Why Mormonism Is Not Christian

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I know! I know! They're nice people. Everybody says that and I agree. But the purpose of this article is not to show that Mormons are nice people. There are some nice Buddhists, and I have met scores of Hindu people who were really nice. We're not talking about the *people* of Mormonism; we're talking about the *doctrine* of Mormonism. The real question is this: Is the doctrine of Mormonism a **Christian** doctrine?

This is my 40th year of studying the cults and world religions. I have devoted many hours to the study of this amazing cultic organization called "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (LDS). Here is a group of over 12 million people who believe there is no hell, who baptize living people for dead people, and who believe the Bible is inferior to the *Book of Mormon*. They are people who believe the Trinity is composed of three separate gods, who believe they will become gods themselves, who believe that all other religions are false, and who believe that Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer, and that He was married and had more than one wife. And that's just for starters! Ultimately, there is only one decision that we can conclude: Mormons and Christians worship at different altars.

There are many (and I mean *many*) critical doctrinal differences between Mormonism and Christianity. It would be easy to come up with 20 or 30, but I will do my best to show you five big reasons I believe that Mormonism is not Christian. On church teachings and doctrinal statements I will only quote LDS sources from their own story and doctrine. Here are my five reasons:

I. **Joseph Smith.** This is the man who started the entire movement. He lived from 1805 to 1844. According to Smith, beginning in the early 1820s, he had visions. In some visions an angel directed him to some buried golden plates that were inscribed with a Christian history of ancient American civilizations. In 1830, Smith published what he said was an English translation of these plates as the *Book of Mormon*, and organized the LDS church, saying he had been chosen by God to restore the early Christian church. Church members were later called Latter-day Saints or Mormons. Years later Mormon President Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth LDS prophet said, "Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. . . . He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen."¹

¹ Doctrines of Salvation by Joseph Fielding Smith Vol. 1, p. 188. Let me add here that many LDS books will be cited. This makes the study of this cult more complicated because the words spoken by their living "prophet" become part of the solid doctrine of the church. Thus, to find out what Mormons really believe one has to search through many journals, books and other publications.

Was Joseph Smith really a prophet of God? In order to find out we must first answer the question: Who qualifies as a true prophet of God? At this point we must yield to the authority of scripture. Consider the following:

- A true prophet's words will be in absolute harmony with the words of the prophets that have preceded him (Isaiah 8:20).
- A true prophet does not lie—his predictions will be fulfilled (Jeremiah 28:9 and Deuteronomy 18:22).
- A true prophet prophesies in the name of the Lord, not in his own name (2 Peter 1:21).
- A true prophet does not give his own private interpretation of prophecy (2 Peter 1:20).

According to LDS scripture, when Joseph Smith was 15 years old, he was confused as to which church was true. He claimed his heart was powerfully impressed one night and went into the woods near his house to pray that God would tell him which of all the Christian sects (denominations) was right. As he began to pray, he claimed that he was nearly overcome by "some power" of "astonishing influence" that prevented him from speaking. This story is in the current LDS publication titled, *Pearl of Great Price*. Here is what it says,

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—"This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong)—and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof.²

This story is accepted as scripture by the Mormon people. This is the "official" LDS version. There are in fact nine different versions³ of this story. Also, it is interesting to note that this vision supposedly occurred in 1820 but was not published until 1842 in the Mormon publication *Times and Seasons*. Why? Why wait 22 years? We believe it is because the story came later—much later than

² Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price—Joseph Smith History 1:19*, (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), p. 49.

³ Visit Mormon Research Ministry at: <u>http://www.mrm.org/first-vision</u>

1820.⁴ Personally, I don't think it ever happened. If Joseph Smith did have this "vision" then it was not from God.

Think about what Joseph Smith said in the words printed above. We are led to believe these personages were God and Jesus because he says one of the "personages" points to the other and says, "This is my Beloved Son. Hear Him!" In the words that follow, all denominations (sects) were wrong. All wrong? Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, or Lutherans? Today we have over 200 denominations in the USA—**all wrong**? Their creeds are an "abomination?" The Christian tenets, all Christian doctrine, all evangelical beliefs an **abomination**? Then all "professors" (believers) are corrupt. In one stroke of the pen all denominations, churches, doctrines, and believers are denounced as wrong, an abomination and corrupt. The early church fathers, all the Christian martyrs, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield **all corrupt**?

How could any thinking person believe that a 15-year-old child could have a vision like this? How could we ever believe that Joseph Smith is the founder of a religion that believes all others are false and teaches a "restored gospel"? Do you really think this boy could be a prophet of God?

Here's why I don't believe it:

Inconsistency about church membership. In the vision Smith was told to "join none of them" referring to the local churches. In 1828 (eight years later) Joseph Smith sought membership in the Methodist church where his wife, Emma, had belonged since she was seven years old.⁵

Joseph Smith's false prophecies.⁶ Smith said Jesus would "return within 56 years" (by 1891). He didn't! Smith said that the temple "would be built in Missouri within his generation." It wasn't! Smith said that "All Nations would be involved in the American Civil War." They weren't! Smith said that the sun would hide its face and refuse to give light, and the moon would be bathed in blood in not many days." Neither prophecy has come true! Smith said his son would be his successor in leadership of the church and be "king of Israel." Smith's son did not succeed him (Brigham Young became the second leader) nor did his son become "king of Israel." Joseph Smith made many false prophecies.

Universal apostasy. The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints believe that the church that was founded by Christ and His apostles was destroyed from the earth, that the Gospel was perverted, its

⁴ Jerald and Sandra Tanner have done extensive research on this thought and printed their findings in *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* Read chapter eight, "The First Vision."

⁵ Marvin Cowan, Mormon Claims Answered, (Salt Lake City: Utah Christian Publications), p. 8.

⁶ These are discussed in detail by a wonderful research group called, "Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry." You can reach them at: *http://carm.org/false-prophecies-of-joseph-smith*.

ordinances were changed, its laws were transgressed, its covenant was broken, and the world was left to flounder in the darkness of a long period of apostasy from God. This is absolutely false. In Ephesians 3:21 Paul said, "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Could that statement be true if there were a universal apostasy of the church for several centuries? Our Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." There is absolutely no proof, historically nor biblically, that the church went into apostasy after the first century.

Joseph Smith's theology. To be a true prophet you must speak the Word of God. I have a copy of the "King Follett Discourse" printed and circulated by the Mormon Church. This "speech" is classified as an "utterance" by the "prophet" Joseph Smith. Here is his actual statement from this document.

I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is . . . God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make Himself visible—I say, if you were to see Him today, you would see Him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God . . . It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for certainty the character of God and to know that we may converse with Him as one man converses with another, and that He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the father of us all, dwelt on earth, that same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible . . . Here, then is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you.

The Mormons believe that God was a man and that (Mormon) men will become gods. This is why I said earlier that Christians and Mormons worship at different altars.

II. **Book of Mormon.** The LDS church teaches that in 1823, an angel named Moroni visited Joseph Smith and divulged the location of some golden plates containing the "fullness of the everlasting gospel." These plates—abridged by Moroni and his father, Mormon, 1400 years earlier— were written in "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics." Along with the plates, Smith found a pair of magical eyeglasses that he used to translate the cryptic writing into English. The first edition of this work was printed by the church in 1830 and is called *The Book of Mormon*.

In the introduction page to this book it says: "The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealing with the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and

contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel." This is simply not true. It is not comparable to the Bible and it certainly does not contain the "fullness of the everlasting gospel." There are many central and critical beliefs held sacred by the Mormons that are not even mentioned in this book. Here are just a few of these teachings:

- Elohim (God the Father in Mormonism) was once a mortal man and that he was not always God.
- God has a body of flesh and bones.
- God is married in heaven.
- Men can become Gods.
- Temple participation is necessary to become exalted.
- Jesus and Lucifer are brothers.
- The blood of Christ does not cleanse us from certain sins.
- A person can lose his salvation if he is not baptized on behalf of dead Relatives.
- There is more than one God.
- Males must hold either the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood.
- There are "three degrees of glory."
- "Celestial polygamy" (Mormon men will have many wives in heaven) is approved by God.
- Faithful members of the church must wear sacred undergarments that have the power to protect them.

Many evangelical believers have no idea that Mormonism teaches these things. Be assured that the above list is very accurate and can be easily documented. None of these teachings are to be found in the *Book of Mormon*. Don't you think that if it is the "fullness of the everlasting gospel" it should contain their central teachings? They will be quick to tell you that there are other "sacred books" that explain their beliefs. Don't allow this diversion. There are only two to be considered here: *The Book of Mormon* and the *Holy Bible*. Only these two are said to contain "the fullness of the everlasting gospel." The eighth article of faith in the Mormon Church says "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly." To them, the Bible is inferior to the *Book of Mormon*. Here are some reasons why I don't believe the Mormon bible is the Word of God:

Thirty-eight cities mentioned—none have ever been found. No Mormon cities have been located by using the *Book of Mormon* as a guide. Archaeologists have never successfully used the *Book of Mormon* as a guide in locating any ancient ruins. Leading archeological researchers not only have repudiated the claims of the *Book of Mormon* as to the existence of those civilizations, but have amassed much evidence to show the impossibility of the accounts given in the Mormon bible. Many times Mormons will cite how the Smithsonian Institute backs up their claims. The following is an official statement made by the Smithsonian in 1979: "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the *Book of*

Mormon in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archaeologists see no connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book."

No such language as "Reformed Egyptian Hieroglyphics." The *Book of Mormon* was supposedly translated from "reformed Egyptian." Nothing on the western hemisphere has been found that even remotely resembles Egyptian. Officially "reformed Egyptian" doesn't exist. Think about it: the LDS church says that these ancient people in middle America were Jews who came over from Palestine. The *last* language that any Jew would write in would be Egyptian! The Hebrew language is one of the most pure languages of all time. They surely would have written any of their history in Hebrew as they did in the Old Testament.

Book of Mormon changed at least 3,913 times—many were *major* changes. The LDS have added words, they have deleted words, they have made textual changes, and they have made thousands of spelling changes. Many Mormons minimize this fact by saying that the changes have been minor. Typographical errors are one thing but they have made weighty changes in doctrine, and they have corrected major errors in consistency and in common sense. Jerald and Sandra Tanner compiled a photo reprint of the original 1830 edition of the *Book of Mormon* with all the changes marked.⁷ I will cite one of the first doctrinal changes here: on the title page in the 1830 edition it states: ". . . by Joseph Smith, Junior, Author and Proprietor." In today's edition it states: "Translated by Joseph Smith, Jun."

Contains plagiarism from King James Version—25,000 words taken verbatim from the King James Version of the Bible. There are 19 complete chapters copied word-for-word from the Bible. How can this be? *The Book of Mormon* was supposedly written 1200 years before the King James Version was published.

Contains prophetical errors. In the King James Bible it says in Micah 5:2: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." However, the *Book of Mormon* said He would be born at Jerusalem. In the *Book of Mormon* it says in Alma 7: 10 "And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin . . ."⁸

Nobody has ever physically seen the "golden plates." Mormons say that people have seen them but with the "eye of faith." We are told that they are now in heaven. Further, the plates would have

⁷ Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *3913 Changes in the Book of Mormon,* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co.). This book is still available at *Amazon.com*. A quick search on the Internet will bring ample proof that these changes plus many more have been made to the *Book of Mormon*.

⁸ Many of these errors are discussed by Sandra Tanner at: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, P. O. Box 1884, Salt Lake City, UT. Their website is: *www.utlm.org*. They have an excellent selection of free online books on false Mormon teachings.

weighed between 200-230 pounds. There is no way young Joseph Smith could have even picked them up!

III. **Theology of God**. The third big reason I believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints is not Christian is focused on their teaching about God and His attributes. Here are some of the principal teachings about the god of Mormonism:

God (the Mormon god) was once a man. Joseph Smith said, "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens."⁹ Milton Hunter, member of the 1st Council of the Seventy, echoed Smith's claims in his book *Gospel Through the Ages*. On page 114 it states: "... if we accept the great law of eternal progression, we must accept the fact that there was a time when Deity was much less powerful than He is today." So the Mormon Church believes that God progresses—that He knows more today than He did yesterday. They believe that He once had a body of flesh and bones and is now an exalted man. In *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22 it says, "The Father has a body of flesh and bone as tangible as man's"

There are many gods. Joseph Smith said, "In the beginning, the head of the gods called together a council of the gods and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people in it."¹⁰ The Mormon Church believes that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost comprise the Godhead just as we do. But they add a twist to this concept. They believe that *each* of these three persons in the Godhead is a god. Thus, their theology allows for a plurality of gods to exist. Mormon leader Bruce McConkie said, "To us, speaking in the proper finite sense, THESE THREE ARE THE ONLY GODS WE WORSHIP. But in addition there is an INFINITE NUMBER of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods."¹¹

Adam is God. Again, in the *Journal of Discourses* Brigham Young said, "When our father Adam came into the Garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body and brought Eve one of his wives with him. He helped to make and organize his world. He is our Father and our God and the only God with whom we have to do."¹² Please notice how they take elements from the truth of God's Word and add their own version of the truth. In the above quote they say "Adam came into the Garden" indicating that he pre-existed before that time. Notice that they say he came with a "celestial body and brought Eve one of his wives with him" indicating that he had more than one wife. This is a common occurrence in the cultic world. They take some Bible truth to make it sound good and then add the false teaching in with it!

⁹ Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. VI (Liverpool: R. James, 1966) page 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.5.

¹¹ Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), page. 576-577.

¹² Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. I (Liverpool: R. James 1966), page 50.

There is a Mother god. Mormonism not only teaches a heavenly Father with flesh and bones, but also a "heavenly Mother" with flesh and bones as well. LDS Apostle James Talmage, in a book titled *Articles of Faith*, wrote on page 443: "We are expressly told that God is the Father of spirits, and to apprehend the literalness of this solemn truth we must know that a Mother of spirits is an existent personality." Also in the book, *Gospel Through the Ages*, page 98, Milton Hunter said, "The stupendous truth of the existence of a heavenly Mother, as well as a heavenly Father, became established facts in Mormon theology."

IV. **The Mormon concept of man**. Mormons view our human life here in this world as a training ground for the work that will continue after death, where faithful souls will continue to create and populate worlds and where they will impart the keys of the knowledge of eternal life to their own spirit children. Mormons hold that "the glory of God is intelligence" and it is no surprise that Mormons place a strong emphasis on education. They believe that persons will take with them to the next life all knowledge and skills that they develop during their mortal life on earth. They have some strange teachings about human nature. Here are a few:

The pre-existence of man's soul. The Mormon Church teaches that man was a pre-existent spirit and that mankind is of the same species as God. Our origin is supposed to have been as procreated children of God, born as spirits in some other realm. In that "spirit-world" existence we progressed as far as was possible, but to become truly like our heavenly Father we needed to obtain physical bodies. In a Mormon publication titled *Evidences and Reconciliations*, on page 393, John Widtsoe, a prominent Mormon writer, says, "In the Spirit World are countless numbers of spirits waiting for their descent into mortality, to secure earth bodies as a means of further progress. These unborn spirits desired the best possible parentage. Those assuming plural marriage almost invariable were the finest types in the community." This explains the early practice of polygamy. Today's Mormons are quick to tell us: "That was then and this is now" and the church doesn't sanction polygamy anymore. Two thoughts here: (1) It took them 60 years to stop practicing polygamy (1830–1890), and (2) they believe in "celestial polygamy." They believe that in eternity a Mormon male, baptized and sealed in the temple and found worthy, will become a god and have many wives and produce spirit-children to populate another planet.

Man can become a god. A Mormon teaching was formed into a couplet by President Lorenzo Snow, which states: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."¹³ Think about what you just read: God used to be a man and man has the potential to become a god. This is not an isolated teaching in the Mormon Church. In the aforementioned *King Follett Discourse* on page 10 it says, "Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods

¹³ This famous couplet is taken from one of his poems which appeared in print for the first time in an article written by his son, LeRoi C. Snow, "Devotion to a Divine Inspiration," *Improvement Era*, June 1919; 22:656,660. It also was printed in the *Millennial Star*, Vol. 54. It has caused much trouble for the LDS movement because it is so blasphemous.

yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another . . ."

All mankind will be saved. Apostle John Widtsoe in *Evidences and Reconciliations*, on page 216, declares, "In The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, there is no hell. All will find a measure of salvation." Janis Hutchinson, a former Mormon missionary who found Christ, wrote a most interesting book titled, *The Mormon Missionaries*. She says, "A member must accept Christ to get into any of their three heavens. But, the *third* heaven—the highest, called the Celestial Kingdom where only God and Jesus Christ are supposed to dwell—is attainable *only* by accepting Joseph Smith. Jesus isn't enough."¹⁴

Man has to shed his own blood for his sins. This is perhaps one of the saddest teachings found in Mormonism as it relates to human nature. The biblical teaching on blood atonement is that the shedding of blood is required for forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). The Bible teaches that the blood of Christ cleanses from "all sin" (1 John 1:7). Early Mormon theology, however, teaches that for certain sins the blood of Christ alone does not avail and the person's own blood must be shed for atonement. Under the section, "Blood Atonement," of the book, Mormon Doctrine, LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "... there are some serious sins for which the cleansing of Christ does not operate, and the law of God is that men must then have their own blood shed to atone for their sins." The tenth Mormon prophet, Joseph Fielding Smith, in *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. I, page 135 says, "Joseph Smith taught that there were certain sins so grievous that man may commit, that they will place the transgression beyond the power of atonement of Christ. If these offenses are committed, then the blood of Christ will not cleanse them from their sins even though they repent. Therefore, their only hope is to have their own blood shed to atone as far as possible in their behalf." Think back to Gary Gilmore executed by a firing squad in 1977 at Utah State Prison in Draper. Think back to John Albert Taylor executed in Utah in 1996 and Ronnie Lee Gardner executed in Utah in 2010—all by firing squads. The prevailing belief is that in its early history, Utah used a firing squad because it allows one to "shed his own blood."

V. **Christology.** Perhaps the worst of all Mormon teachings centers on what they believe about Jesus. This is important because without Jesus we simply cannot be saved. Not Jesus *plus* the Mormon Church (or any other church!) but Jesus only. He is the way, the truth, and the life and we cannot come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Here are some of the unbelievable things they teach about our Lord:

Not begotten of the Holy Ghost. In the *Journal of Discourses* Vol. I page 51, Brigham Young said, "Now remember from this time forth and forever, that Jesus Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost." In the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 2, p. 725, it says, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

¹⁴ Janis Hutchinson, *The Mormon Missionaries: An inside Look at Their Real Message and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications. 1995) page 70.

day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was fathered by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost."

Spiritual brother of the devil. In *Gospel Through the Ages*, page 15, Milton Hunter writes, "The appointment was contested by one of the other Sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this Spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind."

Jesus began by Adam. Again in *Journal of Discourses,* Vol. I, page 51 Brigham Young says, "Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh, by the same character that was in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in heaven." We know from previous quotes in this article that person was none other than Adam!

Jesus had many wives—He was a polygamist. This is a debatable issue in modern Mormonism but not so in the beginning. The belief that Jesus was married, was a polygamist, and had children through his wives was a well-accepted teaching by 19th Century Mormons. The quote most often read comes from Mormon Apostle Orson Hyde, "I said in my lecture on Marriage, at our last conference, that Jesus Christ was married at Cana of Galilee, that Mary, Martha, and others were his wives, and that he begot children" (*Journal of Discourses*, 2:210). Orson Pratt in *The Seer*, page 159 says: "If all the acts of Jesus were written, we no doubt should learn that these beloved women (Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene) were His wives."

So where do we go from here? We must come to the conclusion that the god of the Mormons is not the God of the Bible! We must, as I said in the beginning of this study, realize that Mormons and Christians worship at different altars. Here are a few more "musts": we must pray for them, we must realize that Jesus died for them, and we must win them to Jesus. Mormonism is not Christian. The people of Mormonism are a mission field and they can be and are being won to Christ.

While LDS theology is what separates Mormonism from orthodox Christianity, it doesn't mean we can't witness to and win Mormons to Christ.

Sandra Tanner, 57, co-director of Utah Lighthouse Ministry in Salt Lake City, says, "You join Mormonism because of friendship ties, a sense of belonging, a hope for your deceased family. It is a religion that gives the best of both worlds." We know that their message is not a biblical message but we can use the desire for friendship and belonging to win them.

Let's do all we can to help them find the true Prophet—Jesus Christ—our Lord and Savior.

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