



bring Jesus

Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



Steen also blogs at LCA eNews. To sign up to his newslist go to www.lca.org.au/enews, insert your email address and tick the box next to 'bring Jesus'. He would also love to hear your thoughts and stories about mission in your context.

You can email him at steen.olsen@lca.org.au with 'bring Jesus' as the subject line.

Inviting others to believe

Sometimes we are told that you become a Christian when you invite Jesus into your heart or life. But I am not sure that it is helpful to think of conversion in this way. The Bible never speaks of non-Christians inviting Jesus in, making him their Lord, or dedicating themselves to serving Jesus.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am sure that this has been part of a process which has seen many people become Christians. The Spirit of God can use all manner of things to lead us along the road to faith. I just said that it is not particularly helpful—and the accounts we have in the Bible never take this approach.

Yes, I know that Revelation 3:20 says, 'I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you ...'. But if you look carefully, you will see it is addressed to the church at Laodicea; that is, to Christians.

So what does the Bible say? Well, there isn't just one formula or approach, but in general we can see that the Bible speaks of **repentance** to God the Father, **believing** in Jesus the Son and **receiving** the Holy Spirit. The Bible also speaks of being baptised in the name of all three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or sometimes, just being baptised in the name of Jesus.

What do we find in the Acts of the Apostles? People were told God's big story—or parts of it—and then the witnesses looked for the Spirit's work in the listeners. At Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter quotes from Joel before pointing

to Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection. The crowds say, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter's answer is instructive: 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'.

Stephen begins with Abraham and Moses (Acts 7) and Philip starts with the passage the Ethiopian Eunuch was reading in Isaiah and then they both proclaim the good news about Jesus (Acts 8). The Jews stone Stephen but the Eunuch asks to be baptised, which Philip promptly does.

In the home of the gentile Cornelius (Acts 10), Peter doesn't bother with a long Old Testament introduction. Instead he tells them about Jesus and his death and resurrection, concluding with 'everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name'. The Holy Spirit interrupts proceedings by falling on those who heard the word, and Peter, perhaps a bit surprised, says, 'Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'

In Athens (Acts 17) Paul begins with a local altar to an unknown God and says that this is what he is going to tell them about. He uses their own literature as he tells them about the One whom God raised from the dead.

What do we see in all these examples? They speak the word of God by telling something of God's dealings with people and then, where the Holy



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Spirit works faith, they recognise it. As a result sins are confessed, faith is professed, the Holy Spirit is poured out and people are baptised. No-one is told to pray a particular prayer or to invite Jesus into their heart.

The focus is on God and what he does through the Holy Spirit at work in the word. It is not our decision to believe. We can only recognise the faith that the Holy Spirit creates and celebrate the new life that has begun. I like the way C S Lewis described it as being 'surprised by joy'.

If it were my decision to believe then I would be vulnerable to Satan's attacks in regard to my sincerity. When I recognise that in spite of myself God has planted faith in me, then my confidence rests in God's work, not my own. It is a miracle of God's grace that I believe that Jesus died for me and therefore I am forgiven and will one day rise to live with him forever.

So, how do we witness to others and so bring Jesus to them? When the time is right we tell them something of what God has been doing in our world, including the death and resurrection of Jesus for us. You might then ask if your friend believes this, and if they confess faith, rejoice with them, help them to understand what the Spirit has done in their lives and pray with them, thanking God for his mercy and grace.

If you would find it helpful to use a simple overview of God's big story, then I recommend the *Crossways* witnessing tool, *The Divine Plan*. I have some available for 50 cents each (or whatever you can afford). You can also order them from <http://www.crossways.org> [go to store/additional resources]. It comes in a little envelope that is easily carried in a pocket or purse.

Steen Olsen serves as the SA/NT Director for Mission and as a member of the LCA Board for Local Mission.



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LCA Strategic Direction 2013-2018, p15.
<http://www.lca.org.au/sd>

Read some stories about church-planting on pages 17 and 24 of this edition of *The Lutheran*.

