



Cleansed and Fed: The Sacramental Life God Feeds Us Jesus

COMMUNION IS A MYSTERY

When we use reason and logic, we can learn a great deal about ourselves and our world. For example...

Even within the realm of science, there are things about ourselves and our world that reason and logic will never help us learn. For example...

Communion and Christmas

John 1:1-3, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Who is the “Word”? What does it mean that “the Word became flesh”?
What term do theologians use for this mystery from God’s Word?

Identify some logical problems with God becoming human.

How should we expect the world to react to such logical problems?
(See John 1:5,11)

Read Luke 1:34-37. What solution does this passage offer as to the mystery of the incarnation?

Matthew 26:26-28

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." ²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

What words does Jesus use to describe the bread and wine he gives his disciples?

When you take these words at face value, what is Jesus saying that his disciples are receiving in this meal?

Identify some logical problems with the teaching of the *Real Presence* of Jesus' body and blood in Holy Communion.

How should we expect the world to react to such logical problems?

Agree or disagree: When reaching out to the world with the message of Scripture, we should downplay parts of the Bible that defy logic, like the incarnation of Jesus and the teaching of the *Real Presence*.

What do Christmas and Communion have in common?

Why do you suppose God has chosen to do such mysterious things?

Sing or say the following hymn stanza together

Soul, adorn yourself with gladness;
Leave behind all gloom and sadness.
Come into the daylight's splendor;
There with joy your praises render
Unto him whose grace unbounded
Has this wondrous supper founded.
Though he reigns above most holy,
Deigns to dwell with you most lowly.

*Johann Franck
Christian Worship Hymn 311, s.1*

Attempts to solve the mystery

Some well-meaning Christians believe that when Jesus said "This is my body" and "This is my blood" he was using a figure of speech. They say the bread *symbolized* his body and the wine *symbolized* his blood. They think that when they receive the Lord's Supper, they only receive bread and wine, not the body and blood of Jesus.

What is the basis for this interpretation? What do these interpreters hope to gain by this line of thought? What is lost?

The Swiss reformer John Calvin taught that the body and blood of Jesus are really present in the Lord's Supper, in a spiritual way. He said that when we receive the Lord's Supper we are lifted up to heaven by faith and are connected to the very body and blood of Jesus who died for us.

What's wrong here?

Agree or Disagree: We should understand everything in the Bible literally.

Agree or Disagree: If there's a question as to whether or not a Bible passage should be understood literally or figuratively, it's up to us to decide which interpretation we like better.

What inevitably happens when humans try to find a logical solution for something from God's Word that is supposed to remain a mystery?

Sing or say the following hymn stanza together

Now I kneel before you lowly,
Filled with joy most deep and holy,
As with trembling awe and wonder
On your mighty work I ponder,
How by mystery surrounded,
Depths that no one ever sounded.
None may dare to pierce unbidden
Secrets that with you are hidden.

*Johann Franck
Christian Worship Hymn 311, s.4*

The Testimony of Scripture

How do the following Bible passages shed light on Jesus' words: "This is my body," and "This is my blood"?

1 Corinthians 10:16

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 11:27

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

In his Small Catechism, Luther says:

What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink.

How well do Luther's words match what Scripture says?

If Scripture already says it, why does Luther put it in his own words?

When might you have an occasion to put the teaching of the *Real Presence* into your own words? How can you be confident that what you are saying is true?

When it comes to the mysteries like the *Real Presence*, why are Christians happy to trust Scripture more than they trust their own reason and logic?

Sing or say the following hymn stanza together

Human reason, though it ponders,
Cannot fathom these great wonders,
That Christ's body must be boundless
Since the souls it feeds are countless,
And that he his blood is giving
With the wine we are receiving.
These great mysteries unsounded
Are by God alone expounded.

*Johann Franck
Christian Worship Hymn 311, s.5*

Why this mystery matters

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Colossians 2:9

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.

Who is Jesus Christ? What does the Bible say?

1 John 1:7

The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

What has Jesus accomplished for us sinners by the shedding his blood for us on the cross?

Whose body and blood do you receive in Communion? What does this mean?

Evaluate: Since the Lord's Supper is difficult to comprehend we shouldn't spend too much time thinking about it.

Sing or say the following hymn stanza together

Lord, by love and mercy driven,
You have left your throne in heaven
On the cross for me to languish
And to die in bitter anguish,
To forgo all joy and gladness
And to shed your blood in sadness.
By this blood redeemed and living,
Lord, I praise you with thanksgiving.

*Johann Franck
Christian Worship Hymn 311, s.6*