

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Then, out of nothing, the Lord of All Creation brought into being the stars and the sun,
our earth and its moon, the land and the seas, the plants and animals,
and finally men and women, both created in the divine image.

God created it *good*, as a peaceable realm where all could live together
in relationship with one another and with God.

But then, as now, humans misused their God-given freedom of choice. Like you and me, they made
decisions destructive to themselves and to the earth, and sin entered God's good world.

Because the Lord of All Creation is full of mercy, love and grace,
God did not destroy humanity or the damaged creation,
but continually found ways to forgive and to redeem.

God named a people as God's own, adopted them as children, taught them the way of the Lord,
and called them back into a loving and obedient relationship whenever they lost their way.

Their story is our story. We broke God's commandments and ignored God's prophets.

We continued to sin, kept turning away from God and wandering from our true home.

So God came to us. The Word became flesh, human like us, God-with-us, living in our midst.

Jesus' life revealed both God and ourselves in a way we had never seen before.

We saw what humanity could be as he taught us how to love our neighbors as we do ourselves
and demonstrated what it means to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

We learned that God is our Father, and discovered that divine love meets us
on our own frail ground, loves us as we are, and even dies for us so that we might live.

Jesus' death fundamentally changed the relationship between God and humanity.

We still sin, but the ultimate price for that has already been paid.

God chooses to cover the muddy filth of my sin, and the sins of all who believe,
with the pure cloth of Christ's righteousness.

Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate example of God's power to transform despair into hope,
darkness into light, condemnation into redemption, and death into life.

That power of God is still at work in our world and in human lives.

After Jesus' return to heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to be always and everywhere God-with-us.

The Spirit welcomes us into unity and life with the one triune God;
teaches us truth and reveals God's Living Word to us through the written word of Scripture;
unites us with one another even as we create and condone divisions between us;
enables us to accomplish abundantly far more than all we could ask or imagine;
and transforms us more and more, day by day, into the image of Christ,
all to the glory of God.

We who bear the name of Jesus can proudly proclaim that we are God's people.

By God's grace and through the power of the Spirit,
we are the children of God, so named and claimed in the waters of baptism.

As we sit with Jesus at his table, we taste and see the goodness of the Lord
as we are fed, body and soul by that same grace and power, which also unites us
with Christ and with one another, even with all the saints of every time and place,
that we may be one family of God sharing one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

As the church, that family is called to live as one body with Jesus as head,
every part contributing, each acknowledging the worth and importance of all the other parts.

The church and all her people are also called to be the body of Christ in the world,
continuing his ministry by breaking down walls that divide, crying out for justice,
showing his love to neighbors, strangers, and even enemies, just as we should love ourselves,
and by bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to life in our day and time in every way we can,
even as we wait with all Creation for the day when Jesus will come again to rule and redeem.

The amazing, extravagant grace and mercy of the Lord of All Creation has been poured out on me.
I have been claimed as God's own in baptism; I have been redeemed by my Savior;

I have been empowered by the Holy Spirit;

SO THAT I may bless as I have been blessed, forgive as I have been forgiven,
love as I have been loved, and follow and obey and serve the One
who created me and knows me and calls me by name.