

***St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church***

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# WORSHIP

A Biblical Understanding

*Basic Elements of the Worship Service*

## The Basic Pattern for Worship

For Lutherans, worship is an ever-changing and growing experience. There are parts of the worship experience that connect us with the traditions of the ancient Church. There are parts of the worship service that remind us that worship is not a static experience. Connected with and central to everything we do, worship unites us as a faith community in celebration, engages us in thoughtful dialogue and helps us grow in faith. It grounds us in our Christian roots, while demonstrating practical relevance for today's world. While some of the approaches to worship may differ from one congregation to another, certain things are held in common.

There is a basic pattern for worship among Lutherans.

- We *gather*.
- We encounter God's *Word*.
- We share a *meal* at the Lord's table.
- And we are *sent* into the world.

But we do not think about worship so much in terms of what we do. Worship is fundamentally about what God is doing and our response to God's action. Worship is an encounter with God, who saves us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Think about it like this. God's Spirit calls us together. God speaks to us through readings from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, through preaching, prayer, and song. God feeds and nourishes us in a saving way. And God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

Taken together, the Word proclaimed and the sacraments -- both Holy Baptism and Holy Communion -- are called the means of grace. We believe that Jesus Christ is present in these means through the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we describe worship as a "gathering around the means of grace." This is a way of saying that we trust that God is genuinely present with us in baptism, in preaching, and in sharing the bread and wine of Holy Communion. In that sense, Lutherans believe that God's presence permeates all of Christian worship.

The cross is the central symbol that marks our worship spaces and when Lutherans worship, we sing The voices of all the people joined in song and the participation of all the people in the worship is a witness to our conviction that in worship we are being drawn in to God's own saving story.

## Some Historical Background

The Liturgy of the Word (the first part of the service leading up to Holy Communion) comes to us from the ancient synagogue service of the Hebrew people. With the fall of Jerusalem in 584 BC and the deportation of people and eventual destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, a new institution began to assert itself in the Jewish community. This institution did not aim to replace the temple as a ritual center, but it did aim to replace the temple as a cultural center. The synagogue then and now serves as community center, school, place of prayer.

It was in the synagogue that Jesus had his primary religious experiences, and it was in the synagogue that he preached and revealed the Gospel. It was also in the synagogue that St. Paul first addressed Jews and Christians living outside of Palestine. The basic synagogue service is comprised of readings, psalter and commentary.

Early Christians went to the synagogue first, and then gathered in homes for the second of our two services, The Eucharistic Meal. Here more than just bread and wine were gathered in and enjoyed, but many food offerings that were shared with the whole congregation. St. Paul has a great deal to say about this in I Corinthians. In the midst of this meal, just as in the upper room, a prayer of thanks was said over the bread, which was then shared; and a prayer of thanks was said over wine, which is then shared. Through these ordinary gifts of bread and wine the incarnate God comes to us in the sacramental presence of the crucified and risen Jesus.

## **The Entrance**

In order for the service to begin, we have to enter the building. Most of us do it by entering through the front door and, in many congregations throughout Pennsylvania, ascending a set of stairs or maybe using an elevator since the sanctuary was often placed on the second story for economy of heat and use of space.

The Baptismal Font is a focal point as we enter the worship space to remind us of our baptism. Some people remember their baptisms by touching the water and then touching themselves with the water or tracing the sign of the cross to remember our baptism.

## **Sanctuary | Nave Chancel Area**

The word “sanctuary” means sacred space. The Nave is the central part of the church where the community gathers for worship extending from the Narthex to the Chancel / Altar area.

## **Processions**

Sometimes there are processions as the worship service begins, especially at the beginning of festival services like Christmas and Easter. Processions help to gather and move people into the worship space. In some cultures the procession begins at the furthest part of a village and concludes at the church. Along the way members of the community join the procession with song and dance.

## **Standing**

Standing is a sign of respect, and you'll notice that we do a great deal of it during the service.

## **Parts of the Service**

The worship service may take different forms depending of the season of the church year or for special occasions. Generally you will find many of these parts included in the worship service.

## **The Ringing of the Bells**

This was a way to a call to God's people to church long before cellular phones and the internet.

Ringling the bell during the Lord's Prayer is a way to announce to the larger community that those assembled for worship are now praying the Lord's Prayer. In years past those in the community who may have had to work on a Sunday, like farmers, could pause and join the community in prayer.

## **The Prelude or Gathering Music**

Music helps draw us into an attitude of prayer and praise.

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name." - Psalm 100:4

## **The Apostolic Greeting**

The Apostolic Greeting is from the writings of St. Paul. Like most parts in the worship service its source is the Bible. St. Paul used this greeting in his letters to the churches. The minister welcomes the people with this greeting and the people respond "and also with you." - 2 Corinthians 13

## **The Invocation**

We call upon God to be present with us. We worship the triune God, remembering our Baptism in His name\*. Amen means "So be it, it is true!" \* Matthew. 28:19-20; Ephesians. 2:18.

## **The Confession of Sins**

We examine ourselves and publicly confess our sins. Such a confession at the beginning of the service or after hearing the sermon provides a climate of acceptance. In spite of our sins, we are accepted by God, and in turn we can accept each other. \* I John 1:8-10 [Romans. 7:14-8:4].

## **The Absolution or Declaration of Grace**

Christ said to his disciples, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven"\*. The pastor or assisting minister announces God's forgiveness.\* John 20:23.

## **The Service of the Word**

From the time of the apostles down through today, an important part of the service has been the reading of the Scriptures, including the Old Testament Lesson, the Epistle Lesson from the New Testament, and the Gospel Lesson. The reason for including these readings is the scriptural principal that God's Word is the only rule and guide for Christian faith and living. The Service of the Word concludes with the sermon (which is the preached word), the church's confession of faith in response to God's Word, and the prayers of God's people.

## **The Introit**

Introit is a Latin word meaning "he enters into." The Introit is a part of a psalm or a hymn that announces the theme of the day and begins the Service of the Word. Many years ago the people would meet outside and then proceed into the church. The pastor and the people would chant psalms as they entered the sanctuary. The Introit traditionally consists of an Antiphon, or refrain, a Psalm or a series of Psalm verses, the Gloria Patri\*, and the Antiphon repeated. \* Rom. 16:27; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; Rev. 1:6, 8.

## **The Kyrie**

Kyrie is a Greek word meaning "O Lord." It is a cry to the Lord for help and strength\*. In ancient times, the crowds would shout "Lord, have mercy" as the King entered their town. The church has taken over his prayer to greet its King Jesus Christ in the church service. As the people so long ago expected help from their King, so we Christians expect help from our Savior. \* Matthew. 9:2; Matthew. 15:22; Matthew . 20:30-31; Luke 17:13.

## **The Hymn of Praise**

Hymns of praise like, "Glory to God in the highest" and "This is the feast of victory," give the worshipping assembly the opportunity to praise God and express joy because Jesus is our victorious Savior. During Advent and Lent, the hymn of praise is usually omitted. \* "Glory to God in the highest," Luke 2:14; "This is the feast of victory," Revelation. 5.

## **The Salutation**

*The Lord be with you. And also with you.*

In the Salutation, the worship leader and members of the assembly greet each other in the Lord's name. \* Ruth 2:4; Luke 1:28; II Thess. 3:16; II Tim. 4:22.

## **The Prayer of the Day**

The main thoughts of the day are collected, or summarized in this prayer. These prayers for the season of the church year have come to us from the rich treasury of the church's heritage.

## **The First Lesson**

The first reading may be taken from the Old Testament, except during the Easter season when it is from the Book of Acts. This reading usually relates to the Gospel of the day. \* I Tim. 4:13.

## **The Gradual**

Gradual, a Latin expression meaning "step," is a scripture passage for each season of the church year. It is a response to the First Lesson and a bridge to the Second Lesson. Sometimes a psalm is sung or spoken.

## **The Second Lesson**

The second reading may come from one of the epistles (letters) in the New Testament.

## **The Verse**

A verse from the Holy Scriptures is usually sung in preparation for the reading of the Gospel. There are general verses as well as specific verses for the seasons of the church year. \* John 6:68; Deut 30: Joel 2:13 (through lent).

## **The Holy Gospel**

The Gospel reading is a selection from the accounts of the life of our Lord recorded by the four evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. We may also sing versicles (short verses) before and after the reading of the Gospel. On certain festival days the minister may read the Gospel while standing among the people. He may be flanked by acolytes carrying candles who proclaim Jesus and his word as the "light of the world." In ancient days this also helped the minister reading the scripture to be able to see the words of the text.

## **The Hymn of the Day**

This hymn follows the theme of the readings and usually relate to the sermon.

## **The Sermon**

Here God's Word is shared as it applies to modern life as disciples of Christ.

## **The Creed**

After hearing the word of God read and proclaimed, the assembly responds with his confession of faith in the words of the Apostles' or Nicene Creed depending on the season of the church year. \* I Cor. 15:1ff; I Pet. 3:18ff; I Tim. 3:16.

## **The Prayers of the People | The Prayers of Intercession**

This prayer in the service follows the directive of the Apostle Paul to young Timothy, a pastor: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for Kings and all those in authority, that we may live in peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness"\*. For this reason, the hymnal says "prayers are included for the whole church, the nations, those in need, the parish, and special concerns. The congregation may be invited to offer petitions and thanksgivings. The minister gives thanks for the faithful departed, especially for those who have died" \* I Tim. 2:1-2; Luke 23

## **The Service of the Meal**

The members of the assembly have confessed their sins and been forgiven, and its faith has been nurtured through hearing the Word. The assembly now moves into in the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. The following parts of the liturgy help the worshipers partake of the holy meal thoughtfully, thankfully, and joyfully. Is. 6

## **The Offering**

The gifts of God's people are a response to God's blessings. Our offerings support the mission of the church both locally, regionally, and global through a variety of ministries, including Christian education, and pastoral care, and food, clothing, shelter to those in need. Like every household the local congregation has operating expenses to maintain its programs and facility for ministry.

## **The Offertory Hymn or Song**

As the offerings are brought to the Lord's table, the worshipers sing the offertory song to express gratitude for all God's blessings, dedicate themselves to God, and request God continued blessings. This hymn may change with the season or scripture theme. \* "What shall I render to the Lord," Ps. 116:12, 17, 13-14, 19; "Create in me a clean heart", Ps. 51:10-12.

## **The Preface**

Preface means "introduction." As the assembly gets ready to celebrate the Holy Meal they by welcome each other at the Table with this ancient greeting \* Cf. "Salutation"; Lam. 3:41; Ps. 86.4.

The Proper Preface or words appropriate to the season of the church year offer special thanks relating to the season. \* Psalm. 69:30; 95:2; 100:4; 107:22; 116:17; 147:7.

## **The Sanctus | Holy, Holy, Holy**

Sanctus is a Latin word meaning "Holy." The Sanctus contains words from Isaiah's vision of God (Isaiah 6:3) and the crowd's response on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9). We join them in spirit by singing their words as we anticipate Christ's coming in the sacrament.\* Is. 6:3; Matt. 21:9 (Mk 11:9); Ps. 118:25-26.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

Jesus offered this prayer to his disciples as a model for prayer. \* Matt. 6:9ff; Luke 11:2ff.

## **The Words of Institution**

The presiding minister speaks the words which Jesus spoke when He instituted the Supper with His disciples in the Upper Room. With these words the bread and wine are consecrated, that is, set apart for God's use in the sacred meal. \* 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20.

## **The Peace**

The greeting of peace which Jesus spoke on the first Easter is shared before we approach the altar to receive Holy Communion. In the Lord's Supper, the body and blood of Christ are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine. \* John 14:27; John 20:19-21.

## **The Agnus Dei**

Agnus Dei is a Latin phrase meaning "Lamb of God." John the Baptist spoke these words as he pointed to Jesus coming toward him (John 1:29). As Christ comes to us in the Holy Supper, we recognize him as the Lamb of God sacrificed for us to free us from the bondage of sin and death.  
\* John 1:29; Is. 53:7.

## **The Administration of the Meal**

Holy Communion can be distributed in a continuous flow at stations. At times individuals kneel at the Altar rail. The words "This is the body of Christ is given to you." and "This is the blood of Christ shed for you." are spoken to each individual receiving communion. We respond "Amen," which means "So be it. May it be true." May people offer a silent prayer of thanks when they return to seats. While the meal is being distributed, the assembly and/or the music may sing one or more hymns.

## **The Post-Communion Hymn | Song**

Hymns like "Thank the Lord," "Lord, now let Your servant go in peace," may be sung. The purpose is to offer our thanks and express our faith in what God has done for us and promised to do for us in the future. \* "Lord, now you let Your servant go in peace". Luke 2:29f.

## **The Prayer of Thanks**

Once again we express our appreciation to our gracious God for giving us this Holy Meal through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. \* Psalmss. 107:1; 118:1.

## **The Blessing**

The blessing is God's promise that Christ will go with us as we leave the church and return to the world to serve Him. We sing or say "Amen" to affirm the blessing; "So be it -- it is true!" \* Numbers 6:23-27.

## **The Dismissal**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. - Luke 7

## **Sources**

[www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Welcome-to-the-ELCA/How-We-Worship.aspx](http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Welcome-to-the-ELCA/How-We-Worship.aspx)  
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