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[A Guide to the Ancient Catechism](#)

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PREFACE

The Christian faith is mysterious not because it is so complicated but because it is so simple. A person does not start with baptism and then advance to higher mysteries. In baptism each believer already possesses the faith in its fullness. The whole of life is encompassed in the mystery of baptism: dying with Christ and rising with him through the Spirit to the glory of God. That is how the Christian life begins, and to seek to move beyond that beginning is really to regress. In discipleship, the one who makes the most progress is the one who remains at the beginning. And that is where theological thinking comes in handy. Theology does not have all the right answers, but it can help us to contemplate the reality of baptism and to penetrate more deeply into its meaning for life.

That is why I wrote this book. Not because anyone needs to be told what to believe but because Christ's followers have everything they need already. "All things are yours," says Paul: "all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (1 Cor 3:21-23). We are not beggars hoping for scraps. We are like people who have inherited a vast estate: we have to study the documents and visit different locations because it's more than we can take in at a single glance. In the same way, it takes considerable time and effort to begin to comprehend all that we have received in Christ. Theological thinking does not add a single thing to what we have received. The inheritance remains the same

whether we grasp its magnitude or not. But the better we grasp it, the happier we are.

So this small book is an invitation to happiness. I have written it with a glad heart, and I hope it will be helpful for others who want to comprehend the mystery of faith in all its “breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19).

The book began life as a series of sermons on the creed at Leichhardt Uniting Church in Sydney. I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. John Hirt and to the Leichhardt congregation for their friendship and hospitality on that occasion. To them this book is affectionately dedicated. The sermons were long, and the book is short. In both cases I take comfort from the words of Irenaeus: “Since the faith is one and the same, the one who says much about it does not add to it, nor does the one who says little diminish it” (Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.10.1).
