

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Baptism and Life Passages



Using *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

Volume Two

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Preface to the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* Leader Guides

E*vangelical Lutheran Worship* includes a number of related print editions and other resources developed to support the worship life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. The core print editions of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, released in 2006, include the following:

Pew (Assembly) Edition

Leaders Edition and Leaders Desk Edition

Accompaniment Edition: Liturgies

Accompaniment Edition: Service Music and Hymns

An encounter with these core editions and their introductions is important to an understanding of the goals and principles embodied in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

In addition to the core materials, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes other published resources that are prepared to extend the usefulness of the core editions and to respond to the developing needs of the church in mission. The *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* leader guides, which include the present volume, supplement the core editions in a variety of ways.

These resources are intended to provide worship leaders and planners with support for *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in ways that would not be possible within the core editions themselves. Although the assembly edition includes more interpretive material than its predecessors, such as the annotated patterns for worship that complement the notes within the services, it provides only minimal guidance for leading worship in a variety of settings. Although the leaders edition includes a more extensive section titled Notes on the Services, it is not designed to accommodate deeper historical context, theological reflection, or extensive practical counsel for those who want to lead worship with understanding and confidence.

The leader guides include a set of three volumes, *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. This set addresses as its primary audience pastors, seminarians, and church musicians—people who together take the lead in preparing the assembly’s worship week by week. In a time when many congregations have implemented a broader sharing in worship leadership and planning, however, the contents of these three volumes will be valuable also for assisting ministers with various roles, altar guilds and sacristans, worship committees, and worshipers who are seeking deeper understanding.

The Sunday Assembly, the first book in the set of three volumes, includes a general introduction to worship that is evangelical, Lutheran, and ecumenical. That is followed by in-depth historical, theological, and practical reflections on the service of Holy Communion and the Service of the Word. This book, *The Christian Life: Baptism and Life Passages*, is the second volume in the set and takes up the service of Holy Baptism and related services such as Affirmation of Baptism, together with the services of Healing, Funeral, and Marriage. *Keeping Time: The Church’s Years*, the third volume in the set, addresses the church’s calendar of Sundays, festivals, and seasons; the place of the lectionary and other propers; and the cycle of daily prayer.

The leader guides also include two volumes focused on assembly song. *Musicians Guide to Evangelical Lutheran Worship* presents essays on the musical leadership of assembly song in a variety of styles and genres and offers music performance helps for each piece of liturgical music and every hymn in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. The *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes detailed background on the words and music of the hymns, together with an overview of the role of hymnody in the church’s worship. Both of these volumes, while having particular appeal to church musicians, will be useful also to pastors, seminarians, worship committees, choir members, and other worshipers.

Other reference and interpretive resources will be included among the leader guides as needed. *Indexes for Worship Planning* is one such volume, with an extensive list of suggested hymns for the church year and an expanded set of other indexes.

Many of the church’s gifted teachers have contributed to the writing and assembling of the leader guides. They have sought to discern and give additional focus to the vision for worship among Lutherans that

emerged from the five-year Renewing Worship process (2001–2005), which engaged thousands of people across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in encountering provisional materials, sharing creative gifts, and evaluating various stages of the proposal. To be sure, this vision is one marked by a great diversity of thought and practice, a diversity the contributors seek to reflect in these volumes. Yet these gifted teachers also bring to this work their own distinctive points of view, shaped by their own experiences and by their encounters with other teachers, rostered leaders, and worshiping communities around the world.

The *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* leader guides thus do not intend to provide definitive answers or official positions in matters related to worship among Lutherans. In these volumes, however, we are invited to engage in conversation with teachers of the church, to consider how their insights and guidance may best inform and inspire the many different contexts in which local leaders guide the worship life of their communities. In so doing, these leader guides in their own ways seek to do what also the core editions set out to do: “to make more transparent the principle of fostering unity without imposing uniformity” so that ultimately all these resources might “be servants through which the Holy Spirit will call out the church, gather us around Jesus Christ in word and sacrament, and send us, enlivened, to share the good news of life in God” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Introduction, p. 8).

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Baptism: Wellspring of the Christian Life

One of the most noticeable outcomes of the renewal of worship taking place in many parts of the church is a renewed awareness of the centrality of baptism. Congregations that are building or renovating worship spaces are considering how to reflect this centrality in the size and placement of the font. Newer worship resources in many denominations have given greater accent to baptism and related rites, and baptism more frequently has a central place in primary worship services. Educational materials and preaching helps give greater attention to baptism. Individuals and families are encouraged to remember and give thanks for their baptism and its significance for their whole lives.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship continues and extends this movement toward a renewed emphasis on baptism, especially in the context of worship. Lutherans and many other Christians regard holy baptism as a sacrament equal in importance to holy communion, even as it has a different function in the Christian life. Thus, the first volume in this series, *The Sunday Assembly*, focuses primarily on the church's primary weekly gathering around the word of God and the sacrament of holy communion. And this volume focuses primarily on the church's gathering in worship around the sacrament of holy baptism—in services where the sacrament itself is offered and in other settings where the connection of baptism to the Christian life is lifted up.

What is so important about baptism? And what has led to a renewed appreciation of its centrality? In this chapter, we will examine some of what lends baptism its weight within the Christian life, aided by a number of significant resources and documents: *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* itself, both the assembly/pew edition (AE) and the leaders edition (LE); one of its primary foundations, a statement called *The Use of the Means of Grace* (UMG), adopted for guidance and practice by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1997 and included as an appendix to *The Sunday Assembly* in this leader guide series; the writings of Martin Luther and other reformers as translated in *Luther's Works*

(LW) and in the *Book of Concord* (BC); and an influential ecumenical study called *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM), which originated in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in 1982.

Other chapters will address how baptism intersects with the church's worship (chapter 2), look in detail at the service of Holy Baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (chapter 3), and proceed on to the other services closely related to baptism (Welcome to Baptism, chapter 4; Affirmation of Baptism, chapter 5; and Individual and Corporate Confession and Forgiveness, chapter 6). This book will conclude with considerations of three further expressions of the baptismally founded Christian life, jointly referred to as Life Passages: Healing (chapter 7), Funeral (chapter 8), and Marriage (chapter 9). The scope of the material covered in chapters 4 through 9—the wide range of ways in which holy baptism flows through the Christian life—is evidence that the chords struck by this sacrament reverberate widely in the church.

Among Martin Luther's greatest contributions is lifting up what *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* calls "the baptismal life"—a baptismal spirituality, or even a baptismal way of living. From a Lutheran perspective, this washing with water in the name of the triune God among the gathered Christian assembly is at the center of one's whole life as a Christian. We might describe baptism as the wellspring from which the entire Christian life flows. Jesus' words to the woman at the well in John 4:14, promising "a spring of water gushing up to eternal life," are often applied to baptism. This spring gushes up from the font, where, as Romans 6 assures us, we are liberated from sin and death by being joined to Jesus' death and resurrection. From the font, God's spring of living water flows freely and powerfully throughout the gathered assembly, its ripples extending into every day of the Christian's life. The streams of the baptismal spring include nurture, formation, initiation, return, affirmation, vocation, remembrance, and, ultimately, the completion of God's promise in the life to come, when the wellspring of baptism overflows in new life.

Between the moment of our baptism and the moment of our death, we continually do that which baptism attests. "By God's gift and call, all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are daily put to death so that we might be raised daily to newness of life" (UMG 17).

Evangelical Lutheran Worship helps us by making connections between baptism and various aspects of our lives as Christians. Our dying to sin and rising to new life is most vividly expressed in the various forms of confession and forgiveness. Yet returning to and living out of the promise of our baptism is equally important when significant transitions occur in Christians' lives. At these times the service of Affirmation of Baptism helps the church express the ongoing significance of baptism in the lives of Christians. While this order is most often associated with confirmation and when receiving or restoring people into congregational membership, it is an especially meaningful way of marking other important moments in life. In addition, three particular times in Christians' lives—need for healing, the time of death, and (for some) the entry into marriage—are considered so important that the church through the ages has developed baptismally centered rites for these times.

The baptismal life in all its expressions reflects several emphases. First, baptism gives physical expression to our Lutheran understanding of salvation as justification by grace through faith. Second, this promise is as important to the life of the church as it is to the life of the individual Christian. In addition to being the source of the Christian life, baptism is also the wellspring from which congregations are gathered and in which Christian denominations find their shared life in Christ. Third, our baptismal unity accommodates a diversity of practice, so that celebrations of the baptismal life may reflect a particular community, context, and culture. Fourth, God's gift in baptism is so great that a wealth of scriptural images and metaphors are needed to deepen and enliven our understanding of the baptismal life. In this chapter, we explore these four emphases related to holy baptism: we consider baptism as a consistent Lutheran theme, a point of ecumenical convergence, a complex of rites that reflect culture and context, and a reality best appropriated through rich images for God's many gifts.

A Consistent Lutheran Theme

Luther's entire life was a celebration of baptism because he found in baptism both lifelong assurance that God has forgiven our sin and daily motivation to live as those who belong to Christ. For Luther, baptism is a sign, promise, and participation in what God does for humanity

and all creation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though we may wander away from the baptismal life for a time, God's promise remains. For this reason, Luther argued that God's promise in baptism "should swallow up your whole life, body and soul, and give it forth again at the last day, clad in the robe of glory and immortality" (LW 36:69).

Luther was genuinely overwhelmed by God's grace in baptism. In a sermon on baptism, he declared, "there is no greater comfort on earth than baptism." Baptism is "so great, gracious, and full of comfort, we should diligently see to it that we ceaselessly, joyfully, and from the heart thank, praise, and honor God for it" (LW 35:34, 42). Luther is said to have made the sign of the cross over himself daily while reminding himself that he was baptized. By remembering that he was baptized and trusting the promise God made to him through water and the word, Luther found the courage to face each day. He encouraged Christians to "regard baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and say: 'But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body'" (BC 462). The goal of Luther's entire ministry was that all Christians might live each day trusting in the assurance that they are baptized.

Baptism is foundational to a Lutheran understanding of the Christian life because it is nothing less than the promise that we share in Christ's death and resurrection and, therefore, are justified by grace through faith. In his monumental treatise on the sacraments, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther wrote, "Baptism, then, signifies two things—death and resurrection, that is, full and complete justification" (LW 36:67). In a sermon on baptism, he taught that in baptism the Christian dies to sin and rises in the grace of God. The old Adam, conceived and born in sin, is drowned, and a new Christian, born in grace, comes forth and rises. Through this spiritual birth the Christian is a child of grace and a justified person. Sins are drowned in baptism, and in place of sin, righteousness comes forth (LW 35:30). Through baptism, God establishes a new relationship with the Christian. In Luther's words, "We must humbly admit, 'I know full well that I cannot do a single thing that is pure. But I am baptized, and through my baptism God, who cannot lie, has bound himself in a covenant with

me. He will not count my sin against me, but will slay it and blot it out” (LW 35:36).

That salvation is God’s gracious act toward humanity is made plain when infants and young children are baptized. Luther initially defended infant baptism as the traditional practice of the church, on the grounds that infants are aided by the faith of those who bring them for baptism, and because Christ received children and blessed them. However, in the Large Catechism Luther subsequently taught that “we pray God to grant [the child] faith. But we do not baptize on this basis, but solely on the command of God” (BC 464). The baptism of infants and young children makes it clear that salvation in Christ is first and foremost God’s gracious act of justifying the sinner. Through water and God’s word, those baptized are declared righteous before God on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and nothing else.

Faith, then, is not intellectual assent to doctrine or right living but trust in God. Faith simply means trusting that God will do what God promises to do in baptism, namely granting forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. Even this trust is God’s gift. Our faith results from the work of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in the church. Luther states this eloquently in his explanation of the third article of the Apostles’ Creed in the Small Catechism (AE p. 1162). In a similar vein, the Augsburg Confession declares:

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he [God] gives the Holy Spirit, who produces faith, where and when he [the Holy Spirit] wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe. [BC 40]

The infants we bring to the font can claim no faith or personal decisions of their own. They are completely dependent and completely trusting. In this regard they powerfully witness that salvation is entirely God’s act, that we in no way cooperate with God in baptism, and that faith and repentance are lifelong consequences of and not preconditions for baptism.

In addition to providing assurance, baptism initiates a way of life motivated and directed by God’s promise that our sins are forgiven,

that we belong to Christ, and that God’s action in baptizing us is effective for the rest of our lives. “Baptism conforms us to the death and resurrection of Christ precisely so that we repent and receive forgiveness, love our neighbors, suffer for the sake of the Gospel, and witness to Christ” (UMG 14A). The Christian life is lived in the aftermath of being conformed to Christ in baptism and is a continual remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism. All Christians need to remember this promise, since we “are at the same time sinners and justified. We experience bondage to sin from which we cannot free ourselves and, at the same time, ‘rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit’” (UMG 17A). The Christian life is one long returning to and then living out our baptism. It is daily dying to sin and being raised to live before God. In the community of faith, we die to sin and are raised to new life when we seek the consolation of our brothers and sisters in Christ, confess our sins and receive forgiveness, hear the word and receive Christ’s supper, proclaim the gospel in word and deed, and strive for justice and peace in all the world. To help worshipers remember their baptism, Lutherans typically place their baptismal fonts either in the front of the church, often near the place of the word and the table of the meal, or at the entrance to the worship space. In our individual Christian lives, we remember and return to baptism—among other ways—by reading scripture, praying, professing the creed, making the sign of the cross, and encountering the catechism. As we remember that we are baptized, God’s promise in baptism becomes a wellspring of confidence and renewal every day of the baptismal life.

From the time of Luther through the dawn of the eighteenth century, the so-called period of Lutheran orthodoxy, Lutheran Christians maintained Luther’s baptismal emphasis. Lutheran church architecture emphasized the entire assembly seeing and hearing everything that happens at altar, pulpit, and font. Those three came to be the central foci of Lutheran church buildings; they were placed close together in front of the assembly. The period of the Enlightenment (roughly 1700–1800) tended to suppress spirituality based on the sacraments. Sacraments were understood as biblical commands and therefore obligatory, but they were celebrated infrequently and with minimal ritual and no sense of festivity. A stated goal of *Lutheran Book of Worship* was “to restore to Holy Baptism the liturgical rank and dignity implied by Lutheran theology” (Introduction, p. 8), an emphasis grounded in Luther’s own

baptismal spirituality. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* reinforces and builds upon this return to Luther's emphasis on baptism. "Baptism is set within the principal gathering for worship, and its themes are reflected in other services. Materials are newly included to help congregations welcome adults and children to formation in faith, to baptism, and to the baptismal life" (AE p. 7).

Ecumenical Convergence

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an extraordinary ecumenical convergence as several of the world's Christian churches moved toward a greater consensus on both baptismal practice and interpretation, like springs of baptismal water flowing into a common stream. Lutherans around the globe joined with others, including member churches of the worldwide Anglican communion, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Roman Catholics, in conversation about baptism and its place in the life of the church. Rites were developed and shared; the churches borrowed from and informed one another as they sought to reflect this conversation and growing consensus in their worship life. A significant catalyst for this ecumenical endeavor was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council (1963–1965), which resulted in the creation of renewed rites for the baptism of children, confirmation, and the Christian initiation of adults.

In keeping with another stated goal of *Lutheran Book of Worship*, "to continue to move into the larger ecumenical heritage of liturgy while, at the same time, enhancing Lutheran convictions about the Gospel" (Introduction, p. 8), the major North American Lutheran church bodies produced new services of Baptism and Affirmation of Baptism for that worship book. These services drew deeply upon the ecumenical conversation and convergence of the time, yet the extensive pan-Lutheran dialogue and review of provisional materials ensured that "Lutheran convictions about the Gospel" were well represented in the final versions. The baptismal services in *Lutheran Book of Worship* subsequently became the standard of practice in the vast majority of congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Beyond these services, an order titled Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism was included in *Occasional Services* (1982). In following years, various North American church bodies, including Lutherans,

Episcopalians, and Methodists, continued work on principles and resources related to the formation of youth and adults leading to baptism, in conversation with Roman Catholics who were implementing their Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The work of the ELCIC and the ELCA in this arena is ongoing; it is notably visible in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* through the inclusion of the order for Welcome to Baptism.

The theologies of baptism and baptismally-related worship resources in several Christian churches had so much in common that in 1982, in a significant document entitled *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches provided an overview of the widespread denominational consensus on both baptismal theology and the shape of baptismal rites. According to this document, baptism is the one sacrament for which no church questions the validity of the practices of other Christians. The churches agree that baptism is rooted in the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. They affirm that baptism is God's gift of incorporation into Christ and entry into the new covenant. Yet the statement agrees with Luther that the life of baptism also encompasses human response: that baptism is a lifelong process of growth into Christ and that the Christian life involves both struggle and continuing in the experience of God's grace. The commission lifts up and attempts to bring together the various scriptural emphases on the meaning of baptism (see *Images of Baptism*, p. 16), without favoring one over the others.

Turning to practice, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* specifically addresses the differences between believers' baptism—baptism only of those able and willing to confess their Christian faith—and the baptism of infants. Rather than attempting to resolve these differences, the statement affirms that both are rooted in the faithfulness of Christ and within the faith and life of the believing community. The statement lifts up the merits of a variety of practices. It advises churches, both those that practice believers' baptism and those that practice infant baptism, to reconsider certain aspects of their practices. Churches that practice believers' baptism may seek to express more visibly the fact that children are placed under the protection of God's grace. Those that practice infant baptism must guard themselves against the practice of apparently indiscriminate baptism and take more seriously their responsibility for nurturing baptized children so that they grow to mature faith in and commitment to Christ.

Finally, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* spells out six implications of this ecumenical consensus for baptismal practice. They include the following:

- (1) identifying the essential parts of services of baptism,
- (2) encouraging the generous use of water in baptism,
- (3) administration in the name of the triune God as essential to the sacrament,
- (4) endorsing the use of additional symbols and actions to help communicate the meanings of baptism,
- (5) highlighting baptism as a communal act, and
- (6) connecting baptism and the festivals of the church.

These implications are affirmed in *The Use of the Means of Grace* and are reflected in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

First, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* incorporates the elements identified as essential in an order of baptism. As *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* notes,

Within any comprehensive order of baptism at least the following elements should find a place: the proclamation of scriptures referring to baptism; an invocation of the Holy Spirit; a renunciation of evil; a proclamation of faith in Christ and the Holy Trinity; the use of water; a declaration that the persons baptized have acquired a new identity as sons and daughters of God, and as members of the Church, called to be witnesses of the Gospel. Some churches consider that Christian initiation is not complete without the sealing of the baptized with the Holy Spirit and participation in holy communion. [BEM 6]

How do we see these essential elements in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*'s baptismal service? Biblical images abound in the thanksgiving at the font. The Holy Spirit is invoked twice, in the thanksgiving—"Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word"—and again in the prayer accompanying the laying on of hands. By God's grace we "profess [our] faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church" through the renunciations and the creedal affirmations that follow. A generous use of water is encouraged. Each of the newly baptized is named "child of God" and is welcomed by the assembly into the mission of the whole church. The baptismal rite in *Evangelical*

Lutheran Worship also includes the declaration that the newly baptized are sealed by the Holy Spirit, an action that may be accompanied by anointing with oil. *The Use of the Means of Grace* (37D) provides for the possibility that the newly baptized, including infants, receive holy communion in the service at which they are baptized.

Second, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* encourages generous use of water at baptism: “Water is used generously” (Notes on the Services, LE 28). This recommendation flows from an awareness that the symbol of water speaks most eloquently when it is plentiful and visible rather than minimal. Toward this end, pouring and immersion are especially valuable ways of administering baptism. Each mode accents a particular image of what God is doing in baptism: pouring suggests cleansing from sin, immersion communicates dying and rising with Christ. *The Use of the Means of Grace* asserts that water, as a sign of cleansing, dying, and new birth, “is used generously in Holy Baptism to symbolize God’s power over sin and death” (26). This statement goes on to affirm that God’s word, not the amount of water, is the power at work in baptism, and that God can use any amount of water we may have. However, citing Luther, the statement emphasizes that “we wish to make full use of water, when it is possible” (26A).

Third, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* reflects the ecumenical consensus that baptism is administered in the name of the Holy Trinity and that reference to Matthew 28:19 is integral to the baptismal order. *The Use of the Means of Grace* states that “Holy Baptism is administered with water in the name of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (24), and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* uses these words at the baptism. *The Use of the Means of Grace* goes on to state, however, that baptism into the triune God involves confessing and teaching the meaning of the Trinity. Teaching that meaning occurs within the community of faith. The goal of this instruction is to help the baptized understand the name not merely as a formula but as “the power and presence of the triune God and of that teaching which must accompany every Baptism” (24B) This teaching ought to help the baptized distinguish between what the doctrine of the Trinity does and does not convey, including continually reexamining what *Father* and *Son* mean in biblical and creedal perspective. In this way, the church will “maintain trinitarian orthodoxy while speaking in appropriate modern language and contexts” (24A).

Fourth, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, continuing what was included in *Lutheran Book of Worship*, affirms the early church's practice of using additional gestures and symbols to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism. Such actions engage the various human senses and serve as vivid expressions of what God is doing in baptism. *The Use of the Means of Grace* agrees that interpretative signs—including the laying on of hands, prayer for the Holy Spirit, signing with the cross, and anointing with oil—proclaim the breadth of the meaning of baptism and the gifts that God's promise gives. Scripture provides the key for interpreting these signs. The baptismal service in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes these symbols and gestures, as well as the possibility of clothing the newly baptized in baptismal garments and presenting each with a lighted candle.

Fifth, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* highlights the communal nature of baptism. Baptism is intimately connected with the corporate life of the church, in and through a congregation. This relationship with a particular congregation leads to baptism best, and normally, being administered during public worship. The wisdom of this accepted practice is twofold. First, celebrating baptism within worship helps the members of the congregation recognize the centrality of baptism, remember their own baptism, and live the baptismal life. Second, the members of the congregation can support the newly baptized, their sponsors, and families, and can express their commitment to nurture those being baptized and welcome them into community. The connection to the church further implies that, under normal circumstances, baptism is administered by an ordained minister.

Sixth, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* carries forward the ecumenical encouragement to link baptism and the church's major festivals. This is a continuation of the counsel of *Lutheran Book of Worship*: "It is appropriate to designate such occasions as the Vigil of Easter, The Day of Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and The Baptism of Our Lord for the celebration of Holy Baptism. Baptismal celebrations on these occasions keep Baptism integrated into the unfolding of the story of salvation provided by the church year" (Ministers Edition 30). *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* says that baptism "is appropriate to great festival occasions such as Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany, as was the practice in the early Church" (23). *The Use of the Means of Grace* includes All Saints Day and the Baptism of Our Lord as worthy of consideration

and identifies the Vigil of Easter as an especially appropriate time to celebrate baptism, because it emphasizes that the source of all baptisms is the death and resurrection of Christ. The notes on Holy Baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (LE 27) rightly observe that designating festivals as baptismal celebrations will amplify baptism's imagery and significance. This approach to scheduling baptism also links the story of Christ's life and our salvation.

We might think of these six characteristics of baptismal celebration as manifestations of the ecumenical convergence around the theology and practice of baptism, which have been making their way into the church's life since the middle of the twentieth century. This ecumenical consensus is both a gift of the Holy Spirit and a powerful Christian witness. It was influential in the development of *The Use of the Means of Grace* and both *Lutheran Book of Worship* and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. These considerations guide this volume and can helpfully inform pastoral practice.

Baptism in Culture and Context

Christian worship occurs within a given community, context, and culture. Preaching, baptism, and communion cannot exist without a gathered assembly of Christians. "The congregation assembles in God's presence, hears the word of life, baptizes and remembers Baptism, and celebrates the Holy Supper" (UMG 6A). What assemblies do when they gather to worship is, for the most part, shared across time, space, history, and culture; however, the ways congregations worship also take seriously the local context, and thus they can foster the expression of local Christian unity.

The Worship and Culture Study undertaken from 1993 to 1998 by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) provided biblical and historical foundations for celebrating Christian worship, particularly baptism and eucharist, in culture and context. It also outlined contemporary issues facing Lutheran churches. The Study's "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities" (Appendix A), published with supporting essays in *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, outlined a fourfold dynamic of Christian worship and culture. Christian worship is and should be *transcultural*, the same substance everywhere, transcending culture. It is *contextual* in the ways the substance of Christian worship is expressed locally, adapted from

Life is complicated. We got your back! The FREE courses on the Online Christian Academy help transform your life into a meaningful and exciting adventure! The Online Christian Academy was built for you: seekers, Christians and people of other faiths. We have created online courses that explain what the Bible teaches about different areas of life, as well as how you can apply these to your life today and experience the benefits. Get FREE access to all the courses on the Academy! Team up with your friends and family. The Christian life is also supposed to persevere to the end. Hebrews 10:38-39 addresses this issue by quoting from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk: "Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." God is not pleased with one who "draws back" from Him after making a commitment, but those who live by faith will never draw back, because they are kept by the Holy Spirit who assures us that we will continue with Christ until the end (Ephesians 1:13-14).