

What is the Reformation?

It was a time of reform, which the Church so desperately needed. It was not just a reform of the church's life. Most important, it was a reform of the Church's teachings. Martin Luther, a monk and priest in the church of his day, was deeply troubled by his sins. Because he seldom heard that Jesus had forgiven his sins, he found no comfort in the rites and ceremonies Catholic Church provided for troubled consciences. He never knew whether he had confessed his sins thoroughly enough. He was always unsure if his acts of penance were performed well enough.

When he finally learned from the Bible that Jesus was not his judge but his Savior, and that righteousness was not a demand but a gift, Luther knew he could not keep it a secret. So he confessed his new faith, which in many ways ran counter to that of the Catholic Church. The story of the Reformation is a story of the power of God's Word and the miraculous way the true Gospel was spread throughout the world.

The Catholic Church refused to be reformed. Luther did not intend to start a new church, but a new church was inevitable. Using Martin Luther, who had nothing at his disposal but the power of the Word, the Lord made available to the entire world the message of free and complete forgiveness, peace with him, and the certain hope of eternal life in Christ, his Son. That's what we are celebrating today.

The Lutheran Confessions

The teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Church are laid out in several confessions. The "Church's confession" is the three ancient creeds that express the faith of Christians of all time. They are the **Apostle's, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds**.

The "the people's confession," is the **Small Catechism**. All the basic truths of Christianity are taught in this confession. Luther wrote this to help parents teach their children the truths of the Christian faith. Luther also wrote a **Large Catechism** to provide parents with a deeper understanding to help them teach their children.

The **Augsburg Confession** is the "princes' confession," which the Lutheran princes fearlessly presented to the ruler of all Europe at the German city of Augsburg in 1531.

"Luther's Confession" was prepared by Martin Luther as his "bottom line" position on Christian truth. It is called the **Smalcald Articles**. He prepared it later in life (1537) for an anticipated conference at the German city of Schmalkalden.

The **Formula of Concord** might be called the "theologians' confession." This was prepared in 1577 to answer errors that had crept into the Lutheran Church after Luther's death. These confessions were all gathered into the *Book of Concord* (1580, "concord" means peace). Confessional Lutherans hold to these documents because we are convinced they accurately teach what the Lord says in his Word.



A SERVICE OF THE WORD

IN

STAINED GLASS AND SONG

THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for opening the eyes of your servant, Martin Luther, and for graciously allowing him to see clearly the meaning of the Gospel message. Give us the same insight that you gave him. Help us always to treasure our understanding of your grace and mercy in Christ, which we have as members of a confessional Lutheran congregation. Accept our worship today, in Jesus' name. Amen.

OPENING

P: We begin our service in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

OFFERING

INTRODUCTION

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (CW 201)

OUR REFORMATION CONFIDENCE

SONG—"To Shepherds as They Watched by Night" (CW 53)

CONFESSION OF SINS (PLEASE STAND)

SONG—"He Stood Before the Court" (CW 115)

RESPONSIVE HYMN READING —"Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" (CW 377)

OUR REFORMATION PRAISE

SONG—"How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place"

SCRIPTURE READING—John 3:1-15

SONG—Improvisation on "Amazing Grace" (CW 379)

PRAYER (PLEASE STAND)

SONG—Psalm 100

OUR REFORMATION PRAYER

SONG—"Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (CW 203)

CLOSING PRAYER Words to "Lord, When Your Glory"

SONG—"Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See" (CW 219)

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN "Not Unto Us" (CW 392)

BENEDICTION

The Song Groups

The Prep Singers is the touring choir of Luther Preparatory School, located in Watertown Wisconsin. Watertown is 60 kilometers west of Milwaukee. The choir is comprised of about 24 male and female singers. Students at Luther Preparatory School are considering the full-time pastoral or teaching ministry, and many will continue their education at Martin Luther College, the WELS pastor and teacher training college.

Koine began as the hymn choir of St. Marcus Lutheran Church, an inner city WELS congregation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Much of their work involves setting Lutheran hymns to contemporary arrangements. They are currently artists in residence at Wisconsin Lutheran College and are busy most weekends giving concerts in various places in the US and Canada.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus is our seminary's touring choir. The seminary is located just north of Milwaukee in a town called Mequon. The choir is an all male choir and makes a major tour every other year.

The Stained Glass

The stained glass windows used in this service were photographed by Pastor Koester and can all be found in churches of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod. For more picture of stained glass found in the WELS, see www.welsstainedglass.org.