

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

If you looked ahead in the bulletin, you likely saw that we have a “Rite of Confirmation” coming up after this sermon. Now it may seem an odd time for confirmation, and it is a bit unusual. It’s the way things worked out. But we do rejoice that we welcome Amelia Brooks into communicant membership today. She has been instructed in the chief articles of Christian doctrine; she confessed it before the Elders assembled yesterday; momentarily she will come to the Lord’s table to eat and drink with us at His supper.

She has been instructed; she has confessed. When it comes to confirmation, these are the important things. The rite is a nice churchly ceremony, but it’s not the main thing, and actually, we could do without it. It does, however, signal formally to the congregation that Amelia is now confessing on her own the faith into which she was baptized. It does do that.

I guess it’s not surprising that “confessing the faith” is a topic that came up this past Thursday at our confessional study. We’re studying Luther’s Large Catechism right now, and we’re in the section on the Sacrament of the Altar. In it, right away, Luther says we need to know “three points” about the Sacrament: “What is it? What are its benefits? and Who is to receive it?” (Large Catechism, Part 5 Sacrament of the Altar, 1). And then a bit later, he says: “it is not our intention to let people come to the Sacrament and administer it to them if they do not know **what they seek** or **why they come**” (LC, Sacrament, 2).

“What do you expect to receive from my hand here at this altar?” And “Why do you want it?” These are the questions I ask visitors who come to Zion and wish to eat and drink with us. The ushers know to bring visitors to me so I can question them. It sometimes surprises the visitors. Of course, I also want to know that they come from a congregation we’re in fellowship with — most often that means a Missouri Synod congregation, but not always.

The answers that I expect to these questions are the answers that Amelia gave yesterday. “What do you expect to receive?” The Sacrament “is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” You can give more of the catechism answer, and some do: “under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself,” etc., but I want to make sure they discern what they are receiving here (1 Cor. 11:29). Then, “Why do you want it?” Answer: “[T]hat person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’” I want them to say that they want the “forgiveness, life, and salvation” that is offered in the Sacrament . . . because they are sinners.

Now, these questions, I perceived, surprised some of the other brother pastors there, and it prompted an interesting question: “What about your regular members?”

Would you bet your life that they would answer these questions rightly?” I never really answered that question, but gosh, I certainly hope so. I know you once could. And if you can’t now, perhaps it’s time to dust off your catechism and review it. Maybe you could even open the pages toward the end and ask yourself the questions “Prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for those **who intend to go to the Sacrament.**” The first question? “Do you believe that you are a **sinner?**” The third question? “Are you **sorry** for your sins?” Repentance there. The thirteenth question? “Do you believe, then, that **the true body and blood of Christ** are in the Sacrament?” Knowing the answers to these and the other questions and confessing them would go a long way in changing my answer to that question posed — “Would you bet your life” on it — to “absolutely.”

Another question in Luther’s Christian questions and answers intersects with today’s Scripture lessons, for remember, St. Paul teaches us that “*as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes*” (1 Cor. 11:26). And Luther asks, “Why should we remember and proclaim His death?” He answers: “First, so that we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins. Only **Christ, true God and man**, could do that” (Sixteenth question). That’s exactly what we confess in the Apostles’ Creed — there’s that word again, confess. Yes, we confess that Jesus Christ is the Father’s “only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” And Luther explains, “I believe that Jesus Christ, **true God**, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also **true man**, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord” (Small Catechism, Creed, Second Article). You’ll be happy to hear that Amelia confessed this, too, yesterday.

This is also what the Evangelist Matthew is doing today in our text. In fact, he begins it in the opening verses of the chapter. He is establishing Jesus’ credentials as Christ and Savior, as Immanuel — God with us — and as mortal man whose flesh comes from the blessed Virgin Mary. It’s as we confess it.

Yes, Matthew calls Jesus “the Christ” not just in the first verse of our Gospel text, but also in the very first verse of his Gospel. Jesus is that one who was foretold by prophets of old, the one that would come and ascend to the throne of His father David, the one who would reign in a kingdom without end. Jesus is that son of David, Matthew proclaims. Jesus is that king. And just in case you didn’t get it, Matthew continues his account of Jesus by having the Magi explicitly call Jesus “*the one born king of the Jews*” (Matt. 2:2).

Matthew gives Jesus’ credentials for having this title. He traces Jesus’ genealogy from Abraham through David and all the way to Joseph. There are a bunch of “*begats*” in that list. Abraham begat Isaac; Isaac begat Jacob; Jacob begat Judah; and so forth. Jesse begat David; David begat Solomon out of the wife of

Uriah; and so forth. Interesting that Matthew didn't leave out the less-than-righteous deeds of some of these forebears of Jesus. But when we get to Joseph, something changes. We have another Jacob in the genealogy, and he begat Joseph, but Joseph didn't beget Jesus. Rather, Matthew says: “*Joseph [was] the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*” (Matt. 1:16). Something is different with the birth of Jesus. Jesus is born of Mary, but not from the seed of Joseph. Nevertheless, His legal ancestry would come from Joseph, and that ancestry is definitely a kingly line.

Still, how can this be? That Jesus is born the son of David and not have Joseph as his natural father? Joseph wonders the same thing as he hears of Mary's surprising pregnancy, and Joseph doesn't take it too well. Honestly, we wouldn't be happy either.

Not just we, but they also, knew how babies were made. It takes a man coming together with his wife, and that didn't happen with Joseph and Mary. They hadn't gotten to that point yet. They were betrothed, but hadn't consummated the marriage. Thus Joseph thought the right thing to do would be to divorce his betrothed quietly and not put her to shame. God had other ideas of what was righteous, and sent an angel to Joseph to deliver the message.

Go ahead and take Mary as your wife. This son of Mary is not conceived of infidelity, the angel told Joseph. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit. This son of Mary is Savior, Joseph, that's why you are to give Him the name Jesus, a Greek form of Joshua, which means “the Lord saves.”

But how can a mere man do this? The Psalmist confesses: “*Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice*” (Ps. 49:7-8).

That's the point, isn't it? Of this chapter in Matthew, of the Gospels, of the New Testament, of the Old Testament prophecies, too. Jesus is not a mere man. He is the Son of God and the Son of Man; and this man “*came ... to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Matt. 20:28). To do that, the Son of God had to become mortal. He needed flesh, and He received it from Mary, being born of her, that He could pay the ransom price ... death ... “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23).

No mere man can ransom another, but if that man is also God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, if that man is God with us, Immanuel, then He could die, and His death could be the sufficient ransom price for the sins of the world. This is who Jesus is. Matthew tells us about it. This is what we confess. It's what Amelia confessed yesterday, that Jesus Christ, true God and also true man, her Lord and ours, “has redeemed [us], ... lost and condemned [persons], purchased and won

[us] from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that [we] may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.” And we all confess together: “This is most certainly true.”

God bless us in this confession.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.