

MESSIAH

THE REALLY EARLY YEARS

AKA

THE BOOK OF ACTS



“THE PLAN”

MESSIAH: THE REALLY EARLY YEARS..... AKA “THE BOOK OF ACTS”

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INTRODUCTION

In early January of 1941, a young pastor, fresh out of seminary, stepped out of his car into the freshly fallen snow. The snow creaked under his boots in the 14 below weather as he walked up to the first house on his rounds. This was to be the first house in his travels around the sparsely populated area of Mounds View. Pastor Beltz was meeting with local families to determine if there was any interest in beginning a Lutheran congregation in the new suburb. The interest was most certainly there, and that interest was the catalyst for Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church.

But that was not the beginning of Messiah. Even though Messiah’s first worship service in Mounds View was in February of 1941, our history goes much further back than that. Pastor Beltz’s footsteps were just a continuation of the footsteps of many generations that came before in the Lord. Messiah’s history actually begins, “In the Beginning...” Adam and Eve were our original founding family. Noah was our first evangelist. The patriarchs were our charter members and the prophets were our first pastors. Our history’s high point was the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And it didn’t stop there; the ascension was just the beginning of a new chapter of OUR history.

It is that chapter that we are going to be spending the next two months looking into. We will be going back way past 1941, to a time right after Jesus’ ascension and His commissioning of His followers to go out into the world to share His Gospel. We will do this by using the book of Acts as our window into the past to see how the church as a whole, and ultimately Messiah, got started. The narrative is not as perfect as we would maybe like our family history to be. You will see people making mistakes and you will witness conflict between church members. You will watch as our spiritual ancestors will not always know the answers to troubling questions and they will at times doubt about how to proceed. You may even be surprised when you realize how many times Saint Paul failed in his evangelism attempts. However, you will also see the Lord at work in miraculous ways in the midst of His people’s struggles. You will see lives being transformed and the foundation laid for our church and every other church throughout the world.

It may be called the book of Acts but for us it is more like “Messiah: the REALLY early years.” The feet that walked out that locked room in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost day have continued on to Mounds View, Minnesota, and from there they have continued on through our doors to the rest of the world. Acts is the history of the whole Church but it is also our history.

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WEEK 1 – PENTECOST: “Now what?” That was the question on many of the disciple’s minds after our first reading this week. The disciples had left everything in order to follow Jesus. He had changed their lives and died for their sins. He had also defeated death by rising again, but soon after ascended into heaven. He was their savior, and their leader, and now He was gone.

What were they to do next? As we have seen over and over again throughout the Gospels, the disciples were not brave and they certainly weren’t leaders who could formulate a spectacular plan on their own, they were fearful and inept admirers. Their main tactic when faced by resistance or persecution was usually to run away and hide.

But something happens to them. When He ascended, Christ promised that He would send the Holy Spirit and He would change them, and that is exactly what He did. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit and people who just moments before were filled with fear and anxiety became courageous followers of Christ who could not keep silent about what God had done for them. Through the Holy Spirit’s power, the disciples went out and started telling people about the life changing news of Jesus. The Holy Spirit then worked in the hearer’s hearts too and they believed. These miraculous events are the beginning of the Church and by extension, Messiah.

September 12th, 2016 – Acts 1:1-26 – Jesus just ascended...now what?

September 13th, 2016 – Acts 2:1-41 – Are these even the same guys?!?!

September 14th, 2016 – Acts 2:42-47 – The first Christians

September 15th, 2016 – Acts 3:1-10 – Peter heals a crippled man

September 16th, 2016 – Acts 3:11-26 – Peter explains what he did and uses it to point to Christ

September 17th, 2016 – Acts 4:1-22 – Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin

September 18th, 2016 – Acts 4:23-31 – Peter and John are released

This week’s “Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School” suggested videos:

- ➡ September 12th, 2016 – Acts 1:1-26 - **Episode 146: Where's Your Crown?**
- ➡ September 13th, 2016 – Acts 2:1-41 - **Episode 147: Something's Different this Pentecost**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 2 – STEPHEN AND THE DEACONS: Last week we saw how our spiritual ancestors dealt with the problem of how to move forward after Jesus’ ascension. Now we look at how they faced the equally daunting question of, “Ok, now that we are the Church, what does that look like?”

In our modern times we take for granted how the church functions. We worship, we have fellowship, we help others, we feed the poor, and so on. But when the first believers started to meet together they had no other churches to learn from. They had no experience they could build on. They hadn’t even heard of a pot luck. They just tried to put their Christian faith into action in the best ways they knew how. Some of those attempts were successful and others didn’t go so well. It’s a comforting thought to know that when a program or event doesn’t go the way we wanted it to at Messiah, we are in good company. The Lord will still use our efforts, just as He did our ancestors in Jerusalem.

September 19th, 2016 – Acts 4:32-37 – The believers share everything

September 20th, 2016 – Acts 5:1-16 – Don’t try to lie to God

September 21st, 2016 – Acts 5:17-42 – “They got whipped and then did what!?!?”

September 22nd, 2016 – Acts 6:1-7 – Deacons are chosen

September 23rd, 2016– Acts 6:8-15 – Stephen is arrested

September 24th, 2016– Acts 7:1-29 – Stephen recounts God’s plan (Part 1)

September 25th, 2016– Acts 7:30-53 - Stephen recounts God’s plan (Part 2)

This week’s “Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School” suggested videos:

➡ September 22nd, 2016 – Acts 6:1-7 - **Episode 148: Hey! I'm Hungry Too!**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 3 – THE FIRST MARTYR AND NEW APOSTLE: Messiah has a wonderful history of sharing the gospel with all people. We know there is no one who is too far gone that they can't be saved by God's grace. One of best examples of that is St. Paul. When we first meet Paul, he is referred to as Saul, and he is the man at whose feet the members of the Sanhedrin lay their cloaks before they stone Stephen.

From this first introduction Paul goes from being a bystander, to being the head of the persecution against Christians. He was so energetic in his persecution that in Acts 22 he says, “I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death...”

If the Lord can change a heart like that, there is no one he can't change. It is for that reason, St. Paul went out into the world to share the saving grace of the Savior. And it is for that same reason that Messiah continues that work in our present day.

September 26th, 2016 – Acts 7:54-8:3 – No good deed goes unpunished. (Stephen is martyred)

September 27th, 2016 – Acts 8:4-25 – “Can't buy me love”

September 28th, 2016 – Acts 8:26-40 – Philip and the Ethiopian

September 29th, 2016 – Acts 9:1-19a – Saul is brought to faith kicking and screaming

September 30th, 2016– Acts 9:19b-31 – Saul's post conversion days

October 1st, 2016 – Acts 9:32-43 – Aeneas and Dorcas

October 2nd, 2016 – Acts 10:1-23a – And because of these verses... WE CAN EAT BACON!!!

This week's “*Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School*” suggested videos:

- September 28th, 2016 – Acts 8:26-40 - **Episode 149: To Samaria and the Ends of the Earth**
- September 29th, 2016 – Acts 9:1-19 - **Episode 150: God's Great Reclamation Project**
- October 2nd, 2016 – Acts 10:1-23a - **Episode 151: Time for Change**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 4 – PAUL’S FIRST MISSION TRIP: Messiah is not just a church for a specific race or economic group. We are a church for all nations and all peoples. However, because of our sinful nature, that idea is sometimes a hard thing for us to put into practice. We want to be around people that look like us, talk like us and act like us. As we will see in our readings for this week, the apostles and early believers were no different. They had the same sinful prejudices and preconceived notions that fight against.

That is why God, through His Holy Spirit, gave them and us, a new common ground. In Christ we aren’t similar because of our skin color or nation of origin. We are all the same in that we are sinful human beings who are in need of a savior and we are all in need of someone to restore our relationship with God. That is what makes us one. It’s not the things the world looks at, like skin color or economic status. It’s the fact we are all in need of a savior and Jesus died to be that savior for us. That is something we have in common no matter what we look like or how much money we have. In Christ we are all one family.

October 3rd, 2016 – Acts 10:23b-48 – Cornelius and his family are brought to faith.

October 4th, 2016 – Acts 11:1-18 – “Lucy, you have some ‘splaining to do!”

October 5th, 2016 – Acts 11:19-30 - Antioch

October 6th, 2016 – Acts 12:1-25 – Peter’s escape from prison and Herod’s death

October 7th, 2016 – Acts 13:1-12 – Paul and Barnabas begin their first missionary journey

October 8th, 2016 – Acts 13:13-41 – Paul preaches at the synagogue Pisidian Antioch

October 9th, 2016 – Acts 13:42-52 – The Word takes root

This week’s “Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School” suggested videos:

- ➡ October 6th, 2016 – Acts 12:1-25 - **Episode 152: Persecution Flares Up**
- ➡ October 7th, 2016 – Acts 13:1-12 - **Episode 153: The Ball Gets Rolling**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 5 – THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL: Over the last 75 years, Messiah has had all sorts of growing pains. Messiah began worshiping in the Clemmer home in 1941, but we quickly outgrew it within a year and moved into the little white church. Over the next 20 years we moved from the little white church to the basement church, then to the upper story of the basement church, and then to the current sanctuary. There were times we had so many kids in Sunday School we used the boiler room as a classroom. At every stage, Messiah had to come up with new and interesting ways to overcome the challenges that came from moving from a fledgling mission start to a busy congregation.

In our previous readings we saw that growing pains have been a part of the Church from the very beginning. In week one the Church struggled with what they would look like without Christ physically being present. In week two we saw the Church try to deal with the logistics of growth and how to serve all those in need. This week we will see the Church wrestle with what to do when the perfect “idea” of ministry meets the real world. They are struggling because more and more Gentiles are being reached with the Gospel. These are people who have not followed the laws of Moses in the past because they weren’t Jewish so people are asking what Old Testament laws should they obey. Should Christians follow all the Old Testament requirements, should they forget about them completely, or is the answer somewhere in-between.

Growing pains have been part of the Church and part of Messiah since the beginning but the Lord always sees His people through them. More often than not, He then uses them to create more opportunities to share His Good News.

October 10th, 2016 – Acts 14:1-28 – Trouble in Iconium and Lystra

October 11th, 2016 – Acts 15:1-21 – The first church council

October 12th, 2016 – Acts 15:22-41 – The council sends out its answer

October 13th, 2016 – Acts 16:1-15 – Timothy and Lydia

October 14th, 2016 – Acts 16:16-40 – Jailhouse Rock (I know it’s cheesy but I couldn’t resist)

October 15th, 2016 – Acts 17:1-9 - Thessalonica

October 16th, 2016 – Acts 17:10-34 – “To the unknown god”

This week’s “*Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School*” suggested videos:

- ➡ October 11th, 2016 – Acts 15:1-21 - **Episode 154: You Have to Do This Our Way!**
- ➡ October 13th, 2016 – Acts 16:1-15 - **Episode 155: Whatever It Takes**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 6 – ONWARD TO JERUSALEM: If you watch enough TV preachers or read enough religious Facebook posts you might get the idea that being a Christian is an insurance policy against bad things happening to you. You might even get the impression that great things are owed you because of your faith. However, that is not what the Bible promises and it is not what Messiah has experienced. Messiah has had many easy years but there have also been many tough years. There have been years of plenty but there have been years of want. There have been years when the pews were packed and there have been years when you could throw a stone and not hit anyone... So which is the real church; the one where everything is rosy for those who believe or the one where the trials of this life are very real but they are faced with God’s presence and strength?

If we were to delve way back into our history and look at the book of Acts we would see that Paul and the other disciples faced all sorts of hardships. Their faith did not ensure a life of luxury and success. They did have successes, but as we will see, they also had times when whole towns rioted against them. The key for them, as it has been for Messiah, is that through the highs and the lows, our eyes are always looking to the Savior who is with us and will see us through.

October 17th, 2016 – Acts 18:1-17 – Paul in Corinth

October 18th, 2016 – Acts 18:18-28 – Curly, Moe and Larry

October 19th, 2016 – Acts 19:1-22 - Ephesus

October 20th, 2016 – Acts 19:23-41 – The Gospel causes a riot

October 21st, 2016 – Acts 20:1-12 – Your pastor isn’t the only one who can put people to sleep

October 22nd, 2016 – Acts 20:13-38 – Farewell to Ephesus

October 23rd, 2016 – Acts 21:1-26 – Back to Jerusalem

This week’s “*Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School*” suggested videos:

🕒 October 19th, 2016 – Acts 19:1-22 - **Episode 156: Open Doors and Opposition**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 7 – PAUL’S ARREST: As we read last week, Paul knew that when he went to Jerusalem he would be arrested. The Holy Spirit informed him that there would be trials and imprisonment waiting for him, but he went anyway. He went because he knew that the Lord would use his imprisonment to allow the Gospel to be preached to people who never would have heard it otherwise. To the world, Paul’s imprisonment was a disgrace but Paul understood that with God on his side, his imprisonment was going to be used in amazing ways.

That’s the funny thing about the Gospel. God uses the things, people and situations that the world finds unimportant or embarrassing and uses them to do His work. He used common, uneducated people as His first disciples. His first converts were from the poor and disenfranchised. His greatest missionary did his best work in chains. And Messiah is no different. We aren’t in the most fashionable part of the country. We aren’t even in the fanciest part of the Twin Cities, but the Lord has used Messiah to continue the work that He started through the disciples and Paul. By worldly standards we might not be popular or prestigious but the Lord does His best work through those who trust in Him and not on their own capabilities.

October 24th, 2016 – Acts 21:27-36 – Paul is arrested

October 25th, 2016 – Acts 21:37-22:29 – Paul tries to reason with the mob

October 26th, 2016 – Acts 22:30-23:11 – Paul before the Sanhedrin

October 27th, 2016 – Acts 23:12-35 – If you can’t beat him...kill him.

October 28th, 2016 – Acts 24:1-27 – Paul at Caesarea

October 29th, 2016 – Acts 25:1-12 – Paul’s trial before Festus

October 30th, 2016 – Acts 25:12-22 – Agrippa visits Festus

This week’s “*Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School*” suggested videos:

- ➡ October 24th, 2016 – Acts 21:27-36 - **Episode 157: Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire**
- ➡ October 27th, 2016 – Acts 23:12-35 - **Episode 158: The Road from Jerusalem to Rome**

These videos can be found on www.lhmmen.com under the “Studies and Resources” heading or there is a link at www.messiah-lutheran.org Just click on the “Acts” picture on the front page.

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WEEK 8 – PAUL IS SENT TO ROME: This week we will be finishing our trip through the Book of Acts and will find that the book ends at a very unusual point. Paul has been arrested at the request of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem because they want to stop his preaching of the Gospel. He has appealed to Caesar and is sent off on a harrowing journey to Rome and is now under house arrest in the city. The problem is that is where it ends. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, never tells us what happens when Paul stands in front of Caesar’s court or even if Paul lives or dies. We are left wondering what happens next.

From other sources we know that Paul was most likely released from his imprisonment in Rome and then went on to Spain to preach the Gospel to new lands, but we don’t hear that from Acts. So why the abrupt ending? Why not continue on to include Paul’s trip to Spain or even his martyrdom in Rome in the mid to late 60’s AD?

Well, there are many ideas. Some say that Luke wrote a second book that has been lost to time. The problem with this idea is that no early church writer talks about the existence of a second book. The second and more probable idea is that what Luke wrote was at least partially recorded to serve as a written defense of Paul and his work up to that point for the Roman officials. It is quite possible that the Theophilus that both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written to was a Roman official handling Paul’s case. Therefore, Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke to him as an explanation of who this Jesus guy is and he wrote the book of Acts as a document designed to inform Theophilus and other officials of what Paul had been doing for the last few years. Then, after the Lord used the letters to share the Gospel with Rome, they were shared with the world.

However, no matter what the reason is for the ending without an ending, the way the book of Acts comes to its conclusion fits the 75th Anniversary of Messiah very well. Like Paul, we have come through many trials and tribulations, there have been thousands upon thousands of people saved in this place and like Paul’s story in the book of Acts, our story is not yet done. Messiah is a continuation of the faith that was started, “In the beginning...”. It is a child of the Church that was won and instituted by Christ and it is the fruit of the congregations that God used Paul to plant. We are part of the great History of God’s work and after these first 2016 years of Church history, and 75 years of Messiah’s specific history, the Lord still has work for us to do. May God give us many, many more years in His service. Amen.

October 31st, 2016 – Acts 25:23-26:23 – Paul’s defense to Agrippa

November 1st, 2016 – Acts 26:24-32 – Paul witnesses to Agrippa

November 2nd, 2016 – Acts 27:1-12 – Paul sets sail

November 3rd, 2016 – Acts 27:13-26 – The storm

November 4th, 2016 – Acts 27:27-44 – “It was only supposed to be a 3 hour tour.”

November 5th, 2016 – Acts 28:1-10 – From shipwreck to snakebite, can the day get any worse.

November 6th, 2016 – Acts 28:11-31 – Paul preaches in Rome

This week’s “Stuff They Didn’t Teach Me In Sunday School” suggested videos:

➡ November 2nd, 2016 – Acts 27:1-12 - **Episode 159: Is This the End or a New Beginning?**