

**“Hearers of the Word”:
Luke’s Gospel as Sacramental Formation for a Liturgical
Community**

Arthur A. Just, Jr.*

*Editor’s note: Just’s address was based on his two-volume commentary on Luke’s gospel. From *Luke 1:1-9:50* - Concordia Commentary by Arthur A. Just, Jr. © 1996 Concordia Publishing House. Used with permission. All rights reserved; and from *Luke 9:51-24:53* - Concordia Commentary by Arthur A. Just, Jr. © 1997 Concordia Publishing House. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

It is privilege to return to the Institute of Liturgical Studies after a long absence, especially on a subject that has consumed me in one way or another over the last fifteen years. I am very grateful to the advisory council for assigning me a topic that develops the biblical foundations of the catechumenate. My doctoral work on Emmaus, my vocation as professor of exegesis and pastoral theology, my participation in the ELCA and LCMS working groups on the catechumenate, as well as my participation in the Missouri Synod’s efforts to develop its own catechumenal process, have all contributed to my remarks this afternoon. But it is through conversations with colleagues about the New Testament as a catechetical document, and particularly my work on Luke’s gospel, that has been seminal to my own thinking about the biblical foundations for the catechumenate.

It seems obvious to say Luke wrote his gospel as Holy Scripture for a liturgical community of believers. One alternative is he wrote it for pagans as an apologetic for the Christian faith. There are some today who imagine Luke wrote his gospel for the academy. This perpetuates itself, as the academic guild moves from one creative form of criticism to another. Luke’s gospel as the object of academic pursuit does not touch the lives of most pastors and laity.

In today’s church there is another problem. There is the idea Luke wrote his gospel not for liturgical communities but for private Bible study groups or the personal devotional life of the people of God. Who here has not experienced those Bible studies where a passage of scripture is read, and then each person takes his or her turn telling the group what this passage means to them? This is its own form of deconstruction of the text, a somewhat unsophisticated form of reader-response criticism, where the

primary purpose of Scripture is to make meaning for the individual reader from the peculiar context of that reader, so the original audience is replaced by a post-modern reader. For many Christians today, the Bible is a private document, standing alone and outside of the church, available for individuals to approach by themselves without an attachment to a worshipping community of believers.

Such an understanding must be rigorously challenged, not only by scholars who have no reason to consider Luke as Holy Scripture, but by the saints who need to reclaim the Bible as sacramental formation for a liturgical community. There has even been a renewed interest in considering Luke as Holy Scripture for a believing community within the scholarly community. In the new series by Eerdmans Darryl Palmer discusses the genre of Luke-Acts, whether it is an historical monograph, a theological history, an apologetic historiography, or a form of Graeco-Roman biography.¹ But he also takes seriously another perspective: that Luke is consciously writing scripture for a worshipping community of believing Jews and Christians. He cites G.E. Sterling from his book *Historiography and Self-Definition. Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, noting that Sterling suggests the author of Luke-Acts saw his work as a continuation of the Biblical narrative. He sees Luke's style of writing, which is similar to the Greek of the Septuagint, as evidence Luke believed his narrative constituted the fulfillment of Old Testament promises.²

This address could easily become another attempt to clarify the genre of a gospel such as Luke's. But the literature here is vast, and the conclusion that seems to best fit the analysis of the genre of the gospels is that Luke, along with Matthew, Mark, and John, are their own unique literary compositions, unparalleled in literature before and after their advent. They are unique precisely because they are written as Scripture for liturgical communities. So instead of plowing that field once again, we will look at Luke through a liturgical lens; that is, we will consider his audience as "hearers of the Word," who listen to the evangelist in the context of the church's weekly Eucharist, and we will take seriously the idea that Luke writes Scripture for a liturgical community that is preparing

¹Darryl Palmer, "Acts and Ancient Historical Monograph," in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. B.W. Winter and A.D. Clarke (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 1-2.

²Ibid., 16.

people for Baptism and nurturing people in their baptismal faith by preparing them to receive the Lord's Supper.

*Luke as Holy Scripture*³

Luke is writing a gospel for Jewish Christians to use in evangelizing and catechizing God-fearers and Gentiles. The concept of revelatory instruction as catechesis for pilgrims serves as a helpful formulation for considering the unity of God's work in Jesus' ministry, in Luke's church, in the early catechetical communities, and in the church's ministry today. The gospel was used in catechesis, which we may define broadly as the instruction of those who have come to faith and who look forward to Baptism or who have been baptized already. Catechesis is centered in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was promised in the OT and became incarnate to accomplish the Father's plan of salvation. Jesus continues to be present—spiritually and in his flesh—in preaching and in the sacraments, where he offers the gifts of life, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins.

Luke's gospel is a book of the church, written for the church, to be used by the church in its proclamation of the Gospel to the unbaptized and the baptized. The community that receives Luke's gospel is a catechetical and eucharistic body that already *in the first century* had a method for making Christians. Thus, the context in which Scripture is received is *liturgical*, that is, a church that worships Christ who is present in the reading and preaching of the Word and the receiving of the Sacraments. As Aidan Kavanagh puts it, "This means that rather than being Scripture's stepchild, worship is Scripture's home."⁴

Since Scripture's home is the worshiping community, it is likely that Luke's gospel was first received by a worshiping community. It is addressed to an individual named Theophilus, who almost certainly was a member of such a community. In our consideration of Luke's gospel as Scripture for a liturgical community, two contexts are to be pictured that

³Editor's note: Most of this section is excerpted from Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 4–7.

⁴Aidan Kavanagh, "Scriptural Word and Liturgical Worship," in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 131.

reflect the original first-century audience: 1) those who participate in the events of Jesus' life (the ministry of Jesus in A.D. 30), and 2) those who first receive the gospel as sacramental formation (Luke's church in A.D. 55–60). The process of evangelization that sent the church into the highways and byways to seek the lost (Luke 14) and proclaim the Gospel of release (Luke 4) had as its goal the enrollment of these newly converted into this process of initiation that begins with catechesis and climaxes with Baptism and Lord's Supper. The rhythm of the early Christian communities was the rhythm of evangelization, catechesis, Baptism, and Lord's Supper. This pattern was established by the earthly ministry of Christ himself, in fulfillment of the pattern of the Old Testament.

*Catechumens or "Hearers of the Word"*⁵

St. John Chrysostom points out in his Baptismal Homily that "catechumen" comes from the Greek for "echo" because "instructions were to be so internalized that they 'echoed' not only in one's mind but in one's conduct."⁶ In its use in the early baptismal and catechetical texts, "catechumens" are those who are preparing for Baptism, and a clear distinction is made between those who are "catechumens" and "the baptized." The catechumens would be dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word, while the baptized would remain for the Liturgy of the Lord's Supper. Only the baptized were admitted to the Holy Supper. The Liturgy of the Word came to be known as the "Liturgy of the Catechumens" or the "Mass of the Catechumens" because it was through the *Liturgy of the Word* that the catechumens were instructed in the Christian faith.

In the unique genre of the "mystagogical catecheses" of the fourth century, an explanation of the mysteries of Baptism and Lord's Supper was saved until *after* the catechumen was baptized during Easter week. For eight days, catechists, who came to be known as "mystagogues," explained to the newly baptized what happened to them at the font and at the table. Even though they had been catechized about the doctrine of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, they had not yet heard about the *rites* that accompanied these two great sacramental moments. Pedagogically, the

⁵Editor's note: Most of this section is excerpted from Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 11–12.

⁶T.M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 4.

catechists believed that it was more important to first *experience* Baptism and Lord's Supper and then have these rites explained to them.

While the Liturgy of the Word was called "the Liturgy of the Catechumens," it did not exclude the baptized. The reading and interpretation of the Scriptures was also intended to prepare the baptized to receive Christ as he comes to them in his Supper. The baptized as well as the unbaptized catechumens were nourished and sustained through the Christ who was revealed in his holy Word. The gospel accompanied the OT readings in order to instruct as yet unbaptized catechumens in the way of the Lord and to prepare the baptized to meet the Lord in the eschatological feast of heaven that was given them in the Liturgy of the Lord's Supper. ***Those not yet and those already baptized "echo" the teaching of Jesus in their confession and witness. The baptized are members of a life-long catechumenate as they daily die and rise in Christ.***

The Two Audiences of the Gospel⁷

Luke's gospel as sacramental formation may be illustrated in the two intended audiences addressed by the evangelist. The *first audience* includes the twelve apostles, the seventy(-two), the crowds/people, and the religious establishment, that is, those people who were actually present for the historical events described in the gospel. The first audience historically participates in the very life of Jesus himself, even though during his earthly life they never fully understand what was happening. *The first audience never fully understands the gospel until the end of the story.* They fail to comprehend that Jesus must go to Jerusalem, give up his life in an atoning sacrifice to release the world from its bondage, rise on the third day, and ascend on the fortieth day. *This first audience does not understand God's plan of salvation in Jesus until after the resurrection and Pentecost!*

The *second audience* is the community of believers who received Luke's gospel. It is composed of catechumens: both those preparing for Baptism and those already baptized, who continue to be catechized and who commune with Christ in the Eucharist. These are liturgical Christians who are living in a eucharistic community. The difference between the first and second audiences is that Luke's eucharistic community of catechumens *knows the end of the story*—they know that Christ has gone to the cross, risen, ascended, and that after Pentecost he is continually present in the

⁷Editor's note: Most of this section is excerpted from Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 13–20.

church through his Spirit. Jesus' presence in both his human and divine natures is just as real in his church now as it was in his earthly ministry. It is a *real presence* in body as well as in spirit. It comes through the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Lord's Supper.

Luke's audience can now hear the historical events of Luke's gospel with ears that hear. Their eyes are opened to see what God has revealed about his plan of salvation in Jesus. Like the Emmaus disciples, their eyes have been opened through Jesus' teaching on the road and in the breaking of the bread. For Luke's audience, the "teaching on the road" occurs in the Liturgy of the Word (catechesis), and "the breaking of the bread" occurs in the Liturgy of the Lord's Supper. *It cannot be overemphasized that those who receive Luke's gospel hear in light of the passion and resurrection facts, Pentecost, and Christ's ongoing presence in the church.*

Luke's gospel, then, is written to be heard, not read, in the church's liturgy. The evangelist, therefore, uses the literary techniques of the day, based on the principle of balance, to assist the hearer as he listens for significant themes and memorizes them. His gospel shapes life in Christ by describing that life under the cross in a hostile world that is at odds with the gospel, a life lived in eschatological tension in the now/not yet. It is about conversion, a turning from the world to live in a new way. It therefore speaks of things related to conversion: repentance and forgiveness, Baptism, and table fellowship with God. As a liturgical document, it cannot be understood outside the church's worship life. Because it is liturgical, it is also catechetical in that it either prepares hearers of the word for baptism or it nurtures the baptized.

The gospel is addressed to specific first-century hearers in a specific cultural, sociological, and political milieu. Most of these hearers are converts to Christianity who have come from the ranks of God-fearers or pagan Gentiles who knew not Christ but are now believers from hearing the Gospel.

While those groups are Luke's hearers, the gospel itself is written to be read by *Jewish-Christian interpreters* who lead the worship in a house church. They will read the Gospel and interpret it for the God-fearers and pagan Gentiles. This is the reason the gospels are more reticent than we might expect, preserving a *disciplina arcani*, for they are written to be read *in the church* by those who are trained to both read and interpret. The primary Lukan community is different from the communities addressed by the other gospels. As a catechism for Jewish-Christians to use in catechizing God-fearers and pagan Gentiles, it presents a new

narrative of the same events recorded in the other gospels, but in a manner that is accessible to a Gentile catechumenate who needs a more detailed explanation of the OT background and Jewish culture to understand the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation in Jesus.

The genre of the gospels is like Cyril of Jerusalem's *procatechesis*, which prepared for baptismal and eucharistic initiation. The gospels are not mystagogical catecheses that unveiled the sacramental mysteries for the newly baptized only after they had experienced those mysteries. Thus, since the gospels are part of a *disciplina arcani*, the theological meaning of the events is veiled in a literary genre that requires exegesis by a qualified pastor or catechist who has been raised up by the community as an interpreter of the text. One must *hear* between the lines, so to speak, by listening for themes in the gospel that unpack the meaning of the events of Jesus' life. Meaning is not immediately accessible to the Gentile hearer, for the gospel must be heard in a community that regularly washes newcomers at the font, feasts at the Table of the Lord, and safeguards the traditions of the church. The sense of the text would not be immediately understood by a neophyte within the catechumenate. He must hear the gospel with interpretation by authoritative servants who are in continuity with Jesus' prophetic ministry and the apostolic ministry of the Twelve and the seventy(-two).

Luke records the teaching of Jesus in a literary narrative that has theological significance, but the meaning needs to be explained and interpreted. Luke the evangelist guides his hearers through a maze of themes, allusions, doctrines, and picturesque descriptions that comprise a mosaic of Jesus, thereby creating and sustaining faith in God's plan of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. To illustrate sacramental formation in Luke's Gospel, a few examples might be helpful.

*The Benedictus*⁸

The Benedictus provides Jewish Christians with a resource to catechize God-fearers or Gentiles, offering Luke's hearers a magnificent vehicle for rehearsing Israel's covenantal history. Coming at the liturgical moment of John's circumcision, Zechariah's Benedictus connects the OT promises of God's visitation and redemption with the fulfillment of those promises in the Child for whom John prepares. The link between salvation

⁸Editor's note: Most of this section is excerpted from Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 95-101.

and forgiveness is a critical issue in the preparatory instruction or catechesis for baptismal initiation.

Central to this hymn is God's remembrance of his holy covenant (1:72b) and the oath he swore to Abraham (1:73). Surprisingly, διαθήκη ("covenant") is used in the synoptics only at the institution of the Lord's Supper and here in the Benedictus. Remembrance is an important concept in table fellowship language, both at the Last Supper and in the ongoing Eucharist of the church (cf. Lk 22:19, ἀνάμνησις).

The occasion of John's circumcision and incorporation into the covenant of Abraham recalls all of OT covenantal history. God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) ... was sealed with a bloody sacrifice in the presence of God (Gen 15:12–21) and entered into by means of circumcision (Gen 17:1–14), which Luther compares favorably to the Sacrament of Baptism.⁹ God's salvation is central, and this salvation is focused in the covenant of Abraham that God remembers throughout the history of Israel.

The use of "covenant" (διαθήκη) suggests a link between the Benedictus, the series of covenants in the OT, and the Last Supper. The common theme is sacrifice. The covenant with Abraham was a bloody one, sealed by the presence of the Lord in the smoking pot as it passed through the two cut pieces of the animal (Gen 15:17–21). At the Passover, the blood of the sacrificial lamb without blemish was applied to the lintel and doorposts. The covenant promises to Abraham and to Moses are brought together in Ex 6:2–9 and 12:48–49. This covenant is reaffirmed at the foot of Mt. Sinai through another bloody act of sacrifice, where the people promise to hear and heed God's covenant (Ex 24:4–8).¹⁰ This covenant takes on a new dimension with the prophets, particularly with Jeremiah who elaborates on the new covenant as one of forgiveness (Jer 31:31–34).

The new covenant comes to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This is the promise that the Benedictus rehearses through God's mighty acts in the OT and through John's role as the forerunner of Messiah who will "give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Lk 1:77). However, the hearer also knows that the covenant in the center of the Benedictus comes to its complete fulfillment on the night in which

⁹Lectures on Genesis (1538–39), in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 101–112.

¹⁰See X. León-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament*, trans. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 145.

Jesus was betrayed and said, “This cup [is] the new covenant in my blood, which is being poured out on behalf of you” (22:20). According to Luke, then, this new covenant of Jesus’ very body and blood subsumes the old blood covenants that anticipated this final covenant. The covenantal sacrifice God made with Abraham, celebrated in the Passover, poured on the people by Moses, and foreseen by Jeremiah is now offered in a cup of the Lord’s blood. All the OT covenants are now superseded by the coming of the one for whom John will prepare.

John’s mission is to “prepare his ways” (1:76; ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ). The “way” is catechetical language from the OT. The way was both a journey in faith and a catechetical lifestyle, i.e., a path to the Promised Land (on which the Israelites were “catechized” through the Word of God that came to them through Moses and through suffering) and a posture of confession in which they should walk. This journey/catechetical lifestyle motif became formalized in the OT catechetical concept of the “two ways”: God’s way or the people’s way. The Didache, an early Christian writing that is highly Semitic, also begins with this kind of catechetical language: “There are two Ways [ὁδοὶ δύο], one of Life and one of Death, and there is a great difference between the two Ways” (τῶν δύο ὁδῶν; Didache 1:1).¹¹

Blessings and Woes: The Sermon on the Plain¹²

This catechesis may be illustrated by Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. *This sermon is the most significant summary of Jesus’ catechesis during his Galilean ministry.* It is the beginning of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples about what it means to be a catechumen. He intends for them to use his teaching to make further catechumens and disciples. *This is also the first teaching Jesus specifically directs to his disciples.* Disciples are learners, students, or in early Christian parlance, *catechumens*. Here they are taught by Jesus in the same way the early church would later teach catechumens. Throughout the sermon there are references to their status as either “disciples” (Lk 6:20) or “hearers” (6:27) of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus will say to “those who hear” (6:27; τοῖς ἀκούουσιν) a series of commands (6:27–38), and the sermon concludes by referring to the

¹¹*The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, trans. K. Lake (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 309.

¹²Editor’s note: Most of this section is excerpted from Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 283–287.

catechumen as the one “who comes to me and hears my words [ἀκούων μου τῶν λόγων] and does them” (6:47). Jesus will also contrast himself as teacher to his “disciples” or “catechumens”: “A disciple [μαθητῆς] is not above his teacher [διδάσκαλον]. Everyone who is fully trained will be as his teacher” (6:40).

Luke’s gospel continues the OT catechetical tradition of the two ways: the way of life and the way of death. The Sermon on the Plain portrays this classic OT and Christian antinomy between life and death more starkly than Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. Luke seems to highlight sections that accent the “either/or” alternatives of catechesis, even following the beatitudes with Jesus’ series of woes. The catechumen is to see that life is filled with these two alternatives and that in himself and his teaching, Jesus is offering the way of light and life.

Who might Luke’s first hearers have in mind when they hear the beatitudes? Who are blessed because of their poverty, their hunger, their crying? Who are blessed for the hate, insults, and exclusion they receive on account of the Son of Man? Would these hearers in Luke’s day not recall the martyrs who went before them, the saints who preceded them and now stand with them in the church? Would they not see themselves? For when one enters the Christian community by Baptism, these beatitudes describe the character of those who belong to this community.

Luke’s hearers then and now should see beyond themselves to the One who was poor for them, who hungered in the wilderness for them, who wept for them as he entered Jerusalem, who received hate, insults, and exclusion for them, and who was cast out and crucified outside Jerusalem as evil—the Son of Man. In the beatitudes, the Great Reversal first announced in the Magnificat is sounded again, but now in the context of a ministry of reversal in which Christ shows that all blessedness comes from his humility in the face of mounting persecution. The Christological character of the beatitudes would not be lost on Luke’s hearers, who see themselves only in terms of how they see Jesus, who understand their baptismal incorporation into his body and into all that he brings. *The catechumen, who enters the Christological life through Baptism, is taught about the stage of this life by being told in the gospel how Jesus lived his life in a hostile world that put him to death.* Those who join his community will live this same life in this same world. This Christological reading applies not only to the beatitudes, but also to the rest of the Sermon on the Plain, beginning with the woes that show life without Christ (6:24–26), the imperatives of catechesis that point the way to this

Christological life (6:27–38), and the goal of catechesis that describes the enlightenment, the fruit, and the foundation of this life (6:39–49).

*Emmaus*¹³

Luke begins like no other gospel and ends like no other gospel. It is framed by the catechetical language adopted by later centuries to describe the process of sacramental formation. The prologue describes the purpose of his gospel in terms of catechesis. Luke the catechist does not give an unbiased, “neutral” narration, but a persuasive, confessional one filled with Christological meaning. As catechesis about Christ, it is a Christology.

This Christological meaning continues in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus. The journey is catechetical. The Emmaus disciples are transformed from catechumens into initiates—believers with understanding—through the teaching of Jesus on the road (literally, “in the way” [24:32, 35]), where their hearts burn, and through the breaking of the bread, when their eyes are opened. The round-trip journey recapitulates the journey of the entire gospel, which began with *doubting* Zechariah in the temple (1:5–25) and ends with joyful *worshippers* in the temple (24:52–53). It is also a précis of Jesus’ ministry of table fellowship and catechesis, beginning with his sermon in Nazareth (4:16–30) until his Passover on the night in which he was betrayed (22:14–20).

The catechesis on the road also establishes the pattern for Christian worship. The catechesis is Christology, and its vehicle—teaching—is the first element in the table fellowship matrix, serving as *preparation for the meal*. The Christological interpretation of the Scriptures *teaches* the disciples about Jesus. *In Christian worship, this same teaching will be accomplished by the Service of the Word, which precedes the Service of the Sacrament.*

The core of the catechesis on the road is 24:25–27, in which, for the Emmaus disciples, Jesus exegetes Moses, the prophets, and all the OT Scriptures. *This first climax of the Emmaus story and of the gospel itself accomplishes two aims:* (1) In 24:26, *the kerygma of the gospel is forged into one simple statement:* “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (2) In 24:27, *a scriptural foundation is provided for this kerygma:* “And after beginning from

¹³Editor’s note: Most of this section is excerpted from Arthur A. Just, *Luke* 9:51–24:53, 994, 1001–1020.

Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” These two features provide for the hearer of the gospel a precise lens that brings into sharp focus who Jesus is and what he has done in accomplishing God’s plan of salvation.

The catechesis on the road serves as *preparation for the meal at Emmaus*. It accomplishes its goal: faith in the suffering and rising Christ. Jesus’ rebuke of the disciples reprimands their lack of faith¹⁴ in the true Christology that includes rejection, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection. Their lack of faith came from not understanding the prophecies. But now *Jesus the teacher* explains the hermeneutical key that opens the Scriptures so that the hearts, slow to believe (24:25), become burning (24:32). The issue of faith or its absence is central to the Lukan themes of recognition versus the failure to recognize, opened or closed eyes, comprehension or misunderstanding of the passion and resurrection facts. The evangelist moves from physical seeing and hearing to spiritual perception in the heart, from ignorance and unbelief to faith. True remembering (24:6, 8) comes from a Christological understanding of Moses and the prophets—a goal only *the risen Christ* can accomplish in the Emmaus disciples.

The personal presence and instruction of the risen Lord is the element that sets this act of teaching apart from all others. The teaching of the risen Christ readies the Emmaus disciples for the meal with the risen Christ in 24:28–30 by giving them faith to believe all that the prophets had spoken. Later in Christian worship, the teaching of the proper understanding of Jesus’ suffering and of the real presence of his body and blood in his Supper will be prerequisite for participating in the Meal in which the guests receive the forgiveness of sins for their own resurrection life.

The primary thrust of the Emmaus narrative is *table fellowship*. As in the earlier Lukan meals of Jesus, the *teaching of Jesus* and the *meal of Jesus* must be considered together. The teaching functions as *preparation* for the meal, where reconciliation takes place. The catechesis on the road by the risen Lord prepares the Emmaus disciples for the recognition of the reality of his resurrection in the breaking of the bread.

What is the high point of the Emmaus narrative? There are, in fact, two climaxes, the first preparatory for the second. *The teaching and the breaking of the bread together form the summit of Luke’s entire gospel*. The Emmaus narrative is the first time a disciple of Jesus recognizes by *faith* that *Jesus is the suffering and rising Messiah prophesied in the OT*.

¹⁴As an articular infinitive, τοῦ πιστεῦειν, “to believe,” explains in what way they were ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ, “foolish and slow in heart.”

The teaching of Jesus in 24:25–27 creates burning hearts as the disciples yearn for divine revelation that will explain the events that have baffled them (24:19–24). It is not the teaching, but the breaking of the bread in 24:30 that is *the moment of revelation*.

This question must be asked: Why does Jesus choose to reveal himself in the breaking of the bread?¹⁵ To answer that question is to go at the heart of Luke's Gospel as sacramental formation. *The order of teaching then eating sets the pattern for the early Christian meals in Acts. That order is also reflected in the church's liturgical worship by the Service of the Word (teaching) followed by the Service of the Sacrament (meal).* In the Emmaus narrative, the combination of these two elements—teaching and eating—is neatly phrased in Luke's concluding verse in 24:35: “And they were expounding the things in the way [τὰ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ] and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread [ἐν τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου].”

The final section of Luke's Gospel from the Emmaus narrative to the ascension scene is the evangelist's post-resurrection teaching about the sacred mystery of the crucified and risen Christ's presence in his church. It provided the early church with a fitting example of what may have led to the practice of “mystagogical catechesis.”¹⁶ This was the predominant method of catechesis in the early church through the fourth century. In “mystagogical catechesis,” some teaching about the Sacraments occurred before catechumens were baptized and communed for the first time during the Easter Vigil, but the mystery of Christ's presence and the full theological meaning of the Sacraments were expounded afterward during the week following Easter. The sacramental mysteries were unveiled for the newly baptized only after they had experienced those mysteries. In a similar way, as the Emmaus disciples converse with Jesus along the road, they are only partially aware of the significance of the teaching they receive. They remain unaware of the reality of Jesus' presence with them up until that point in the meal when they recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Only after they experience the revelations of Jesus in his

¹⁵This question is also posed by Richard J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24*, *Analecta Biblica* 82 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 105.

¹⁶See the section “Church of Hippolytus (A.D. 215) and Today's Church” in the introduction to *Luke 1:1–9:50*. See also H.M. Riley, *Christian Initiation: A Comparative Study of the Interpretation of the Baptismal Liturgy in the Mystagogical Writing of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ambrose of Milan* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1974).

interpretation of the OT Scriptures and in his breaking of the bread do the disciples finally understand the mystery of his resurrection and his abiding presence with them.

The revelation of Jesus as the risen Christ, who lives forevermore, gives table fellowship an added eschatological dimension. The new era of salvation that has begun will never end, and the resurrection life revealed at Emmaus will continue at the eternal banquet in the presence of Jesus, whose glory will then be fully revealed. Table fellowship of teaching and breaking bread becomes the occasion for the presence of the eschatological kingdom because it is a celebration of the new covenant that is founded on Christ's death and resurrection.

Yet these events are not for the two Emmaus disciples exclusively; they are for the benefit of the entire church. Those two disciples are part of the continuum of all who have received revelations from God. Those two disciples are representatives of all Jesus' catechumens, and they are members of the one holy catholic church, extending from OT times to the parousia. Thus they are part of the eschatological community of saints—the true catechumenate. God's people waited millennia for this moment of revelation, and for two millennia since the Emmaus events the church has remembered this climactic moment in God's plan of salvation in eucharistic fellowship.

The prologue and the Emmaus story frame Luke's gospel. Faith rests upon *certainly* about the *catechetical* tradition of the church, and that catechesis is now being passed on through Luke as sacred Scripture (Lk 1:4). The full catechesis of the church includes the "things" (24:35)—the facts—about Jesus' passion and resurrection, as well as the *knowledge* (1:4; 24:31, 35) of the presence of the crucified and risen one in the breaking of the bread. The journey of Jesus, from heaven to earth (the infancy narrative), to Jerusalem, and back to heaven (24:51), will now set in motion the journey of the Christian church. Acts will document how the disciples are now empowered to go out into the world, armed with "the word and the bread ... the means to mission."¹⁷

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the Emmaus narrative is that Jesus, the moment he is recognized, disappears from sight. Why? With the crucifixion and resurrection, the table fellowship of Jesus has been transformed. He no longer reclines at table as he did during his earthly ministry, for he is now present with the church in a new way. The presence

¹⁷G.R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 124; See also Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses*, 107, 113, 153, 212, 216–217, and especially 227–296.

and disappearance of Jesus at the Emmaus meal helps prepare the church to understand that Jesus will be present yet unseen at the church's eucharistic meals. Emmaus is the transitional meal between the pre-resurrection meals of Jesus' earthly ministry, including the Last Supper, where he physically and visibly ate with his disciples, and the church's continuing celebrations of the Lord's Supper, where Jesus is present in flesh and blood, yet unseen. The church, like the Emmaus disciples, is to recognize, with the opened eyes of faith, that Jesus is truly present in the breaking of the bread (cf. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7).

The stranger who walked with the Emmaus disciples on the road, who became their guest and then their host at the meal, is a stranger no more. Every time the church follows his institution and gathers to celebrate the new testament in his blood, he is present as the unseen host, feeding his church with his body, which he gave into death on the cross, and with his blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. The old covenant meals have passed away. The eschatological meal—the Lord's Supper—will be the feast of the church until that day when Jesus again eats with his disciples at “the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom, which has no end.”¹⁸ In the meantime, the church rejoices in the presence of Jesus' eschatological kingdom through the teaching of his words and the breaking of the bread.

¹⁸*Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 144.