

Happenings At Hope

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Worship & Study
Bible Class & Sunday School
9:30am

The Divine Service
Sundays 10:30am
Wednesdays 7pm

Skype Bible Study
Thursdays 8pm

Ladies' & Men's Bible Studies
1st and 2nd Saturdays of the
month respectively, at 9am

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From the Pastor

Dear members and friends of Hope Lutheran Church. The saying goes that if you don't know history, you will be bound to repeat history. Usually this statement, or one similar to it, is said in the context of a warning, telling us that if we don't make a point of studying history and learning from the mistakes others have made, that we're setting ourselves up to fall into those same pits. But learning from the mistakes of history is really only half the story. Just as we are warned by the mistakes of history, we are also guided and inspired by the successes of history.

In this issue of *Happenings at Hope* you are going to find a lot of history. In our ongoing study of the parts of the liturgy, we have now come to the creed. As you know, on every Lord's Day we confess the Christian faith according to one of the historic creeds of the Church. And as confessional Lutherans we are guided in our interpretation and application of the Scriptures by the Lutheran Confessions. But what are these creeds and confessions? Where did they come from? And why is it important for us to retain these creeds and confessions and to be guided by them many centuries after they were written?

You will also find two other articles in this issue of our church's newsletter. One, written by our synod's communications director, is a good reminder for us of where we came from, and how we were made. This article can be especially helpful for us as we

find ourselves hearing more and more in the news about controversies in our country over gender identity and bathrooms.

And finally, this issue contains an article on the history of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This is a history of which our congregation is largely not a part, because it hasn't even been twenty years since we became a member congregation of the ELS. But I think that you will find that even though the histories of our congregation and synod are not the same history, that they are definitely of the same spirit.

- Pastor Webber

Male and Female He Created Them

Jesus, the Almighty Son of God, prayed to God the Father, “Your Word is truth.” (John 17:17) God’s Word is truth. The Word of God is the basis for all the beliefs of a Christian. For someone to declare even one part of God’s Word incorrect, they must be willing to believe that all of it is untrue. For a Christian, faith in the Word of God is a necessity. It cannot be compromised.

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we are taught that God created human beings as male and female: *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27) Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.*

(Genesis 5:2) Further into the book of Genesis, Noah is told to bring male and female of each kind of animal into the ark. (Genesis 6)

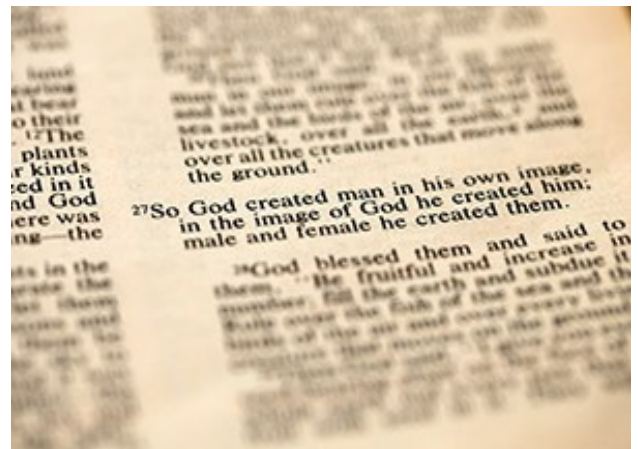
Because God created two sexes, two genders, that is what Christians must believe and teach to remain faithful to God’s teachings.

According to God there are two genders: male and female. There are no other options. To

believe or teach otherwise is to declare to God that He is wrong.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning... (Romans 8:22). Even creation itself groans in its imperfection as it waits for the return of Jesus. Because of the Fall into sin, creation is imperfect. In very rare instances, people are born without a clear physical indication of their gender or with extra genetic material. This does not change the fact that there are only two genders: male and female, as God created them.

Christians should treat all those who are struggling with their gender identity with respect and empathy, leading them to know that God assigned their gender even before they were born and that gender is not changeable. More importantly, we need to bring the saving message of the Gospel to them through God’s Word. Jesus died for all people, even those who are broken, confused and struggling. God wants all people to



repent of their sins continually, understanding that Jesus has paid for and forgiven those sins. He wants all of us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to leave those sins behind us and to walk in His ways.

– Rev. Paul Fries, ELS Communicantions Director

The Creed

In the Divine Service, we usually confess our faith according to either the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds. Less frequently we confess our faith according to the Athanasian Creed (on Trinity Sunday) or in song according to the *Te Deum Laudamus* (when we are using Matins). The reason why we and our Christian forbears have confessed the Christian Faith in these ways is actually very simple: we are not trying to invent something new.

The Christian religion, as the one, true, saving faith in the one, true, saving God, is not something that is invented and shaped by those who believe it. Rather, in His Word God has told us exactly what to believe. It is through this revealed faith that we are saved from the eternal consequences of our lives of sin through the redemptive merits of Jesus Christ. *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*, Acts 16:31.

Our faith, itself, is not what saves us. The Triune God is the one who saves us. Faith is the way through which God connects us to himself, and it is the vehicle through which he imparts to us the forgiveness of sins and every other resultant blessing that has been won for us by Christ. This is why creeds are important. As Christians, we don't simply “believe.” As Christians we believe *in* something—that “something” being the content of the Scriptures.

But, even though the Scriptures are certainly clear and readable, it isn't very easy to just rattle them off from beginning to end as an explanation of your faith. This is where creeds come in. They are a way of explaining what the Scriptures teach in a concise, organized, easily memorable, way. And the creeds also confess the truth of God's Word over and against error. This is actually the source for many of our creeds and confessions. They were not made necessary by the truth. Rather, they were made necessary by falsehood.

Take the Nicene Creed for example. It was written in response to what was being taught by a man named Arius, who claimed that there had been a time in the history of the world when Jesus had not existed. Jesus, as the eternally-begotten Son of God, as the Bible describes him, must have been born at some point. This seemed logical to Arius and many others, but in teaching this, Arius was unintentionally striking at the full divinity of Christ, because if Christ was created, then he wasn't as “much” God as God the Father,



who is eternal. And if Jesus wasn't fully God, then he couldn't have fully been our Savior, because nothing less than the sacrifice of a life bearing the value of God could have atoned for the sins of all mankind.

In the creeds we are reminded of errors like Arianism (the name given to the above teaching) and the successes of those who, according to the Word of God, were able to show the falsehood and danger of such errors. We are guided not only in the substance of what they taught, but even in the words that they used to teach. The use of such “sound language” helps us to avoid falling into the same the potholes and pitfalls into which, unfortunately, others have already stumbled.

As Confessional Lutherans, we don't only confess our Christian faith according to the “Ecumenical” (meaning universal) creeds. We are also guided in our teaching and beliefs by the *Lutheran Confessions*. As is true of the creeds, we would never say that these confessions are on the same level of God's Word. What God tells us in the Bible is the only source of our faith. But what the creeds and confession of the church do is explain what the Bible actually teaches, especially in the face of misunderstandings and false teaching.

As Christians who hold to the creeds and confessions of the Church, we are definitely not on our own. We have God with us and in us through his Word. And through the creeds and confessions, we also have with us the great teachers of the Christian Church throughout the ages, guiding us in the same faith “of the apostles and prophets, of which Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20)

-Pastor Webber



A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod had its beginnings among Norwegian immigrants to the United States of America in the nineteenth century. As these immigrants began settling primarily in the upper Midwest they had no congregations, no pastors, no schools of their own; but the Lord had not forgotten them. Soon pastors from their homeland began arriving to provide spiritual leadership for them and to organize congregations in which the public ministry of God's Word and His Sacraments could preserve the people in the true faith.

One of these early immigrant pastors held a memorable service outdoors under an oak tree in September of 1844 at a place with the Indian name of Koshkonong, near Madison, Wisconsin. Soon afterward, two congregations bearing that name were organized in the area. In 1853 a church body composed of



several congregations was organized at nearby Luther Valley Church under the official name of The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For a long time this church body was to be commonly known as the “Norwegian Synod.”

These Norwegian spiritual pioneers soon came into contact with other Lutheran groups in this country. Unfortunately, not all of the latter were in full agreement on the teaching and practice set forth in God’s Holy Word. However, the members of the Norwegian Synod eventually discovered a synod and its leader with whom they were in blessed agreement, a larger group of primarily German Lutherans known as the Missouri Synod, which quickly opened its educational institutions to the Norwegian Synod for the training of their pastors and teachers.

In 1872 these two synods, the Wisconsin Synod and several other state synods formed the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, for many years a strong champion of the true teachings of the Holy Scriptures and of the Lutheran confessional writings gathered in the Book of Concord in 1580.

The Christian church here on earth, however, is called the militant church—and for good reason. The devil is constantly seeking to destroy God’s church by undermining the truth of His holy teachings. In the 1880s a serious disagreement on the biblical doctrine of God’s election of individuals to salvation divided the Norwegian Synod. When in 1917 the larger group resulting from this division rejoined other groups, a remnant of the Norwegian Synod refused to enter into this merger because it was based on the false teaching that man can somehow by nature cooperate with God in bringing about his own conversion.



In order to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word, this minority reorganized in 1918 at Lime Creek Lutheran Church, near Lake Mills, Iowa, as The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. This name was later officially changed to its present designation, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, with headquarters in Mankato, Minnesota. The Lord of the church blessed this little flock, which soon rejoined its former member churches in the Synodical Conference.

Mid-twentieth-century doctrinal differences arising in the Synodical Conference eventually forced the Norwegian Synod to withdraw from this federation. However, in 1993 it joined with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and several other smaller but doctrinally and confessionally sound Lutheran church bodies throughout the world to form a new international federation, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

In 1927 the synod purchased and began operating as its own school of higher learning, Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato. For many years a two-year college, it was at the turn of the century upgraded to a full baccalaureate institution. In 1946 Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was added to the synod’s educational



program. The synod fervently promotes Christian education also at the elementary and high school levels and has quite a few Christian day schools and several area Lutheran high schools serving its youth. For a period of forty years it once operated a high school on the campus of Bethany Lutheran College. From its reorganization the synod has also been actively engaged in mission work both in the United States and in foreign lands.

The prayer arising from the hearts of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is that the Lord of the Church will preserve them in their confession of His inerrant and alone-saving Word, the Holy Scriptures.

Reprinted from: [Juul Madson], "A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod," An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism(Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001), 215-16.

Parish News

Special Events:

May

22 – Movie Night at Church, *Star Wars, the Force Awakens*, 7pm

June

12 – Golf Outing, Time TBD

26 – Movie Night at Church, *Exodus, Gods and Kings*, 7pm