

The Lord's Supper

What is the Lord's Supper?

It is a *meal* – hosted by Christ and shared at God's family table. It is a good gift given to God's people – a sacrament – by which God makes known to us the promise of God's redeeming work in Christ. Even as the Word of God and a sermon put that promise to our ears, in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the gifts of bread and the fruit of the vine put that promise before our eyes and into our hands.



What happens during the Lord's Supper?

Nothing less than a *miracle*, every

time! Christ himself is the one who welcomes us to the Table, and Christ himself offers to us spiritual food for our spiritual life. We cannot possibly understand how, but by faith we believe that the Holy Spirit is at work so that even as our bodies are nourished as with bread and cup, our very souls are nourished with Christ's body and blood. By the Spirit, Christ offers us these sustaining gifts, and by faith we receive them. Our Belgic Confession calls *faith* the hand and mouth of our souls!

Who is invited to come to the Table, to receive these gifts?

All who are baptized and who trust Christ is the one through whom God is redeeming the world – including them! – are welcome to

come to the Table to receive the gifts of bread and wine/juice. In baptism, God adopts us in Christ as God's children; then, just as any good parent would nourish a newborn child, God nourishes us,



so that we might *grow* as God's children. Since this is the good gift that God gives to God's children, it is offered to *all* God's children, no matter how strong or fragile their faith may seem, no matter how mature or immature. It's *that* faith that God longs to nourish. If someone is not baptized, but feels the Spirit is compelling them to participate in the Lord's Supper, then surely the Spirit is compelling them to be washed in the waters of baptism, too.

Why do we "lift up our hearts" and then pray at the Table?

We "lift up our hearts" so that we might not miss the miracle that happens: that we have profound communion with Christ, and with all those in Christ, during the celebration. Even as Jesus did, we receive all God's good gifts with thankfulness. The sacrament is

one of God's good gifts that holds before our memory the most extraordinary of God's gifts: Christ himself for our salvation. So, in prayer, we give thanks to God for all creation and for the redeeming work of Christ for all creation. Then we ask God to send the Holy Spirit, so we might both truly receive God's gifts in this sacrament and experience the hope of the new creation when we do.

Why do we sometimes pass the gifts to one another where we sit, and other times we go forward?

No matter *how* we celebrate the sacrament, Christ offers the same good gifts and we receive them as *one body*. Passing a tray to another and looking another in the eye to say, "The body of Christ for you" and "The blood of Christ for you," and then waiting to eat or drink until we all eat or drink together, is one way to experience that unity with one another. Going forward and receiving a piece of bread,

freshly torn from the same loaf, dipped into a common cup,



is another expression of that unity. In the sacrament, first *God* offers us a good gift, and we offer ourselves in return. Coming forward may be seen as an expression of that offering, too.

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What could I think about during the sacrament?

Many different things! It's certainly fitting to remember and give thanks for Christ's death on the cross, but remember also Christ's glorious resurrection. This is a feast of God's victory!



Remember that *in Christ, we died to sin, and in Christ, we*

are already raised to new life! So think about life in Christ! Give thanks for God's redeeming work: think about how you have experienced this in your life and in the world. Revel in the mystery of belonging to God's family, and delight in being among family during this sacramental meal. Perhaps pray: "Christ, you are life. By your Spirit, by this meal, restore life to me – and to us all." "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." "Spirit of God, strengthen me anew to be God's servant, doing God's work in the world."

What could I tell a child about the Lord's Supper, to make the feast more meaningful for him or her?

With joy, how about something along this line? "This is a meal. Jesus welcomes us here. We are gathering at God's family table. Remember that in baptism, God marked you as God's child, and now God gives you good food so

you grow strong as God's child. God's Word helps your faith in Jesus to grow, and so does this meal. Give thanks to God for *all* the good gifts God has given you: Jesus, our friends here at church, our family, friends, even books, school, your warm bed '

Invite a child to draw pictures that go along with the thanksgiving prayer we offer: Pictures of creation, and everyone in heaven singing "Holy, holy, holy!" Pictures of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Pictures of the Holy Spirit doing big things in little people.



When do we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and why then?

The Lord's Supper celebrates all God's good gifts, but especially the gift of redeeming all things in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The best way to live into such celebration would be to receive the Lord's Supper every time the redeeming work of Christ is proclaimed from the pulpit and put to our ears – and that happens every Sunday! Even if we do not

celebrate the sacrament every Sunday, we can choose a pattern of celebration that draws our attention to the redeeming work of Christ, from his Incarnation to the promise of this coming again. That is, we can celebrate the sacrament in tandem with the seasons and celebration days of the Christian Year, since these are themselves a devotional gift used by the church to tell the story of salvation. So we will gather at the Table to remember each Sunday of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter; and on the days celebrating the glory of Christ, namely, Christmas, Epiphany Sunday, Baptism of the Lord Sunday, Transfiguration Sunday, and Pentecost; and on the Sundays commemorating the Trinity and Christ the King. What will happen during the long green, growing season of Ordinary Time that happens to span the summer and fall? Nothing ordinary! Our longing to gather at the Table again will increase, and our appetite for the Supper will be whetted as the redeeming work of God in Christ is proclaimed week by week, pointing toward our renewed

celebration of the sacrament with the dawn of the next Church Year.



In season and out, may we all *grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!