Martin Luther, the Catechism, and Music
Notes for the Leader

You may choose to study all five hymns as a single lesson; to study each hymn with the corresponding part of the Small Catechism; or to use some but not all of the hymn studies.

Resources:
Each participant should have access to a copy of Evangelical Lutheran Worship. Participants will also use Luther’s Small Catechism, which is included in ELW beginning on page 1160. Participants will also need access to a Bible for one of the questions about Luther’s baptismal hymn.

Copies of this lesson can be distributed to the participants, or a leader can simply walk the participants through the discussion of each hymn.

Reproducible public domain texts are provided as part of this study for the following catechism hymns that are not included in ELW:

“That Man a Godly Life Might Live”
“Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above”
“To Jordan Came Our Lord, the Christ”

For those who prefer to view the hymn texts online rather than to print copies, the following web links were valid as of 19 October 2023.

The text of Luther’s Ten Commandments hymn is available online at http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/hymns/godlylife.txt and at http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/t/h/a/t/thatmana.htm (with a music file).

The text of Luther’s Lord’s Prayer hymn is available online at http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/hymns/ourfather.txt and at http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/o/u/f/a/oufather.htm (with a music file).

The text of Luther’s Baptism hymn is available online at http://openhymnal.org/Lyrics/To_Jordan_Came_Our_Lord_The_Christ-Christ_Unser_Herr.html (with a music file).

If your congregation still has copies of the Lutheran Book of Worship, you can also find “To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord” with a more modern translation as LBW 79.

A note about language:

Please note that the language of the translations that are in the public domain is often dated. This may pose a challenge to students, but it is also an opportunity to talk about the importance of Luther’s work as a translator. Translation isn’t just about different languages like Latin, German, and English. Effective translation requires using language that regular people can understand. Because language changes over time, it is important for the church to follow Luther’s example of retranslating the Scriptures, liturgy, and hymns, as well as writing new hymns, to communicate the Christian faith clearly in new contexts.
Martin Luther, the Catechism, and Music
A lesson for confirmands of all ages

Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to remember words that have been set to music? Martin Luther realized this, too. He wrote many hymns to make it easier for Christians to learn about their faith. Sometimes he wrote new words for a familiar tune. Sometimes he took a hymn he had already written and set the words to a new and more memorable tune. Studying Luther’s catechism hymns may help you learn and remember, too!

Luther’s Ten Commandments Hymn
“These Are the Holy Ten Commands”; alternate title, “That Man a Godly Live Might Live”

If you were going to write a hymn to teach people the Ten Commandments, how many verses would you write?

Now look at Luther’s Ten Commandments hymn. How many verses did he write?

Which verses can be matched up with actual commandments?

Which verses are Luther’s commentary about the Ten Commandments?

In stanzas 1 and 11, Luther explains why God gave us the Ten Commandments. What reason does Luther give in stanza 1? What reasons does Luther give in stanza 11? What is the difference between the reasons given in these two stanzas?

Luther ends every stanza of this hymn with the same words. What are they? Why do you think he repeats these words?

Commands are a form of speech that tell someone to do something. The final stanza of Luther’s Ten Commandments hymn is a different form of speech. Who is being addressed, and why? What do we call this kind of speech? Why do you think Luther chose to end his hymn this way?
Luther’s Apostles Creed Hymn  “We All Believe in One True God” (ELW 411)

Open your hymnal to the Apostles Creed on page 105. Put a bookmark there and a bookmark at ELW 411 so you can go back and forth between the Creed and the hymn.

1. Read the first article of the Creed aloud together. Now read the first stanza of Luther’s hymn.

How does Luther describe God’s activity as Creator?

How does Luther describe God’s activity as a parent?

How are these two activities (creating and parenting) related?

2. Read the second article of the Creed aloud together. Now read the second stanza of Luther’s hymn.

What words or images stand out for you?

What phrases from the Creed does Luther leave out of this stanza? Does Luther add anything?

In this part of the hymn, Luther refers to Jesus as “our elder brother.” What does it mean to you to think of Jesus as “our elder brother”? As your elder brother?

Luther describes Jesus both as God’s Son and as our brother. What does that say about us? About you?

3. Read the third article of the Creed aloud together. Now read the third stanza of Luther’s hymn.

The third article of the Creed lists a series of important Christian beliefs. What verbs does Luther use to describe the things listed in the Creed?

Why do you think it was important for Luther to describe the relationship between the things in the third article of the Creed, instead of just listing them?
Luther’s Lord’s Prayer Hymn
“Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above”

What do you think the purpose of prayer is? How do you feel about prayer?

Compare the first stanza of Luther’s Lord’s Prayer hymn with Luther’s explanation to the beginning of the Lord’s Prayer in the Small Catechism (page 1163 in ELW). How does Luther describe the purpose of prayer? What kinds of feelings does Luther associate with prayer?

Many of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer ask God to act in certain ways. In the second stanza, Luther’s hymn asks God to help us act in certain ways. Why do you think he does that?

Read the first sentence of Luther’s explanations to the First, Second, and Third Petitions of the Lord’s Prayer in the Small Catechism (the first sentence answers the question “What is this?”). Pay attention to the last half of each sentence, especially the very last word. What do you think about the way Luther shifts the focus of the Lord’s Prayer from God to us? Where do you see this shift in focus in the hymn?

In the fifth stanza, Luther describes “daily bread” broadly, including many other things we need for our daily life besides food. What sense does it make to you to think of things like defense and peace as part of our daily bread? Are there things you would add to Luther’s list? How do we identify what we really need in life, not just what we want?

In stanza 8, Luther says “the times and days are perilous.” Where do we encounter temptations and evils in our own context? How might prayer help us to respond to temptations and evils?

Read the final stanza of the hymn. Sometimes we think of “Amen” as nothing more than a way of saying “The End,” but Luther devotes an entire stanza to it. What does he tell us that “Amen” means? What new insights does this stanza give you about the purpose of prayer and about what we should expect when we pray?
Luther’s Baptism Hymn
“To Jordan Came Our Lord, the Christ”

In the first stanza, how does Luther describe the purpose of Jesus’ baptism? How does he describe the purpose of our baptism?

In stanzas 3 and 4, how does Luther relate Jesus’ baptism to our own baptism?

In this hymn, as in the Small Catechism, Luther makes the point that baptism is not just water. What does he connect water with in stanza 2? What does he connect water with in stanza 7?

In the Small Catechism, what benefits does Luther say that baptism gives (ELW, page 1165)? Where do you see these benefits in Luther’s hymn?

Read stanza 5 of Luther’s hymn, and then read these short Bible passages: Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, and John 3:3-5, 16-17. How do you see the themes of these Bible passages reflected in Luther’s hymn?

Read just the last lines of stanza 1, stanza 2, and stanza 3. (Each of these lines forms a complete sentence). What do these three lines together communicate about what it means to be a Christian?

Close your eyes and listen to someone read the final stanza of the hymn aloud. What words or images stand out for you as you listen?
Luther’s Communion Hymn
“Oh Lord We Praise You” (ELW 409)

The first stanza of this hymn dates from the 15th century, before the Reformation. Luther liked it because it was a song that people sang during communion. He added two more stanzas to the hymn, emphasizing his understanding of communion as God’s gift.

What verbs does Luther use in the hymn to describe God’s action in the sacrament of communion? What verbs does Luther use to describe our action?

Before the Reformation, it was not common for people to receive communion more than once a year. Often, when they attended the service, they simply watched the priest’s actions and did not participate. Look through Luther’s hymn for words emphasizing our participation in communion. Why do you think Luther uses words like “feast” and “banquet” in this hymn? What feelings or actions is he trying to evoke?

In the Small Catechism, what benefits does Luther say that communion gives (ELW, page 1166)? Where do you see these benefits in Luther’s hymn?

“O Lord, have mercy!” is sung twice in each of the three stanzas of the hymn. When and where are the words “Lord, have mercy” sung in our worship service? What are the words a response to, in the liturgy and in this hymn?

Luther also ended every stanza of his Ten Commandments hymn with the words, “Have mercy, Lord.” Do the words sound or feel different when used in these two different hymns? Where in our world, or in your own life, is God’s mercy most needed?

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"That Man a Godly Life Might Live"
by Dr. Martin Luther, 1483-1546

1. That man a Godly life might live,
   God did these Ten Commandments give
   By His true servant Moses, high
   Upon the Mount Sinai.
   Have mercy, Lord!

2. I am thy God and Lord alone,
   No other God beside Me own;
   Put thy whole confidence in Me
   And love Me e'er cordially.
   Have mercy, Lord!

3. By idle word and speech profane
   Take not My holy name in vain
   And praise but that as good and true
   Which I Myself say and do.
   Have mercy, Lord!

4. Hallow the day which God hath blest
   That thou and all thy house may rest;
   Keep hand and heart from labor free
   That God may so work in thee.
   Have mercy, Lord!

5. Give to thy parents honor due,
   Be dutiful, and loving, too,
   And help them when their strength decays,
   So shalt thou have length of days.
   Have mercy, Lord!

6. In sinful wrath thou shalt not kill
   Nor hate nor render ill for ill;
   Be patient and of gentle mood,
   And to thy foe do thou good.
   Have mercy, Lord!

7. Be faithful to thy marriage vows,
   Thy heart give only to thy spouse;
   Thy life keep pure, and lest thou sin,
   Use temperance and discipline.
   Have mercy, Lord!

8. Steal not; all usury abhor
   Nor wring their life-blood from the poor,
   But open wide thy loving hand
   To all the poor in the land.
   Have mercy, Lord!

9. Bear not false witness nor belie
   Thy neighbor by foul calumny.
   Defend his innocence from blame;
   With charity hide his shame.
   Have mercy, Lord!

10. Thy neighbor's house desire thou not,
    His wife, nor aught that he hath got,
    But wish that his such good may be
    As thy heart doth wish for thee.
    Have mercy, Lord!

11. God these commandments gave therein
    To show thee, child of man, thy sin
    And make thee also well perceive
    How man unto God should live.
    Have mercy, Lord!

12. Help us, Lord Jesus Christ, for we
    A Mediator have in Thee;
    Our works cannot salvation gain;
    They merit but endless pain.
    Have mercy, Lord!

Text: Exodus. 20: 1-17
Author: Martin Luther, 1524
Translated by: Richard Massie, 1854, alt.
Titled: Dies sind die heil'gen Zehn Gebot'
Tune: Dies sind die heil'gen
German melody, c. 1200

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"Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above"
by Dr. Martin Luther, 1483-1546

1. Our Father, Thou in heaven above,
   Who biddest us to dwell in love,
   As brethren of one family,
   To cry in every need to Thee,
   Teach us no thoughtless word to say,
   But from our inmost heart to pray.

2. Thy name be hallowed.
   Help us, Lord,
   In purity to keep Thy Word,
   That to the glory of thy name
   We walk before Thee free from blame.
   Let no false doctrine us pervert;
   All poor, deluded souls convert.

3. Thy kingdom come. Thine let it be
   In time and in eternity.
   Let Thy good Spirit e'er be nigh
   Our hearts with graces to supply.
   Break Satan's power, defeat his rage;
   Preserve Thy Church from age to age.

4. Thy gracious will on earth be done
   As 'tis in heaven before Thy throne;
   Obedience in our weal and woe
   And patience in all grief bestow.
   Curb flesh and blood and every ill
   That sets itself against Thy will.

5. Give us this day our daily bread
   And let us all be clothed and fed.
   From war and strife be our Defense,
   From famine and from pestilence,
   That we may live in godly peace,
   Free from all care and avarice.

6. Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore,
   Remove from us their burden sore,
   As we their trespasses forgive
   Who by offenses us do grieve.
   Thus let us dwell in charity
   And serve our brother willingly.

7. Into temptation lead us not.
   When evil foes against us plot
   And vex our souls on every hand,
   Oh, give us strength that we may stand
   Firm in the faith, a well-armed host,
   Through comfort of the Holy Ghost!

8. From evil, Lord, deliver us;
   The times and days are perilous.
   Redeem us from eternal death,
   And when we yield our dying breath,
   Console us, grant us calm release,
   And take our souls to Thee in peace.

9. Amen, that is, So shall it be.
   Confirm our faith and hope in Thee
   That we may doubt not, but believe
   What here we ask we shall receive.
   Thus in Thy name and at Thy word
   We say: Amen. Oh, hear us, Lord!

Amen.

Text: Matt. 6:9 ff.
Author: Martin Luther
Translated by: composite
Titled: Vater unser im Himmelreich
Tune: Vater unser
1st Published in: "Geistliche Lieder"
Town: Leipzig, 1539

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“To Jordan Came Our Lord, The Christ”
by Dr. Martin Luther, 1483-1546

1. To Jordan came our Lord the Christ,
   To do God’s pleasure willing,
   And there was by Saint John baptized,
   All righteousness fulfilling;
   There did He consecrate a bath
   To wash away transgression,
   And quench the bitterness of death
   By His own blood and passion;
   He would a new life give us.

2. So hear ye all, and well perceive
   What God doth call baptism,
   And what a Christian should believe
   Who error shuns and schism:
   That we should water use, the Lord
   Declareth it His pleasure;
   Not simple water, but the Word
   And Spirit without measure;
   He is the true Baptizer.

3. To show us this, He hath His Word
   With signs and symbols given;
   On Jordan’s banks was plainly heard
   The Father’s voice from Heaven:
   This is My well-beloved Son,
   In whom My soul delighteth;
   Hear Him. Yea, hear Him every one
   Whom He Himself inviteth,
   Hear and obey His teaching.

4. In tender manhood Jesus straight
   To holy Jordan wendeth;
   The Holy Ghost from Heaven’s gate
   In dovelike shape descendeth;
   That thus the truth be not denied,
   Nor should our faith e’er waver,
   That the Three Persons all preside,
   At baptism’s holy laver,
   And dwell with the believer.

5. Thus Jesus His disciples sent:
   Go teach ye every nation,
   That lost in sin they must repent;
   And flee from condemnation:
   He that believes and is baptized,
   Obtains a mighty blessing;
   A new-born man, no more he dies,
   Eternal life possessing,
   A joyful heir of Heaven.

6. Who in this mercy hath not faith,
   Nor aught therein discerneth,
   Is yet in sin, condemned to death,
   And fire that ever burneth;
   His holiness avails him not,
   Nor aught which he is doing;
   His inborn sin brings all to naught,
   And maketh sure his ruin;
   Himself he cannot succor.

7. The eye of sense alone is dim,
   And nothing sees but water;
   Faith sees Christ Jesus, and in Him
   The Lamb ordained for slaughter;
   She sees the cleansing fountain red
   With the dear blood of Jesus,
   Which from the sins inherited
   From fallen Adam frees us,
   And from our own misdoings.

   Amen.

Written by Martin Luther in 1541
Titled: Christ unser HErr zum Jordan kam
Translated by Richard Massie, 1854

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