



**Northern Illinois District**  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

## **Crossing Thresholds: *To Others***

### **Session 2: Holy Baptism: The Beginning of the Journey Together**

*“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’”*  
(Matthew 28:16–20 ESV).

#### **Catechetical Reflection**

When Christ instructed the eleven to go out into the world to make disciples, He did so, giving them two things to do: baptize and teach. From that moment on, those two actions would forever be linked together. Our baptismal liturgy reinforces this as pastors charge sponsors to “support them in their ongoing instruction and nurture in the Christian faith.”

Baptism and teaching are the things that make a disciple; that is, they are the things that make a Christian. The rhythm our life takes us on is one that continually drives us back to remember that we have been indelibly tattooed with the Holy Name, that we repent of where we have done wrong, and we turn our eyes and our feet to follow Jesus.

But Christ does not stop merely at baptizing and teaching. Rather, He gives us the answer to “who” we are to baptize and teach. This shouldn’t surprise us, for we know Christ died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Making disciples of *all nations* is Jesus’ call to us. Women, men, children, infants, those near, those far, those who look different than you, that is who He wraps up in that little word, all.

#### **Scriptural Theme**

*“And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him”* (Acts 8:31 ESV).



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### **The Study: Acts 8:26-40 ESV**

*“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:*

*‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter  
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he opens not his mouth.  
In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who can describe his generation?  
For his life is taken away from the earth.’*

*And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”*

**Before we get too far down the road, what are some things you notice from this passage? What are some things you wonder?**

### **PLACE**

**Where does this study take place and who are the people there?**

We, the hearers of the passage recounting the encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch are not given an exact location of where the two met. St. Luke outlines in the



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opening verse of the passage: *“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place”* (Acts 8:26).

Franzmann writes: *“There were two roads that Philip could have taken. One of these was the coastal road Philip could have caught at Lydda and then followed to the area of Gaza. This was the main caravan route to Egypt. But it appears more likely that he took a second road. This would have led him from Jerusalem over Bethlehem and Hebron and then in a southwesterly direction toward Gaza. It is to the country on the last stage of this road that some apply the word ‘desert.’ Others question whether this area actually was desert in the strict sense. They point out that the Greek word used here can also mean ‘lonely’ or ‘sparsely settled.’ It really makes no difference which view we take. In either case the twofold purpose of the Holy Spirit remains the same: 1) He directed Philip on a road on which he would find the Ethiopian. 2) He wanted to provide Philip the opportunity to be alone with the Ethiopian and not to be disturbed in that momentous encounter by frequent travelers or by people in villages dotting the road.”*<sup>1</sup>

### Philip the Deacon

We first encounter Philip the Deacon in Acts chapter 6:

*“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and **Philip**, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them”* (Acts 6:1–6, emphasis added).

Weedon calls this the institution of the first auxiliary office in the Church.<sup>2</sup> Philip was set aside to tend to the task of service of others. After the stoning of St. Stephen, also

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<sup>1</sup> From *Bible History Commentary: New Testament – Volume 2* © 1989 WELS Board for Parish Education. Used with permission.

<sup>2</sup> *Celebrating the Saints: The Feasts, Festivals, and Commemorations of Lutheran Service Book* © 2016 William C. Weedon



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one of the seven deacons, the Jerusalem congregation scattered. There we find Stephen evangelizing in the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5).

### **Ethiopian Eunuch**

Franzmann describes the Ethiopian eunuch's role in the queen's court as the 'secretary of the treasury.'<sup>3</sup>

He continues:

*"At once we realize that the man must have been a proselyte to Judaism. Now, there were two classes of proselytes. There were those called 'proselytes of righteousness.' They became Jewish in the full sense. They not only professed faith in God as taught by the Jews, but also bound themselves to observe the whole Mosaic law. Such proselytes were allowed to enter the inner courts of the temple. The other class of proselytes was called 'the proselytes of the gate.' They had to remain outside the temple's inner courts, 'at the gate' or in the area called the Court of the Gentiles. These proselytes did not become Jews in the full sense. They were not circumcised nor did they become subject to the many ordinances of the ceremonial law. We know that the Ethiopian must have been this kind of proselyte, for a eunuch, being regarded as mutilated, could not 'enter the assembly of the Lord' (Deuteronomy 23:1). The proselyte of the gate before us had become a devout adherent to Judaism, for he was occupying his time on the journey home by reading the book, that is, the scroll, of the prophet Isaiah. Also take into account that he had traveled some 200 miles to worship at Jerusalem, perhaps at one of the great festivals."*

Both church father Irenaeus<sup>4</sup> and Ethiopian tradition<sup>5</sup> contend that the eunuch returned home and evangelized the people. It is also interesting to note that as the church in Ethiopia grew it eventually found favor with one, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther. There is a well-documented history of Luther's interactions with the Ethiopian

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<sup>3</sup> From *Bible History Commentary: New Testament – Volume 2* © 1989 WELS Board for Parish Education. Used with permission.

<sup>4</sup> *Against Heresies by Irenaeus* translated by Philip Schaff © 2015 by Roman Roads Media, LLC, p. 40, [files.romanroadsstatic.com/materials/romans/early-christianity/IrenaeusV1-0.pdf](http://files.romanroadsstatic.com/materials/romans/early-christianity/IrenaeusV1-0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *The Establishment of the Ethiopian Church* by Professor Sergew Habele Selassie [ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html](http://ethiopianorthodox.org/english/ethiopian/prechristian.html)



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Church, especially with the Deacon Michael.<sup>6</sup> Hardt contends that this interaction even included a declaration of church fellowship with the Church of Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup>

**In session 1, you discussed the importance of “place” in the Scriptures. As you consider this passage, what strikes you as important aspects of place for Philip and the eunuch?**

Catechist/Guide: Be sure to give time for discussion. Take note of questions participants bring up that are not related to study questions below.

### LEARNING

**How does Philip find himself on the road? How about the Ethiopian eunuch? See Acts 8:26–27.**

The author of Hebrews begins the letter by stating: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world”* (Hebrews 1:1–2). The angel of the Lord and the Holy Spirit spoke to Philip.

**Where has God spoken to us today? How does this tie into Matthew 28:16–20 and Acts 8:26–40?**

God speaks to us in His Holy Word, which we receive in His wet Word (Baptism), His heard Word (proclamation), and His satiating Word (Eucharist). We see in Matthew and in Acts that God has tied all things up in His Word. In Matthew we see that Baptism is not just the application of water, but a combined water and Word, also accompanied by teaching. In Acts 8, we see Philip tell of the Word made flesh. *“... he told him the good news about Jesus”* (Acts 8:35).

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<sup>6</sup> *Martin Luther and Ethiopian Christianity: Historical Traces* by David D. Daniels

[divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/martin-luther-and-ethiopian-christianity-historical-traces](http://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/martin-luther-and-ethiopian-christianity-historical-traces)

<sup>7</sup> The Confessional Principle: Church Fellowship in the Ancient and in the Lutheran Church by Tom G.A. Hardt in *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* Volume 8, No. 2. *“In one case Luther is known to have issued a letter of recommendation for an Ethiopian deacon, Michael. The intention was apparently to make it possible for Michael to receive the sacrament; the similarity between the outward forms of the Lutheran and Ethiopian eucharistic liturgy being stressed. Michael was said to have accepted all our articles of faith, ‘omnibus nostris articulis.’ This unexpected declaration of fellowship between the Wittenbergian churches and the Church of Ethiopia may have been based upon a misunderstanding, but it yet speaks about the openness of Luther’s mind and his consciousness of belonging to the church of the holy fathers.”*



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**After Philip ran to the eunuch, what did he ask? After this question, what does he do?**

It is important to note that Philip doesn't rush in to instruct the Ethiopian eunuch. Rather, prompted by the Spirit, he approaches the eunuch and enters into a Holy conversation. "*Do you understand what you are reading?*" (Acts 8:30) is a question seeking to connect. After asking this question, Philip listens. He waits and is a guide to his catechumen.

**The eunuch asks, "*See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?*" (Acts 8:37) What might this question tell you about the scope of what Philip taught?**

In teaching all of the "*good news about Jesus*" (Acts 8:35), Philip included Christ's institution of Holy Baptism. And as a model of this, he must have taught the eunuch to "*observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20).

### PRACTICE

**The Spirit sent Philip to join the eunuch's chariot. The Spirit sent Philip to join someone who did not look like him. As mentioned above, the church has held that the Ethiopian eunuch brought Christendom to what was then Ethiopia. How does this instruct us today in our communities? Discuss.**

Catechist/Guide: Seeing our neighbors as people Jesus bled and died for is the driving force of the evangelism task. Whether those neighbors are little ones in your home, the next-door neighbor, or the neglected neighborhood in your community, Jesus' care for the world is for all "*tribes and peoples and languages*" (Revelation 7:9). Philip may have never known how God used his one conversation with a man from a faraway land; but he knew his calling, and he knew that this was for "*all nations*" (Matthew 28:19). And that one conversation helped bring Christ to a nation from the first century all the way to this very day.

In the same way, we may never know the outcome of our labors. The call to make disciples is to do the part given to you right now. Paul planted, Apollos watered, God gives the increase when and how He wills. Often, we are discouraged when we don't see the results of our labors. This need not be so. Our job is to do our little part when and where we are placed.



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**It seems Philip must have instructed the eunuch on Baptism as a part of the Good News of Jesus. How might this instruct you today in your proclamation of Christ in your community? Discuss.**

After the prompting of the Spirit, Philip ran over to the chariot and then “*heard [the eunuch] reading Isaiah*” (Acts 8:30). Another way to say this might be: “Philip listened.”

**Is it easy for you to listen first? Why or why not? If not, what are some ways that you can work to improve?**

### **Prayer**

Almighty and everlasting God, we give thanks to You for Your servant Philip the Deacon. You called him to preach the Gospel to the peoples of Samaria and Ethiopia. Raise up in this and every land messengers of Your kingdom, that Your Church may proclaim the immeasurable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.<sup>8</sup>

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