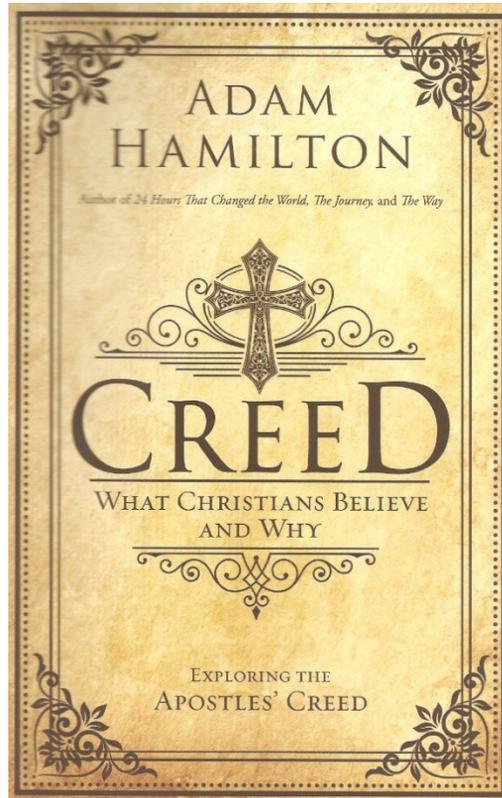


Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd 2019 Lenten Student/Mentor Handbook



Student Name: _____

Mentor Name: _____

6th-8th Graders: Please return handbook to **Linda B.** by **Wednesday, April 24.**

9th Graders: Please return handbook to **Pastor Mary** by **Wednesday, April 24.**



Session 1: God

- If you were God and wanted to prove your existence to the world, what would you do?
- If you could ask God to do one thing to prove His existence, what would you ask for?

The Apostles' Creed identifies God as "the Father Almighty." That phrase is partly about our belief that God is the "creator of heaven and earth" (although notice that the Creed doesn't give a blow-by-blow account of how God created; it simply states God did). But it's even more about our relationship to our (and everyone and everything else's) Creator.

Christians call God "Father" because Jesus did, and told us to as well. The name Father connects us to biblical truth, historic tradition, and Jesus' own prayer life. We don't judge God by our human relationships to see how well God measures up. Instead, we measure our human relationships by the standard God sets in God's relationship with us!

The Bible talks about and pictures God in many ways: as a mother, as a winged bird, as a rock, as a tower, and more. We need a variety of names and images for God.

- How close is your relationship with God? How, if at all, has it changed over time?
- What about Jesus most clearly shows you that God exists for you and loves you?

Read Exodus 2:23-3:15

- Moses see a burning bush that is burning but is not burned up. What does this "amazing sight" (verse 3) suggest about how God is and acts in the world?
- What does God's name (verse 14) tell us about God's freedom from human control?
- God assures Moses, "I'll be with you" (verse 12). How can people know God is with them today? How do you know God is with you?
- How would you describe your relationship with God right now: a burning bush? A flickering shrub? A few ashes in the wind?

What do you believe?

A new thought I had about God in this session: _____

A question I still have about God after this session: _____

One thing I want others to know I believe about God: _____

Share a high and low and then close in prayer.

Session 2: Jesus Christ

- My favorite Bible story about Jesus is _____ because _____.
- One thing the Bible doesn't tell us about Jesus that I want to know is _____

The Creed tells more of Jesus' story than we might realize, simply by identifying its main character as "Jesus Christ, (God's) only Son, our Lord." In the Hebrew and Aramaic of Jesus' day (Jesus spoke Aramaic), his name was "Yeshua." "Jesus Christ" was also translated in the Hebrew language as "Messiah" which means anointed one. So, what makes *this* Messiah, Jesus, different from the rest? Part of the Creed's answer is that Jesus is God's "only Son."

Jesus understood himself to be connected to God in an extremely close and personal way. Jesus invited everyone to relate to God as a child relates to a parent. Why then does the Creed call Jesus God's "only" Son? When they called Jesus "Son of God," they were trying to put this incredibly close connection between Jesus and God into words—identifying the two of them without confusing the two of them.

Restricting itself to biblical language, the Apostles' Creed doesn't answer all our questions about Jesus' relationship to God.

- If someone asked you to tell them the story of Jesus for the first time, how would you tell it?
- If you were asked to add one sentence to the Creed about Jesus' life between his birth and death, what would you write?

Read Luke 8:22-25.

- What is significant about the fact that the disciples call him "Master"?
- What has been a "storm" for you in which you've heard Jesus ask, "Where is your faith?"

Read 1 Corinthians 15:11

- When have stories you've received from the church helped you know Jesus, yourself, and others better?
- What does "Christ died for our sins" mean to you? What is God saying to you in this passage?

What do you believe?

A new thought I had about Jesus in this session: _____

A question I still have about Jesus after this session: _____

One thing I want others to know I believe about Jesus: _____

Share a high and low and then close in prayer.

Session 3: The Holy Spirit

- When you hear the term “Holy Spirit,” what immediately comes to your mind?
- Who is someone you know or know about whom you think is spiritually gifted, and why?

The Apostles’ Creed summarizes the early Church’s experience of Jesus. His earliest followers found, after his resurrection, that even when he was no longer with them physically—after, as the Creed says, “he ascended into heaven”—he was still with them spiritually. Matthew’s Gospel even ends with Jesus promising his disciples, “I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age” (28:20).

The Holy Spirit is Jesus’ spirit. The Holy Spirit is Jesus with us, on this side of Easter—still loving us, comforting us, guiding us, inspiring us. The Holy Spirit is God’s wind, God’s breath. The Spirit gives existence and life. Jesus’ conception is the only miracle from his earthly life, other than the Resurrection, mentioned in the Creed. We tend to think about Jesus forgiving us, but Scripture also credits the pardon we receive to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers us to know God and Jesus and to begin a life in their presence now that will continue and be made perfect after we die.

The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to the whole church. The Spirit is also God’s gift to every individual Christian. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, is at work in and around you right now.

- Where, how, and in whom do you see the Holy Spirit active today?
- What do you think your spiritual gifts might be? Who do you (or could you) talk to in order to discover your gifts more clearly?

Read Luke 4:14-30 (These verses are Luke’s account of the first sermon Jesus preached in his public ministry, and its aftermath, in Nazareth, the village where Jesus grew up.)

- Why do you think Jesus chooses to read these verses?
- What things go on at your school or in your community that lead you to believe Satan is real?
- Why does the congregation in Nazareth stop admiring Jesus (verse 22) and become so angry with him that they want to kill him (verses 28 and 29)?
- How did Jesus resist the devil? What have you found helpful in resisting temptation?

What do you believe?

A new thought I had about the Holy Spirit in this session: _____

A question I still have about the Holy Spirit after this session: _____

One thing I want others to know I believe about the Holy Spirit: _____

Share a high and low and then close in prayer.

Session 4: The Church and the Communion of Saints

- Name one thing you really like about your church.
- If you had to choose one word to describe your church, what would it be?

According to recent research, 78 percent of American high school and college students say they believe in God, but only 41 percent say they go to weekly religious services. Overall, the percentage of Americans who seldom or never attend church services is going up. The early church didn't spend time worrying about whether people "went to church." They were too busy *being* the church.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke reports that the earliest believers met together every day. They didn't have a strategy for "growing the church." Instead, they loved one another and loved their neighbors, and *God* "added daily to the community those who were being saved." (See verse 47, Acts 2:42-47.) People want to know that they are loved and want a community where they can show love in return. When the church is asking, not "How do we get more people here?" but "How do we love people wherever they are at?" then it's giving up to its calling. Then it really is acting as what the Apostles' Creed calls "the holy catholic church."

So, if being the church matters more than going to church—if following Jesus by loving others is what the church is all about—how concerned should we be about how many people do or don't come? After all, can't we love God anywhere? Aren't there neighbors we can serve all around us, every day?

- How connected are you to your church body? How can you help the "body" function better?
- What are some specific, practical ways your congregation carries out the church's mission of loving one another and loving its neighbors?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (These verses are part of the Apostle Paul's extended description of the church as "the body of Christ.")

- Why does Paul say Christ is like a body?
- What part of Christ's body do you think you are most like, and why? Would others in the church say the same about you?
- On a scale of 1 ("whatever") to 10 ("I care a lot"), how important is it for you to fit in? Be popular? Be unique?

What do you believe?

A new thought I had about the church in this session: _____

A question I still have about the church in this session: _____

One thing I want others to know I believe about the church: _____

Share a high and low and then close in prayer.

Session 5: The Forgiveness of Sins

- What is your earliest memory of getting caught doing something you knew was wrong?
- Are some actions unforgivable? Why or why not?

We human beings oftentimes take God for granted, and we actively choose against God. We betray Him, and we let him down. Sometimes we even try to justify it. Sometimes we don't even say we're sorry. The Apostle Paul explains the situation this way, "all are treated as righteous freely by God's grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24

The Apostles' Creed declares the early church's belief in the forgiveness of sins. Christians have always believed that Jesus died and was raised in order to save us from the spiritual consequences of our sins."

In Christian theology, Jesus' work of saving us from sin is called the atonement. Jesus atones for what we have done wrong—he "makes up for it." He makes our relationship with God possible when we, left to ourselves, would throw it away.

We need to forgive as we have been forgiven. If God's forgiving us our sins doesn't lead us to forgiving those who sin against us, then we haven't experienced God's pardon, and we are still enslaved to the power of sin. Forgiveness doesn't mean pretending other people have done nothing wrong, or that we are not hurt by their actions. And it doesn't mean putting ourselves in a situation where we are almost certain to be hurt again. But it does mean refusing to let the way they wronged us define us, or them.

- When have you been most aware of God's forgiveness of your sins?
- When have you had a hard time forgiving someone? What did you do (or what are you now doing) about it?

Read Luke 7:36-50

- Why is Simon, the Pharisee, so scandalized by the woman who interrupts his dinner with Jesus, and by Jesus' reaction to her?
- How do you show gratitude to God for forgiving your sins in Jesus?
- How does Jesus' forgiveness of the woman's sins show who Jesus is?

What do you believe?

A new thought I had about forgiveness in this session: _____

A question I still have about forgiveness after this session: _____

One thing I want others to know I believe about forgiveness: _____

Share a high and low and then close in prayer.

Session 6: The Resurrection of the Body

- Are you basically an optimist or a pessimist? Why?
- What image first comes to mind when you think about heaven?

The Apostles' Creed concludes with two very specific affirmations about the future: "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." The resurrection of the body refers to the Christian hope that God will give us new life after we die. In the new life God alone gives us, we will still be ourselves. In fact, we will be more ourselves than we ever can be in this life because we will no longer have to struggle against sin and evil. God will save and make perfect everything that makes *you* in the life to come.

"New Jerusalem" represents God's re-creation of all things, a new heaven and a new earth where God and humanity live together again as they did in the garden of Eden. We Christians look forward not just to our own salvation, but to the time when God will be "making all things new." Revelation 21:5

When we really believe in the life everlasting, we can't rest content and complacent with this life, this world, as it is. Until it arrives, this world is still God's world, and we still live in it as God's chosen and commissioned people.

- What will be the best thing about the life everlasting?
- How does the hope of life everlasting motivate you to act in this life?

Read Revelation 21:1-5 and 21:22-26:6 (The early Christian prophet John received a vision of New Jerusalem—the new world God promised to create at the end of time.)

- What features of John's vision appeal to you the most? Which ones, if any, confuse you?
- Why is there no temple (the special meeting place of God and humanity) in the New Jerusalem (21:22)?
- What modern images would you use to describe everlasting life and God's new world?
- What common hopes do people seem to have about heaven?

What do you believe?

A new thought I had about God's promised future in this session: _____

A question I still have about God's promised future after this session: _____

One thing I want others to know I believe about God's promised future: _____

Share a high and low and then close in prayer.