

Christian Belief

A Confirmation Resource
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Christian Belief

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”—Acts 16:31

“I believe in order that I might understand.”—St. Augustine

These 23 sessions serve as an accessible presentation that focuses on the essentials of the Christian message, centrally, salvation by grace. This study includes an overview of the Bible, a line-by-line study of the Apostle’s Creed (a 4th century summary of Christian belief), and a peek into the Book of Common Prayer (which provides the prayers, services, and readings used in Episcopal churches).

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Session 1: The Grace of God

What is grace? *Grace* is unmerited favor that leads to an act of kindness. When we speak of the grace of God we speak of the fact that God loves us and gives us His unmerited favor not because of anything we have done, but because of who He is, a God of grace. The ultimate act of kindness that demonstrates God's unmerited favor is found in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for the sins of the world.

Throughout the New Testament we find many references to the grace of God, both where we find it and what it means for our lives. Here are seven reflections about the grace of God:

1) The ultimate expression of the grace of God is found in Jesus Christ.

In his powerful description of the Incarnation the Apostle John wrote,

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16-17).

2) We have been saved because of the grace of God.

There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation through Jesus Christ. It is a gift due to the grace of God, and like other gifts, it is received, not earned. The Apostle Paul addresses this in his Letter to the Ephesians:

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

3) We have been justified by the grace of God.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24).

“... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

4) It is the grace of God that enables us to serve Him.

“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (II Corinthians 9:8).

5) The grace of God is enough, even in our weakness.

“But he (Jesus) said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (II Corinthians 12:9).

6) We are to grow in the grace of God throughout our lives.

As an elderly man the Apostle Peter closes his second and final letter with these words:

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (II Peter 3:18).

7) In every one of the Apostle Paul’s thirteen NT letters he proclaims the grace of God to his recipients near the beginning and near the end.

Take Paul’s Letter to the Romans for example:

“To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:7).

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you” (16:20).

Our relationship with God begins with the grace of God, continues with the grace God, and because of the grace of God, never ends ☺.

Key Verse:

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

Session 2: What is a Christian?

A short answer: A Christian is someone who has received God's gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:23—"For the wages of sin is death, but the *free gift of God* is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord."

John 17:3—"And this is *eternal life*, that they may *know you*, the only true *God*, and *Jesus Christ* whom you have sent."

A longer answer: A Christian is someone who responds to the *grace* of God by *believing* that Jesus is the Son of God who *died* on the cross for the sins of the world and was *raised from the dead*, by *receiving* Him into his/her heart, and by *confessing* Him as Lord. This response is demonstrated by receiving the sacrament of *baptism* and being filled with the Holy Spirit, who ensures the person of his/her *identity as God's child*. This is reaffirmed at confirmation. (Other privileges involved with being a Christian—prayer, the church, communion, etc., will be addressed later in the course).

Grace

Ephesians 2:8-9—"For by *grace* you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the *gift* of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

Believing

John 3:16—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who *believes* in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Jesus' death and resurrection

I Corinthians 15:3-5—"For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ *died* for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he *was raised* on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve."

Receiving

John 1:12—"But to all who *received* him, who *believed* in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

Romans 5:8—"But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ *died* for us."

Confessing

Romans 10:9-10—"Because if you *confess* with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one *confesses* with the mouth and so is saved."

Baptism

Matthew 28:19—"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Romans 6:4—“Therefore we have been buried with him by *baptism* into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

Acts 2:38—“Peter said to them, Repent and be *baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Identity as God’s Child

Romans 8:15-16—“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are *children of God*.”

Galations 4:6—“And because you are *children*, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

I John 3:1a—“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called *children of God*; and that is what we are.”

Key Verse:

John 3:16—“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Session 3: The Old Testament: Part I (Pentateuch and Historical Books)

The Bible is the most important and influential book in the world because it is the Word of God. The Bible tells us who God is, who we are, what our purpose in life is, and how we can fulfill that purpose. The human authors of the Bible were inspired by the divine author, the Holy Spirit. Paul refers to this in the last letter he wrote, his second letter to Timothy, written from prison as he awaited his martyrdom: “All scripture is inspired by God” (II Timothy 3:16a).

Ultimately, the Bible is about how created and redeemed the world, including you and me, through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament begins with the creation of the world, and develops the story of God’s redemptive plan all the way through the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC and into the Babylonian exile. There are about four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments, and then this story of redemption continues with the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, followed by the growth of the Christian Church.

The Bible therefore “contains all things necessary to salvation” (Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles, BCP 868) and is a primary way God leads us as we follow Him: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

There are 39 books in the Old Testament. These books are divided into four sections: Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy), Historical Books (Joshua—Esther), Wisdom Literature (Psalms—Song of Solomon), and Prophets (Isaiah—Malachi). Here is a brief, big picture view, of the Pentateuch and the Historical Books:

The Pentateuch (first five books, also known as the Torah):

Genesis: Covers the creation of the world, the fall, the flood, the Tower of Babel, the calling of Abraham (and his son, Isaac, his grandson, Jacob, and Jacob’s twelve sons), the establishment of the nation of Israel, and Israel’s arrival in Egypt. The first verse of the Bible sets the tone, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1).

Exodus: Covers God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt after 400 years of bondage. This includes the calling of Moses, the ten plagues, the exodus, the celebration of the first Passover, and God’s giving His law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This law includes the Ten Commandments (20:1-17), directions on how to build the tabernacle, and other laws.

Leviticus: Covers details regarding the worship of God, who is holy. It includes part of the greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), and also includes additional laws for Israel.

Numbers: Covers a census of Israel and various events in their forty-year journey through the wilderness. This book contains this beautiful priestly blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (6:24-26).

Deuteronomy: Covers Moses’ second giving of the law to Israel, the rest of their wilderness journeys, and Moses’ death. It includes the other part of the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (6:5).

Historical Books:

Joshua: Covers Israel's crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, battles involved in conquering this land (including the Battle of Jericho—chapter 6), and the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. It includes God's wonderful promise to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (1:9).

Judges: Covers the period in Israel's history between the death of Joshua and the last of the judges of Israel, Samuel. Two of the more famous of these judges are Gideon and Samson. It was a particularly difficult time in Israel's history because, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25).

Ruth: Covers the moving story of the redemption of Ruth, a widow who became King David's great-grandmother.

I Samuel: Covers the life and ministry of the last of Israel's judges, Samuel, the reign of Israel's first king, Saul, and the anointing and rise of David.

II Samuel: Covers the reign of King David, a "warrior poet," which included his many victories over Israel's enemies, his writing of many psalms, and preparations for the building of God's temple. It also includes difficulties in his personal life, including adultery, murder, and an insurrection led by his son, Absalom.

I Kings: Covers the reign of David's son, Solomon, including the building and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. It also covers the reigns of several succeeding kings, and the division of Israel into two separate kingdoms: the southern kingdom (Judah) and the northern kingdom (other twelve tribes). This book also includes events in the powerful ministry of the prophet, Elijah.

II Kings: Covers the reigns of the rest of the kings of Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC. It also includes the death of Elijah and the ministry of his successor, Elisha.

I Chronicles: Covers genealogies of the twelve tribes of Israel and a recap of the reign of David.

II Chronicles: Covers a recap of the reigns of Solomon and the rest of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Ezra: Covers the building and dedication of a new temple in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah: Covers the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem.

Esther: Covers the story of Queen Esther, who was led by God to save the Jewish people from genocide at the hand of the Persians.

Key Verse:

II Timothy 3:16a—“All scripture is inspired by God.”

Session 4: The Old Testament: Part II (Wisdom Literature and Prophets)

There are five books in the Wisdom Literature section of the Old Testament:

Job: This poem covers the story of Job, who was tested in his faith through the loss of his children, wealth, and health. Much of the book records conversations between Job and four friends. The book climaxes with God's restoration of Job. This book contains a famous verse regarding our hope in the resurrection: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God" (19:25-26).

Psalms: Includes 150 psalms of praise, wisdom, lamentation, and recounting of God's faithfulness in Israel. Many were written by King David. This book is quoted more often in the NT than any other OT book. Corporate recitation of psalms has been part of Jewish and Christian worship for nearly 3,000 years. The most famous psalm is Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd."

Proverbs: Attributed mostly to King Solomon, this book includes wisdom about the importance of hard work, avoiding temptation, money, relationships, etc. It contains a lot of very practical wisdom for life. One of the most famous passages is this: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (3:5-6).

Ecclesiastes: Attributed to King Solomon, this book describes the vanity of life without God. King Solomon concludes the book by pointing to the need to follow God: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:13-14).

Song of Solomon: Also called the Song of Songs, this is one of the most famous love poems of all time. It describes metaphorically the privileges of marriage. A verse that is often read at weddings is this: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2:16a).

There are seventeen books in the Prophets section of the Old Testament. All of these books were written by and/or about the prophet indicated in the title of the book. The "major prophets" are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The "minor prophets" are the other twelve prophets. There are three main themes in the prophets: the choice of repentance from sin or facing the judgment of God, the faithfulness of God in spite of the unfaithfulness of Israel, and the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah: Contains many prophecies about the coming Messiah. One of the most famous is the prophecy of chapter 53, a prophecy about the sufferings Jesus Christ endured in His passion and death. This well known verse is from that passage: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6).

Jeremiah: Contains prophecies before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians. Jeremiah's ministry was marked by much trouble, persecution, and grief.

Lamentations: Attributed to Jeremiah, this is a poem of lamentation expressing the grief of the Jews when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and many were killed or taken away in exile. Yet even in the midst of this suffering, Jeremiah writes: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (3:22-23).

Ezekiel: This book contains the visions and prophecies of Ezekiel, whose ministry was during the Babylonian exile. One of the main themes of this book is the departure of the glory of God from the temple and judgment against those nations who have attacked God's people.

Daniel: Describes the story of Daniel, a Jewish exile. Two of the most famous stories in this book are the three men in the fiery furnace (chapter 3) and Daniel in the lion's den (chapter 6).

Hosea: Compares God's love for Israel to a husband's love for an unfaithful wife.

Joel: Contains prophecies regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God's people as occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2): "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions" (2:28).

Amos: Includes prophecies of God's judgment on Israel's neighbor nations.

Obadiah: A prophecy of God's judgment against Edom.

Jonah: Contains the story of Jonah, who was thrown into the sea, swallowed by a great fish, and thrown up on a beach three days later. This prefigures Jesus' death and resurrection.

Micah: Contains a famous prophecy about Bethlehem being the birthplace of Jesus Christ (5:2).

Nahum: Contains a prophecy against Nineveh.

Habakkuk: Describes the importance of following God even when life is very hard. This verse is well-known: "God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights" (3:19).

Zephaniah: Contains prophecies of judgment against Israel's neighbors and describes the Lord's joy over Israel.

Haggai: Describes the future glory of the rebuilt temple of the Lord.

Zechariah: Contains several visions and prophecies regarding the relationship of God with Israel.

Malachi: Contains prophecies about the importance of offering our best to God (chapter 1), the importance of tithing (chapter 3), and the second coming of the prophet Elijah (chapter 4), whom Jesus later describes as John the Baptist.

Key Verse:

Psalm 119:105—"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Session 5: The New Testament: Part I (The Gospels)

The word, *gospel*, refers to the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the New Testament this one gospel is recorded by four different writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each has a slightly different perspective on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels, because they contain a lot of similar parables, teaching, etc. The Gospel According to John has its own style. While each gospel writer has different styles and emphases, each makes the same point: Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of the world and was raised on the third day. Here are some of the unique characteristics of each:

The Gospel According to Matthew:

- The Gospel According to Matthew was written by Matthew the Apostle. His emphasis is on how Jesus brings us into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- He wrote his Gospel primarily for a Jewish audience, so there is much emphasis on how Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.
- In addition to the narrative passages that describe Jesus' birth, three-fold ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing, and His suffering and death, there are also five main sermons of Jesus in Matthew: Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5 – 7), Mission (chapter 10), Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven (chapter 13), Community (chapter 18), and the Coming of the Kingdom (chapters 23-25).
- There are many famous passages in the Gospel According to Matthew, including the Beattitudes (5:1-12), the Lord's Prayer (6:9-13), the Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32), and the Great Commission (28:18-20).
- One passage from this gospel that emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is 27:54 (right after Jesus died on the cross, when there was an earthquake, etc.)—"Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's son!'"
- The Gospel concludes with Jesus' commanding the disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:19-20).

The Gospel According to Mark:

- The Gospel According to Mark was written by Mark, who accompanied the Apostle Peter on his missionary journeys and wrote this gospel based on Peter's preaching and eyewitness account of Jesus' life and ministry.
- It is the shortest of the four gospels, but has more about Jesus' passion and death on the cross than the others.
- It is a very fast-paced gospel, indicated by the fact the word for "immediately" is used many times.
- It does not include a birth narrative, but begins with the ministry of John the Baptist.
- The emphasis on Jesus Christ being the Son of God is clear from the very first verse: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1).
- There is an emphasis on Jesus' death on the cross and His call to all who follow Him to pick up their cross and do so: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (8:34); and "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45).
- Much of what is covered in the Gospel According to Mark is also found in Matthew and Luke.

The Gospel According to Luke:

- The Gospel According to Luke was written by Luke, a missionary companion of Paul, and emphasizes Jesus' heart to reach the lost, the marginalized, and the outcast. This is found in the birth narrative, which records Jesus being revealed to shepherds, and continues all the way to the cross, where Jesus dies between two thieves.
- Jesus states bluntly in 19:10—"For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." This theme is also evident in various parables and events only found in the Gospel According to Luke, including The Good Samaritan (chapter 10), the three parables in chapter 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son), Jesus' healing of the ten lepers (chapter 17), the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (chapter 18), and Jesus' dying between two thieves, one of whom repented (chapter 23).
- As with the other gospels, there is an emphasis on Jesus' being the Son of God, as seen in the angel Gabriel's conversation with Mary: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" (1:31-32a).
- This gospel also contains three famous passages used often in worship: The Song of Mary (*Magnificat*)—1:46-55; The Song of Zechariah (*Benedictus Dominus Deus*)—1:68-79; and The Song of Simeon (*Nunc Dimittis*)—2:29-32. Luke also wrote Acts, which recounts the birth and growth of the early church.

The Gospel According to John:

- The Gospel According to John was written by the Apostle John, the only one of the disciples who witnessed the actual death of Jesus Christ (the others had all fled when He was arrested).
- Referring to Jesus as "the Word," John wastes no time in making clear that he is writing about the Son of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1).
- The theme of Jesus being the Son of God continues throughout this gospel and calls for a response from the reader—"These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).
- There are many "I am" sayings in John, all of which point to the divinity of Jesus Christ: "I am the bread of life" (6:35); "I am the light of the world" (8:12); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); and "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6).
- Perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bible is found in John: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (3:16).

Key Verse:

John 20:31—"These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."

Session 6: The New Testament: Part II (Acts, Epistles, and Revelation)

The first four books of the New Testament include the Gospel According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four Gospel writers describe the one Gospel from unique perspectives. This one Gospel is this: Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of the world and was raised on the third day.

The remaining 23 books of the New Testament describe how the Holy Spirit moved to develop the Early Church (Acts), how the church was taught about both what Jesus Christ did for us and how we are called to respond (Epistles), and the hope that we have in Jesus Christ for eternity (Revelation).

Here is a brief description of these 23 books:

Acts: Written by Luke, this book picks up where the Gospel According to Luke leaves off. It describes the ascension of Jesus into heaven, Pentecost, and the subsequent exponential growth of the Early Church. This growth follows the pattern described in Acts 1:8 in which Jesus told His disciples—“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The main character in *Acts* is the Holy Spirit, who works throughout the book to grow and develop the Early Church. *Acts* also highlights the ministries of Peter and Paul.

Romans: This book could also be called the Gospel According to Paul, for in it Paul systematically describes what God did for the salvation of the world through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Like all of Paul’s letters, the first part of the book describes what God has done for us in Christ, and the rest of the book describes how we can respond. A key verse is Romans 5:8—“But God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

I and II Corinthians: Also written by the Apostle Paul, these letters were written to the Christians in Corinth. They contain classic passages on love (I Cor. 13), the resurrection (I Cor. 15), being ambassadors for Christ (II Cor. 5), and Paul’s sufferings for the Gospel (II Cor. 11).

Galatians: Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in the region of Galatia. It contains this classic description of Paul’s relationship with Jesus Christ: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (2:20). This book also contains a classic passage on the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23).

Ephesians: Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus. It contains passages on how God gifts certain people for leadership roles in the church (4:7-13) and the armor of God (6:10-17). It also includes this classic doxology: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).

Philippians: Paul wrote this letter from prison to the Christians in Philippi, the first church in Europe. This letter is marked by joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (4:4). It includes a beautiful description of Jesus’ ministry (2:5-11) and this classic passage describing Paul’s passion for God: “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (3:10-11).

Colossians: Paul also wrote this letter to the Christians at Colossae while in prison. It contains a powerful description of the deity of Jesus Christ (1:15-20) and also a description of what Christian community looks like (3:1-17). It includes this verse on the importance of forgiving others: “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (3:13).

I and II Thessalonians: Paul wrote both of these letters to the Christians at Thessalonica. One of the major themes of these letters is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (I Thess. 4:3-18 and II Thess. 2:1-12). This passage describes the repentance of the Christians at Thessalonica: “For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God” (I Thess. 1:9).

I and II Timothy, and Titus: Paul wrote these letters, known as the Pastoral Epistles, to Timothy and Titus, pastors at Ephesus and Crete respectively. In these letters Paul describes the characteristics of effective church leaders (I Tim. 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9). In II Timothy, the final letter Paul wrote, he exhorts Timothy, “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (1:6-7).

Philemon: This is the shortest of Paul’s letters and was written to Philemon, a friend of Paul’s, about a dispute Philemon had with a servant named Onesimus.

Hebrews: No one knows for sure who wrote this letter, but it was written to the Hebrews, to Christians who had converted from Judaism (legal in the Roman Empire) to Christianity (illegal in the Roman Empire) and were suffering persecution as a result. The letter describes how Jesus Christ is superior to the covenant of the Old Testament. The writer encourages the Hebrews to remain focused on Christ in the midst of their persecution: “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:1b-2).

James: This letter was written by the Apostle James and is a very practical description of what it looks like to follow Jesus Christ. This includes passages about obeying the word of God (1:22-25), the importance of taming the tongue (3:2-12), and this passage about the power of praying for one another: “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (5:16).

I and II Peter: These letters were written by the Apostle Peter and include descriptions of the church (I Pet. 2:4-10), passages about suffering (I Pet. 3:13-22), and Peter’s eyewitness account of the Transfiguration (II Pet. 1:16-18). The final verse of II Peter is a powerful final word from the Apostle Peter: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (II Pet. 3:18).

I, II, and III John: These three letters were written by the Apostle John and stress the deity of Jesus Christ and how He is the ultimate expression of the love of God, as evidenced in these verses: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (I John 3:13) and “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (I John 4:16b).

Jude: This letter was written by the Apostle Jude, and contains words of judgment against false teachers in the church. It also includes this beautiful doxology: “Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (v. 24-25).

The Revelation to John: This book records visions that God gave the Apostle John while he was an exile on the island of Patmos. Some of these visions are very difficult to understand and are of a type of biblical writing known as apocalyptic literature. These visions include the seven letters from Jesus to the seven churches in Asia Minor (chapters 2-3), a vision of worship in heaven (chapter 4), many visions of judgment against the ungodly (particularly those who have persecuted Christians), and an inspiring vision of the new heaven and the new earth (chapters 21-22). This book, the last book of the Bible concludes with these words about the Second Coming: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.” (22:20b-21).

Key Verse:

Romans 5:8—“But God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

Session 7: The Lord's Prayer

The most widely prayed prayer in the world is the prayer Jesus taught His disciples (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4). This prayer is known as the Lord's Prayer:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Here's a closer look at each line of the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,

Jesus taught us to address Almighty God as "Father." When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and part of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is to assure us of our identity as God's children:

Romans 8:15-16—"For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Galations 4:6—"And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

As Christians we follow the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Our lives are not about building our own little kingdoms, but rather serving God in His kingdom. This includes praying that God's kingdom will come and His will be done. Sometimes following God's will is hard, as we see with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane:

"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'" (Matthew 26:39).

Discerning God's will in our lives begins with surrendering ourselves to God in worship in response to what God has done for us in Christ:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2).

Give us this day our daily bread.

Following God is a daily decision, as we see in both the Old Testament with Joshua and the New Testament with Jesus:

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Even though we may wish we could simply pray once that God would give us everything we need for the rest of our lives, God has us pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” In part this is because He wants a daily relationship with us marked by our daily trust in Him. We can express that daily trust in God by praying the Lord’s Prayer daily.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, and when we confess our sins to Him He forgives us completely, 100% (I John 1:9). In the same way God forgives us completely, He commands us to forgive completely those who have sinned against us. In the verses immediately following the Lord’s Prayer Jesus states: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15).

We see this idea in Paul’s letters as well:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

God does not lead us into temptation. We allow ourselves to be led into temptation. James addresses this: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

When we find ourselves in situations of temptation, there is always an Exit sign. All we have to do is follow it:

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (I Corinthians 10:13).

When Jesus died and was raised again, He delivered us from evil:

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him” (I Thessalonians 5:9-10).

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer concludes with a reminder that our lives are about God’s Kingdom, not our own little kingdoms, and moreover that all the power and glory belong to God. God’s Kingdom continues to spread on earth as the Church grows throughout the world, and it will last for all eternity.

Key Verse:

I Thessalonians 5:17—“Pray continually.”

Session 8: The Book of Common Prayer: Part I

The first *Book of Common Prayer* was written and compiled by Thomas Cranmer in 1549. It combined the most important aspects of worship, prayer, and liturgy from both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Reformation. It was revised in 1552, and later revised in 1662. After the Revolutionary War, the Church of England in America became the Episcopal Church. The first version of *The Book of Common Prayer* for the Episcopal Church was ratified in 1789. There have been several revisions, the two most recent being the 1928 and 1979 versions. Currently at Christ Episcopal Church we use the 1979 version of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

The Book of Common Prayer begins with its ratification statement, a preface, words about Christian worship, and the Calendar of the Church Year (we'll look at this more closely later). The remainder of *The Book of Common Prayer* is divided into sixteen sections, the first seven of which are described below.

The Daily Office (37-146)

The services of the Daily Office date back to the Early Church. These services are designed for groups, but can be done alone as well. In some churches they are offered daily. (At Christ Episcopal Church Evening Prayer is offered 5:30pm Monday through Friday evenings). At Anglican monasteries these services are offered every day.

The primary two services of the Daily Office are Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. These services combine sentences of Scripture, confession, Scripture readings, the Apostles Creed, prayers, collects, and thanksgiving. The Rite One services feature traditional language, and the Rite Two services feature contemporary language. The Daily Office also includes Compline (a short service prior to going to sleep), daily devotions, and suggested canticles (hymns of worship from Scripture or the Early Church).

The Great Litany (147-155)

This collection of prayers, confessions, and collects is most often used during Lent and on Rogation Days (days of prayer and fasting in the early summer). Many churches use the Great Litany during Holy Week.

The Collects: Traditional (157-210)

A "collect" is a written prayer that "collects" the themes of the assigned scriptures for a particular service and is to be prayed "collectively" by the congregation. These collects are powerful and are one of the best known features of *The Book of Common Prayer*. In addition to assigned collects for every Sunday of the year, there are also collects for major holy days, saint days, and other occasions.

The Collects: Contemporary (211-261)

These collects are simply the traditional collects in contemporary English.

Proper Liturgies for Special Days (263-295)

This section contains the liturgies used for the primary services of Lent and Holy Week. These services include Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and The Great Vigil of Easter.

Holy Baptism (297-314)

There are two sacraments administered in the Episcopal Church: Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist (Holy Communion). Holy Baptism is a celebratory service, and the liturgy contains prayers, scripture readings, presentation of the candidates, the Baptismal Covenant (a question and answer form of the Apostles Creed), thanksgiving over the water, and the actual baptism. This service is also used for Confirmation, because Confirmation involves a reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant. (We'll examine this service in more detail on November 11).

The Holy Eucharist (315-409)

The Holy Eucharist: Rite One uses traditional language, and offers two different Eucharistic prayers from which to choose. The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two uses contemporary language and offers four different Eucharistic prayers from which to choose. There are two primary parts of Holy Eucharist: The Word of God (prayers, Scripture readings, preaching, creed, confession) and The Holy Communion (Eucharistic prayers and the administration of Holy Communion). (We'll examine this service in more detail on November 18).

Key Verse:

Acts 2:42—“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Session 9: The Book of Common Prayer: Part II

This session we continue our brief survey of the 1979 version of *The Book of Common Prayer*:

Pastoral Offices (411-508)

This section contains liturgies for various pastoral services for the church. These services include confirmation, marriage, thanksgiving for children, Reconciliation of a Penitent, ministrations to the sick and dying, and funeral services, both Rite One and Rite Two. These services are often landmark moments in a Christian's life, and contain rich, biblical liturgies.

Episcopal Services (509-580)

These services are called Episcopal Services because they are led by bishops. (The word "Episcopal" is derived from the Greek word *episcopos*, meaning "elder" or "overseer"). These services include ordination (for bishops, priests, and deacons), Celebration of a New Ministry (when a new vicar or rector begins ministry in a parish), and Consecration of a Church or Chapel (when a new sanctuary is dedicated).

The Psalter, or Psalms of David (581-808)

This is the book of Psalms in liturgical form. They are translated and presented to facilitate corporate reading of Psalms in the various services of the Episcopal Church. The asterisk (*) found in each verse indicates a pause when the Psalms are read aloud. In addition, each Psalm has a short Latin heading that is a phrase from the first verse of that Psalm. There are also headings that identify Psalms to be read during Morning and Evening Prayer so that one can read the Psalter through every month.

Prayers and Thanksgivings (809-842)

This is a set of beautifully written prayers and thanksgivings that can be offered to God either in corporate worship or private devotion. These prayers cover a wide range of topics. At Christ Church one of these prayers is often prayed immediately prior to the beginning of the 11:00 service.

An Outline of the Faith, or Catechism (843-862)

A catechism is a question/answer format of learning the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith. In certain traditions these questions and answers were committed to memory by those being prepared for adult baptism or confirmation. It is a helpful primer on basic Christian beliefs.

Historical Documents of the Church (863-878)

These documents include the Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Natures in the Person of Christ from the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), the Creed of St. Athanasius, the Preface of the First Book of Common Prayer (1549), the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. These are fascinating documents that give us a glimpse of the historic roots of the Episcopal Church.

Tables for Finding the Date of Easter and other Holy Days (879-887)

These tables help one find the calendar dates of moveable feast days, including Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension Day. The Table to Find Easter Day gives the calendar date for Easter Day for the years 1900 through 2089.

The Lectionary (888-932)

The Lectionary for Sundays provides the assigned Scripture passages for every Sunday of the year. Over a three-year cycle the vast majority of the Gospels and New Testament, and a large part of the

Old Testament is covered. The church year begins with the first Sunday of Advent and concludes with Christ the King Sunday (the last Sunday after Pentecost). This section also includes the assigned Scripture readings for Holy Days (921ff).

Daily Office Lectionary (933-1001)

The Daily Office Lectionary provides assigned Scripture passages for use in the Daily Office (Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer) services. On most days there is a reading from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the New Testament, and the Gospels. It is a helpful tool for developing the habit of daily reading of Scripture.

Key Verse:

Hebrews 10:25—“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Session 10: Sacrament of Holy Baptism

In this session we'll examine the Sacrament of Holy Baptism using some of the questions and answers from the Catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 857-858) and the biblical passages from which they are drawn. Then we'll walk through the service for Holy Baptism from *The Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 299ff).

Q. What are the sacraments? A. The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.

Q. What are the two great sacraments of the Gospel? A. The two great sacraments given by Christ to his Church are Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

At the Great Commission Jesus instituted Holy Baptism when He commanded His disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

At the Last Supper Jesus instituted Holy Eucharist: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28). See also Mark 14:22-24 and Luke 22:19-20.

Q. What is Holy Baptism? A. Holy Baptism is the sacrament by which God adopts us as his children and makes us members of Christ's Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5).

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8:15-17).

Q. What is the outward and visible sign in Baptism? A. The outward and visible sign in Baptism is water, in which the person is baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

See Matthew 28:19 above.

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace in Baptism? A. The inward and spiritual grace in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.

See Romans 6:3-5 and 8:15-17 above.

Q. What is required of us at Baptism? A. It is required that we renounce Satan, repent of our sins, and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

“When the people heard this (Peter’s sermon at Pentecost), they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:37-38).

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

“They tell us how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (I Thessalonians 1:9).

Key Verse:

Matthew 28:19—“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Session 11: Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

In this session we'll examine the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist using some of the questions and answers from the Catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 859-860) and the biblical passages from which they are drawn. Then we'll walk through the service for Holy Eucharist: Rite Two from *The Book of Common Prayer* (pp. 355ff).

Q. What is the Holy Eucharist? A. The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again.

Jesus Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper on the evening before He died on the cross for the sins of the world.

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:26-28). See also Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; and I Corinthians 11:23-25.

Q. What is the outward and visible sign in the Eucharist? A. The outward and visible sign in the Eucharist is bread and wine, given and received according to Christ's command.
(See the above passages).

Q. What is the inward and spiritual grace given in the Eucharist? A. The inward and spiritual grace in the Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ give to his people, and received by faith.
(See the above passages).

Q. What is required of us when we come to the Eucharist? A. It is required that we should examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people.

Self-examination prior to partaking of Holy Communion matters. Check out the exhortation about this in *The Book of Common Prayer* (316-317).

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (I Corinthians 11:27-29).

For this reason, prior to receiving communion there is both the Confession/Absolution and the Passing of the Peace in order to ensure that we are right with God and right with our neighbor.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

In *The Book of Common Prayer* there are both Rite One (traditional English, pp. 323ff) and Rite Two (contemporary English, pp. 355ff) liturgies for the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. In addition there are two Rite One forms of the Eucharistic prayer (1 and 2) and four Rite Two forms (A, B, C, and D). Different forms are often used in various seasons of the church calendar.

There are two primary parts of the service of Holy Eucharist: 1) *The Word of God* (opening acclamation, collect, Scripture readings, sermon, creed, prayers of the people, confession/absolution, and passing of the peace) and 2) *The Holy Communion* (The Great Thanksgiving, which concludes with the Lord's Prayer, and the Breaking of the Bread, which includes administration of the bread and wine to the congregation). Following the post-communion prayer the service concludes with the blessing and dismissal. Partaking of Holy Eucharist is a phenomenal privilege, one that should never be taken lightly, for in doing so we obey Jesus' command to remember anew and receive afresh the benefits of His death on the cross for the sins of the world, and His resurrection from the dead.

Key Verse:

I Corinthians 11:24c—“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Session 12: The Church Calendar

The Church Calendar provides an annual structure to commemorate the main events of the Christian story. Each year these events are reviewed through Scripture readings, seasons of the church year, and liturgical colors.

There are six seasons within the Church Year:

- 1) *Advent Season*: From the Latin word meaning “to come to,” this season is one of anticipation of the celebration of the first coming of Jesus (Christmas) and also of the fact that Jesus will come again (Second Coming). It runs for four Sundays prior to Christmas Day. Liturgical color is purple or blue.
- 2) *Christmas Season*: Runs from Christmas Day through January 5 (12 days of Christmas), and commemorates the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Liturgical color is white.
- 3) *Epiphany Season*: From the Greek word for “manifestation,” it runs from January 6 through Shrove Tuesday (the day before Ash Wednesday), and commemorates Jesus being manifested or revealed to the Gentiles. Liturgical color is white on Epiphany (January 6) and green after that.
- 4) *Lenten Season*: Connected with the “lengthening” of days, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and culminates with Holy Week. The focus during Lent is repentance in preparation for the celebration of Easter Day. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (the Friday before Easter Day) are the two primary fast days of the Church Year. Liturgical color is purple. On Good Friday the liturgical color is black.
- 5) *Easter Season*: Begins on Easter evening and runs through the Day of Pentecost. Commemorates the central historical event of the Christian Church, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Liturgical color is white. On the Day of Pentecost we commemorate the falling of the Holy Spirit on the apostles as recorded in Acts 2. Liturgical color is red.
- 6) *Season after Pentecost*: The longest season of the Church Year, this season emphasizes Christian discipleship and mission. Liturgical color is green.

The specific dates of the church year always center on the date of Easter, which is always celebrated on the first Sunday following the first full moon of spring (on or after March 21).

There are seven Principal Feasts in the Church Year: four movable feasts (Easter Day, Ascension Day, The Day of Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday) and three fixed feasts (All Saints Day: November 1; Christmas Day: December 25; and The Epiphany: January 6).

In addition, there are seven additional feasts commemorating other events in the life of Jesus Christ: The Holy Name, The Presentation, The Annunciation, The Visitation, Saint John the Baptist, The Transfiguration, and Holy Cross Day.

There are other additional feast days in the Church Year—see pages 16-30 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

In the book, *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, there are collects and recommended Scripture readings for the various “lesser” feasts and fasts of the Church Year. Many of these days commemorate the lives of apostles and saints. In The Lectionary and Daily Office Lectionary there are also recommended Scripture readings (BCP 887ff).

One of the benefits of paying attention to the yearly rhythm of the Church Year is that the Christian story becomes woven into our lives, into our stories, day by day, year by year. As we commemorate yearly the historical events in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as we commemorate the lives of the apostles and other saints who have gone before us, we gain a richer understanding of and appreciation for our faith in Jesus Christ and our being a part of His Church.

Key Verse:

Joshua 24:15—“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Session 13: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

Here we will begin our examination of the Apostles' Creed, named because some believe that it was originally composed by the twelve Apostles. The word "creed" is derived from the Latin *credo* ("I believe"), and means more than lending intellectual assent; it is to trust in the truth of what we proclaim. The Apostles' Creed has been used in the Western Christian Church since the 4th century, and beautifully summarizes what we believe as Christians:

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

The beliefs proclaimed in the Apostles' Creed are derived from Scripture. The Apostles' Creed is Trinitarian in structure, and so we begin this session with the opening phrase about the First Person of the Trinity, God the Father: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

The Bible never argues for the existence of God, but rather simply proclaims that He exists, as in the very first verse of Scripture: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In fact, the Bible clearly states that to not believe in the existence of God is foolish:

Psalm 14:1 (also 53:1)—"Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'"

In the Apostles' Creed we state three specific aspects of our belief in God: that He is the Father, the Almighty, and the creator of heaven and earth.

1) God is our Father. When Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4), He instructed us to address God as "Our Father." As Christians we are reborn by the Holy Spirit, and made God's children:

John 1:12—"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

Romans 8:15-16—"For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

I John 3:1—"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are."

2) *God is Almighty*, an attribute of God mentioned in Scripture several times, including:

Genesis 17:1—“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.’”

Revelation 1:8—“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

3) *God is the creator of heaven and earth* (Gen. 1:1 above), and our creator too:

Genesis 1:27—“So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God he created them; male and female He created them.”

Colossians 1:16—“For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.”

Key Verse:

Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Session 14: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord

This morning we're going to continue with the Apostles' Creed, beginning the focus on Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord." We'll examine the Name of Jesus of Christ, as well as His identity as the Son of God and our Lord.

1) The Name of Jesus Christ:

The Name, "Jesus" is the equivalent of the Hebrew name, "Joshua," and it means "Yahweh saves." Thus, Jesus' very Name reveals His identity as the Savior of the world. As the angel told Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20b-21).

This is also reflected in the Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy: "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15).

Jesus Himself explicitly describes His role as Savior to the Pharisee, Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

The word "Christ" is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word "Messiah," which means "Anointed One." Jesus Christ fulfilled all the prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the coming Messiah, the Anointed One.

The Apostle Peter explicitly confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah: "He (Jesus) said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God'" (Matthew 16:15-16).

At His trial Jesus acknowledged His identity as the Messiah: "Again the high priest asked him (Jesus), 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus said, 'I am'" (Mark 14:61b-62a).

2) Jesus Christ is the Son of God:

Mark opens his account of the Gospel by declaring Jesus' identity as the Son of God: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God..." (Mark 1:1).

The angel, Gabriel, proclaimed to Mary that Jesus is the Son of God, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:31a).

At His baptism Jesus was proclaimed to be the Son of God by God the Father: "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased'" (Matthew 3:16-17; see also Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; and John 1:31-34).

Witnesses of Jesus' death on the cross declared Him to be the Son of God: "Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'" (Matthew 27:54).

Jesus' identity as the Son of God was also declared by His resurrection: "...the gospel concerning his (God's) Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:3-4).

3) Jesus Christ is our Lord:

We are called not only to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, but also to confess Him as our Lord: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

At Confirmation you will be asked, "Do you promise to follow and obey him (Jesus Christ) as your Lord?" (BCP 303).

Key Verse:

Mark 1:1—"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God..." (Mark 1:1).

Session 15: He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary

This morning we're going to continue with the Apostles' Creed, examining the sentence, "He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." We'll examine this in Scripture, The Nicene Creed, and the catechism from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

The Virgin Birth in Scripture:

Matthew 1:18-25—"Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us' (Isaiah 7:14). When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus."

Luke 1:26-35—"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'"

Luke 2:1-7—"In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

The Virgin Birth in The Nicene Creed:

"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. 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" (BCP 358).

The Virgin Birth in the catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer (849-850)*:

Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary?

A. We mean that by God's own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother.

Q. Why did he take our human nature?

A. The divine Son became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God, and be made heirs of God's kingdom.

The Virgin Birth is of vital importance to our Christian faith because it means Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. Because of this, His death on the cross for the sins of the world and resurrection from the dead, both of which are actual events in history, are sufficient for the salvation of all who put their faith in Him:

“For in him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

Because of the Virgin Birth, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, is indeed “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Key Verse:

Luke 1:35—“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.”

**Session 16: He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

This morning we're going to continue with the Apostles' Creed and look more closely at why Jesus' suffering and death are so important—"He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." In his First Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul wrote, "For I handed on to you as of *first importance* what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried" (15:3-4a).

Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. The catechism from *The Book of Common Prayer* describes this: "Q. What is the great importance of Jesus' suffering and death? A. By his obedience, even to suffering and death, Jesus made the offering which we could not make; in him we are freed from the power of sin and reconciled to God" (850). Through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross He saved us, atoned for our sin, reconciled us to God, redeemed us, and justified us.

1) Through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross He *saved* us from sin and death:

Luke 19:10—"The Son of Man came to seek out and to *save* the lost."

I Timothy 1:15b—"Christ Jesus came into the world to *save* sinners."

John 3:17—"God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be *saved* through him."

2) Through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross He *atoned* for our sins, that is, he paid the price on our behalf:

Romans 3:24c-25a—"...Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a *sacrifice of atonement* by his blood, effective through faith."

I John 2:2—"He (Jesus) is the *atonement sacrifice* for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

I John 4:10—"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the *atonement sacrifice* for our sins."

3) Through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross He *reconciled* us to God:

II Corinthians 5:19a—"... in Christ God was *reconciling* the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them..."

Colossians 1:19-20—"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

4) Through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross He *redeemed* us, that is, bought us back from sin and death:

Ephesians 1:7-8a—“In him we have *redemption* through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.”

Colossians 1:13-14—“He (Jesus) has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have *redemption*, the forgiveness of sins.”

5) Through Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross He *justified* us, that is, made us righteous (innocent) in God’s eyes:

Romans 3:22b-24a—“For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now *justified* by his grace as a gift.”

How can we respond to Jesus, who saved us, atoned for our sins, reconciled us to God, redeemed us, and justified us—all through His suffering and death? All these things are gifts of God’s grace. All we are to do is repent (turn to God), put our faith (belief and trust) in Him and receive Him:

John 1:12—“To all who received him (Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

Key Verse:

1 Timothy 1:15b—“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

Session 17: “He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.”

“He descended to the dead:”

What happened when Jesus “descended to the dead” after His death on the cross? In the catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* we see:

“Q. What do we mean when we say that he descended to the dead?

A. We mean that he went to the departed and offered them also the benefits of redemption” (BCP 850).

The Scriptural reference to this is found in the First Epistle of Peter:

“For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He (Jesus) was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison” (3:18-19).

This means that all who lived and died prior to the coming of Jesus still had the opportunity to receive salvation through Him, and Jesus Himself gave them this opportunity.

“On the third day he rose again:”

All four accounts of the Gospel contain narratives on the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead: Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; and John 20:1-10.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate sign that He is who He said He is, the Son of God:

“... this gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Romans 1:3-4).

Just prior to raising His friend, Lazarus, from the dead, Jesus declared:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26a).

Again, in the catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* the significance of Jesus’ resurrection is clearly identified:

“Q. What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection?

A. By his resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life” (BCP 850).

Through faith in Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, we are guaranteed of being raised from the dead as well and having eternal life, as we see in these classic words from the Apostle Paul:

“When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: Death has been swallowed up on victory...”

thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:54, 57).

At our baptism we were united with Christ in His death and resurrection and therefore have the hope of eternal life through Him, as the Apostle Paul describes in his Letter to the Romans:

“Therefore we have been buried with him (Jesus) by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For is we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his... if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (6:4-5, 8).

The hope we have in eternal life through Jesus Christ is not a myth or a fairy tale or a psychological crutch. It is the truth, because it is based on the historic fact of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ☺!

Key Verse:

John 11:25—“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live”

**Session 18: “He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.”**

“He ascended into heaven”

After Jesus was raised from the dead He appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) and His disciples (Luke 24:36-49; I Corinthians 15:3-8). After these encounters with His disciples, the risen Jesus ascended into heaven, as we see at the conclusion of the Gospel according to Luke:

“Then he (Jesus) led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:50-53).

Luke also wrote the Book of Acts, the story of the beginning of the Church and the spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. He begins this story with the ascension of Jesus into heaven:

“(Jesus said), ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:8-11).

“and is seated at the right hand of the Father”

When Jesus ascended into heaven He took our human nature into heaven (Jesus is fully God and fully man), and was seated at the right hand of God the Father, the place of highest honor. There Jesus intercedes (prays) for us. We see these things clearly in Scripture:

“God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:20-23).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

“It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34).

This is also described in the catechism from *The Book of Common Prayer*:

“Q. What do we mean when we say that he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father?”

A. We mean that Jesus took our human nature into heaven where he now reigns with the Father and intercedes for us” (BCP 850).

When Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, was dying, Jesus, at the right hand of God, stood to honor him:

“But filled with the Holy Spirit, he (Stephen) gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

In the Old Testament we see in Elijah, who appeared with Moses and spoke with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), a foreshadowing of Jesus’ ascension:

“As they (Elijah and Elisha) continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven” (II Kings 2:11).

Key Verse:

Luke 24:51—“While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven”

Session 19: “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

When Jesus ascended into heaven two angels told those present that He would return again:

“They (two angels) said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11).

While there is much mystery surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, there are at least three things we know for sure:

- 1) Jesus Christ will come back unexpectedly.
- 2) Jesus Christ is the final Judge.
- 3) We can look forward to His Second Coming, not fear it.

1) Jesus Christ will come back unexpectedly:

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36).

“For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (I Thessalonians 5:2).

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (II Peter 3:10a).

2) Jesus Christ is the final Judge:

“For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil” (II Corinthians 5:10).

In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus powerfully describes what will happen when He returns to judge the living and the dead:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly

I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

3) *We can look forward to the Second Coming, not fear it:*

"And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:27-28).

"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment" (I John 4:16b-17a).

Finally, at the very end of the Bible we are encouraged to await the Second Coming of Jesus Christ with anticipation:

"The one (Jesus) who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

Key Verse:

I John 4:16b-17a—"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment."

Session 20: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

The Person of the Holy Spirit

1) In the catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* we find a succinct description of the Person of the Holy Spirit:

“Q. Who is the Holy Spirit? A. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and in the Church even now” (852).

2) When Jesus instituted the sacrament of Holy Baptism at the Great Commission, He included the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 28:19—“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

3) The Holy Spirit is also included in the following benediction:

II Corinthians 13:14—“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

4) All three Persons of the Trinity were present at the baptism of Jesus:

Matthew 3:16—“And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.”

5) Holy Scripture (the Bible) was inspired by the Holy Spirit:

II Timothy 3:16a—“All scripture is inspired by God.”

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit works in our lives in many ways, seven of which are:

1) The Holy Spirit enables us to declare Jesus as Lord:

I Corinthians 12:3b—“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

2) The Holy Spirit leads us into truth:

John 14:17—Jesus said, “This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides in you and he will be in you.”

3) The Holy Spirit assures us of our identity as God’s children:

Romans 8:15b-16—“When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God.”

4) The Holy Spirit empowers us to be witnesses for Jesus Christ:

Acts 1:8—Jesus said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

5) The Holy Spirit reminds us of God's Word:

John 14:26—"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all I have said to you."

6) The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to help us follow Jesus Christ:

Philippians 2:13—"For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

7) The Holy Spirit develops Christ-like character in our lives:

Galatians 5:22-23—"By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."

Receiving the Holy Spirit

To receive a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, all we have to do is ask God:

Luke 11:13—Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Ephesians 5:18b—"Be filled with the Spirit."

Key Verse:

Ephesians 5:18b—"Be filled with the Spirit."

Session 21: “the holy catholic church, the communion of saints”

In the catechism of *The Book of Common Prayer* there is a description of “the holy catholic church” (BCP 854-855). This description is grounded in Scripture, as indicated below by what follows each Q/A:

Q. What is the Church?

A. The Church is the community of the New Covenant.

- This New Covenant was established by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross (Hebrews 8:6), and celebrated at Holy Eucharist (Matthew 26:27-28).

Q. How is the Church described in the Bible?

A. The Church is described as the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members. It is called the People of God, the New Israel, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and the pillar and ground of truth.

- These descriptions of the Church are found in I Corinthians 12:12-13; Colossians 1:18; I Peter 2:9-10; and I Timothy 3:15.

Q. How is the Church described in the creeds?

A. The Church is described as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

- This is found in the Nicene Creed (BCP 326 and 358).

Q. Why is the Church described as one?

A. The Church is one, because it is one Body, under one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Again, see I Corinthians 12:12-13 and Colossians 1:18.

Q. Why is the Church described as holy?

A. The Church is holy, because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, consecrates its members, and guides them to do God's work.

- This is found in I Corinthians 6:11 and Galatians 5:16-25.

Q. Why is the Church described as catholic?

A. The Church is catholic, because it proclaims the whole Faith to all people, to the end of time.

- This is found in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and in Paul's description of the mission of the Church (Ephesians 4:13).

Q. Why is the Church described as apostolic?

A. The Church is apostolic, because it continues in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles and is sent to carry out Christ's mission to all people.

- This is found in the description of the early church in Acts 2:42, and also in Ephesians 2:20.

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

- This is the ministry of reconciliation, as Paul describes in II Corinthians 5:16-21, and is based on the fact that through Jesus' death on the cross God has reconciled us to Himself. In response to that we are called to be reconciled with one another as well.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

- These aspects of the Church's mission are found in Acts 2:42-47, James 5:16, John 4:24, Matthew 28:18-20, and Matthew 25:31-46.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

- All Christians are ministers of the Gospel, not just full time clergy, missionaries, youth ministers, etc. Paul makes this abundantly clear in Romans 12:1-8 and I Corinthians 12:12-31.

Being part of the Church also means experiencing “the communion of saints,” a relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ that transcends both time and space (Hebrews 12:1). That is why Christians can meet other Christians from anywhere in the world and experience a sort of instant connection; it's the bond all Christians share through Jesus Christ.

Key Verse:

Colossians 1:18a—“He (Jesus Christ) is the head of the body, the church.”

Session 22: “the forgiveness of sins”

God loves all of us. All of us are sinners. Therefore, God loves sinners. Because God loves sinners, we can believe in “the forgiveness of sins.”

God’s forgiveness of our sins is a gift we receive from God through faith in Jesus Christ:

“The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus answered, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance’” (Luke 5:30-32).

“The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29).

“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost” (I Timothy 1:15).

“But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Jesus died on the cross as the sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the world:

“But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the *atonement sacrifice* for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:1b-2).

“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the *atonement sacrifice* for our sins” (I John 4:10).

“For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a *sacrifice of atonement* through faith in his blood, effective through faith” (Romans 3:22b-25a).

“For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In response to the amazing love of God who gives us the gift of His forgiveness of our sins, we are to give that same gift to others:

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

“Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Colossians 3:13).

When we sin, instead of wallowing in guilt we are to confess those sins to God, receive His forgiveness, and rejoice in His grace:

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9)

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us” (Psalm 103:12, BCP 734).

“You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19c).

“Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away” (Psalm 32:1, BCP 624).

Key Verse:

I John 4:10—“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins”

Session 23: “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting”

The resurrection of the body:

Through Jesus Christ we have the hope of eternal life in a resurrected and restored physical body. There are several passages in Scripture that attest to this:

Before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus told Martha (Lazarus’ sister), “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

One of the classic passages in the New Testament epistles about the resurrection is I Corinthians 15. Here are a few highlights of this passage: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ... For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: Death has been swallowed up in victory... thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:20-22, 52b-54, and 57).

In our baptism we are guaranteed of resurrection through Jesus Christ: “For if we have been united with him (Jesus) in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his... if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Romans 6:5, 8).

Jesus Christ Himself will play an active role in our resurrection:

Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Jesus said, “Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29).

Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day” (John 6:44).

The life everlasting:

In both the Old and New Testaments we see that at the heart of life everlasting is being in the presence of God Himself, and seeing Him face to face:

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:25-27a).

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them: they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true’” (Revelation 21:3-5).

Life everlasting, like our creation and salvation, is a gift from Jesus Christ:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:11; 27-28).

Key Verse:

John 3:16—“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”