

What we believe and teach about...

The Sacrament of Baptism

1. Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize “all peoples.”
Matthew 28:19.
2. Children have as great a need for salvation as do adults. Psalm 51:5
3. We have recorded evidence in Scripture itself that states it was the practice of the Apostles to baptize “whole households” ~ a term indicative of the presence of both young and old.
Acts 2:38-39
4. To deny that it is possible at infancy to have lifesaving faith implies that man must cooperate in conversion. Ephesians 2:8-9
5. Baptism is not an action of man toward God but of God towards man. There is power in the sacrament! Romans 6:1-11
6. The practice of infant baptism was well established and universally accepted in the Christian Church from apostolic times, according to the church fathers.

What we believe and teach about...

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

What does the Bible say?

Matthew 26:26-28 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.” (Similar accounts of Jesus’ celebration of the Lord’s Supper are also reported in **Mark 14:22-25** and **Luke 22:17-20**. They are not repeated here because His language is identical.)

1 Corinthians 10:16,17 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

1 Corinthians 11:24-26 And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 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.

Summary Comments:

The Bible says we eat bread and drink wine. It says when we eat bread and drink wine we also share in the body and blood of Jesus. That is our position. All four elements are miraculously present. In/with/under the bread and wine we truly receive the body and blood of Jesus. Not because it makes sense, but because God’s Word is clear.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 repeats for emphasis the fact that in the Lord’s Supper people eat bread and drink wine. Also for emphasis it says that if we do it in a manner that is unprepared and lacking in faith, we violate the sacrament and “sin against the body and blood of Jesus.” This passage also explains why Lutheran Christians want to make sure that those who receive the Lord’s Supper understand what they are doing and approach the Lord’s table with faith. The Lord’s Supper is powerful because of God’s promise, not because a pastor makes it so, or those who take it make it so. It is power that can help or hurt a Christian according to this passage; therefore, we offer the Lord’s Supper only to those who can “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.” (*verses 28, 29*) Notice, this is not a “Lutheran” position imposed by some pastor or

denomination. It is a clear Biblical teaching and so we attempt to honor it in our church. On the basis of the Gospel witness and the clear passages of 1 Corinthians 10:16,17 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, we teach that communicants eat the bread and drink the wine and at the same time, mysteriously and miraculously, receive the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. You will never see or taste the body and blood of Jesus but we believe they are truly present because (and only because) God's words says so in these passages. We also believe that those who do not recognize this view can take the sacrament to their spiritual harm and should, therefore, not approach the sacrament as explained in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

What are some questions to ask before receiving the Lord's Supper?

Are you a believer in Christ (Hebrews 11:6)?

Are you sorry for your sins (Proverbs 28:13)?

Do you believe that with the bread and wine Christ offers His body
and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16)?

Are you willing to forgive those who have sinned against you (Matthew 6:14 – 15)?

What conditions would prohibit Christians from receiving
the Lord's Supper?

Disbelief. John 10:25-27, Hebrews 11:6

A heart unwilling to forgive another person. Matthew 6:14,15

Hatred. 1 John 4:19-21

A refusal to recognize the Body and Blood of Jesus together with the bread and wine in the sacrament. 1
Corinthians 11:28,29

A persistent disruption of the true faith by a refusal to accept the chief doctrines of the Bible and the
Christian Church. Romans 16:17,18.

What about Children and the Lord's Supper?

Some things have no bearing on a person's readiness to receive the Lord's Supper:

Gender... before God, one gender is just as important as the other.

Intelligence... smart people aren't preferred by God.

Social Standing... you don't have to have own or wear designer clothes to be welcomed at the Lord's
Table.

Age... getting older doesn't make a person worthy nor unworthy.

Church Membership... hypocrites are sometimes found even in Christian Churches. Membership isn't the
issue.

Confirmation... Just because a person understood and affirmed the truth of God's teaching at age thirteen
doesn't mean they still understand and believe those truths today.

Religious Behavior... (sometimes called piety) Martin Luther correctly said, "Fasting and other bodily
preparations are a wonderful outward training... but they don't automatically make you worthy and well
prepared to receive the sacrament."

What prepares a Christian to receive the Lord's Supper as God intends?

Only God's grace and favor - His mercy, forgiveness and loving-kindness.

A willingness to acknowledge my sinful condition and a humble reliance on the grace and mercy of God. 1
John 1:8,9

A personal faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. Isaiah 53:4-6,
Philippians 3:7-9

A personal belief that, together with the forms of bread and wine, those who commune miraculously and
unexplainably receive the body and blood of Jesus as clearly taught in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 10:16, and 1
Corinthians 11:23-27.

Christians who have repented of their sins, and those with weak faith are especially encouraged to receive the
Lord's Supper. It is expressly given for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith. Isaiah 42:3,
John 6:37, Luke 5:31,32.

Christians who have been instructed in the Scriptures that teach about the Lord's Supper. This sacrament is

different from baptism in two ways. 1.) Jesus said “Do this in remembrance of Me,” which requires that we would know who Jesus is and what He has done for us by His death and resurrection. 2.) Those who commune must first examine their beliefs and heart before receiving the Lord’s Supper. Taken lightly, in disbelief, or without proper understanding, the Bible says such participation in the Sacrament is detrimental to saving faith. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

Finally, it should be said that the Lord’s Supper is God’s gift to Christians, and **not** something **Christians do** to earn forgiveness from God.

How old should a Christian be to receive the Lord’s Supper?

It is not a question of age, but rather the Biblical standards listed above. A communicant must be old enough to be instructed in the Biblical teaching. Old enough to examine the claims of Christ, and the Bible’s teaching on this matter so that it is a blessing and not a detriment to their faith.

Historically, even in Jesus’ life, a child was welcomed to full participation in the covenant activities of the Church at age twelve. Luke 2:41,42.

Our custom is a preparation for first communion at age twelve or thirteen. We recognize that other Christian Churches provide instruction and permit reception of the Lord’s Supper at an earlier age. We do not consider those churches in violation of any Biblical command. They have freedom to establish procedures that they believe best honor the Biblical directives.

The practice at St. John is for a child to receive two years of instruction during the seventh and eighth grade years of school. First Communion is offered on Ash Wednesday of a student’s eighth grade year. It is not right or wrong. It is just our custom and practice based on ancient tradition and a belief that, developmentally, children of this age are able to appropriate abstract thoughts required by this teaching, i.e. “That a communicant literally eats bread and wine but miraculously (with it) receives the body and blood of Jesus.”

We realize that children who have been instructed in other congregations may wish to continue their past communion practice at St. John. We are not inclined to legalistically deny the sacrament to these children. At the same time we would like worshippers at St. John to honor our local practice just as we honor and accept the practice of other congregations.

If a family feels strongly that their instructed child should not discontinue a former practice of receiving the Lord’s Supper, we ask those families to make an appointment with one of our pastors to discuss this matter. We want to preserve the unity of our congregation while not causing offense either to new members or old members over this issue. Our pastors would want to examine the beliefs of such children and to discuss what would be best in each individual situation.

The Lord’s Supper is a wonderful gift of God. In Baptism He miraculously claims us as His children, washing away our sins and granting us the gift of His Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38) In this sacrament, the Lord maintains His intimacy with us and in a tangible way reminds us of His great love. The sacrament is a gift He intends for Christians to receive often in remembrance of Him and in proclamation of the salvation that comes by grace through faith in Jesus alone.