



CHRISTIAN BURIAL: THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
1 Thessalonians 4:13b

As discussed in the previous section, death is a consequence of the fall into sin (Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12). The coming of life incarnate into our world signals the death of death and the ultimate victory of life. Jesus meets death and grief head-on (Luke 7:1–17; Mark 5:35–43; John 11:1–44) and transforms them by His own death, burial, and resurrection, thus giving way to life.

In Holy Baptism, we are immersed in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–11). Luther says that one’s burial and resurrection from the dead are the fulfillment of one’s Baptism: “This journey (from this life to the life beyond) begins in Baptism. And as long as there is faith, man continues on this course until he completes it through death.” The burial rites themselves are a kind of journey that begins at the deathbed, leads to the funeral home and the church, and finally to the cemetery. They follow the believer as he or she departs this world with Christ through death to life.

BURIAL RITES

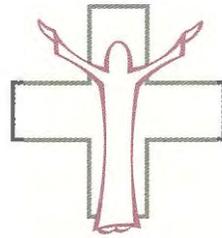
In the burial rites, two emphases are held in tension: penitence and the resurrection (2 Samuel 12:15–23). The Kyrie, Litany, penitential psalms, and the ancient Christian hymn “In the Very Midst of Life” (*LSB* 755) are examples of how the rites take seriously both death and the deep effect death has on us. In Christ, the sting of death is conquered so that the Christian sees, in the midst of death, the hope of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. The various Scripture readings, hymnody, and the prayers in the rites testify to the glorious victory over death that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Deathbeds have been the time of confession both of the faith and of the resurrection of the body. Christ calls death a sleep (Mark 5:39) and so, for Christians, the hour of death can be approached with the confidence of falling asleep. The **Commendation of the Dying** offers comfort to Christians as they see their dying in the light of their Savior’s death. The rite offers the opportunity for confession of the faith as well as the confession of sins before death. For the family, the rite assists them in making the transition from having their loved one with them to seeing him or her in the arms of their gracious Savior.

Upon hearing the news of a death, many people come to extend their consolation to the family and share in their grief. The rite of **Comforting of the Bereaved** gives a structure for the pastor to comfort “those who are in any affliction” (2 Corinthians 1:4) with the Word of God. Most often, this rite occurs at the funeral home.

The **Funeral Service** is a public service of the Church. It is a public confession of the faith concerning death, burial, resurrection, and the life hereafter. The baptismal theme of death and resurrection with Christ is most prominent (Romans 6:1–11). The funeral service, then, is the public proclamation of the marvelous and gracious works of our great God and Savior, Jesus, applied to this specific situation. In the service, we join the saints and angels, the Church in heaven and on earth, in giving thanks to the Lord Jesus for the gifts He has won and delivered to us in His death and for the comfort Christians find in the resurrection.

The body is God's creation. God Himself took on flesh and bone in Jesus to redeem the world. The Holy Spirit sanctifies the Christian, body and soul, in Baptism, in the hearing of God's Word, and in the communion of Christ's life-giving body and blood in the Sacrament. For this reason, Christians bury their dead in the sure and certain promise of the resurrection of the body. This is the purpose of the rite of **Committal**.



FUNERAL SERVICE

THE ORDER OF SERVICE

The funeral service is the Church's public proclamation of Christ crucified to the specific situation of the death of a Christian. Of all the burial rites, the funeral service is the chief opportunity for the deceased, or the deceased's family, to confess the hope that each Christian has for the journey through death to life.

Let us look at the funeral service commonly used in the Lutheran Church. The wording of the funeral service is located on the left side of the page; a brief commentary is on the right. It is good to familiarize yourself with this service so you can understand what will happen and can ask your pastor about any sections that may not be clear to you.