilities better than can so ask others what they see as your spiritual gifts. What do they see?

(among others) giving, administration, healing, discernment, and mercy. While all should live out their faith in their words and acts of helpful service, some are especially gifted to serve in specific ways.

Discovering what God has enabled us to do is not as difficult as we might think. Prayerful reflection, advice from others and old-fashioned trial and error are basic steps to begin recognizing what Christ has given you for his service. It is a joy to realize that, through God's Spirit, you have been awarded the capacity to share in Christ's service to his Church and world.

### For Reflection & Discussion

Read John 3:3-15  
Ephesians 4:7, 11-12  
Romans 12:3-8  
I Corinthians 12:1-13:13

All disciples are ministers of Christ. Jesus instructs us to serve one another as he served us. Who has served you in your life that has been especially meaningful to you? What ministry has been important in your own Christian life?

From the above readings, list the spiritual gifts mentioned by the author. Note the ones that you think need further discussion.

### Holy Scripture

Scripture (Latin origin, *writing*) or, as it is often called, the bible (Greek origin, *book*) is our only window into understanding our faith in God. All past and present thinking about God revealed in Jesus Christ starts here. It contains everything that is necessary for understanding our relationship with God. Without it, our beliefs about God and his creation, including ourselves, are left to our own imaginations.

Like any relationship, we cannot know anyone personally until they share themselves, including information about them. These writings, which were written by God's people, reveal God's message to us and his activity in the universe. By the Holy Spirit's unique inspiration of the human authors, these texts are collectively God's word which points to Jesus, God's Word in the flesh. That is why, after reading the lesson, the reader declares, "The Word of the Lord" and the people respond, "Thanks be to God."

There are sixty-six books in the bible; thirty-nine were written before Jesus and twenty-seven after. Originally written in Hebrew, the first thirty-nine make up the Old Testament (OT) which refers to God's first covenant (or, *testament*) with his people, Israel. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament (NT) were originally written in Greek and explore the importance of Jesus and his new covenant for his people and the world. Together, they tell of the progression of God's revelation of his grace to humanity and the hope for all creation. Therefore, they should not be seen in contradiction to each other as though, for example, the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New Testament.

The Apocrypha is a collection of Hebrew writings that are sometimes found between the Old and New Testaments. They were never recognized by Jews or Christians for teaching the faith until the sixteenth century by the Roman Church. Still, they are valuable writings and some passages are used in Christian worship.

The scriptures are made up of many different kinds of literature including histories, sermons, legal documents, poetry, wisdom literature and letters which were written by different people for different purposes at different times. Therefore, we need to read them as they were intended so that our own prejudices do not prevent our understanding of these texts. For example, the creation story of Genesis was a statement about the God who created the universe and his relationship with his creation, especially humanity. It is not a scientific explanation of when and how it

was created. In the same way, distinguishing other kinds of literature, when and to whom they were written helps us to understand their meaning.

Within the community of the church, the Holy Spirit assists God's people both to understand the Christian message and to live it out in their lives. This message of God's presence and activity in our lives reassures us of his concern and care for us and our hope for the world. As our understanding of God grows through our study of the bible, our life of prayer, worship and loving service will also grow. This is why reading God's word has always been considered essential for Christian living in the Anglican tradition. The *Book of Common Prayer* contains the Daily Office (pp. 943-1001), an arranged schedule of daily readings over a two-year cycle. Daily reading of Holy Scripture deepens our relationship with the God whose message still addresses us today.

*Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP, 236*

## For Reflection & Discussion

All our beliefs about God should come from scripture and should be tested against what scripture says and corrected accordingly. Read 2 Timothy 3.16 and list the uses of Holy Scripture in the life of the Christian and Church.

Read the following passages and identify the kind of literature. Should they be interpreted the same or differently?

Psalm 100

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

2 John

Leviticus 1:1-9

## Christian Service with Our Spiritual Gifts

In the ancient world, a conquering king would lead a parade of his triumphant army and his defeated prisoners of war through the streets of his city. During the procession, treasure won from the battle would be presented to the victorious king and, sometimes, they would be shared with his loyal subjects. For the early Christians, Jesus, in a similar way, ascended to his throne as the victor who conquered the forces of evil and death in his own death and resurrection. From his heavenly throne, he graciously sends his Spirit to give spiritual gifts to his people.

Our baptism with Christ's death and resurrection delivers us from our divided and rebellious condition and unites us as one people. In the Holy Spirit we are united to worship and work as one people who offer ourselves in thanks and praise for God who is King over all. And though we are one, every believer is entrusted with a variety of unique abilities to be used for the growth of the Church and spread of God's kingdom. These many and different endowments are the generous gifts of Christ's Spirit who resides in his people, enabling them to participate in God's project for the world.

Every Christian is given spiritual gifts and has a duty to discover, develop and exercise them in the service, or ministry, of Christ's church. Some practice their gifts in a formal way as church officers (e.g. deacons, priests and bishops) and staff members (e.g. youth leaders and church administrators) in order to guide and assist those who informally share in Christ's ministry. Despite the sad fact that Christians have always tended to place more importance on some of the gifts, no gift is greater than the others and all are equally important. No one person has all of them and, therefore, needs to serve and receive the service of others. Together, Christians are to lovingly serve and support one another as they use what Christ has given them to celebrate God's transforming love and share it with the world.

So, just what are these gifts? Though scripture does not have an organized discussion of all of them there are several important passages that mention them. The apostle Peter categorizes them into two basic groups of speech and helpful service (see I Pe. 4:10-11). Speaking gifts include (among others) teaching, evangelism, missionary service, exhortation, prophecy and tongues.\* Gifts of helping service include

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\* Opinions differ about the meaning of the gift of tongues. Many Christians believe that it refers to kind of heavenly language used in prayer and/ or communication from God to others. Others believe that it refers to human speech miraculously granted for evangelism to foreigners which may or may not continue today.

Why is frequent worship so important for the life of the Church? Why is frequent worship important for the life of the Christian?

Since Christians already have the Holy Spirit to guide them, why do they need to read scripture?

Read through the rite of Eucharist most commonly used at your church. Notice the flow of the service indicated by the bold print. In your own words, briefly describe the transitions and why it flows as it does; for example, from Word of God to Holy Communion, from Confession of Sin to The Peace.

Do you have a favorite verse or passage? What is it and why is it so important to you?

Write down the words or phrases in the rite that need explanation.

As a group, have a 'dry run' through the Eucharist. Discuss each section and its importance. Note each point in the service that requires an active response of the lay participants (for example, when to stand, kneel, sit, bow, pray aloud or perform the sign of the cross).

## Our Creed: Part I

Read the Nicene Creed (BCP, 326-328 or 358-359)

People everywhere live their everyday lives with certain beliefs which may or may not be healthy. Many teenage girls live with a sense of shame because they secretly believe they are overweight. Some people believe the rest of us can't survive without their constant input of usually annoying advice. Scores of people think of God as a cosmic Santa Claus who fulfills all our wishes. So, when prayers go unanswered it seems God is uninterested or uninvolved, sometimes horribly cruel and often a fantasy to be abandoned. All this is to say that we live by beliefs that often go unrecognized, usually remaining under the surface as they steer our actions.

A creed is a basic summary of what Christians believe to be true about God and the world. More accurately, it is a confession concerning God in whom we entrust our cares and hope. Two creeds are used in Episcopal worship: the Apostles' Creed at Baptism (BCP, 304) and the Nicene Creed during the Eucharist. They summarize the biblical story and are organized into three major divisions following Jesus' commission to baptize in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Following the outline of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed begins by confessing:

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

This declares our allegiance to the one God of the Jews who still pray every morning and evening, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4). Two basic thoughts are implied: First, this God is the creator of all that is visible and invisible. The universe, in all its splendor, is recognized as the good creation of a wonderfully creative God (see Gen. 1:31). However, because of human rebelliousness, it is broken and longs for healing and transformation. This leads to the second point, namely, that God is the Almighty One who delivers his creation from its desperate condition. God is still present and active just as he rescued his people from Egypt and promised to renew the entire creation. This belief is expressed by the Psalmist who sang, "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121:2).

The creed continues by linking this God who works in human history with Jesus who is considered God's Son, the Creator and Deliverer of the

Luke's gospel tells of a third meal which was secretly shared with two discouraged disciples who believed that Jesus' movement was shattered at his crucifixion. Both of them were surprised with joy as they recognized the risen Jesus as he was breaking the bread. This 'breaking of the bread' was the earliest reference to what also became known as the 'Lord's Supper,' 'Holy Communion,' 'the Divine Liturgy,' 'the Mass,' and 'the Great Offering.'

The early Christians celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday which marked the new Day, or Age, of the Messiah which dawned at Jesus' resurrection (Hence, it is called the Lord's Day). It was celebrated by hearing God's word and being nourished by Christ's body and blood as we *feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving* (see BCP, 365). As the Church reminds us, "the Holy Eucharist is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death and resurrection, until his coming again" (BCP, 859). However, during the Middle Ages, people began to receive Holy Communion less frequently, often only once a year. One of the goals of the English Reformation was to restore its weekly celebration. Today, the expectation is that every Christian will come together every week for corporate worship with the living God.

The celebration of Holy Communion stirs our hearts and minds, reminding us of God's forgiveness in Christ, strengthening our union with him and providing a foretaste of eternal communion with God. However, presently, our communion with God is distracted by our sinful behavior. Therefore, we are called to examine our own lives and be reconciled with God and others before we worship. This reconciliation is symbolized by the passing of the peace of God before we share in the Holy Communion. After Holy Communion, we are sent with a mission into the world. At this dismissal, we are commissioned to love and serve the physically and spiritually poor, the lost and lonely so that they too might share in God's love and forgiveness.

## For Reflection & Discussion

How is worship an important part of your life as a Christian? What aspect of the Eucharist do you enjoy most?

Briefly describe what Holy Communion means to you.

## The Eucharist

We are called to worship at all times; in moments of joy and sorrow, wonder and fear. Worship can be in private or with others. It can be spoken, sung or silent. It can be quick or lengthy. Worship is communion with the living God who has reached out to us. Through the Holy Spirit who indwells all God's people, we are responding to a Heavenly Father who has revealed himself through Jesus the Messiah.

The central act of Christian worship is commonly called the Eucharist. The service is divided into two principal parts which are equally important. The first half is called 'The Word of God' which declares the message of God who has reached out to us with good news of unconditional love in Jesus the Messiah. Our response to God's word is celebrated in the second half of the service called, 'The Holy Communion,' which we share as a community brought into relationship with God the Father through his Son in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Three meals in the gospels are important to understanding the Eucharist. The first is Jesus' miraculous feeding of five thousand at which point he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples to distribute the crowd. Many who expected a Messiah believed he would provide 'manna' as Moses did in the wilderness and, when Jesus fed the people, some of them wanted to make him king. John's gospel records that, the next day, Jesus taught that he himself was the bread of life and "whoever eats of this bread will live forever" (Jn. 6:51). Many, however, found Jesus' claim to be troublesome and stopped following him.

The famous Last Supper between Jesus and his disciples is the second and most important meal for understanding the Eucharist. On the night Jesus was betrayed he celebrated the traditional Passover with his followers. However, he did something new. Jesus took the Passover bread, offered thanks (or *eucharist* in Greek) for it, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is my body." After supper, he took the cup of wine, blessed it and said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." By doing this, he was linking his own death with the covenant promised by the prophets who anticipated a new relationship with their God who had saved them from their enemies in Egypt, Palestine and Babylon. This new relationship meant God's forgiveness of the sins of Israel as well as the whole world which would be blessed through Jesus.

world. Even from the beginning of Jesus' ministry the relationship between Jesus and God the Father provoked controversy. The Creed maintains this relationship. Unfortunately, however, it is often felt that, at this point, the creeds choke a person's simple faith by forcing them to swallow jargon that is out of date and out of touch with their daily lives. It is true that the creeds are not a full and final statement about God. Those who composed the creeds wanted to say what they understood to be the basic message of the earliest disciples of Jesus. However, experience taught them that a lopsided view of Jesus cheapened their understanding of God and his creation which, in turn, frustrated their lives, their prayers, and their worship. Over time, they realized the limits of what Christians can say without oversimplifying the grandeur and complexity of God.

To demonstrate this point, the Nicene Creed shows how a new situation required new language to express the heart of the message revealed in Jesus without endangering it. Early in the fourth century, a popular teacher named Arius argued that the Son was the first and supreme creature who was created to make everything else for a God who was so holy and great that he could not have anything to do with the material world. During a council of bishops at Nicea (325 A.D.), an Egyptian bishop, Alexander, and his assistant, Athanasius, saw that Arius' God amounted to a remote being who was completely withdrawn from the world, watching over it from a distance. From the beginning, however, Christian prayer and worship was addressed to Jesus and, since only God could be worshipped, he must be God.. In Jesus, God reveals *himself* to his people, not simply with messages and ideas about God but God *himself* in person. The Church's beliefs about God, then, were not wishful speculation but God's own personal self-disclosure. Athanasius convinced the Church that, for the earliest disciples, God was not a remotely distant divine being but present and active in his creation—personally transforming it in Jesus. So, to express that the Son was not simply a creature but God himself, the Church expanded upon an earlier baptismal creed by adding the following phrases (italicized below):

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God, (John 3:16)  
*eternally begotten of the Father,* (John 1:1-5)  
*God from God, Light from Light,*  
*true God from true God,* (Colossians 1:19)  
*begotten, not made,*  
*of one Being with the Father.* (John 14:8-11)  
*Through him all things were made.* (Colossians 1:15-17)

Human recognition of Jesus as the Son who reveals the Father would be impossible without the presence and activity of God the Holy Spirit who gives us the new life of the creation that is transformed in the resurrected Jesus. As the Creed states, the Spirit is also to be “worshiped and glorified” with the Father and the Son. The Spirit is not an impersonal force but a personal agent who directs our attention to the Son who taught us to pray to our Father in heaven who provides and protects. Among his many activities, the Spirit graciously prays with us and for us when we don’t know what to pray, how to pray and can’t pray. In this way, God continues to be present and active in the creation, renewing the hearts and minds people.

Though the word ‘Trinity’ cannot be found in scripture it is, like the phrases above, a shorthand term that conveys an understanding of God that is genuinely biblical. In the Nicene Creed, the Church wanted to avoid reducing the three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, to simply three different roles played by the same actor. Like the infamous analogy to water, ice and steam this idea, in the end, reduces God to filling different job descriptions. In the same way, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit could not be seen as a co-op of three gods for that would violate their most basic belief in one God. Steering away from these two basic pitfalls, the Church needed to maintain the complexity of one God whose very being is a communion of three fully divine Persons who are equally and eternally united in relationship to one another and united in their activity of graciously bringing creation into that loving communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **For Reflection & Discussion**

Read Psalm 19:1-6. Silently meditate upon the splendor of God and his creation by spending an hour outdoors. Pay attention to the detail around you from the sounds of the birds, the colors of the bark or the smell of the soil. Afterward, write some of your thoughts.

In Colossians 3:2-17, Paul uses the image of early Christian baptism where a believer would strip down their outer clothing before entering the water to be baptized and put on new clothing when they come out of the water. He uses this image to describe the new life of the new creation in Jesus and how we are to live it. Read the passage and list (1) what is to be stripped away and (2) what is taken on. Next, ask yourself: What in my life needs to be taken off and put on?

This idea of stripping away old clothing and putting on new clothing is expressed in the baptismal service. Read the service (BCP 298-308) and find what we renounce and take on in baptism. What do we renounce? What do we take on and affirm? (Hint: see pp 302-305)

Read the service of Confirmation (BCP pp. 412-419). Soon, you will renew your commitment to God who has already committed himself to you. The renewal of your baptismal covenant describes God and your relationship with Him and his creatures. What part of the service is most important to you? Is there any part of the service that seems strange or disagreeable to you?

means *our* death—death to all our plans of self-improvement, our false ideas of ourselves and death to the shame and guilt that controls our moods and behavior. On the positive side, we have also been raised from death in his baptism into the vibrant life of intimate friendship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because of his loving and gracious action toward us, a new exodus has begun and the dawn of God's salvation has broken through. And until we finally share in the full renewal of the creation initiated in Jesus' resurrection, we are reassured of our hope by our baptism which remains God's pledge to transform our bodies and souls entirely.

Baptized disciples who have committed themselves to follow Jesus and wish to affirm their faith that was first expressed at their baptism celebrate a worship ceremony called, Confirmation. At this service, the bishop confirms that God's Spirit has been active in the person's life as a believer. This is marked by a special prayer and blessing by the bishop for the committed disciple of Christ who desires to share in full membership of the Church with all its responsibilities.

### **For Reflection & Discussion**

Describe your baptism. How old were you? Where did it take place and in what church? If you were too young to remember, what do your parents/ sponsors remember? Do you have a certificate of baptism and/ or photos?

Read Romans 6:3-13 where Paul describes our baptism with Christ. What imagery does the apostle use to describe the meaning of our baptism? Verses 12 & 13 explain the importance of our baptism with Christ for daily living. In your own words, what do these verses say?

As believers in a God who is committed to the restoration and transformation the creation, should Christians be concerned about the state of the environment? If so, then how should we share this concern? If not, why?

Our North American culture can be materialistic. Yet, our belief in God the Creator implies that the material world is not all there is to life. In practice, do we trust God or our goods?

Like Arius, we often think of God as a remote Being who watches us from a distance with little involvement in our lives. Athanasius, on the other hand, argued that, in Jesus, we discover a God who is passionately concerned and intimately involved in human history—especially among the stresses of our lives which frustrate our prayers.

Read Romans 8:14-39 and mark the places where the apostle Paul mentions God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In your own words, summarize what Paul is saying about how the triune God presently works in (1) our lives and (2) the creation.

Do you think it is important to preserve the connection between God the Father and Jesus as the Son of God? Why or why not?

Note any phrase(s) of the creed that you would like to discuss further.

Memorize this portion of the creed.

## Our Creed: Part II

For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

Mary's virginal conception of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit is an exceptional event though not unfamiliar to the history of Israel. Throughout the biblical story, God had brought forth leaders through extraordinary circumstances to accomplish extraordinary things for his people: Aged Abram and Sarah had no children before God promised a family; the baby Moses was delivered from infanticide; the judges Samson and Samuel were born to infertile women; John the Baptist was born to aged Elizabeth and Zechariah. Jesus' miraculous birth signaled that God was once again working among his people to save them and his creation.

Here, though, Jesus was more than simply a revolutionary and inspiring spiritual or political leader. His first disciples realized that he was Israel's Messiah, and finally, God in the flesh (literally, *incarnate*). In Jesus, God had identified himself with his creation to reconcile it in an unexpected way of undeserved love that liberates and transforms humanity and the world. This implies two important ideas that convey the meaning of what happened on Christmas and Good Friday-Easter: (1) The God who is "*for us*" (as the Creed puts it), delivering the world from sin and death, is (2) the God who is *with us*, forever uniting himself to our humanity and transforming so that we might be more truly human and share full communion with God.

In Jesus we discover a God who is *with us* even in the deepest pains of life. The good news of the incarnation is that God has indissolubly bound himself fully to our humanity. From his cradle to the grave and beyond, he is truly human in everyway that we are—both physically and psychologically. As such, he intimately knows the twisted wreckage of human experience. This means, Temptation, Rejection, Disappointment,

## Baptism & Confirmation

John's baptism marked a radical movement of renewal in first century Judaism. That's because there already was a ceremonial cleansing for worship in the Temple where one found God's forgiveness. Baptism has always been a baptism *for* something and, in the Temple, it meant cleansing in preparation for worship. But for John, the Temple was corrupt—compromised by the political and religious leaders who held it in captivity. Instead, a new exodus was about to occur. And, like the legendary Red Sea incident, God would once again liberate his people. Now, baptism for the forgiveness of sins could be found on the banks of a river, not the Temple. For John, baptism was an embodied act of spiritual cleansing in preparation for the coming kingdom of a God who would immerse, or baptize, the world in the purifying fires of God's judgment and finally liberate God's people and, with them, the entire world.

Baptism was a *humiliating* ritual. It was an admission of sinfulness and need for God's help. For this reason, it was an embarrassment that Jesus joined his cousin in the water. In effect, Jesus was saying, "We are in dire straits and need God's help from ourselves and our enemies." Later, Jesus linked his baptism with his death (Mark 10:38). This is important because, from the Jordan River to Golgotha's cross, God meets us precisely in our darkest hours and greatest needs. When we think we have to get it together ('Get right with God,' as is sometimes said) *before* we can meet God, the Christian message says that *God already meets us* with our all baggage—our greatest disappointments and nagging pains.

In his resurrection, God identified the humiliated Jesus as the true servant of God who accomplished for Israel and the world what it could not do for itself. He is the new Israel who brings God's blessings promised to Abraham and the nations. These blessings are shared through his followers whom he commissioned to make other disciples from all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Bound together by the Holy Spirit into one people, Christian believers share in the long expected kingdom of God.

Therefore, Christian baptism is the symbolic rite that identifies a person with Jesus as one of his disciples and initiates them into the community of God's people who share in the blessings and tasks of the Kingdom. It is an embodied act that visibly communicates God's loving grace realized in Christ and it is his baptism that gives our own baptism any meaning and hope. In solidarity with us, God has immersed (or, *baptized*) himself into the human predicament of sin and death. *His* death

In your own words, briefly describe the Church as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic.'

Why is it important for Christians participate in the life of the church's worship and work?

Memorize this portion of the creed.

Betrayal, Loneliness and Death are not strangers to God. And though this may be somewhat comforting, it is not enough to say that God understands and shares our pain. He does something about it—something we could not do for ourselves. Three times the Creed stresses this point that, *for us* and *for our salvation*, he became human and suffered death by crucifixion *for our sake*. As Jesus' name suggests, *God rescues us*.

The death-resurrection of Jesus *for us* has remained the centerpiece of Christianity since the first disciples (Read 1 Cor. 15:3-5). What, then, does it mean when we confess that the Messiah died *for our sake*? To answer this, we must remember that Jesus died as the "King of the Jews," just as Pontius Pilate designated. On behalf of his people, he himself summed up the role of the entire nation of Israel through whom God would bring blessings to the world (as he promised to Abraham) by the blood of a new covenant (as he promised his prophet Jeremiah). Jesus' death established what only God could, which was, a new covenant whereby God personally pledged himself to us to liberate us. As the incarnate God who binds humanity to himself, Jesus takes our humanity—broken and wounded by sin—and gives it a well deserved death. In the resurrection of Jesus, God sets things right by transforming our humanity into a new reality which serves as the hope promised to all creation. As Paul described it, "He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself" (Phil. 3:21). Jesus has liberated humanity from its predicament by setting things right (much like the judges of the Old Testament) and, upon his return, the living and the dead will share in his resurrection and the fullness of his never-ending kingdom.\*

Many images are used to describe what the death-resurrection of the Messiah achieved. Some of these images portray Jesus as:

- a warrior who, on our behalf, triumphed over the forces that hold us hostage including sin, death and the demonic;
- one who bought the freedom of slaves with his own life as payment for their redemption;
- a judge who endured the judgment that rightly belonged to the guilty who are vindicated, pardoned or justified as a result;
- the Passover lamb slaughtered during the exodus from Egypt as protection from death and food for the journey;

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\* More will be said about Jesus' return in the next lesson.

- a Jewish worship sacrifice which was instituted by God and offered as a substitute for what the people could not be, that is, as a life entirely devoted to God without the taint of sin. This would unite the people to their God.

Each image illustrates a God who takes the initiative to reach out to helpless people who are alienated by their unflinching rebelliousness or relentless guilt, entrapped by their constantly nagging fears, compulsions, addictions and abusive patterns as well as those held hostage to people, situations and forces beyond their control.

Our salvation in Jesus is so gigantic that it defies any single description. It includes rescue, healing, victory, amnesty, reconciliation, peace, forgiveness and freedom. It is why, during our worship, we pray,

*“All glory be to thee, Almighty God, our heavenly Father, for that thou, of thy tender mercy, didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world” (BCP, 334).*

### **For Reflection & Discussion**

Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Why is it important that Jesus is genuinely human? How should this enhance our prayers?

Read the following passages and identify the images (Battlefield, Slave Market, Legal Court, Passover Lamb, Jewish Sacrifice) used to describe Jesus' death-resurrection. Notice that more than one image might be implied.

John 12:31-33

Mark 10:45

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

1 Corinthians 7:23-24

Colossians 1:13-14

Colossians 2:15

Galatians. 2:16-20

also shown that when the Church neglects its calling it and those around it suffer. This serves as a humbling reminder that God is a missionary God who reaches out to the suffering as one who suffered.

Faith is never a private business. God calls us out from our lonely, isolated and self-involved lives into the complex reality of Himself and his creatures. This is the true nature of love. Participation with the Messiah involves the Spirit who liberates us from ourselves to enjoy communion with God and his creatures. Together, we learn to worship and work as God's people who are called to share his blessings (e.g. forgiveness, acceptance, peace, reconciliation, love and hope) with the nations. Therefore, active church participation is a basic characteristic of a living faith.

### **For Reflection & Discussion**

The Holy Spirit lives in every believer, counseling us to better relationships with God, his people and the world by comforting us with a deeper understanding of the Messiah Jesus. In what way has the Holy Spirit worked in your own life?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22 where Paul describes how a new humanity has been created in Jesus which heals the divisions that separate us and establishes peace and unity. How was this accomplished? What images does Paul use to describe this new community?

the growth of God's kingdom. Yet, even the confession that "we believe in one holy catholic (or universal) and apostolic Church" might seem like an unrealistic fantasy that glosses over a Church which appears more divided, unholy and narrow than anything else. What, then, do we mean?

It is only in relation to the rest of the Creed that we can make such a confession about the Church. Our "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" is Jesus' own baptism from the River Jordan to his death, resurrection and ascension. This means our own baptism is not our own but, rather, through the Holy Spirit we share in Jesus' life, death and resurrection life and the forgiveness of sins that comes with it. Our unity with his one new humanity overcomes the old humanity's divisions of race, class and sex (though, in practice, the Church has needed reminding of this since its very beginning). With Christ as its head, this includes a variety of people with a wide range of God-given abilities and, therefore, should not deteriorate into bland uniformity.\* In Christ, therefore, we are *one* Church.

Additionally, in Christ we are a *holy* people, 'set apart' by the Holy Spirit as God's own. The Church is considered holy by virtue of its relationship to Jesus the Messiah. Since, in Jesus, God forgives sinners and considers them his very own holy people, we are called to do the same. This is illustrated by the Corinthian church which was sharply splintered by divisive competition, social elitism and flagrant sexual misconduct. Yet, the apostle Paul addressed them as God's holy ones set apart by the Messiah Jesus and assured them how thankful he was for what God was doing among them (Read I Cor. 1:2-9). By treating other believers as God sees them, we encourage one another to personal holiness of thought and action.\*\*

Finally, the Church is described as 'catholic' and 'apostolic.' Believers united in Christ from everywhere throughout history make up the universal, or *catholic*, Church who seek to be faithful to Him and his message in all its fullness. Christians are not confined to a particular group or geographical region. The reason this is so is that the Church is *apostolic*. Through the Spirit, Christ *sends* the His people to proclaim Himself who remains the focus and force of the message first preached by the apostles (which means 'sent ones') to everyone everywhere. History has shown that, when the Church seeks to be faithful to Christ and his message, people's lives can be transformed for the better. History has

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\* For more on this, see the lesson on spiritual gifts.

\*\* Our love should not be restricted to the Church alone for Christ died, and lives, for the whole world.

Galatians 3:13

I John 3:8

I Peter 1:18-19

Romans 3:23-25

Romans 5:6-11

I Timothy 2:16

Hebrews 9:11-28

Hebrews 10:11-17

Many people hostage to things beyond their control: addictions to alcohol, drugs and bad relationships; compulsive behaviors; nagging guilt; physical illness and disability. In many ways we long liberation and a fresh start. How might does the cross-resurrection of Jesus address these concerns right now?

Many of us offer sacrifices in the sense that we try to demonstrate our commitment to others and restore our spoiled relationships by giving gifts and flowers, cooking someone's favorite meal, doing extra work around the house or for our boss. They are effective but only temporary. God is satisfied with Jesus' sacrifice but, often we are not. Because of this, there are many kinds of sacrifices we try to offer instead. We try to be good people, donate our time and money to good causes in hopes that, by doing so, we might please people and God. In our worship, we participate in the benefits of Christ's "full, perfect and sufficient" sacrifice as we pray, "Unite us to your Son in his sacrifice, that we may be acceptable through him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (BCP, 369). Here, we offer *ourselves* not our *things*. How is that difference important in our relationships with God and others?

How have you tried to gain someone's recognition or approval?

All of us, at some level, seek self-justification. We look for recognition and acceptance by our looks, abilities, ethnic history, nationality, sexual identity, credentials and careers. Read Philippians 3:2-11 to consider what Paul thinks of such symbols of status. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Read through a Eucharist rite of your choosing and briefly note the images of the cross-resurrection of Jesus.

Memorize this portion of the creed.

### **Our Creed: Part III**

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The ascension of Jesus to his heavenly Father's right hand indicates the completion of his sacrificial work as our Great High Priest and his continuing priestly service of prayer for his people. It also signifies his ascension as king of the universe to his heavenly throne. In Jesus, humanity is exalted to be what it was intended, which is, in an unbroken friendship with God and his creation. By raising Jesus, his body and soul, God has demonstrated his commitment to rescue this world. At present, the rest of creation longs to share in the great transformation at the end of time. Christian hope looks to the Messiah who will come as judge to liberate both the living and the dead who will share in his everlasting kingdom. However, those who presently continue in their destructive and self-destructive ways and refuse to acknowledge the Messiah and his kingdom only bring condemnation upon themselves and will share no place in it.

In the meantime, we work and worship in the shadow of Christ's cross—a shadow cast by the dawning hope of Easter's resurrection. Though we wait in the midst of suffering with hopeful expectation of his return, we are not alone. Rather, the ascended Messiah reigns among his covenant people through the presence of the Holy Spirit who empowered, guided and comforted Jesus during his earthly ministry. This same Spirit, who inspired the prophets with both the expectation of God's kingdom and the words to speak out against those who exploited God's creatures everywhere, is the Lord God, the giver of life who breathed life into his creation. Now, sent by the Father and the Son, the Spirit breathes the life of the Messiah's new creation into his community, the Church. As the Spirit guided Jesus, we too are led to participate in God's suffering love for all people everywhere.

The Church is the Spirit-led family of the Messiah Jesus in whom humanity is (and will be) restored. As such, the Church is not one social group among many for fostering community involvement, providing moral instruction or even spiritual refuge from the stresses of life. Nor is it a corporation driven by CEOs with motivational messages to invest in