

Worship: the Reasons for Worship and the Models of Worship

So, we have seen that Christian worship is based on what we have read and practiced from the New Testament. The early Lutheran Church began by drawing distinctions between internal and external worship. For my purposes here, when I say worship I mean what the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession refer to as *The Mass* (article XXIV). The Apology or Defense of the Augsburg Confession says, "In summary, the worship of the New Testament is spiritual, that is, it is the righteousness of faith in the heart and the fruits of faith... True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The externals of worship are described by Luther in his Large Catechism as, "That is, so that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then to offer praise, song and prayer to God." Fine, so what does this all mean? Essentially Luther is saying that worship is when we assemble to hear and discuss God's word and offer our prayers and songs. It is a formal ritual with a specific order and progression; the specific term used to describe this is that our worship is *Liturgical*.

Lutherans usually understand liturgical worship in terms of following the historic liturgy of the western Church, but liturgical worship especially emphasizes the ecclesiastical year with its cycle of seasons and celebrations. And it needs to be said in this regard that the church year is greater than a mere rehearsal of the life of Christ as we move around the cycle- Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Passion Week, Easter, etc. The liturgical celebration of the church year is more than the rehearsal of this history and more than 'sanctified nostalgia'; it is walking with Christ via the liturgy: celebrating his grace, sharing his sorrows, exulting in his victory by means of the rich rites, practices and propers of the liturgy. (Cortright)

But people worship for a variety of reasons and the reasons we bring to worship shape how we do it and what we expect from it. Among the different reasons:

- Some want excitement and they think of worship as a spiritual pep rally.
- Some want to receive information and they desire "good teaching."
- Some want spiritual formation and will talk about whether they "got anything out of it."
- Some aim to win others, and so "seekers" will be their top priority.
- Some see worship as an act of preserving the faith and passing on a heritage to the next generation.
- Some worship out of a sense of obligation, to fulfill duties they feel they have been given.
- Some think the purpose is to produce satisfied customers, so effective marketing is their aim.

Each of these reasons will attract people to a different style of worship.

Perhaps it will be helpful for us to first identify where Lutheran worship falls in the spectrum of all Christian worship. Alongside Orthodox worship (the eastern Orthodox churches, etc.) and Roman Catholic worship, we are part of the family who practices Protestant worship.

Yet Protestant worship has about five different families within its borders too. *Anglican/Episcopal worship* is perhaps the closest to Roman Catholic worship and has retained much of its ritual. *Lutheran worship* has been shaped by the teachings and patterns of Martin Luther after the Reformation. *Reformed worship* has largely followed the teachings and patterns of John Calvin. *Free Church worship*, found in most Bible churches and Baptist churches generally influenced by Zwingli, prefers not to think of structure or liturgy. *Pentecostal worship* places great emphasis on the workings of the Holy Spirit, who often leads spontaneously and with emotion.

Though we do not find that the Bible prescribes a specific liturgy for worship, we do find that our understanding of the Scriptures and the guidelines that it provides will be helpful in discerning the pattern of worship and understanding the freedom for variation and flexibility in our worship life. Moreover, you will find that many of the phrases used in the worship service are taken directly from scripture, both Old and New Testament.

Several Models

in surveying a variety of churches we discovered that generally there are three models of worship that churches practice.

1. "Two-task Model." There are two tasks in worship. One is ours and the other is God's. We give praise to God, and God teaches us. So the worship liturgy will be of two parts: praise and teaching.
2. "Processional Model." Patterned after the worship in Israel at the tabernacle and temple, this pattern of worship approaches the house of God in the same spirit as the "Songs of Ascent" in the Old Testament. Worshipers process through the courts with songs of praise and adoration until they are directly in the holy presence of God. Then God speaks to them.
3. "Conversation Model." If worship is a group conversation with God (see the definition above) then the worship liturgy should be patterned after a conversation or dialogue in which both God and the people speak and listen at alternate times. [In the worship conversation we share time with God when each of us speaks and, conversely, when each of us listens.]

Most Protestants have historically been more comfortable with the third model because they find it more consistent with the pattern of worship that we see a glimpse of in the Scriptures. We suggest you read Psalms 95, 96, and 98 and observe the conversation that is happening. Acts 2 gives us only the briefest glimpse into the worship of the early church, but we can sense the same kind of conversational pattern. <http://www.calvin.edu/worship/planning/insights/4.php>

Being Lutheran, I want to talk a little about the order of worship, the way in which the service moves and the elements of the worship, the technical term for this is Synaxis.

Rather than reinventing the wheel, I will present the order of worship for Lutheran's as it appears on the website of Trinity Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio. I will insert my comments and additions in italics throughout the following:

The preparation, in most churches, an organ prelude begins the worship. This is not just to establish the "mood", but is itself an offering- a creation of artistic talent for God's glory. The music is often related to the liturgical theme of the day or season.

Confession and forgiveness, a brief order of spiritual preparation frequently precedes the Service proper so that with "clean hands and a pure heart" we may "stand in the holy place" of the Lord (Psalm 24). We remember our Baptism by invoking the Name of the Triune God, and perhaps making the sign of the cross which was first given us in the baptismal rite. In response to a scriptural invitation, we confess our sin and ask for pardon. The presiding minister reminds us of divine mercy and declares us forgiven in the name of God who made us children in Holy Baptism.

The Ministry of the Word

The Entrance Rite, we begin the Service with a hymn. The presiding minister greets the assembled congregation in words similar to those used by the apostles in addressing early Christian churches (Romans 1:7). Because worship is not a solo performance by the minister, but an activity of the people, here and elsewhere in the liturgy, the congregation responds to the greeting.

In the **Kyrie**, we greet our Lord as people of old greeted a king when he came into their city. In a series of petitions, the minister asks for peace and salvation for ourselves and the world, the people joining in the response, "Lord have mercy" (in Greek, Kyrie eleison). *Despite the 24th Article of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession referring to the service being held in the vernacular (German) we find the Kyrie being an exception. This is from the time of Gregory the Great c. 600 CE, when he instituted repetitions of Kyrie eleison and Christe eleison.* (Dix 454)

The **Hymn of Praise** which follows expresses our joy for the gifts which our Lord brings. "Glory to god in the highest" is an ancient song which begins with the angels' Christmas carol (Luke 2:14) and swells into the profound adoration of the Holy Trinity. An alternative is "this is the feast," a modern song based on phrases from the Book of Revelation.

The **Prayer of the Day** marks the conclusion of the entrance rite. It is brief, focusing on a central theme for a particular Sunday or Holy day. Like several other prayers in the liturgy, it is introduced by a greeting and response in the minister and people ask the Lord's presence upon each other. We make this prayer our own by responding "Amen."

The Scripture Readings

The Word of God in Holy Scripture has always been a major element of Christian worship. Several Christian bodies, Lutherans [and Episcopalians] among them, use a three year lectionary.

Three Scripture lessons are usually read at each service, interspersed with other biblical passages. **The First Lesson** is usually from the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. This is followed by a Psalm, one of the Old Testament hymns.

The **Second Lesson** is usually a portion of one of the New Testament epistles or letters to the churches.

The climax of the readings is the **Gospel**, a section of the books that record the words and deeds of Jesus. Each of the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is primarily associated with one year of the three year cycle of lessons, while the fourth Gospel (John) is found during all three years. We stand to hear the Gospel, for our Lord's own words are spoken. An acclamation of praise to Christ precedes and follows the Gospel reading. *All three readings of the lectionary and the Psalm share a common theme which relates to the season or Holy day of the church year. This Church year used in the lectionary begins with Advent. It is also a common misconception that we read the entire Bible during the three year lectionary cycle, in fact we read from less than half the books of the Bible in the lectionary series.*

Sermon, Hymn and Creed

The Church's response to and interpretation of the Word of God follows the reading of Scripture. The **Sermon**, usually based on one or more of the lessons, is a living witness of the Gospel, expounding the word and applying it to our own times and conditions.

The **Hymn of the Day**, which may be sung before or after the sermon, fits the theme of the lessons and Sermon. It is taken from the Church's rich treasury of poetry and music by which many generations of believers have offered praise to god and witness to their faith.

The **Creed** embodies the church's ancient and universal confession of faith in God the father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Nicene or Apostles' Creed may be used, depending upon the season of the church year. *You may have noticed a third Creed in the Lutheran Book of Worship, the **Athanasian Creed**. This Creed is attributed to Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, who opposed the Arian teachings and was partially responsible for the Council of Nicea in 325. Although this creed is attributed to Athanasius (Bishop of Alexandria) it was probably written anonymously in Gaul in the 5th century. The reason we continue to find this creed in Lutheran worship books is found in the **Formula of Concord** which states, "we confess our adherence to the three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian, as the glorious confessions of faith- succinct, Christian based upon God's Word, in which all the heresies that had at the time arisen within the Christian churches were clearly and thoroughly refuted."*

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession for the needs of the Church, of society and a wide variety of individuals form a fitting conclusion to the Ministry of the Word. These prayers vary from service to service according to the circumstances of time and place. The people enter into the petitions through the frequent response: "*Hear our prayer*" or "*Lord have mercy.*"

The Ministry of the Sacrament

The Peace, Offertory, and Offering. In an upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples and instituted the Lord's Supper, saying "**Do this for the remembrance of me.**" (1 Corinthians 11:24) After Easter, the risen Christ "was known to them in the breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35). We are brought together by our obedience to Christ's command and our need for Christ's continuing presence in the Sacrament.

As we begin the communion rite, ministers and people share the **Peace** with one another through words and gestures. The Book of worship notes, "*The peace which enables people to live in unity and the spirit of mutual forgiveness comes only from Christ whose Word has been proclaimed. Without the intention to live in such unity, participation in the sacramental celebration is a mockery.*"

The **Offering** of the people is gathered as the altar table is made ready for the Lord's Supper. Offerings of money are given as an expression of love and gratitude for God's blessings. Along with these gifts, bread and wine for Holy Communion are frequently brought forward and presented. An Offertory canticle, hymn or psalm is sung by congregation or choir. Ministers and people join in a brief prayer of offering.

The Great Thanksgiving Just as Jesus at table with his disciples offered thanks in accordance with Jewish practice, so we embody in our celebration of Christ's Supper a great prayer of thanksgiving.

- It begins with a Preface in which the presiding minister bids us lift our hearts to God and give thanks.
- Then a Proper Preface states the particular reason for thanksgiving appropriate to the day or season.
- This leads to a climax in which we join in the canticle "*Holy, holy, holy.*" Here we unite with the heavenly hosts (**Isaiah 6:3**) and with the Church on earth (**Matthew 21:9**) to adore God and to welcome the Savior who came for our redemption and who now comes to us in the Sacrament.

The Great Thanksgiving may continue with the Eucharistic Prayer in which the history of God's salvation is recounted. The scriptural words which tell of Jesus' institution of the Sacrament are recited, in order to consecrate the Bread and the Cup. We pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit that we might be prepared rightly to receive the Body and Blood of Christ which, according to his promise, are now truly present in Holy Communion. Then we say our distinctive prayer of fellowship in Christ, the **Lord's Prayer**, which is here also our table prayer.

The Communion All is now ready for our Holy Communion with Christ and the members of Christ's Body the Church. As the consecrated elements are distributed to the communicants, we sing a hymn, "*Lamb of God*" (**John 1:29**) as a confession of who it is we are receiving and as a prayer for the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation which Christ has promised to give us. Other hymns may also mark our communion devotion. "*The Body of Christ, given for you; the Blood of Christ, shed for you,*" the ministers say as they give the Sacrament to the people. **The Post Communion** As the Lord's Table is cleared; we sing a song of rejoicing. This may be the biblical "*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace*" (**Luke 2:29-32**), in which Simeon rejoiced

that he had seen Christ, a joy we share because we have received Christ in the Sacrament. A final Prayer asks that we may carry out in our lives the implications of Holy Communion. The presiding minister pronounces a Blessing using either a formula similar to the one that began the Service or the Aaronic benediction from the Old Testament (**Numbers 6:24-26**). A minister speaks words of Dismissal, telling us to "*Go in peace. Serve the Lord.*" in daily life, which is also a worship of God. We respond with a shout: "*Thanks be to God.*"

Depending upon the church where you are worshiping, several of the functions assigned to the Minister or Presiding Minister in this explanation are performed by the Assisting Minister, who is a lay leader or a Deacon.

One final word about worship; despite Luther's refutation of the *seven canonical hours* in his Preface to the Large Catechism, Lutherans do have worship services for specific times of day. In fact the Lutheran Book of Worship has settings for Matins, Vespers and Complines. And while each of these settings is different, it continues to offer the opportunity to "*assemble to hear God's Word and then to offer praise, song, and prayer to God*" as Luther writes in his Large Catechism.

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