

Reading *the* Word *of* GOD

**A DAILY READING GUIDE
FOR THREE YEARS**



This daily Bible reading guide, *Reading the Word of God*, was conceived and prepared as a result of the ongoing discussions between representatives of three church bodies: Lutheran Church—Canada (LCC), The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The following individuals have represented their church bodies and approved this introduction and the reading guide: LCC: President Robert Bugbee; NALC: Bishop John Bradosky, Revs. Mark Chavez, James Nestingen and David Wendel; LCMS: Revs. Albert Collver, Joel Lehenbauer, John Pless and Larry Vogel.

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The translation of the Bible into the vernacular — into the everyday language of common people — was one of the greatest and most far-reaching accomplishments of the Reformation. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther posting the 95 Theses, we might also recall that following that event in the year 1517, other events ensured that the Reformation would leave a permanent mark on the Christian church. To name only a few, we might include Luther’s three great treatises of 1520 (*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Freedom of the Christian Man* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*), Luther’s catechisms of 1529 and the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530 by Philip Melancthon. But we also cannot omit Luther’s translation of the Bible into German, with his publication of the New Testament in 1522 and the entire Bible in 1534. The German Bible and the Catechisms enabled the Reformation to extend deeply into the mind and life of the laity.

During ongoing discussions between representatives of the Lutheran Church—Canada, the North American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the participants agreed on two foundational matters.¹ First, we came to a common understanding of the Holy Scriptures. In so doing, we adopted a document titled “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide: A Guiding Statement on the

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Character and Proper Use of the Sacred Scriptures” (appended below, issuu.com/thelcms/docs/jlm-september-2016/6). That document has been circulated within our three church bodies to widespread approval. Second, we agreed that, to a great degree, the membership in each of our church bodies suffers from a declining familiarity with the Bible. We are reminded of the commendation of the Bereans, who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11).

In order to encourage the people of our church bodies in the daily reading of Holy Scripture, we have compiled a three-year plan of *daily* Bible readings and a year-long series of *weekly* readings on Martin Luther’s approach to the Scriptures. The daily readings are on the attached calendars for 2018, 2019 and 2020. The plan provides a guide that will take the reader through the entire Old Testament one time in three years, with the exception of Psalms, which are read twice each year. The New Testament will be read twice in the three years. A reading from the Old Testament, a psalm (or portion of a psalm) and a reading from the New Testament is assigned for each day. Certain church festivals — Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and so forth — have readings appointed for the specific occasion.

The suggested readings are offered for one reason only: to enhance devotional life as an individual or a family daily examines, and is examined by, the Word of God and then responds in prayer to the heavenly Father. Toward that goal, the following suggestions may be considered. They are merely suggestions, of course, as is this daily reading guide. The most

important purpose of the guide is to encourage a daily practice of reading and meditating on the Bible, God’s Word. Since the Scriptures as a whole are God’s Word, increasing familiarity with the various books is encouraged.

Individuals who set aside time for personal devotion may find it easier than families to use this guide as a whole. Families, especially those with small children, who believe this is too ambitious for them may want to select only a portion of what is suggested, as a briefer reading that can be simply explained.

A set time is important — typically morning or evening at mealtime. The individual or family is encouraged to choose a time each day when there will be minimal or no distraction, allowing perhaps 20–40 minutes for reading and prayer. The individual or family may begin with the sign of the holy cross and “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” as a reminder of our baptismal identity, followed by a prayer for the Holy Spirit to prepare the heart(s) to hear and understand the Word of God and to bear fruit in keeping with it (Matt. 13:13; Luke 8:11ff.). One may then read the Old Testament selection, followed by the psalm and concluding with the reading from the New Testament. The individual Christian may wish to read aloud even if reading alone. While reading, remember that the two central messages of Scripture are Law and Gospel, for the Bible continually reminds us of our sins and God’s legitimate wrath against human rebellion (the Law), even as it also tells us the precious truth of God’s forgiveness, mercy and love, which are made

certain in the incarnation, death, resurrection and assured return of our Lord Jesus.

With the frequent reading of the psalms comes an opportunity to use the psalter as the “prayer book of the Bible,” letting each daily psalm become an encouragement for prayer. The daily devotion will be strengthened even more if, following the counsel and practice of countless Christians, it includes confession of the Apostles’ Creed and a purposeful recitation of our Lord’s Prayer, considering each petition. As a final suggestion for this devotional time, the use of Luther’s Morning or Evening Prayer is encouraged.

Lest this devotional exercise be viewed as an alternative to the church’s gathered life in the congregation, two other points are worth noting. First, the user(s) of this guide may wish to keep a notebook of questions that arise during the weekly devotional time. Those questions may be shared with a pastor or other church teachers for further insight in the Word of God. Second, since the morning is given to the Divine Service, the evening of the Lord’s Day is probably the best time to set aside for the daily readings, especially for a family. That time can also provide an opportunity for the family to discuss the sermon and the service that Sunday. The Sunday or weekend devotional time is also an ideal time to read the selection about Luther and Holy Scripture.

Abbreviations of Biblical Books

Old Testament

Genesis Gen.
 Exodus Ex.
 Leviticus Lev.
 Numbers Num.
 Deuteronomy Deut.
 Joshua Joshua
 Judges Judges
 Ruth Ruth
 1 Samuel 1 Sam.
 2 Samuel 2 Sam.
 1 Kings 1 Kings
 2 Kings 2 Kings
 1 Chronicles 1 Chron.

2 Chronicles 2 Chron.
 Ezra Ezra
 Nehemiah Neh.
 Esther Esther
 Job Job
 Psalm Ps.
 Proverbs Prov.
 Ecclesiastes Eccl.
 Song of Songs Song of Songs
 Isaiah Is.
 Jeremiah Jer.
 Lamentations Lam.
 Ezekiel Ezek.

Daniel Dan.
 Hosea Hos.
 Joel Joel
 Amos Amos
 Obadiah Obad.
 Jonah Jonah

Nahum Nah.
 Habakkuk Hab.
 Zephaniah Zeph.
 Haggai Hag.
 Zechariah Zech.
 Malachi Mal.

New Testament

Matthew Matt.
 Mark Mark
 Luke Luke
 John John
 Acts of the Apostles Acts
 Romans Rom.
 1 Corinthians 1 Cor.
 2 Corinthians 2 Cor.
 Galatians Gal.
 Ephesians Eph.
 Philippians Phil.
 Colossians Col.
 1 Thessalonians 1 Thess.

2 Thessalonians 2 Thess.
 1 Timothy 1 Tim.
 2 Timothy 2 Tim.
 Titus Titus
 Philemon Philemon
 Hebrews Heb.
 James James
 1 Peter 1 Peter
 2 Peter 2 Peter
 1 John 1 John
 2 John 2 John
 3 John 3 John
 Jude Jude
 Revelation Rev.

**Weekly Readings —
 Martin Luther on Holy Scripture ²**

As a companion to the Daily Reading Guide, the participants of the LCMS-LCC-NALC consultation are also offering selected readings from the work, *Luther on the Scriptures*, by Johann Michael Reu, (1869–1943), a German-born American Lutheran pastor, theologian and educator who taught from 1899 till his death at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.

While we in no way intend for these to replace or be understood as equal to the value of daily Bible reading, we do believe they will be helpful, especially for Lutherans. Why?

Undoubtedly, there are those within Lutheranism today who no longer understand the meaning and purpose of Holy Scripture. Some Christians describe multiple methods of reading and interpreting the Scriptures, and this has had a negative impact in Lutheran churches as well. Increasingly in world Lutheranism, the notion of a “Lutheran” way of approaching the Bible has been lost,

ignored or confused by competing yet supposedly equally valid means of studying Scripture. The result has been, in some places, a lack of commitment to the truth and authority of God’s Word, skepticism about the trustworthiness of God’s Word and a general lack of interest in hearing and heeding God’s Word. It should be no surprise, then, that there is the aforementioned “declining familiarity” with the Bible in our churches.

As we commend the Daily Bible Reading Guide to you, then, we also invite you to explore Martin Luther’s understanding of Holy Scripture with the series of weekly readings. Reu’s brief work, now out of print, has been shared among the participants of our consultation, enlightening and directing our conversations as we have sought a deeper and richer appreciation for God’s Word, largely through Luther’s own writing. As he speaks to us of the clarity, simplicity, trustworthiness and infallibility of Scripture, it is our hope and prayer that each member, household and congregation will turn daily to the Biblical readings with renewed desire for the Word which is a “lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path” (Ps. 119:105)

² Selected from M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Springfield: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1960).