

## **“Lutherans and the Rapture”**

***“In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.” (Hebrews 1:2, ESV)***

Eschatology is the theological study of end time prophecy. And eschatological terms like “millennium” and “rapture” often are floated around. The concept of the millennium (based upon the sole reference to it in Revelation 20:1-6) has been talked about for centuries. The Lutheran reformers had this to say about the subject in *Article 17* of the *Augsburg Confession*: **“Our churches also condemn those who are spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed”** (*Augsburg Confession, Article XVII, Line 5*. Quoted from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Second Edition*, Concordia Publishing House, Copyright 2006, p. 40). See, like others throughout Christendom, Lutherans have an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. We believe that the 1000 years mentioned, like so many of the numbers and imagery in the Book of Revelation, was written as symbolic language. So, we interpret the 1000 years as a figurative expression for the entirety of the **“last days”** – namely, the time from the Ascension of Christ until His return on Judgment Day (aka the day when all the dead shall rise). So, we are in the 1000-year period right now. This means that we are in the **“last days,”** as the writer to the Hebrews tells us in the passage I provided above, and as St. Peter made clear in quoting from Joel 2 in his Pentecost Day sermon (Acts 2:14-21). This same apostle made a similar reference in 1 Peter 1:20, as does St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Now, regarding the rapture. Because this newsletter article is short, my comments will be far from exhaustive. But the LCMS has done more in-depth analysis when it comes to this subject. At the end of this article, I will tell you how you can access more information about the Lutheran understanding of the end times. And please always remember that you may contact me, the called teacher of the congregation(s), if you wish to talk more about this matter privately. To start, among the Christians who teach that there is a rapture, there isn’t overwhelming consensus among themselves when it comes to eschatology. And the lack of clarity undoubtedly comes from the fact that the rapture is not a Biblical teaching. The word “rapture” is mostly taken from a Latin translation of the Greek word **“harpagesometha”** in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. And bear in mind that Latin, like English, Spanish, or French, is only a translation of the original. For the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Thessalonians in the Greek language. And the Greek word **“harpagesometha”** here in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is frequently translated into English as **“will be caught up”** (ESV). The clear context in 1 Thessalonians 4 is the return of Christ on the day of resurrection when the church in heaven and the church on earth shall be gathered together to live forever in the resurrection with Christ in **“a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells”** (2 Peter 3:13, NIV2011).

The idea that 1 Thessalonians 4 has something to do with a strange disappearance of believers before the Second Coming of Christ didn’t develop until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Needless to say, we Lutherans do not believe that such rapture teaching is Biblical teaching. Therefore, despite its popularity among some Protestant sects, we do not teach or confess that the rapture is a Christian doctrine. In fact, we don’t believe that this rapture taught by false prophets will even occur. The newest edition of *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* provides a brief but informative exposition about rapture teaching. Responding to the question, *“What are some false teachings*

*about the end of time and life everlasting” (#229), among the responses in the catechism it says: “Rapture teaching claims that the thousand-year reign follows a secret return of Jesus, when believers are ‘caught up... in the air’ and removed from the earth. This turns the simple, comforting hope of Christ’s second coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) into complicated stages (contrary to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3; Hebrews 9:27-28; John 5:28-29); denies that believers will suffer Satan’s tribulations (contrary to Matthew 24:9; Acts 14:22); and claims that those who reject Christ will have a second chance to achieve salvation during an earthly reign (contrary to Luke 16:27-31; Revelation 20:11-15)” (Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, Concordia Publishing House, Copyright 2017, p. 229).*

My brothers and sisters in Christ, the teachings surrounding the rapture are untrue, and like all false teachings, are dangerous because they deny the truth of God’s Word and therefore lead us away from Christ. For see, there is no second plan of salvation for the Jews or for anyone else. To reject Christ crucified and risen is to reject God’s only plan of salvation. **“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:20a, NIV2011).** The cross is the only way that the Lord paid for the sins of the world, reconciled humanity to Himself, and overcame Hell & death for mankind. It’s an insult to God to ever diminish His Son’s sacrificial work at Calvary. So, the only way that the Jews, who **“were broken off because of their unbelief” (Romans 11:20b, ESV), can “be grafted back into their own olive tree” (Romans 11:24, ESV)** is through faith in Jesus Christ. And (as taught above in the catechism quote) that only happens in this life (Hebrews 9:27-28). For on the day that Christ returns, there will be no second chances, no purgatory, and no reincarnation.

My newsletter article is a brief overview. Here are two links providing more in-depth study about the end times:

- <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/23D8C043-52E4-4527-A81D-E63CF644A7D8>.
- <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/D3114ADE-2810-4826-841C-8953CC935AE2>.

These documents were prepared by the Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology & Church Relations (CTCR). All CTCR documents are provided free of charge on the LCMS website ([www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)).

My fellow Christians, we look forward to the final coming of Jesus on the day of resurrection. So, let us join God’s people in praying: **“Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20c, ESV).** His return could be any day. For Jesus’ Second Coming is not dependent upon current events or spurious visions or Old Testament passages taken out of context. For Jesus’ coming again and our resurrection to everlasting life are prophecies that are grounded in the sure and certain promises of the Divine Messiah who died and overcame the grave for us. What great hope we have! **“Watch out that no one deceives you” (Matthew 24:4, Evangelical Heritage Version).**

In Christ,  
Pastor

## Psalm Readings for November

**WEEK ONE:** Wednesday, November 01; PSALM 116; **Thursday, November 02;** PSALM 117; **Friday, November 03;** PSALM 118:1-14; **Saturday, November 04;** PSALM 118:15-29

**WEEK TWO:** Sunday, November 05; PSALM 119:1-8; **Monday, November 06;** PSALM 119:9-16; **Tuesday, November 07;** PSALM 119:17-24; **Wednesday, November 08;** PSALM 119:25-32; **Thursday, November 09;** PSALM 119:33-40; **Friday, November 10;** PSALM 119:41-48; **Saturday, November 11;** PSALM 119:49-56

**WEEK THREE:** Sunday, November 12; PSALM 119:57-64; **Monday, November 13;** PSALM 119:65-72; **Tuesday, November 14;** PSALM 119:73-80; **Wednesday, November 15;** PSALM 119:81-88; **Thursday, November 16;** PSALM 119:89-96; **Friday, November 17;** PSALM 119:97-104; **Saturday, November 18;** PSALM 119:105-112

**WEEK FOUR:** Sunday, November 19; PSALM 119:113-120; **Monday, November 20;** PSALM 119:121-128; **Tuesday, November 21;** PSALM 119:129-136; **Wednesday, November 22;** PSALM 119:137-144; **Thursday, November 23;** PSALM 119:145-152; **Friday, November 24;** PSALM 119:153-160; **Saturday, November 25;** PSALM 119:161-168

**WEEK FIVE:** Sunday, November 26; PSALM 119:169-176; **Monday, November 27;** PSALM 120; **Tuesday, November 28;** PSALM 121; **Wednesday, November 29;** PSALM 122; **Thursday, November 30;** PSALM 123; **Friday, December 01;** PSALM 124; **Saturday, December 02;** PSALM 125