

What do Lutherans believe with regard to...

The Holy Spirit?

Martin Luther wrote; *"I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith."*

These are part of Martin Luther's teaching about the Apostle's Creed in his "Small Catechism". Lutherans believe that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us in the faith. All of this flows from what we understand to be the Holy Spirit's paramount work – *"to bring to mind all that (Jesus) did and said"*, to reveal and glorify Christ, to strengthen the believer's faith and guide the believer's life.

For Lutherans, the Holy Spirit "as person" teaches that the Holy Spirit is one of God's *"three revealed faces."* These faces are God the Creator, Jesus Christ the Redeemer, and The Holy Spirit. The center of God's divine activity is the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Yet, just as the Son performed the work of the Father who sent him, so the Spirit performs the work of the Son in the believer, whom Christ "sends" into the world just as Jesus was sent into the world. In carrying on Jesus' earthly ministry, the Spirit's ongoing work is to reveal truth, give life and strengthen faith. Much of our understanding of "the work" of the Holy spirit comes from the New Testament book of John – specifically verses 7:39, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7-15.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is present in;

- creating the world and sustaining life.
- history, using Israel to reveal God's divine redemptive purpose for humankind
- individual believers, anticipating the New Testament doctrine of the Spirit who dwells in human hearts.

In the New Testament the Spirit of God;

- comes to the Virgin Mary empowering her to give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:35)
- is present at Jesus' baptism announcing that he is God's son, (Luke 3:22 , described as "descending on Jesus like a dove")
- is given by the post-Resurrection Jesus to his disciples (John 20:22) *and*
- forms the church at Pentecost, extending Jesus' earthly ministry throughout the world (Acts 2:4 , described as descending on the believers as tongues of fire).

The New Testament is uniquely a book of the Holy Spirit. Almost all its writings contain references to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit as the "giver of life" has a central place in Christian revelation, particularly in the Nicene Creed, where we say;

*"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets."*

According to the New Testament the "new life in Christ" from beginning to end is solely the work of the Spirit. The Spirit's essential work of bestowing God's grace of forgiveness is pure gift, renewing us so that Christ may dwell in us. For Christians, the Spirit makes the living and life-

changing Christ a personally experienced reality. In John 14:16 we are told by Jesus that the Spirit is our Advocate which is given to dwell with us forever. John goes on to say, "*You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you*" (John 14:17). Thus the Spirit, equal in time, power and glory, comes to humanity from both Father and Son. The Spirit not only creates faith, but also sustains the church in the "*one true faith*" passed on from the first disciples.

For Martin Luther, the Holy Spirit was the author of the Gospel and, simultaneously, a gift to humankind enclosed in the Word. He stressed both the Spirit as the creator of the new life and as indwelling witness. He professed that such things as "*raising one's children, loving one's wife and obeying the magistrate are fruits of the Spirit.*" At the same time, Luther taught that within the Church, the Spirit works primarily through the Word and Sacraments. Lutherans receive the written word of God and the Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) as instruments of the Spirit which "feed" our faith.

In binding the Spirit to the external means of Word and Sacrament, Luther did not deny the working of the Spirit in individual believers. However, he did understand the Word and Sacraments to be safeguards against the excesses of individualism and emotionalism, a kind of romanticizing or ecstatic internalization of the Spirit that divided even the earliest Christians. He emphasized that the Spirit's proper work is precisely a strengthening of a person's individual faith, but that this had congregational and community implications.