



Fulness of Joy

**A Study of the Liturgy of the Church
Instructor's Guide**

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Thou dost show me
The path of life;
In thy presence
There is fulness of joy....
Psalm 16:11

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But
the LORD
is in
His
holy temple.

Let
all the earth
keep silence
before Him."

Habakkuk 2:20

Preface

One can hardly call this an exhaustive study of the liturgy, or even an expert analysis. Rather, it represents the “journey” I have taken in discovering the wonder of the liturgy that we sing in the Lutheran Church each week.

Dr. Hermann Sasse, perhaps the foremost confessional Lutheran scholar of the 20th century, noted that there were two great dangers for a confessional church body. The first was to abandon its confession of faith entirely, turning to other beliefs or simply becoming ambivalent about doctrine. The other was to hold to a confession of faith, but no longer know why.

What is true for a church's confession of faith is true for liturgy as well, because the liturgy confesses the faith of the church. Within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, we see both dangers apparent today. In many congregations, the liturgy has been dispensed with completely, or else revised and reduced until it is only a faint representation of what it is supposed to be. The argument for this change is that the liturgy has been beneficial to worship in the past; however, people, paradigms and culture have all changed to the point where the liturgy is no longer meaningful and relevant. Churches that hold fast to the liturgy are accused of being afraid of change, of singing the liturgy because “we’ve always done it that way.” The jokes begin: “How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?” Answer: (*Gasp!*) “Change?!” While we all need a good laugh at ourselves now and then, the humor too often turns into a mockery of piety.

In other congregations, members doggedly sing the liturgy on a weekly basis. However, if we are to ask them why, the answer too often is “I don’t know,” or “We’ve always done it this way before.” Such a superficial understanding of the liturgy leaves them vulnerable to those who dismiss it; it leaves their children, sensitive and opposed to the shallow, especially endangered. Too often in churches the liturgy is explained ruefully, apologetically with: “We do it because we’re Lutheran. That’s just the way it is.”

Although I am a lover of history and tradition I must state frankly: “We’ve always done it before” is not an adequate reason for continuing the liturgy and Divine Service. There must be a better reason for continuing what has been done in the past.

With the liturgy, there is a far better reason. The liturgy teaches and rejoices in the outstanding truth that our crucified and risen Lord is present with His people in worship—present to serve them with the forgiveness of sins. In that proclamation is a depth and richness that I personally have only begun to mine; indeed, the more I sing the liturgy, the less I tire of doing so.

The purpose of this study is to teach the liturgy. This is not teaching by attrition; it is not my intent to attack other forms of worship until only the liturgy is left standing. Other forms of worship do merit analysis and criticism, and we will spend a little time examining the development of other worship styles. However, the goal of this course is not to defend the liturgy, but to teach it: To explore and reveal the wondrous treasure that our Lord delivers to us there.

This study is keyed to the Service of Holy Communion which begins on page 15 of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, simply because this is the hymnal of the parish at which I serve. It can, however, inform on other settings of the liturgy as well.

Finally, when it comes to acknowledgments, I must confess not knowing where to begin. Much of what I convey here is hardly original thinking on my part; it is a mosaic of the research of others, gathered from sermons, papers, lectures, e-mail snippets and offhand remarks. I have attempted to give credit where I could remember the source, though many others deserve recognition. Where there is truth, they deserve much thanks. Errors are unintended and the result of my ignorance, for the journey is not yet completed. Doctrinal correction is always welcome.

It is my prayer that this study will help the reader to rejoice in the liturgy of the Divine Service. After all, the liturgy declares the news that Jesus Christ is present with His people...and in His presence is fulness of joy.

Pastor Tim Pauls
St. John's Tide, 2002

Part 1: An Overview of God's Presence in the Scriptures

"Thus in the Old Testament faces of the Lord were
the pillar of fire,
the cloud,
and the mercy seat;
in the New Testament,
Baptism,
the Lord's Supper,
the ministry of the Word,
and the like.

By means of these God shows us,
as by a visible sign,
that He is with us,
takes care of us,
and is favorably inclined toward us."

Martin Luther, AE 1:309

Introduction

Fasten your seatbelts, because this will be a quick survey of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation. It will comment on the events noted on the timeline on pages 2 and 3 of the student booklet.

This is hardly an comprehensive study of biblical doctrine; furthermore, this will not even be an exhaustive study of the events that are noted on the timeline. This survey is given to demonstrate the thesis listed on page 4 of the student booklet: *Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God is present with His people*. Furthermore, He is present with them for their good, to provide them His grace and protection. We could rephrase it this way, too: God's desire and will is that He be present with us, and we with Him, both now and in eternity.

The purpose of the survey is to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Real Presence is hardly a sectarian invention. Rather, it is consistent with how God has treated His people throughout history. Indeed, should a church teach that God was not really present with His people, this would be a doctrine inconsistent with the Word.

A further benefit of examining God's presence in the Old Testament is a growing appreciation for the Old Testament. Some of the stories to be examined are quite well known, but the connection to Christ and His presence are often missed; therefore, we will examine the significance of these stories especially as they pertain to the Lord's gracious presence with us. Some of the themes of the Old Testament (the tabernacle, circumcision, etc.) seem so distant to us that we fail to understand their part in God's plan of salvation. If we choose to neglect some of these important things, large portions of the New Testament will have little meaning for us as well. Hopefully, by showing the relationship between these themes and God's presence will provide us with a new appreciation for parts of Scripture that we care very little for at the present time.

The Old Testament

In the Beginning...

Creation (Genesis 1-2)

The story of creation is quite well-known, and the teacher may summarize the account. Some important themes to note for the purposes of this survey are:

- ◆ God creates by speaking. His Word is powerful and effective (Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12); it does what He says. In fact, we will later see Jesus perform miracles, such as healings, merely by speaking to the one who is in need.
- ◆ The state of all creation (Gen. 1:31): When the Lord completes six days of creation, he pronounces creation to be very good. This does not mean “mostly good, but with a few problems.” “Very good” means that creation is flawless, holy. It is without sin and decay.
- ◆ The state of man (Gen. 1:27): Man is created in the image of God. This means that Adam and Eve know God and are perfectly happy in that knowledge. It also means that they are perfectly holy and blessed. (SC, 1943 ed., questions 113-114)
- ◆ Because Adam and Eve are without sin, they can be in the presence of God in His glory without fear or destruction. We know from the Fall account that the Lord confronts them of their sin when He has come to walk with them in the Garden of Eden. While Scripture does not say that the Lord walked with Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, it is possible that He did because He was able to be visibly present with them in their state of perfection. In other words, God does not complete creation and then leave it for some other project; He creates Adam and Eve, then seeks to be present with them.

The Fall (Gen. 3)

Adam and Eve fall into sin and thus lose the image of God. They are destined for death, physical and eternal, and they can no longer be in the presence of God or look upon His face. But even as creation begins to die, observe the graciousness of God:

- ◆ Observations of God's Presence and Mercy (3:8): God walks in the Garden, and Adam and Eve hide from "the presence of the LORD." Adam and Eve are aware of His presence because they hear Him walking; this too is part of God's mercy. We will see in Exodus that a sinner cannot look upon the face of God and live. Rather than confront Adam and Eve to their instant destruction, God permits Himself to be heard approaching.
- ◆ Furthermore, God calls out to Adam and Eve. Since they can no longer look upon Him, He immediately deals with them by His external Word; He speaks to them, even as He does to His people (in Scripture) today.
- ◆ The Promised Presence (3:15): The Lord also declares that the Savior is coming. The Messiah will be of the woman's seed (already an indication of the virgin birth) and will crush the head of Satan. Even at the Fall, God makes this important truth apparent: Since sinful man faces death and can no longer look upon the glorious face of God, God will conceal His glory in human flesh and be present with His people to restore them to life.¹

¹ Rejoicing in and responding to this promise is TLH 91, verses 7-9, which connect our weakness, Christ's victory, and heaven in His glorious presence.

7. Comfort my desponding heart:
Thou My Strength and Refuge art.
I am weak, and cunningly
Satan lays his snares for me.

8. Bruise for me the Serpent's head
That, set free from doubt and dread,
I may cleave to Thee in faith,
Safely kept through life and death,

9. And when Thou dost come again
As a glorious King to reign,
I with joy may see Thy face,
Freely ransomed by Thy grace.

- ◆ A Sacrifice (3:21): God makes tunics of skin for the exposed and sinful Adam and Eve. Likely, He sacrifices an animal to make these garments; this is very well a type of Christ, who is sacrificed to atone for (to cover) our sin.

Cain (Gen. 4:1-16)

The first murder is recorded as Cain kills brother Abel.² Once again, this a familiar story. But verse 16 is worth a second look. Where does Cain depart to? He makes a geographical move, now dwelling East of Eden in Nod. But he also departs from the presence of the Lord. Where Adam and Eve were sinful, but forgiven, Cain is unrepentant and rejects the Lord's gracious presence.

The Flood (Gen. 7:1-24)

The story of the Flood, Noah and the ark is a popular one, but let us point out a couple of things to further this study.

First off, concern is sometimes expressed that God wipes out almost all of humanity without giving them a chance to repent. This is not the case. The ark took close to 100 years to build (cf. Gen. 5:32 and 7:6). During those hundred years, there is little doubt that news spread around again and again about the crazy man named Noah who was building a boat in a world that had never seen rain, much less a flood. No doubt, Noah explained his actions and God's Word; yet no one listened.

The people of God are often called upon to trust in the promises of God, even when doing so means looking foolish to the world. Noah was scorned for building an ark; yet he trusted God's Word and was saved. Christians are ridiculed for trusting in Jesus' death on the cross for salvation, though this is the Word of the Lord. Lutherans are sometimes disparaged for trusting that God is present in His Sacraments; this, too, is the promise of the Lord.

Speaking of God's presence, this brings us to the second point. According to 7:16, it is God who shuts Noah and his family in the ark. God is present there, delivering His people from death.

God's Chosen People

Circumcision (Gen. 17:10-14)

The covenant between God and His people is marked by circumcision in the Old Testament. It was to be done on the eighth day of a boy's life. [BTW: 8 is a symbol of the new creation throughout the Scriptures. The old creation took seven days to be completed; the eighth day is something new. 8 people are saved from destruction in the ark, a symbol of deliverance from sin in Baptism (1 Pet. 3:20); thus a baptismal font will often have 8 sides. The early Christians worshiped on Sunday for two reasons: Jesus did indeed rise from the dead on the first day of the week. However, the Christians also declared it to be the 8th day of the week; because Christ rose from the dead, we too have newness of life.] Whether Israelite or Gentile, any man who was part of the covenant was to be circumcised. If anyone scorned this sign, he was cut off from the people because he had broken the covenant (Gen. 17:14). In fact, we read in Ex. 4:24-25 that Moses did not circumcise his son and the LORD nearly took the life of that son because the covenant was broken.

Circumcision appears in this text for two reasons. First, it is obviously a precursor to Holy Baptism, one of the means of grace by which the Lord is present with His people. Second, it is,

² Ironically (or not!), the first victim of murder is a shepherd. TLH #158 contrasts Abel and the Good Shepherd to declare the Gospel (v. 4): *Abel's blood for vengeance Pleaded to the skies;/But the blood of Jesus For our pardon cries.*

to the eyes of the world, an odd mark for a covenant. It is hidden on a part of the body embarrassing to talk about, and it seems indeed a strange thing for the God of heaven and earth to decree for His people. If we are tempted to view the means of grace with some embarrassment because they seem so ordinary and common, let us not forget that God often works in ordinary, even seemingly shameful ways—as evidenced by nothing less than the cross itself.

BTW: Sometimes the question arises about circumcision in our present day. Is it still commanded by God for His people? This is no minor question: In fact, it was the reason for the first church council in Jerusalem in Acts 15, as well as the book of Galatians. The answer is that circumcision is no longer commanded by the Lord, but is a freedom that Christians may exercise under the Gospel as they desire.

BTW2: This may be a little silly, but it's worth a mention. The Lutheran Church has always held that the central doctrine of Christianity is the Gospel, justification by faith alone. All other doctrines are established by God in support of the Gospel; therefore all other doctrines are to be taught and practiced. A few years ago, a group of Lutheran theologians gathered together in Wisconsin and put forth what is now known as Wauwatosa theology. In a nutshell, they taught that the Gospel is the central doctrine of Christianity; since no other doctrine is as important, other doctrines can be sacrificed in order to help others hear and receive the Gospel.

This is hardly a unique teaching: Many books on church growth today advise congregations to dispense with any doctrine or practice that might offend the visitor. The first doctrines and practices to be dispensed with are the Confession and Absolution at the start of the service, as well as Closed Communion. (Isn't it interesting that the first doctrines under attack are the means of grace?) These must be sacrificed, goes the rationale, because they prevent people from joining the Church. Furthermore, it is contended, God wouldn't place any such roadblocks in front of anyone.

This final assertion, that God would command no difficult doctrine, is what I wish to address here in the context of our discussion on circumcision. Circumcision was commanded not only for natural-born Israelites, but any Gentiles who converted to faith in the true God. So, imagine that you're the "evangelism director" of the ancient people of Israel. A Moabite and his three adult sons come into camp, declaring they have heard of Yahweh and believe in Him. They want to be part of the people of God, and is there anything they must do? Your answer: "Your faith is a gift from God Himself; as His people, He now calls upon you in grateful response to be circumcised. If you don't, you will be cut off from God and His people."

This was God's requirement for believers in the Old Testament; clearly, some of His commands would offend some. If you thought evangelism was difficult now.... ☺

The Covenant with Abraham (Gen. 22:16-18)

We include a quick look at this passage because it is here that the Lord specifies two of His promises to Abraham. He promises the Savior in verse 18, that through Abraham's seed all nations will be blessed. He also promises that Abraham's descendants will be as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore in verse 17. The first is fulfilled in Christ. As to the second promise, it is not fulfilled in the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Rather, all who trust in Christ are children of Abraham (Ro. 4:16; Gal. 3:7,14); you are among these stars and sands.

The Burning Bush (Ex. 3:6, 12, 14)

The story of the burning bush is well known, but the truth of God's presence there may be easily overlooked. Verse 2 declares that it is the Angel of the LORD who appears to Moses; when this Angel is accompanied by a miracle in the Old Testament, He is generally accepted to be Christ before the Incarnation. In other words, the Lord doesn't send a messenger; He *is* the Messenger. Furthermore, when instructed to take off his sandals, we read that "Moses hid his face, for he was

afraid to look upon God" (6). The point is this: God is not looking down from heaven, using the bush as a puppet; He is present there with Moses. He cannot let Moses see Him in His glory, so He hides His glory in a burning bush so that Moses can know of His presence but live to tell about it. Furthermore, when Moses expresses doubt that he is the one to appear before Pharaoh, the Lord says "I will certainly be with you" (12). This is a statement of presence, not of intention or fond hope. And, in verse 14, the Lord declares His name: Yahweh, or I AM. God's name is not disconnected from Himself; when the Lord's name is invoked, He is present with His name.³

BTW1: In 3:5, the Lord tells Moses that he is standing on holy ground. What makes the ground holy? The fact that the holy God is present at that ground. Were one to canvass Mt. Horeb today, he wouldn't find a patch of dirt that demanded the removal of his shoes, because the Lord is no longer gloriously present, revealing His will, there; the ground is holy when Moses is there because the Lord is present there. Now, for a moment, let's say that something is "holy" when God is there for the deliverance of His people. For instance when we see the Old Testament temple, we see the "Holy Place," the room next to where God is present; and the "Most Holy Place," the room where God was present with His people.

What do we call "holy" in the church today? We speak of "Holy Word," "Holy Baptism," and "Holy Communion:" these are the three means of grace by which the Lord is present to deliver His people from sin. We also speak of the "Holy Ministry," the office ordained by God to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments. Note that we never say "Holy Minister;" the Office of the Holy Ministry is not holy because of the person of the pastor, but because the office is instituted by God to distribute the means of grace.

One might wonder about "holy matrimony," a term still used in the church. Marriage is a gift of God for His people, among the "holy orders" or vocations that they have. The priesthood of all believers is holy because God dwells with His people; therefore, their vocations are holy, too.

BTW2: In verse 14 of the Exodus 3, God declares His name is I AM, or "Yahweh" in the Hebrew. Sometimes the question arises about the name Jehovah or why "LORD" in the Old Testament is often listed in capital letters, so here's the scoop: One thing to remember is that, in ancient times, the Hebrew language didn't have any vowels, so "Yahweh" looked like YHWH on the printed page (in Hebrew, of course). The second thing is that, over time, the Jews considered God's personal name to be too holy to speak, and commanded that no one speak it out loud. Whenever someone came upon the name "Yahweh" in the Scriptures, they were to say "Adonai" ("Lord") instead of "Yahweh." When vowels were introduced into the Hebrew language, in order to keep people from reading "Yahweh" out loud, the scholars put the vowels from "Adonai" with the consonants for "Yahweh," and the result was "Yahowaih." Translated into German, "Y" often becomes "J" and "w" often becomes "v", and you have "Jahovaih." You can see that "Jehovah" is not too far away. Now you know.

The Passover (Ex. 12:1-16)

The Passover is once again a rather familiar story. Prior to the tenth plague in which the LORD takes the life of the firstborn of Egypt, He commands the Passover Feast for His people. Each household was to take a lamb without blemish and kill it on the fourteenth day of the month. The blood of the animal was to be put on the doorposts and lintel of the house, and the meat was to be eaten. This was to be done because that night the LORD would strike down the firstborn in

³ The Lord affirms this to be true elsewhere: "In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you" (Ex. 20:24b), and "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). This also indicates the importance of the second commandment: To take God's name in vain is to violate His presence.

Egypt, but would pass over those houses marked with blood, whose inhabitants trusted in His covenant.

The Passover appears in this study for several reasons.

- ◆ God institutes the Passover for remembrance, of what has come and what is to come. The Israelites were to celebrate Passover annually to remind them that it was the LORD who had delivered them from Egypt and brought them to the promised land (14). However, the paschal lamb was also a type of Christ, the Paschal Lamb of God who would be sacrificed to save us from our sins (I Cor. 5:7; I Pet. 1:17)
- ◆ As circumcision was a precursor to Holy Baptism, so is the Passover a precursor to Holy Communion. The first Passover declared that God would come to save His people; Holy Communion declares that God has come and saved His people, and distributes the salvation won. It is no coincidence that Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper at the Passover meal with His disciples; the night He is betrayed, the Lamb of God institutes the means by which He will be flesh-and-blood-present with His disciples after His flesh is crucified and His blood shed. (More on this when we examine the Lord's Supper.)
- ◆ We see in the Passover story an important truth that is often neglected today, either because modern theology considers it too frightening or incompatible with its concept of a loving God: It is the LORD Himself who goes through Egypt and strikes down the firstborn in the households of Egypt (Ex. 12:29). When God is present to deliver His people, woe to the one who is in His presence but rejects His gracious covenant.

The Exodus (Ex. 13:17-22)

The story of the Exodus is also a familiar one, but this is something that may be overlooked by many: The Lord is present, leading the people of Israel out of Egypt. He is not far away in heaven, directing the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night; He is present with His people, concealing His glory in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.⁴ We will see that the Lord often uses a cloud to show His presence in the Old Testament.

Note, too, in 13:19, what Joseph said before his death: "God will surely visit you." Joseph declared that the Lord Himself would lead His people out of Egypt.

Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19)

At Mount Sinai, God—who has already saved them from slavery and death by His presence and work—declares to them the specifics of His covenant with them. As He has already delivered them, they are to keep His law so that they do not break the covenant and reject Him. The people declare their faith in God and their allegiance to the covenant.

God declares that He will meet Moses on Mt. Sinai. How will they know He is there? He will come in a thick cloud (9), and so He does (16-18). The Lord is not speaking from heaven down to Moses who sits on the mountain. The Lord is present with Moses on that mountain. In fact, He warns the people not to climb the mountain, lest they "break through to gaze at the LORD," which would destroy them (19:21).

The Supper of Yahweh (Ex. 24)

Those who gaze upon the Lord will perish—unless the Lord provides for them a way. In Exodus 24, the Lord commands Moses to bring Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders of Israel up to Him. They are to worship Him "from afar" (v. 1); only Moses may come near the Lord. In verses

⁴ Cf. TLH #469, *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken: Round each habitation hov'ring, See the cloud and fire appear/For a glory and a cov'ring, Showing that the Lord is near./Thus they march, the pillar leading, Light by night and shade by day/Daily on the manna feeding/Which He gives them when they pray.*

9 and 10, the group goes up and sees the God of Israel. In fact, they eat and drink with Him; but although they have seen God, God does not lay His hand on them.

How can this be—how can they see God, eat in His presence, and not face judgment? Because of what happens between verses three and nine. Moses reads the Word of God to all of Israel, so that they hear His covenant with them. After that, sacrifices are made. Half of the blood is poured out upon the altar. The other half is sprinkled upon the people, as Moses declares, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words” (24:8). The blood, sacrificed to the Lord and used to cover the people, is certainly typological of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Because blood is shed and used to cover sin—according to God’s covenant, the elders can come into His presence. Their sin is atoned for (covered), and thus they dine with God.

It would be foolish not to note the parallels between this meal on Mt. Sinai and the Lord’s Supper.⁵ Because God declares His covenant and establishes it by the shedding of blood, the elders can see Him and dine in His presence. Because God gives us the new covenant and establishes it by the shedding of Jesus’ blood, we come into His presence at the altar rail and dine with Him, too.

However, despite the similarities, there is a significantly greater intimacy between God and man in Holy Communion. True, the elders of Israel saw the glory of God, while we only see Him hidden in bread and wine. However, where the elders only saw the Lord from afar, in Holy Communion the Lord places Himself—His body and blood—into us that we might be His people.

Tent, Tabernacle and Temple

When reading through the Old Testament, this is often where the reader begins to bog down. After the exciting narratives of Genesis and Exodus, the particulars of tabernacle architecture seem rather tedious and unimportant. Don’t be fooled.

The Tabernacle is Commanded (Ex. 25:8)

If quizzed about the tabernacle, many would probably say something along the lines of it being the tent at which the Israelites worshiped God in the wilderness. They may say that that is where the priests worked and sacrifices were made. True, but there’s some wonderful information that we often gloss over.

The Lord commands His people to build the tabernacle in Exodus 25, and begins by declaring many of the materials that will be needed. However, in verse 8, He gives the purpose of the tabernacle: “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” This will be where God dwells with His people. Located always in the center of the camp (!), it will be where the Lord lives in their midst, for their good. The Lord is not content merely to look down from heaven upon His people; He intends to dwell with them, present among them.

As the tabernacle is to be the Lord’s sanctuary, He details how His tent is to be and what it is to contain.

The tent itself will be divided into two rooms. The outer room will be the Holy Place, and it is here that the priests will go about many of their duties. Separated by a thick curtain from the Holy Place will be the inner sanctum, the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies. It is in this room that

⁵ In fact, this is the Old Testament lesson for Maundy Thursday in the ILCW three-year lectionary, series B.

the Lord will dwell with His people (cf. Psalm 46:5). The tabernacle is 30 cubits long and 10 cubits wide (3x1); the Most Holy Place is a perfect cube, 10x10x10 cubits.⁶

In total, there are seven pieces of furniture, numbered to the diagram on the next page.

- ◆ **The Ark of the Covenant (1)** (Ex. 25:10-16) The Ark of the Covenant is to go into the Most Holy Place. It is a wooden box overlaid with gold and ornamentation, and the Lord directs that it will hold the Testimony that God declares. In other words, His Word—His covenant with His people—is to be kept in His presence, a reminder to us that the Lord is present with us by means of His Word.
- ◆ **The Mercy Seat (2)** (Ex. 25:17-22) On top of the Ark is a cover called the mercy seat, with two golden cherubim facing each other. This is exactly what it says: a seat. It is the throne of God upon which He is present with His people on earth: "And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel" (22). In fact, God will be known as "the LORD of Hosts, who dwells *between* the cherubim" (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2) And, as the mercy seat is the throne of God, the Ark itself is His footstool (1 Chron. 28:2). In fact, the image given is that the Most Holy Place is where heaven and earth come together, for God is present in both; heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool (Is. 66:1). (Hang on to this thought until we discuss Holy Communion, especially the *Sanctus*.)
- ◆ **The Table (3)** (Ex. 25:23-30) A table was to be built for the Holy Place, and upon it was to sit the showbread; twelve loaves were to be there at all times, a perpetual offering of the twelve tribes of Israel to acknowledge that all that they had came from God and that they consecrated the fruits of their labors to Him. This is all quite well-known. What is not so well-known, but vital, is that "showbread" literally in the Hebrew is "bread of the Presence;" the bread was placed here because the Lord dwelt in this tent, just behind the curtain. The bread was a testimony that God dwelled with His people.
- ◆ **The Lampstand (4)** (Ex. 25:31-40) The lampstand is described with seven branches, and was kept lit from evening until morning. The purpose of the lamp's light was apparently a reminder of God's presence and glory with His people (cf. Ex. 29:43); it was the sole light in the tabernacle.
- ◆ **The Altar of Incense (5)** (Ex. 30:1-10) Incense was to be burned on the altar twice a day when the high priest tended to the lamp. Incense was symbolic of the response of the people to God's gracious favor; in thanksgiving, their prayers were to rise before Him as incense (Ps. 141:2). It was therefore placed outside of the Most Holy Place, but close to the curtain that concealed the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 30:6).
- ◆ **The Altar of Burnt Offering (6)** (Ex. 27:1-8) The Altar of Burnt Offering is described in Exodus 27:1-8. However, its purpose receives detailed description in Leviticus 4. When a sin was committed by a priest (4:3-12), the nation (4:13-21), a ruler (4:22-26), or a commoner (4:27-35); an animal is to be sacrificed. It was a substitutionary sacrifice: God did not hold the sin against the person or people because blood was shed in their place, according to the covenant. The sacrifice is typological of Christ, sacrificed for the sins of the world.
- ◆ **The Basin (7)** (Ex. 30:20-21) Between the tabernacle and the altar stood the bronze basin. The priests were to wash their hands and feet in the basin before offering sacrifices; it was a symbolic acknowledgment of sin and impurity (and the washing away thereof) before going about the duties given by the Lord to do. The priest who failed to wash would die, declared the Lord; he had to be washed clean before entering close to the presence of God.

⁶ In our system of measurement, the tabernacle is 15 feet wide and 45 feet long. The Most Holy Place is a 15'x15'x15' cube.

A note about the tabernacle decor (Ex. 26): A survey of Exodus 26 shows exquisite attention to detail on the part of the Lord, even the number of curtain loops (v. 5). It seems odd to modern man for God to be so concerned about details; but this is the Lord's own house, and so He establishes the specifications.

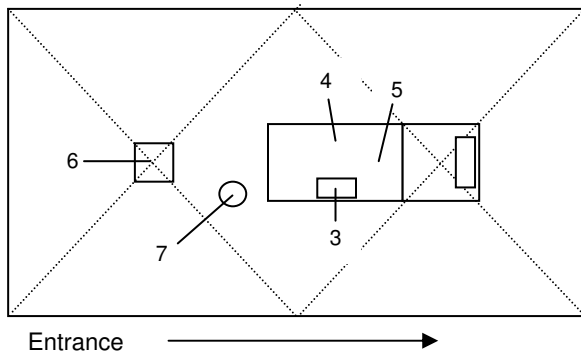
Why spend time examining the tabernacle in a Bible study about worship today? Because we see some themes about worship developing here; furthermore, the tabernacle points to Christ.

The diagram below shows the layout of the tabernacle:

1. It is worth noting that the courtyard of the tabernacle was essentially divided into two halves. At the center of one half was the Most Holy Place—where God promised to be present; at the center of the other was the bronze altar for burnt offerings—where sacrifices were made for the sin of the people. Keep these two central points in mind, for we'll return to them later.

2. Note the progression of one who enters the tabernacle courtyard. Anyone who was not a priest could only go so far as the courtyard, where the altar for burnt offerings was located. There, a substitutionary sacrifice was made for sin. A priest could enter the Holy Place, but only after a substitutionary sacrifice was made and he was washed in the basin. There, in the Holy Place, he witnessed the provision of God (the shewbread), the light of God (the lampstand), and offered prayers (the altar of incense). There was another requirement for a priest to enter: he had to be physically near-perfect to be that close to the Most Holy Place (Lev. 21). The High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place only once a year, and only after a substitutionary sacrifice was made, he was washed, and then passed through the Holy Place.

This is a vivid illustration of the Christian's journey from sin to living in the glorious presence of God in eternity. The Christian can approach God only because Jesus has sacrificed Himself in our place; He is our substitute (Heb. 9:26). Furthermore, the Christian enters the priesthood of all believers by being washed clean of sin in Baptism. Once baptized, the Christian is part of God's holy people, the priesthood. Life on this earth for the Christian is in the "Holy Place," where we see God's provision, live by His light, and offer prayers to our loving Father. We do not remain here forever. Christ, our sacrifice and high priest, has parted the curtain and entered into the presence of God (Heb. 8:1), where He sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty. Because of Jesus, we will enter into God's glorious presence, too.



In the Meantime...The Tent of Meeting (Ex. 33:7-11)

While the tabernacle is under construction, Moses' tent is pitched far outside the camp. It is called the Tent of Meeting. The Hebrew for "meeting" makes clear that the meeting is not a chance gathering, but a meeting at an appointed place and appointed time. The text makes clear that the meeting that takes place at the tent is not between people; it is where God comes and meets man. God is literally present there: The cloud descends and stands at the door to the Tent of Meeting.

God meets with Moses "face to face." This may present a bit of confusion, as we are given to understand that sinful man cannot see the face of God and live; indeed, God will tell this to Moses in this chapter, verse 20. "Face to face" is a literal translation of the Hebrew; it also means "in the presence of" and does not mean that Moses was looking into the glorious face of God. Indeed, Moses could not do so and live.

For the purposes of this Bible study, we focus on this point regarding the Tent of Meeting: Even before the tabernacle is completed, God sets the basic design of worship: He comes to meet—to be present with—His people for their good. The initiation and action is His (He comes); the response and reaction is that of the people (they receive His Presence) by His grace.

...And an Important Question Answered (Ex. 33:12-23)

Before the important question, please note: As Moses expressed concern about leading the people of Israel to the Promised Land, what is the Lord's Response? "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (v. 14). The Lord will not just be thinking good thoughts from far away or looking down upon His people; He will be present with them—in the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night—as they journey to the Promised Land.

Verses 18-23 answer a key question. Moses asks to see God's glory, to look upon His face. Note the Lord's reply: Moses cannot see the face of God, for sinful man cannot see Him and live. But the Lord does set before him the proclamation of His name (and with His name all that He is and gives), His graciousness and mercy. Instead of the glory Moses cannot stand to see, the Lord gives to Him Word and grace.

In the end, Moses does not see the face of God; instead, when God passes by, he sees the Lord's backside. The glory of God is hidden from Moses, for his good.

Martin Luther made use of Exodus 33:12-23 in a sermon to speak about worship. He declared that as we cannot stand to see the face of God, we see His back instead. In other words, rather than being present with us in devastating glory, the Lord hides Himself in Word and Sacrament, in proclamation and the other means of grace. We do not see His face, but we see the means of grace in which He is present to grant us life and salvation--so that we might have eternal life in His presence, face to face.

The Tabernacle is Dedicated (Exodus 40:34-38)

When Exodus 40 begins, all the work on the tabernacle has been completed. God therefore commands that the tabernacle be erected, the furniture set in place, and Aaron and his sons consecrated as priests for the tabernacle. In 40:33, the work is finished. All has been prepared.

The Lord Himself comes into the tabernacle; this is His home with His people. In fact, we read that the cloud covers the tabernacle and the "glory of the Lord" fills it. Not even Moses can enter the tabernacle because the Lord is there in His glory.⁷

The Lord's Presence in the tabernacle determines the journey of the people. When the cloud rises and moved, the people move with it. When it stops, they stop. They do not determine the journey or the schedule; the Lord, present among His people in the tabernacle, does. As verse 38 declares, the Lord will be present in the pillar of cloud and fire, located at the tabernacle, throughout their journeys.

⁷ Note: The "glory of the Lord" means that the Lord is present in that place, for God's glory is not separate from His Presence. Think of it this way: if you walk into a room that is light at night, logic concludes that the source—a light bulb—is in that room. You will not find the light in one room and the bulb in another part of the house; the two necessarily go together. So it is with the Lord's glory: It is present because He is present.

Nadab and Abihu: Strange Fire (Lev. 10:1-2)

The tabernacle is the Lord's dwelling, and it is He who has declared the design, the furniture and the duties of the priests. Among the duties He proclaims, He commands that priests are not to offer "strange fire" on the altar of incense (Ex. 30:9). "Strange" may also be translated as "profane" or "belonging to another;" it is used to describe a harlot, an enemy or an alien. In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu break this command. The information beyond the Scriptural account is slight; one theory holds that, since the Lord gave His own fire in Lev. 9:24, only this fire was to be used in the tabernacle. In any event, we conclude that these sons of Aaron attempted to worship the Lord in a way He had not commanded with fire He had not commanded. They did not use the means the Lord provided in the way He directed them to be used. Nadab and Abihu did not have the authority or privilege to redesign the worship of God, or what went on in His tabernacle; thus the Lord devoured them with His fire. It is a sober lesson that, in the Presence of God, it is He who sets the agenda, not we.

The Temple (1 Kings 6; 7:13-51)

For the purposes of this Bible study, coverage of the temple will be rather brief. The reason is simply that we have covered much of the material in our look at the tabernacle. The temple is essentially the same as the tabernacle with two differences: It is stationary (made of stone), and it is bigger.

Concerning dimensions, the temple is twice as big in width and length: Instead of 10 cubits by 30, the temple is 20 cubits by 60. The 1x3 design of the Triune God's house remains. The height is greater, for the temple is 30 cubits tall; the Most Holy Place, however, remains a perfect 20x20 cubit cube.⁸ The temple is made with stone, ornate jewels, and precious wood. The basic pieces of furniture remain the same, though are often larger or greater in quantity; for instance, there are ten lampstands instead of one.⁹

God Speaks of the Temple (2 Sam. 7:5-16)

It is David who first seeks to build the temple, though the Lord refuses him. As the Lord speaks to David about this (through the prophet Nathan), He recounts that He has dwelled with His people in the tabernacle. He also declares that one of David's descendants (Solomon) will build a house for Him. But more than that, He declares that He will build a house for David: The Savior will be born from David's line, and He will reign forever. Once again, Jesus is prophesied: God will be present with His people in the flesh.

Temple Construction (1 Kings 5-7)

The building of the temple can be read in 1 Kings 6-7. For a moment, we dwell on the Lord's words to Solomon in 6:11-13: Then the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying: "*Concerning this temple which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel.*"

The Lord declares the purpose for the temple: It is here that He will dwell with His people, will be present with them.¹⁰

⁸ In our system of measurement, the temple is 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 45 feet tall. The Most Holy Place is a cube with 30 foot measurements.

⁹ This temple will be destroyed by the Babylonians when they demolish the city of Jerusalem. The temple that Jesus visits is one built by Herod. Herod's temple will be 100 cubits high, 100 cubits wide, and 60 cubits long (150'x150'x90'); the Most Holy Place will be a 20 cubit (30') cube.

¹⁰ The temple (and God's presence) is the imagery behind TLH #129, "Hail Thou Source of Every Blessing." The hymn rejoices that Gentiles are now welcome in the temple courts—*we are brought into the presence of God*. If those singing don't make this connection, the hymn may *Continued on next page*

The LORD Enters the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11)

The temple is dedicated in 1 Kings 8. When construction is complete on the building, the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the Most Holy Place. The Lord's throne is in place, and what happens? After studying the tabernacle, this shouldn't be a surprise: The cloud fills the temple, and the priests must leave because the glory of the Lord fills His house (8:10-11); the Lord is present there.

Special attention should be paid to the ensuing prayer of Solomon (8:23-54), especially verses 27-30. Here Solomon raises an important question of presence: The heavens and the earth cannot contain the omnipresent God, so how can God be in the temple? Is He in the temple more than elsewhere? Does He in fact contain Himself in that small room?

The answer is in verses 29-30: While God is present everywhere, He has designated the temple as the place of His name; it is the place where He will be known, the place where prayers and sacrifices are to be made to Him. The modern-day parallel will help us here: A common objection for church attendance is, "Since God is everywhere, I can spend my weekend mountain-climbing and be with Him on a high peak. I don't need to come to church." But the Lord doesn't promise to forgive sins on mountain-tops; He does so through Word and Sacrament. As Luther said, the Lord is present there, but He is not present there *for you*-for your good and salvation.

A Promise and a Warning (1 Kings 9:3-10)

In response to the prayers of dedication, the Lord speaks a promise and a warning. If the Israelites obey His commands and worship Him, He will bless their nation. If they disobey Him and turn to false gods, He will abandon them and bring about their destruction.

In other words, the temple is a house, not a cage; the Lord is not trapped in the temple. If the Israelites choose to serve other gods, by that choice they declare that they no longer want the Lord to be present with them; and if that is their choice, the Lord will eventually give them exactly what they want. Therefore, it would be foolish for the Israelites to conclude: "We have the temple; therefore we have God. Even if we disobey Him and worship other gods, He will still save us because He lives here." Sadly, however, this is what the Israelites will do, as we will see in our survey of the prophets.

A Progression of Holiness

One more thing about the temple before we move into the Psalms. In speaking of the tabernacle, we saw how the Most Holy Place is "most holy" because it is the dwelling place of God. The Holy Place is "holy" but not "most holy" because it is next to the dwelling place of God. The tabernacle courtyard isn't quite as holy as the "Holy Place" because it is a little further away from God's presence.

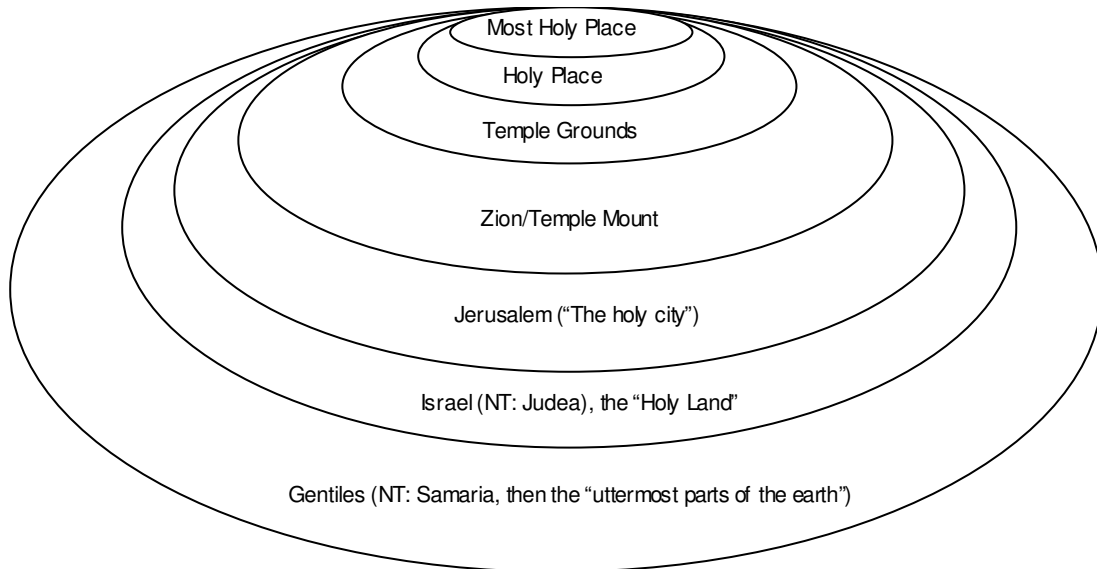
appear abstract and irrelevant. But this hymn is nothing else than a declaration that we enjoy God's presence for the sake of Christ Jesus.

1. Hail Thou Source of ev'ry blessing,
Sov'reign Father of mankind!
Gentiles now Thy grace possessing,
In Thy courts admission find.
Grateful now we bow before Thee,
In Thy Church obtain a place,
Now by faith behold Thy glory, Praise
Thy truth, adore Thy grace.

2. Once far off, but now invited,
We approach Thy sacred throne;
In Thy covenant united,
Reconciled, redeemed, made one.
Now revealed to Eastern sages,
See the Star of Mercy shine,
Myst'ry hid in former ages,
Myst'ry great of love divine.

3. Hail, Thou all-inviting Savior!
Gentile's now their offerings bring;
In Thy temples seek Thy favor,
Jesus Christ, our Lord and King.
May we, body, soul and spirit,
Live devoted to Thy praise,
Glorious realms of bliss inherit,
Grateful anthems ever raise!

With the temple, the “levels” of holiness continue; as one gets further away from the Most Holy Place, one is further away from the gracious presence of God on earth. The “levels” might be diagramed as follows:



This is helpful when reading through the Psalms, for instance when they speak of going to the house of the Lord. As they make pilgrimage to the temple, they are getting closer and closer to where God has promised to be.

The Psalms

Taking a break from Old Testament history for a little while, let us turn to the Psalms. Sometimes called the “hymnal of the Bible,” many of the Psalms are indeed songs for worship—even today. Once again, this will hardly be an exhaustive study, but rather a survey of some of the common themes in the Psalms that declare the presence of God for the good of His people.¹¹

¹¹ One should note that even the temple instrumentation was used to proclaim the presence of God in Old Testament worship:

“David is also said to have decreed which musical instruments were to be used liturgically (1 Chr 23:5; 2 Chr 29:25) and what the choir was to sing (1 Chr 16:41; 2 Chr 7:6). The leader of the choir used small metal cymbals to call the choir and congregation to attention at the beginning of the performance (1 Chr 15:16, 19; 16:5; 2 Chr 29:25). The song of the LORD was accompanied by lyres and harps. While the lyre provided the melody of the song, the harp was most likely used to provide a deeper bass line. *The trumpets, however, were not used melodically or harmonically. They signaled the presence of God the heavenly king and called on the people to perform an act of prostration in his presence, for in the ancient world the trumpet was used royally to announce the public advent and appearance of a king.* David also prescribed that the choir was to sing a psalm of thanksgiving and praise to the LORD (1 Chr 16:4, 41; 23:5, 30), like the one given as a model in I Chronicles 16:7-36.” (Kleinig, John W. “Bach, Chronicles, and Church Music.” *Logia*, IX:3, Holy Trinity 2000, page 9. Emphasis mine)

The City of God (Psalms 48, 43, 15)

Psalm 48

Many of the psalms have Zion as their theme. Used at times to refer to Jerusalem, Zion specifically referred to the Eastern hill of Jerusalem on which were built the temple and the king's palace.

¹*A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.*
Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised In the city of our God, In His holy mountain.
²*Beautiful in elevation, The joy of the whole earth,*
Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, The city of the great King.

Reading through the first two verses of Psalm 48, one might expect to find a high peak that towers over the surrounding countryside. Geographically, however, Zion is disappointing. It is actually at a lower elevation than the rest of the city on the Western hill. The name literally means "parched place."¹²

So what makes Zion so lofty, so "beautiful in elevation?" The first half of the psalm tells us:

³*God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge.*
⁴*For behold, the kings assembled, They passed by together.*
⁵*They saw it, and so they marveled; They were troubled, they hastened away.*
⁶*Fear took hold of them there, And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,*
⁷*As when You break the ships of Tarshish With an east wind.*
⁸*As we have heard, So we have seen*
In the city of the LORD of hosts, In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever. Selah

Zion is God's holy mountain (48:1), and it is holy because God is present there with and for His people. The God who is able to break the ships of Tarshish (48:7) and put fear into kings (48:4-6) is present in the palaces for protection. In verse 8, there is a promise of a Savior: God will establish His presence with His people forever. Zion is a high and glorious hill; but its height and glory are hidden behind a curtain in the temple.

The second half of this psalm (48:9-14) declares the response of the people:

⁹*We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness, In the midst of Your temple.*
¹⁰*According to Your name, O God, So is Your praise to the ends of the earth;*
Your right hand is full of righteousness.
¹¹*Let Mount Zion rejoice, Let the daughters of Judah be glad, Because of Your judgments.*
¹²*Walk about Zion, And go all around her. Count her towers;*

¹² Once we see how visibly unremarkable the physical temple hill is, TLH Hymn #469, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken" captures the paradox quite well. This is God's "own abode" (v. 1); and because He dwells in Zion (the "parched place"), streams of living water flow (v. 2). Verse 3 is quoted in footnote 4. Here are verses one and two:

1. Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken
Formed thee for His own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

2. See, the streams of living waters
Springing from eternal love
Well supply thy sons and daughters
And all fear of want remove.
Who can faint while such a river
Ever flows their thirst t'assuage—
Grace, which, like the Lord, the Giver
Never fails from age to age.

¹³Mark well her bulwarks; Consider her palaces; That you may tell it to the generation following.

¹⁴For this is God, Our God forever and ever; He will be our guide Even to death.

They come to the temple to meditate on His lovingkindness--His grace (48:9); after all, that is where the Lord is present to be gracious to His people, to grant righteousness. Therefore, Zion is a place in which to rejoice (48:11-13): Not because it is geographically stunning, but because this is where the eternal God is present for all generations, to guide even to death. ("To death" does not mean "to an end;" "to" has the meaning of "concerning" or "in the matter of." In other words, the people look for God for help even in the matter of death, for He can help them defeat even the grave.)

Especially in the modern age of skyscrapers and giant edifices, a church building may seem modest, humble, even homely. Against the backdrop of a high-tech culture, an altar on which sits a Bible, chalice and paten may seem quaint and old-fashioned. Yet, were the psalmist to cast this psalm in modern terms, it is the means of grace that are beautiful in elevation, stunningly high and holy; for that is where the Lord is present to grant grace to His people.

Psalm 43

Psalm 43 is a psalm of comfort in the midst of a distressing world.

¹Vindicate me, O God, And plead my cause against an ungodly nation;
Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!

²For You are the God of my strength; Why do You cast me off?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

The author (likely one of the sons of Korah, cf. 42:11), calls for help from God in the midst of injustice and deceit (43:1). Has the Lord forgotten or forsaken him (43:2)? No. To where does he go?

³Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your tabernacle.

⁴Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy;
And on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

He goes to Zion, the "holy hill," to the temple--a tabernacle of stone. He goes to the altar of God, for that is where God is present to grant aid.

So it is with us. Battered by this world, we go to where the Lord proclaims His Word and gives us His Sacraments; that is where He helps us. Though the surrounding hills are taller—and though all else may fail, the Lord is there and will not fail to be present with His people.¹³

Psalm 15

Psalm 15 sets the requirements for who may come into the presence of God in the tabernacle.

¹³ This is the theme of TLH 474, "Zion Stands by Hills Surrounded":

1. Zion stands by hills surrounded, Zion, kept by pow'r divine; All her foes shall be confounded Tho' the world in arms combine. Happy Zion, What a favored lot is thine!	2. Ev'ry human tie may perish, Friend to friend unfaithful prove, Mothers cease their own to cherish, Heav'n and earth at last remove; But no changes Can attend Jehovah's love.	3. In the furnace God may prove thee, Thence to bring thee forth more bright, But can never cease to love thee; Thou art precious in His sight. God is with thee, God, thine everlasting light.
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- ¹*A Psalm of David. LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*
- ²*He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;*
- ³*He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;*
- ⁴*In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD;
He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;*
- ⁵*He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things shall never be moved.*

The one who enters God's presence must be upright, righteous, honest, God-fearing, oath-keeping, and not given to back-biting, evil-doing or friend-reproaching. In other words, to dwell in the presence of God, one must be without sin. Therefore, before priests entered the temple, sacrifices for their sin were made—sacrifices that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, who would die to take away their sins. Once their sins were covered, the priests could enter the temple.¹⁴

Thanks be to God that the Lord Jesus has taken away our sin and credits us with His righteousness. Because we are forgiven, we can enter into eternal life in His presence. In the meantime, because we are forgiven, we can enter into His presence at the Lord's Supper and receive Him for our good. As we've discussed earlier, the unrepentant sinner enters into the presence of God for judgment.¹⁵

As we'll discuss again later, psalms play an important role in the Divine Service today. When we speak or sing psalms about Zion, we are not merely recounting a historical event, a situation in which God used to be present with His people. We are, instead, speaking of a present reality: God currently is not present with His people by means of the temple in Jerusalem; but He is present with His people in Word and Sacrament. Therefore, in Hebrews 12:22, we are told that God is present on Mount Zion, and this new Zion includes heaven as well as the congregation of those who believe in Jesus.

Festivals and Pilgrimage (Psalms 84, 100, 122)

Because the Lord promised to be present in the temple, the temple was the focus of worship, especially at major festivals such as the Passover, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) and Pentecost. At the time of Jesus' Incarnation, devout Jews would gather from the known world at these times of festival. (This is why, in Acts 2, there are so many different nations and languages represented at Pentecost.) In fact, historians declare that, during major festivals, the population of the city would swell to at least a million, possibly even three million!

Therefore, some of the psalms in Scripture are pilgrimage psalms, psalms about the journey to the temple and the presence of God. Perhaps these psalms were even sung by travelers along the way as they anticipated their arrival in Jerusalem for the feast. Here are three for consideration.

¹⁴ Johann Gerhard, preaching on the Passion of our Lord, takes care to note that Jesus is driven outside of the Holy City to be crucified, just as Adam and Eve were driven out of the Garden of Eden. Why? Because Jesus now bears the sins of the world; He allows Himself to be banished from God's presence and damned for our sins so that we can enjoy the glorious presence of God forever. (Gerhard, p. 225; see bibliography)

¹⁵ It is why TLH 310 is a fitting and fervent prayer: "Thy table I approach/Dear Savior, hear my prayer/Oh, let no unrepentant sin/Prove hurtful to me there!" Because Christ has died for us, His presence with us now is for the good of His repentant people.

The Pilgrimage Begins... (Ps. 84)

Psalm 84 begins with praise to God for His presence in the temple, the tabernacle now made of stone:

¹*To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.*

How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts!

²*My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD;*

My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

³*Even the sparrow has found a home, And the swallow a nest for herself,*

Where she may lay her young –

Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God.

⁴*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You. Selah*

Those who dwell there are blessed (because they are righteous, as we saw in Psalm 15). Therefore, the people of God make pilgrimage to the house of God:

⁵*Blessed is the man whose strength is in You,*

Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.

⁶*As they pass through the Valley of Baca, They make it a spring;*

The rain also covers it with pools.

⁷*They go from strength to strength; Each one appears before God in Zion.*

⁸*O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah*

The one who sets his heart on pilgrimage (84:5), who desires the presence of God, is blessed; for God will keep His promise and bless those who trust and desire His presence (84:11-12). The pilgrimage may be long and pass through the Valley of Baca ("valley of weeping"), but to be in the Lord's presence is worth the journey:

⁹*O God, behold our shield, And look upon the face of Your anointed.*

¹⁰*For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.*

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God

Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory;*

No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.

¹²*O LORD of hosts, Blessed is the man who trusts in You!*

In the Lord's presence, then, is protection, deliverance, grace, glory, and all good things. Therefore the people of God hunger to be in His presence.¹⁶

¹⁶ TLH 639 (LW 325) carries the same themes; in fact, it is based upon Psalm 84:1. The people of God make pilgrimage to the church building for absolution, Baptism, Holy Communion, weddings and funerals; because this is where God is present with His people:

1. For many years, O God of
grace,
This church has been Thy
dwelling place
And we Thy congregation.
Upon the precious Cornerstone
Our faith is built, and Christ alone
Is still our one Foundation.
Today we pray:
"Let us greet Thee, Lord, and
meet Thee
Here with singing,
All our praises to Thee bringing."
Continued on next page

2. Here children have been born
anew
As manifold as morning dew,
Their vows to Thee confessing.
Here many found a table spread,
They ate Christ's body with the
bread
And drank the cup of blessing.
Today we pray:
"Let none falter at Thine altar.
We adore Thee,
Gladly worship here before Thee.

3. Here when the marriage vows were
made,
Both bride and groom besought Thine
aid,
Thy love their own transcending.
Here mourners, with their troubled hearts,
Have found the peace Thy Word imparts,
The joy that has no ending.
Today we pray:
"May the story of Thy glory
Here resounding
Be a song of grace abounding.

The Pilgrims Arrive at the Holy City (Psalm 122)

Psalm 122 is a fitting psalm as the pilgrims draw near to the city of Jerusalem.

¹*A Song of Ascents. Of David.
I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go into the house of the LORD."
²Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!
³Jerusalem is built As a city that is compact together,
⁴Where the tribes go up, The tribes of the LORD,
To the Testimony of Israel, To give thanks to the name of the LORD.*

It is a gladsome thing to go to the house of the Lord (122:1), for that is where the Lord is present for the good of His people (122:5-9). Not only the Lord, but His Testimony: He has testified—promised—to be present there, and He keeps His promise.

⁵*For thrones are set there for judgment, The thrones of the house of David.
⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.
⁷Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces."
⁸For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you."
⁹Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.*

God sits upon His throne (the mercy seat) and dispenses His righteous judgment; the “house of David” reminds us of the Son of David to come. The Lord is praised here especially for giving peace: not peace between men, but peace between God and man--established by the forgiveness of sins.¹⁷

The Pilgrims Arrive at the Temple (Psalm 100)

Psalm 100 rejoices that the pilgrimage is at an end:

¹*A Psalm of Thanksgiving. Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
²Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.
³Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
⁴Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.
⁵For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endures to all generations.*

Pilgrims have arrived from all the lands (100:1) and are about to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise (100:4). Why is this worthy of thanks and praise? Because they are about to enter into His presence (100:2), and He has made them His people for their good (100:3). This Shepherd's mercy, goodness and promise is not temporary, but eternal (100:5).¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. LW 498, “O God of Love, O King of Peace” especially verse 4: “Where saints and angels dwell above, All hearts are knit in holy love; Oh bind us in that heav’nly chain. Give peace, O God, give peace again.”

¹⁸ Psalm 100 is the basis for TLH 13, “Before Jehovah’s Awe-full Throne,” which speaks of God’s might, as well as His presence for our good:

Continued on next page

The Ark of Freedom (Psalms 99, 132, 80)

Psalm 99

As Zion is praised because of the Lord's presence, so is the Ark of the Covenant, the subject of Psalm 99:

¹*The LORD reigns; Let the peoples tremble!
He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved!*
²*The LORD is great in Zion, And He is high above all the peoples.*
³*Let them praise Your great and awesome name -- He is holy.*
⁴*The King's strength also loves justice; You have established equity;
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.*
⁵*Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool -- He is holy.*

Psalm 99 rejoices that the Lord who reigns over all dwells "between the cherubim," a phrase that refers to the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2), declaring that God is present with His people in the Most Holy Place. Because He is present there at His footstool (the Ark, 1 Chron. 28:2), people are to worship there.

⁶*Moses and Aaron were among His priests,
And Samuel was among those who called upon His name;
They called upon the LORD, and He answered them.*
⁷*He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar;
They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.*
⁸*You answered them, O LORD our God;
You were to them God-Who-Forgives,
Though You took vengeance on their deeds.*
⁹*Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His holy hill;
For the LORD our God is holy.*

After speaking of the Lord's presence in the Temple, look at what the psalm speaks of: God's presence with His people in the pillar of cloud (99:7), present to judge and forgive (99:8)—present with Law and Gospel! Because He now resides with His people in the temple, the psalm ends with an exhortation to worship Him there.

Again, the Lord promises to be present with us by His means of grace. Instead of the Ark and the mercy seat, we look for His presence at the font, pulpit and altar--in His Word and Sacrament. Thus we worship the Lord in the midst of these things; for by these means the Lord is in the midst of us.

1. Before Jehovah's awe-full throne, Ye nations, bow with sacred joy. Know that the Lord is God alone; He can create and He destroy.	2. His sov'reign pow'r, without our aid, Made us of clay and formed us men; And when like wand'ring sheep we strayed, He brought us to His fold again.	3. We are His people, we His care, Our souls and all our mortal frame. What lasting honors shall we rear, Almighty Maker, to Thy name?
4. We'll crowd Thy gates with thankful songs, High as the heavens our voices raise; And earth, with her ten thousand tongues, Shall fill Thy courts with sounding praise.	5. Wide as the world is Thy command, Vast as eternity Thy love; Firm as a rock Thy truth must stand When rolling years shall cease to move.	

Psalm 132

Psalm 132 describes conditions at the temple because the Lord dwells at His footstool, the Ark (132:7-8). The temple is the dwelling place of God (132:1-8):

- ¹*A Song of Ascents. LORD, remember David And all his afflictions;*
²*How he swore to the LORD, And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:*
³*"Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, Or go up to the comfort of my bed;*
⁴*I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids,*
⁵*Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."*
⁶*Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; We found it in the fields of the woods.*
⁷*Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool.*
⁸*Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.*

Therefore, the priests are to be clothed with righteousness and the people of God are to gather there (132:9). This is God's place of rest, His home on earth. He is present there to dispense provisions to His people and food to the poor (132:15). He declares that He is the one who clothes the priests with salvation and gives joy to the saints (132:16):

- ⁹*Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, And let Your saints shout for joy.*
¹⁰*For Your servant David's sake, Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed.*
¹¹*The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it:*
"I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.
¹²*If your sons will keep My covenant And My testimony which I shall teach them,*
Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore."
¹³*For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place:*
¹⁴*"This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.*
¹⁵*I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread.*
¹⁶*I will also clothe her priests with salvation, And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*
¹⁷*There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.*
¹⁸*His enemies I will clothe with shame, But upon Himself His crown shall flourish."*

But while the Lord will be present always with His people, He declares in the midst of this psalm that He will not be present always by means of the temple: He is making preparations to send His Anointed (132:17, literally "Messiah"), who will reign forever (132:12).

The Messiah has come, been crucified and raised to life. He has established His presence with us by His means of grace. Therefore in worship, the Lord clothes us with His righteousness and salvation, that we might be in His presence forevermore.

Psalm 80

Psalm 80 is a psalm of mourning at a time when the people are suffering for forsaking the Lord:

- ¹*To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lillies." A Testimony of Asaph. A Psalm.*
Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock;
You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!
²*Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength, And come and save us!*
³*Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!*
⁴*O LORD God of hosts, How long will You be angry Against the prayer of Your people?*
⁵*You have fed them with the bread of tears, And given them tears to drink in great measure.*
⁶*You have made us a strife to our neighbors, And our enemies laugh among themselves.*
⁷*Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!*
⁸*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it.*
⁹*You prepared room for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land.*
¹⁰*The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its boughs.*
¹¹*She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River.*
¹²*Why have You broken down her hedges, So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?*

¹³*The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it.*
¹⁴*Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, And visit this vine*
¹⁵*And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,*
And the branch that You made strong for Yourself.
¹⁶*It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.*

Because of their sin, His face no longer shines upon them (80:3, 7, 19): He is no longer present with them for their good. Where is He who dwells between the cherubim (80:1)? How long will He be angry with His people for their rebellion (80:4-6)? The psalmist recounts the deliverance of Israel from Egypt by God, and calls for Him to rescue them once more. How?

¹⁷*Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,*
Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.
¹⁸*Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.*
¹⁹*Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!*

"Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself" (80:17). The Savior is coming.

The Savior (Psalms 22, 118)

The Psalms do indeed proclaim that the Savior is coming--sometimes with an oblique reference to the Messiah, but sometimes with startling detail.

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 proclaims a stunning prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself quotes 22:1 as He is dying on the cross. The beginning of the psalm is a description of deliverance of God's people in the Old Testament (22:3-5):

¹*To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Deer of the Dawn." A Psalm of David.*
My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?
²*O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent.*
³*But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel.*
⁴*Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them.*
⁵*They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.*

However, there is no deliverance for the Subject of this psalm:

⁶*But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people.*
⁷*All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,*
⁸*"He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"*
⁹*But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother's breasts.*
¹⁰*I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God.*
¹¹*Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help.*
¹²*Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me.*
¹³*They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion.*
¹⁴*I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint;*
My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me.
¹⁵*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws;*
You have brought Me to the dust of death.
¹⁶*For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.*
They pierced My hands and My feet;
¹⁷*I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.*
¹⁸*They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.*

He is despised and rejected by all people (22:6-8); indeed, the mockery of verse 8 is very much that of those watching the crucifixion (cf. Matt. 27:40-43). The next verses confirm that the Victim's birth and life are by God's design (22:9-10), but the psalm quickly returns to suffering. The Victim is surrounded (22:12-13), and His bones are out of joint (22:14)—part of crucifixion. He thirsts (22:15) and His hands and feet are pierced (22:16). The crowds gape at Him (22:17) and his garments are divided by lot (22:18).¹⁹

However, the Victim calls upon God for deliverance, and declares that He will live (22:19-21):

¹⁹*But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!*

²⁰*Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog.*

²¹*Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.*

Not only will He live, but He will live to be present in the midst of God's people to declare His praises (22:22,25). The kingdom of God is thus established among all nations (22:27-29), and this message of salvation shall be proclaimed to the generations:

²²*I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.*

²³*You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,
And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!*

²⁴*For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;*

Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard.

²⁵*My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.*

²⁶*The poor shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the LORD.
Let your heart live forever!*

²⁷*All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD,
And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You.*

²⁸*For the kingdom is the LORD's, And He rules over the nations.*

²⁹*All the prosperous of the earth Shall eat and worship; All those who go down to the dust
Shall bow before Him, Even he who cannot keep himself alive.*

³⁰*A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation,*

³¹*They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born,
That He has done this.*

So the Church today proclaims to all peoples, generation after generation, that the crucified and risen Lord is present in their midst for their salvation: A salvation "done"—accomplished, finished—by God Himself (22:31).

Psalm 118

Psalm 118 is part of the "Great Hallel," a series of psalms sung each year at the Passover. In fact, it is nearly certain that this psalm was sung by Jesus with the disciples the night He was betrayed (cf. Matt. 26:30). There is an additional significance to this study: As the Psalm concludes, it makes clear that Jesus is the new temple, the new presence of God with His people.

The psalm begins with the decree that the Lord's mercy endures forever; furthermore, in the Lord alone is deliverance (118:1-9):

¹*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.*

²*Let Israel now say, "His mercy endures forever."*

³*Let the house of Aaron now say, "His mercy endures forever."*

⁴*Let those who fear the LORD now say, "His mercy endures forever."*

⁵*I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.*

¹⁹ For a hymnic commentary on the suffering of Jesus, see the ten verses of TLH 172, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded."

⁶The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?
⁷The LORD is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me.
⁸It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.
⁹It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.

The Subject is surrounded by nations that wish to do Him ill, but He trusts in the Lord for salvation (118:10-18); indeed, while He might be chastened severely, He will not be left for dead:

¹⁰All nations surrounded me, But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.
¹¹They surrounded me, Yes, they surrounded me;
But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.
¹²They surrounded me like bees; They were quenched like a fire of thorns;
For in the name of the LORD I will destroy them.
¹³You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the LORD helped me.
¹⁴The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.
¹⁵The voice of rejoicing and salvation Is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.
¹⁶The right hand of the LORD is exalted; The right hand of the LORD does valiantly.
¹⁷I shall not die, but live, And declare the works of the LORD.
¹⁸The LORD has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death.

Now, note verses 19-23:

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the LORD.
²⁰This is the gate of the LORD, Through which the righteous shall enter.
²¹I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation.
²²The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.
²³This was the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.

The psalm proclaims that what is happening here is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous enter. The "gate" is Zion/temple language, signaling that this is how the Lord is present with His people. How do the righteous enter into His presence--and how does the Lord answer and grant salvation? Through the stone which the builders rejected, but who becomes the chief cornerstone--a direct prophecy of Jesus, confirmed by Jesus Himself (Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17)! St. Peter will declare that Jesus is the chief cornerstone laid in Zion (1 Pet. 2:6-8); *at the Incarnation, Jesus is now how God is present with His people.*

²⁴This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.
²⁵Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.
²⁶Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.
²⁷God is the LORD, And He has given us light;
Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.
²⁸You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You.
²⁹Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

The psalm continues by calling upon God to "Save now!" (118:25), and declares "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (118:26). It is with these words ("Hosanna" means "Save now!") that the crowds greet Jesus when He enters Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9). As the psalm nears its end, it announces that the One who comes in the name of the Lord is God Himself. The psalm concludes with the common refrain, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy

endures forever.” Repeated several times in the psalms and elsewhere in the Old Testament, this refrain indicated that the Lord was indeed present with His people.²⁰

Prophets and Presence

People normally associate the writings of the prophets with the condemnation of sin, calls to repentance, and promises of the Savior. These are all integral parts of the prophets; however, we find also in the prophets much about worship and the presence of God.

Isaiah

The Vision of the Temple (Isaiah 6)

Isaiah 6 recounts Isaiah's vision of the God in the temple. Isaiah sees the Lord enthroned, and His robe fills the temple. Two seraphim fly around and declare that the Lord of hosts is thrice holy; the building shakes from the voice. At 30', the ceiling of the temple hardly seems high enough to encompass this scene. Is the scene heaven, earth, or both? As we have seen before, the mercy seat of the temple is the Lord's throne, while the Ark of the covenant is called His footstool. At the same time, the Lord declares in Isaiah 66:1, *Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?* The imagery lends itself to the teaching that the Most Holy Place is where heaven and earth come together, for God is present there. Isaiah's vision adds to this thought, *for the majesty of God's presence expands the temple far beyond its earthly dimensions.*²¹

In the presence of God, Isaiah is far from joyful. Rather, he cries woe for himself; he is a man of unclean lips, and the sinner will only face judgment if he enters into the presence of God. However, a seraph takes a live coal from the altar, touches his lips and declares him forgiven and pure. He is then called by God to be a prophet who proclaims the Word of the Lord.

The progression regarding sinful Isaiah is this: He is sinful, then absolved. Absolved, He is then set free to serve.

This encounter with God's presence should inform us as we discuss worship in the presence of God, the Divine Service. It is not a time of levity, frivolity or irreverence. Rather, it is a reverent time as unworthy sinners come into the presence of God for the forgiveness of sins. When the Lord is present, He is the central focus—the Lord of hosts is present!²²

²⁰ “Since the Lord was believed to be invisibly and mysteriously enthroned as king on the ark, the choir stood there in his presence and announced his presence to the assembled congregation with a song of praise. In essence it consisted of the following [sic] refrain (1 Chr 16:34, 41; 2 Chr 5:13; 2:3; 6; 20:21): O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.” (Kleinig, page 9.)

²¹ Isaiah's vision is set to music in Luther's liturgical hymn, “Isaiah, Mighty Seer, in Days of Old,” TLH #249 (cf. LW 214). Part of the *Deutsche Messe* or “German Mass,” Luther's reformation and restoration of the liturgy away from Roman false teaching, it was the Sanctus of the liturgy and sung just before Holy Communion. The implication is clear: as the Temple was the place where heaven and earth came together because of God's presence in the Old Testament, so the Lord's Supper is where heaven and earth come together in the present day.

²² Crediting Habakkuk 2:20 as its source, TLH #4 (“God Himself Is Present”) uses imagery from Isaiah 6 to remind us of God's presence for our good, the awesome-ness of His presence, and the propriety of reverence.

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The Savior (Isaiah 7:14)

Right after Isaiah's vision of God's presence in the temple, it is in the next chapter that we hear a profound prophecy of the Savior: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." We are familiar with this passage because it prophesies the virgin birth of Christ. However, do not neglect the name: Immanuel, meaning "God with us."²³ This is not an abstract thought, as if God will be floating around "in spirit" somewhere. *This name is a statement of presence: God Himself, who has been present with His people in the temple, will be present with them in human flesh, born of a virgin.* The One who comes in the name of the Lord will be the Lord.

Signs of the Savior (Isaiah 35, 53)

Among the prophecies of the Savior are prophecies of the mighty acts He will perform; the One who fulfills these prophecies will be the Savior. In Isaiah 35, the weak are to be strengthened because God Himself is coming to save, and they will see the glory of the Lord (35:1-4). How will they know that the Savior is here? The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, and the dumb will sing. (35:5-6).

Furthermore, water will burst forth in the wilderness and "the parched ground shall become a pool." What does that mean? The healings we see in Jesus' ministry, but what of the waters in the parched ground? Don't forget, the literal meaning of "Zion" is "parched place;" indeed, Jerusalem is barren and lifeless if the Lord is not present there. But sure enough, verse 10 declares that the ransomed people of God will come to Zion--they will be in His presence when the Savior comes.

1. God Himself is present:
Let us now adore Him
And with awe appear before
Him.
God is in His temple—
All within keep silence,
Prostrate lie with deepest
rev'rence.
Him alone
God we own,
Him, our God and Savior;
Praise His name forever.

2. God Himself is present:
Hear the harps resounding;
See the hosts the throne
surrounding!
"Holy, holy, holy"—
Hear the hymns ascending,
Songs of saints and angels
blending.
Bow Thine ear
To us here:
Hear, O Christ, the praises
That Thy Church now raises.

3. O Thou Fount of blessing,
Purify my spirit,
Trusting only in Thy merit.
Like the holy angels,
Who behold Thy glory,
May I ceaselessly adore Thee.
Let Thy will
Ever still
Rule Thy Church terrestrial
As the hosts celestial.

²³ This, of course, is the inspiration for the Christmas hymn, "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel," TLH 62 (LW 31). The text, coupled with the plaintive *Veni, Emmanuel* for its tune, presents not just a marvelous summary of prophecies concerning the Messiah; the hymn hints at the expectation of the Old Testament people of God as they waited for the Christ to come.

1. Oh, come, Oh, come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

2. Oh, come, Thou rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. *Refrain*

3. Oh, come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight. *Refrain*

4. Oh, come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery. *Refrain*

However, Isaiah 53 reminds us that the Savior does not come for earthly glory, but to suffer for our sins. We are told that the Savior will have no special outward beauty or attraction (53:2); this is consistent with the Lord who is present with His people in humble means: in a tent behind a curtain, or in water, bread and wine. The Savior is despised and rejected by men; furthermore, he is stricken, smitten and afflicted by God. Immanuel, "God with us", will bear the iniquity of the world and die. But He will live (53:12)

The Temple (Isaiah 44:28; 64:11; 66:6)

Although he dies before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Isaiah foretells both destruction and restoration. In 44:28, God promises to rebuild the city and the temple; it is necessary for His plan of salvation. (Why? We'll see when we get to Malachi.)

Isaiah 64 is a lament, as the prophet calls for God to be present for the good of His people. But the people have sinned, and God hides His face because of their evil. Therefore, the temple is destroyed (cf. Ps. 74:4-8), a visible testimony that God is not present there anymore.

Isaiah 66 demands special attention for our study, for it speaks of God's presence, proper worship, the temple and the Messiah, and the Gospel to all nations. The chapter may be divided in outline into four sections:

Verses 1-4

Verses 1-4 are directed by the Lord to those who have profaned His worship.

In verse 1, then, the Lord declares, "Heaven *is* My throne, And earth *is* My footstool. Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest?" The temple and ark are already there; but because of unbelief, it is not a place of God's gracious presence for the unbeliever. In citing heaven and earth as throne and footstool, God distances himself from them.

Verses 2-4 describe how sinful and contemptible these idolators have become.

Verses 5-9

The Lord now attends to the faithful. Note the mockery by their enemies in verse 5: the evil challenge the righteous that their religion is in vain because God isn't showing His glory. However, the Messiah is coming: The voice of the Lord speaks from the temple in verse 6. Furthermore, Zion gives birth--first to a male child, then to her children. Because God is present (Zion), a male child is born; then the faithful. (The imagery of Zion in travail, awaiting the birth of God's presence in the Savior, recurs in Micah 5, as we will see.)

Verses 10-14

Therefore, Jerusalem is to rejoice with Zion! The two are not synonymous: one refers to the city, the other to God's presence with His faithful there. The Lord will grant His grace to His people in Jerusalem.

Verses 15-24

The Lord will also shower His grace upon the Gentiles. He will judge the wicked, but He will also gather all nations and tongues before Him (18-20), taking some to be priests and Levites (21). Thus the righteous will come from all nations to worship the Lord, while the wicked will be condemned (22-24)

Isaiah 66 summarizes the themes we have seen throughout our study this far. God is present in the temple, but promises He will be present in the Savior. His glory is hidden to the wicked, and so the faithful appear as objects of scorn to the world. However, the faithful will be delivered, for so the Lord has promised.

Joel

The book of Joel is a short one, but the second half of the book is devoted to a promise of the restoration of Judah. Within this section is the famous prophecy of Pentecost, the pouring out of the Spirit upon all people (2:28-29). Let us examine this chapter.

In verses 1-10, the trumpet sounds that the day of the Lord's judgment is coming. Because of the unbelief of the people of Israel, armies are coming to sack the city of Jerusalem. The people of Israel cannot withstand this army by their own power.

In verses 11-14, the Lord calls for repentance. The question arises in verse 14: *Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him -- A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God? Perhaps the Lord will bless His people yet if they repent?*

Verses 15-26 provide the positive answer. A "sacred assembly" is to be called, one so important that the nursing infants and brides are even to stop what they are doing and be gathered. The priests are to pray for repentance and deliverance. The Lord will remove their reproach and provide all good things for His people.

The concluding verses of the chapter (27-32) are key. In verse 27, God declares that at the time of this blessing, He will be in the midst of Israel; this, of course, is fulfilled in Christ. Because Christ comes, Pentecost follows, as prophesied in verses 28-29. Before the Lord comes at Pentecost, there will be some natural wonders, i.e., the sun turned to darkness; this is evident at the crucifixion. However, because of Good Friday and Pentecost, verse 32 announces *And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.* God will be present there, with salvation.

Note, too, that the Lord declares that a remnant will be saved. The people of God will look like a ragged minority in the eyes of the world, not the Church Triumphant.

Micah

In the little book of Micah there are important promises of deliverance. In Micah 4, the Lord declares that His temple will be established for all nations, so that people might be in His presence forever (4:1-5). The Lord will gather the afflicted and the exiles; out of them He will create His nation and rule over them forever (4:6-7).

However, the daughter of Zion—His people, must first suffer exile before the Savior arrives. They will be redeemed from Babylon, but they for a time will be like a woman writhing in agony: They will know that the birth of the Savior is near, but first they must endure a painful wait (4:10). This is essentially how the Old Testament leaves the people of God; waiting, earnestly waiting, for the long-promised Messiah to come.

The Lord provides specific prophecy about the Savior in Micah 5. The daughter of Zion who writhes in the agony of labor will not be abandoned, but will give birth (5:3) to the Savior who will be born in Bethlehem. This Savior is no ordinary human being; rather, although He will be born, He is from everlasting (5:2). He will feed and protect His flock in the name of the Lord (5:4), for He is the Lord; and He will be peace (5:5).

Ezekiel

While Ezekiel deserves a longer look, we will touch on only two prophecies.

The first is 10:18. Chapter 10, like chapter 1, records the mysterious vision of the "within the wheel." Setting that aside for a moment, what else is happening? The glory of the Lord departs

from the temple; because of Israel's sin and worship of false gods, the Lord departs and is no longer present there. Judgment awaits for those who have rejected the Lord and invited His absence by doing so.

But there is hope in Ezekiel 43:1-7, for there the Lord returns to the temple, and declares that He will dwell with His people forever.

Haggai

Haggai is one of the prophets who prophesies to the Israelites who return from exile to Jerusalem. One of the first tasks of the exiles is to rebuild the temple, though they certainly do not have the resources of Solomon at their disposal. The Lord addresses them in Haggai 2. To the eyes, He declares, the new temple is "as nothing" compared to the old (2:3). However the Lord is with them (2:4-5), and is going about His work of salvation. The Savior, the Desire of All Nations will come, and the temple will be filled with glory (2:7). The Lord will be present there to give peace; therefore the glory of the latter temple will be greater than the first (2:9).

The labor pains continue, but the Savior's birth is getting closer.

Zechariah

The King-Priest and the Temple (6:9-15)

As the former exiles continue life in the decimated Jerusalem, another prophecy of the Savior, symbolized by the crowning of Joshua, the high priest. The Lord declares that the "Branch" is coming, who will build the temple and bear the glory of the Lord. This Branch, the Savior, will be both priest and king.

Palmarum Prophecy (9:9-10)

In Zechariah 9, the Lord proclaims judgment upon the enemies of His people, and declares that He Himself will camp around and guard His house (9:8). How will He come? This King will come, righteous and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey. This is, of course, a prophecy of the Lord's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, which we remember on Palm Sunday. Coupled with the prophetic cries of Psalm 118:25-26, this clearly identifies Jesus as the Messiah.

Malachi

The book of Malachi closes out the Old Testament, giving the final word before four centuries of silence. After admonishment, the Lord then declares one more prophecy: He will send a messenger (3:1, an Elijah—cf. 4:5) to prepare the way. *"And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.* The Savior, the Lord Himself present with His people, will come to His temple. Yahweh gives His Word that He is coming.

After this, the people of God endure the labor pains of waiting for four hundred years.

Between the Testaments

When the Old Testament closes, it has provided plenty of prophetic descriptions of the Messiah who is to come. Here's a brief survey of the prophecies we have heard in our study so far:

The Messiah will be God present in the flesh, born of a virgin	Isaiah 7, Zechariah 9
He will be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5
The Messiah will be a man	Isaiah 7
He will perform miracles	Isaiah 35
The Lord will be present in the/a temple	Haggai 2, Malachi 3
He will build the temple	Zechariah 6
He will suffer and die	Psalm 22, 118; Isaiah 53
He will rise and live	Psalm 22, 118; Isaiah 53
His salvation will be for all nations.	Isaiah 66; Joel 2

So, God will be present with His people by becoming man and being born to a virgin in Bethlehem. He will work wonders, suffer and die, but rise again and reign forever. From our perspective, with the New Testament firmly in our hands, these prophecies obviously point to Jesus Christ; and that may make us wonder as to why Jesus is rejected by the Jews.

One part of the puzzle is this: The prophecies were hard to reconcile. How could a mighty Savior be described as stricken, smitten by God and afflicted? How could a King, who reigns for eternity, die? It was tempting to believe the powerful, glorious prophecies about the Messiah, while relegating the prophecies of suffering and death to a lesser position.

Part of it, too, is history. The time between the testaments included the empire of Alexander the Great. Succeeding him, the Seleucids ruled over Judea. One of these kings, Antiochus IV (also known as Antiochus Epiphanes) attempted to force the Jews away from their religious practices, presumably toward Greek religion and philosophy. He instituted religious persecution, forbidding circumcision and Sabbath-keeping, for example.

Furthermore, Antiochus IV worked to desecrate the temple so that it was no longer sacred space. It is recorded that he instituted ritual prostitution on the temple grounds. However, it is said that the Jews finally openly revolted when he slaughtered a pig—an unclean animal—upon the altar of burnt offering. Led by Mattathias Maccabeus, then by his son Judas, the Jews fought until Antiochus' forces were forced to withdraw. In 165 B.C., the temple was solemnly cleansed and sacrifices were once again offered according to Old Testament Law. The commemoration of this cleansing, Hannukah, is still celebrated today.

One can imagine that Judas was received by some as a messianic figure. He led the revolt that expelled the godless enemy, and “rebuilt” the temple by cleansing it from the paganism of Antiochus Epiphanes. Because of such incidents, the popular belief was that the Messiah would be for the Jews alone, and would establish an earthly political kingdom over which He would reign forever.

Jesus did not fulfill such popular expectations. He gathered no army and claimed no political throne. In fact, when they tried to make Him a king, He refused (John 6:15). Because He was no help in expelling the Romans from Judea, He was rejected as no king at all.

This bit of history should serve to warn the Church as well, for the world's expectations of what the Church should do shifts; often, the idea of what the Church should be about shifts within Christendom, too. Is the Church about “Social Gospel”—soup kitchens and homeless shelters? Is the primary purpose of the Church a sanctuary movement, as in the early 1980's when

churches were helping political refugees escape from Central America? Is the Church about forming relationships and building self-esteem?

It is best that we not find the mission of the Church in the expectations of the hearts of man. Rather, we hear of the Church from her bridegroom in His Word. The Church is here to proclaim the Word of God, His Law and Gospel; and in that Word, the Lord is really present even now. The world sees this as hardly helpful or productive, but it is the joyous task that the Lord has given His bride to do.²⁴

²⁴ “Today as always people ask, What does the church actually do? It prays. The praying church [*ecclesia orans*] is one of the constantly recurring themes of early Christian art. The church prays. Thus it was at the beginning. ‘All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer’ it says of the first believers after Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:14). ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers’ it says of the church at Pentecost [2:42]. ‘Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they [were]... praising God and having favor with the people” (v. 46).

“They founded no mission society, organized no city mission, wrote no books on ‘dynamic evangelism.’ Instead, they celebrated the Sacrament and prayed continually. ‘And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.’ (2:47). And they went on praying. The leader of the apostles was imprisoned, ‘but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church’ until the chains fell from his hands and the door of the prison swung open (12:5ff.). And so it went on.

“What does the church do? What could it do in those last years of Jerusalem to solve the problem of Palestine, which the world’s political powers have been trying in vain for centuries to do? What could the church do to stop the ruin of the Roman Empire and of the inestimable treasures of ancient culture? Instead of holding world conferences and having endless debates about the boundaries between church and culture, it went on praying without ceasing and sang the Te Deum on the debris of a world that was coming to an end. None of its prayers were in vain. They rose to heaven, even though they died away on earth.” (Hermann Sasse, *We Confess*. Vol. 2, The Sacraments. St. Louis: CPH, 1985)

The New Testament

In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets. But now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son. (Hebrews 1:1)

As we've seen, the Old Testament is a book of God's presence, yet a waiting for His presence incarnate. He has been present in a variety of ways—the burning bush, the pillar of cloud and fire, the cloud in the temple and on Mt. Sinai, etc. The New Testament opens with some good news: After centuries of travail, the people of God see their Savior, and their Savior is now present in the flesh.

The following is a brief survey of the New Testament, especially—almost entirely—the life of Christ, the Lord's incarnate presence. It is not exhaustive; in fact, many of the texts will receive a rather cursory examination. For the purposes of this study, the focus of these readings is their proclamation of the Lord's presence among His people.

Beginnings and Fulfillments

The Messenger's Conception (Luke 1:1-25)

As the Gospel begins, the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 is set in motion. Gabriel declares that the messenger is coming, and John the Baptist will have the spirit of Elijah (cf. Mal. 4:5); in fact, John will share many of the same outward characteristics of Elijah, such as camels' hair clothing, a leather belt, locusts and wild honey.

Note Zacharias' reaction to Gabriel, that he is fearful when he sees the angel. Note also this: When Zacharias asks for proof, Gabriel points him to the Word and the presence of God (v. 19).

The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) March 25

"The Annunciation" is the day of the conception of Christ, when Gabriel announces the news to Mary. It is a holiday of the church year, celebrated on March 25—exactly nine months before Christmas. ☺

We now engage in a bit of speculation, but note this: Whereas Zacharias is troubled by what he *sees* when Gabriel appears, Mary is troubled by what she *hears*. She hasn't heard much—the real shocking news is yet to come! But she has heard the angel say, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" She has heard the angel say, "The Lord is with you."

While it is commonplace to view this as an abstract phrase, many hold that this is a statement of presence; in other words, Gabriel is saying that the Lord is present, in that room, with Mary.²⁵ This could very well raise all sorts of questions in the maiden's mind: "The Lord is with me? But I'm in Nazareth, and the Lord is in His temple in Jerusalem. How can the Lord be with me? Why would the Lord be with me?"

The angel then tells her how the Lord is literally, physically with her. The Lord of heaven and earth is a tiny zygote in Mary's womb, for she is going to give birth to her Creator. God is now

²⁵Does an angel appear to anyone else in Scripture and declare "The Lord is with you"? Yes, in Judges 6:12: *And the Angel of the LORD appeared to [Gideon], and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!"* Is the Lord present with Gideon? Yes, without a doubt. The Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is normally regarded as the pre-incarnate Christ, and Judges 6 leaves little doubt as to the Angels' deity here: Verse 14 tells us that it is the Lord Himself speaking to Gideon.

present—not hidden within the temple, but within Mary. One might say Mary is the new temple, because the Lord dwells on earth within her.²⁶

The Visitation (Luke 1:39-56) July 2

Following the Annunciation, Mary goes and visits her cousin (and mother of John the Baptist), Elizabeth. This event is still celebrated in the Church as "The Visitation." Mary enters the house and greets Elizabeth; we can assume that the greeting includes a description of the Annunciation, for Elizabeth knows of the events when she responds to the greeting.

Of special note, and likely the reason for the preservation of this holy day, is the fact that John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb. John leaps because His Savior is present with them, and thus the prenatal prophet already announces that the unborn Savior is here. How John knows this is still debated; at times, Luther appears at times to hold that John knows because he is filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Lk. 1:15). However, because John leaps at Mary's greeting, the Lutheran Confessions indicate that he knows of the Lord's presence because of a means of grace—the Word, which Mary proclaims in her greeting.²⁷

In any event, it is a day of joy: though not yet born, God is still present in the flesh.²⁸

The Incarnation (Luke 2:1-20; John 1:14) December 25

Jesus is born, and as one pastor put it, Mary now holds God in diapers,²⁹ for her child is the very Son of God. This takes place in Bethlehem—why? To fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5.

Angels appear to shepherds and announce the birth of Jesus, and the glory of the Lord shines around them. Remember, the glory of the Lord is not separate from the Lord Himself anymore than light is separate from its source. The glory of the Lord is shining on the fields outside of Bethlehem because the Lord Himself is present—wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger!

John 1 approaches the birth of Jesus from a different perspective for a different reason: John wrote his Gospel—by the inspiration of God—to combat the teachings of the Gnostics, a group

²⁶ *Lutheran Worship* Hymn 43 ("From East to West," Coelius Sedulius) captures this miracle in a single verse (3): *For this how wondrously he wrought!/A maiden in her lowly place/Became in ways beyond all thought/The chosen vessel of His grace.*

²⁷ Luther writes, "The Holy Spirit indwelling John goes to the heart of the mother and causes her to speak out with a loud voice, that Mary had conceived and was the mother of the Son of God" (House Postil, vol. 3, p. 358). At the same time, the Lutheran Confessions declare that "John the Baptist was not conceived without the preceding word of Gabriel, nor did he leap in his mother's womb until Mary spoke." (SA III:VIII, 12-13)

These two views are easily reconciled: "These are the events we are considering and commemorating today, not because of Mary, but because of the great miracle which took place on this day. It is not for the sake of her honor, so that we should pray to Mary, but we should give thanks to our dear Lord God that he gave us these two boys, Christ and John, who communicated with each other in their mothers' wombs and are filled with joy. It is a great and mighty miracle that John who is six months older than Christ, leaped for joy in his mother's womb as Christ, through Mary, greeted him. Christ is happy that he has a forerunner; John is happy that his Lord follows in his footsteps. We want to touch upon this today and thank our dear Lord God that he has given us these two boys who here begin the preaching of the gospel" (Luther, House Postil, pp. 359-360).

²⁸ The Visitation is described poetically in TLH #272, "When all the World Was Cursed" (cf. LW 187). Verse 2 proclaims: *Before he yet was born,/He leaped in joyful meeting,/Confessing Him as Lord/Whose mother he was greeting./By Jordan's rolling stream,/A new Elijah bold,/He testified of Him/Of whom the prophets told.*

²⁹ Senkbeil, *Dying to Live*, 31.

that taught salvation by knowledge and held that God could not take on human flesh. (They taught that God is holy and matter is evil, therefore God could not put on evil matter.) John therefore begins by declaring the existence of the Word—Jesus Christ—from creation, and says nothing in the first 13 verses to which the Gnostics would take exception. But then he drops the anti-Gnostic bomb in 1:14: “And the Word *became flesh and dwelt among us*, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

“The Word...dwelt among us.” In the Greek, the verb for “dwelt” is from the same root as the noun for “tent,” or...“tabernacle.” With the beginning of the New Testament, something profound is happening: God is changing how He is present with His people. He has been present in the temple. Now, for a time, He will be present in the temple and in the flesh. After the Ascension, He will be present in His Word and Sacraments.³⁰

Despite the angels’ announcement and a brief display of the Lord’s glory, Jesus’ birth largely is hidden from the world. It appears to be so unremarkable—except in its poverty—as to deny that this Child could be the Son of God. He is born to a virgin, who appears to the world like an unfaithful fiancée. The King of kings is not born to a queen in a palace, but to Mary in a stable. He is laid not in a royal crib, but a manger. Angels announce His birth, yes—but to shepherds, not rulers. The Lord takes on human flesh, fulfilling all sorts of prophecies (Isaiah 7; Micah 5) by being born to a virgin in Bethlehem; however, except for a few, nobody notices His birth. Remember the hiddenness of God in the Old Testament? It continues in the New Testament; the Almighty Lord is present in the flesh, but cloaks His glory for the good of His people. Thus, many deny that He is there at all.³¹

The Child Jesus

In several books about the Gospels that I have read, the introduction usually makes the point that the Gospels are not meant to be comprehensive biographies of the Lord; if they are, they fall terribly short as there is so little recorded about Him between His birth and the beginning of His ministry thirty years later.

There are indeed very few stories about the childhood of Jesus recorded in Scripture. However, those stories that are recorded are precious ones indeed, for they announce the presence of God in the flesh, and show that Jesus is redeeming His people even in His infancy on earth—at great cost to Himself.

The Circumcision and Presentation of Our Lord (Luke 2:21-40)

January 1 and February 2

According to the requirements of the Law (Gen. 17:10-14), Jesus is circumcised on the 8th day; thus, this church holiday is celebrated on January 1. This is the first we hear of Him after birth,

³⁰ Luther captures this presence in his Christmas hymn, “To Shepherds as They Watched by Night,” TLH 103. After declaring in verses 1-3 that Jesus is born, he goes on to proclaim the purpose of the Incarnation in verse 4: *What harm can sin and death then do?/The true God now abides with you./Let hell and Satan rage and chafe/Christ is your brother—ye are safe.*

³¹ Luther highlights this paradox in his beautiful, but largely ignored, Christmas hymn, “All Praise to Thee, Eternal God” (TLH 80). Although a challenging tune, the text is well worth the effort. The first three verses are listed here:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1. All praise to Thee, eternal God,
Who, clothed in garb of flesh and
blood,
Dost take a manger for a throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine
alone. Hallelujah! | 2. Once did the skies before Thee
bow;
A virgin’s arms contain Thee now,
While angels, who in Thee rejoice,
Now listen for Thine infant voice.
Hallelujah! | 3. A little Child, Thou art our Guest
That weary ones in Thee may rest;
Forlorn and lowly is Thy birth
That we may rise to heav’n from
earth.
Hallelujah! |
|--|---|--|

and note what He is doing: in the first recorded event after His birth, Jesus is fulfilling the Law for us. Furthermore, He is fulfilling the Law by shedding His blood.³² By circumcision, He is made and official member of Israel; He is, in fact, Israel's Redeemer.

The circumcision probably takes place in Bethlehem, but the presentation happens in Jerusalem. Ceremonial law declared that mothers were unclean for forty days after giving birth to a male child; thus the Presentation of Our Lord is celebrated on February 2. The family goes to the temple to make the offering for Mary's purification, in accordance with Leviticus 12.

Remember the prophecy of Malachi 3:1, just before the end of the Old Testament: "The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple." After circumcision, the next recorded event of Jesus' life is that He comes to His Father's house; the Lord suddenly comes to His temple—not with armies and trumpets, but carried in the arms of His mother. The prophecy is fulfilled!³³ However, it is not what people expect, and nearly no one notices.

Some, however, do. Simeon is there, having been assured that he would see the Savior, the "consolation of Israel." Directed by the Holy Spirit, Simeon knows that Jesus is the Christ; he takes the infant in his arms and sings the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32) in praise to God.

Time for speculation once again: Where is Simeon looking while he sings this prayer? He could direct his eyes toward heaven, the throne of God. It would also be appropriate to turn toward the Most Holy Place of the temple, for he is standing in the temple courts. But it would also be appropriate for him to gaze down at the Infant in His arms, the helpless/omnipotent Jesus; to Him, Simeon could sing, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace...."

Simeon is not the only one who notices; Anna, the prophetess, knows that the Lord has come suddenly to His temple. Luke 2:38 says that she "spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." For all the people of God writhing in labor pains, she declares that the Savior is born, that God is present with His people.

BTW: It makes sense that there would be a huge surge in songs that find their way into the liturgy at the start of the Gospel: After all, the Incarnation has finally happened and the promise is fulfilled. In Christ, God is present in the flesh in Luke 1-2, just as He is present in Word and Sacrament in worship.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52)

When Jesus is twelve years old, He goes with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem for the Passover. When they depart, He stays behind and is gone for three days. Mary and Joseph finally find Him in the temple, where He says (2:49), "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

³² This truth is often missed within the liturgical year as we are attracted to the celebrations of a calendar New Year. However, the "New Year" hymns of the hymnal do not ignore it: "O Blessed Day When First Was Poured," TLH 115, makes this its central theme (v. 1-3):

1. O blessed day, when first was poured	2. While from His mother's bosom fed,	3. Scarce come to earth, His Father's will
The blood of our redeeming Lord!	His precious blood He wills to shed;	With prompt obedience to fulfill,
O blessed day when Christ began	A foretaste of His death He feels,	A victim even now He lies
His saving work for sinful man!	An earnest of His love reveals.	Before the day of sacrifice.

"The Ancient Law Departs," TLH 117, poignantly declares the same doctrine: *His infant body now Begins the curse to feel; Those precious drops of blood that flow For death the victim seal.* (v. 3)

³³ The connection between the Presentation and Malachi 3:1 is made in at least one hymn, "Within the Father's House" (TLH 133). Verse 1: *Within the Father's house, The Son hath found His home, And to His temple suddenly The Lord of life hath come.*

These are Jesus' first recorded words in Scripture. When we hear Him speak for the first time, He is in the temple, His Father's house, and He announces that He is going about His Father's business. As the Passover festival is ending, He declares that He is the Son of God, going about the "business" of being the Paschal Lamb.

Jesus then returns to Nazareth and is obedient to His parents in all things: He is keeping the fourth commandment for us, that He might credit us with His righteousness and die for our failure to honor our parents.

Once the 12-year-old Jesus announces that He is the Son of God, the curtain closes on the next eighteen years of His life. We do not hear of Him again until His ministry begins.

The Ministry of Jesus

The Baptism of Our Lord (Mark 1:1-11; John 1:19) *The First Sunday after the Epiphany*
As Jesus' ministry is about to begin, Mark announces that the messenger has come: John the Baptist is the messenger foretold by Malachi (3:1) and Isaiah (40:3); he goes on to demonstrate how John is even dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).

Jesus is baptized, and God the Father confirms what Jesus said in the temple: Jesus is the Son of God, and the Father is well-pleased with Him. Jesus is baptized, identifying with us sinners. In fact, one early church father wrote, "...He was born, and was baptized, that by himself submitting he might purify the water" (Ignatius to the Ephesians, 18:2). The image is this: In our baptism, our sins are washed off of us. In His baptism, our sins are washed onto Jesus. From the start of His ministry, God is present with His people in order to bear their sins and die for them on the cross.³⁴

In John 1:29, John the Baptist confirms this at the time of Jesus' baptism: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus has come to be the sacrifice typified by the Passover Lamb over the centuries.

The Temptation of Our Lord (Mark 1:12-15) *The First Sunday of Lent*
Jesus is then driven into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil; the Lord is present in the flesh to resist Satan's temptations for us. It is always tempting to view the temptation of our Lord as an example: "Since Jesus resisted temptation, so can I!" But if we can resist temptation and not sin, why would Jesus have to die on the cross? No, Jesus is resisting temptation so that He can credit us with His righteousness when He takes away our sin. This is part of His active obedience of the Law on our behalf.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. TLH #131, "The Star Proclaims the King Is Here": *Within the Jordan's crystal flood/In meekness stands the Lamb of God/And, sinless, sanctifies the wave/Mankind from sin to cleanse and save.* Another excellent hymn devoted to the Baptism of our Lord is LW #223, "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord," by Martin Luther.

³⁵ LW #92, "O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days" comments upon this. Verses 1-2:
1. O Lord, throughout these forty days 2. You strove with Satan, and you won;
You prayed and kept the fast; Your faithfulness endured;
Inspire repentance for our sin, Lend us your nerve, your skill and trust
And free us from our past. In God's eternal Word.

While the last two lines of verse 2 may seem to indicate that we learn nerve, skill and trust from Jesus' time in the wilderness, there is a far better lesson here. Jesus does lend us His perfect nerve, skill and trust as He credits us with His righteousness. Before God in heaven, God sees us possessing such nerve, skill and trust even now; not because we do by our own merit, but because God sees His Son on our behalf.

Following the temptation, Mark declares that Jesus preaches, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." The kingdom of God is at hand because the King Himself is present, to grant forgiveness and faith. As prophesied, He is preaching the Gospel; He is preaching Good News.

Jesus of Nazareth in Nazareth (Luke 4:15-30)

Following the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returns to the region of Galilee and begins to teach in the synagogues; verse 15 declares that He is glorified by all.

Eventually, the Lord comes to His hometown of Nazareth and teaches in the synagogue there. The text for His teaching that day is Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to *the* captives And recovery of sight to *the* blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." There are several points to emphasize as He declares to the people that God is present with them—in Him!

- ❖ The Trinity: The quotation from Isaiah begins, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me...." Jesus declares Himself with these words to be the Son of God and the third person of the Trinity.
- ❖ The Messiah: As such, He is the Messiah, for the LORD has anointed Him to fulfill His purpose.
- ❖ The Task of the Messiah:
 - ❖ To preach the Gospel to the poor
 - ❖ To heal the brokenhearted
 - ❖ To proclaim liberty[forgiveness] to the captives
 - ❖ To send out the oppressed in liberty[forgiveness]
 - ❖ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.

All of these are about the forgiveness of sins, for this is why the Lord has come to be present with His people. The preaching of the Gospel is obviously so, and by the forgiveness of sins are broken and contrite hearts healed (Ps. 51:17). Regarding the captives and the oppressed, the word for liberty is the same as forgiveness (ἄφεσις).³⁶ The acceptable year of the LORD is a reference to the year of Jubilee, an Old Testament typology of Christ in which debts were forgiven and slaves set free.

Jesus reads these words, well known by the worshipers in the synagogue. With all eyes affixed upon Him, He makes the astounding declaration: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The people marvel at His gracious words. The words are not gracious in the sense of simply being kind; literally in the Greek, they are words of grace (τοῖς λόγοις τῆς χάριτος).

However, although they marvel, they are scandalized. He can't be the Messiah, they reason, because He's Joseph's son. He grew up in their midst, and He is far too common to be the Son of God Incarnate. Jesus therefore calls them to repentance, bidding them to dwell on the Word He teaches, and to be thankful for His presence with them. However, they reject Him and seek to throw Him off of a cliff.

The people of God are well-warned once again in our present time to give thanks to the Lord and look for Him where He promises to be found: In His Word and Sacraments. They appear common to the eye, even as Jesus did to those in His hometown; but that is where the Lord has promised to be.

³⁶ This is clear in "Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes," (TLH #66/LW #29): *He comes the pris'ners to release, In Satan's bondage held. The gates of brass before Him burst, The iron fetters yield.*

Ministry and Miracles (Mt. 9:27-31; Mk. 7:31-37; Lk. 5:18-25; Mt. 9:32-33)

This brief survey of four miracles is simply to show that Jesus fulfills prophecy, such as that of Isaiah 35:5-6. In these New Testament texts, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the mute tongue shouts for joy.

In fact, turn for a moment to Matthew 11:1-11. The imprisoned John the Baptist sends disciples to ask if Jesus really is the Messiah. Jesus tells them to tell John the miracles they have seen. He then declares the John is the messenger who was prophesied; therefore, Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus is the Messiah; however, the greatest miracle of all—our salvation—will be accomplished on the cross, a scandal and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:22-24). We should not be surprised that the Lord works in ordinary, even scandalous things for our salvation today—like words, water, bread and wine.

Miracles happen when Jesus is present. Miracles happen because Jesus is present there among His people. So we turn to one specific example:

The Woman with the Issue of Blood Mark 5:24b-34

The healing of the woman is a poignant example of the Lord's presence among His people for good. Likely an affliction related to menstruation, the woman has been losing blood for twelve years, and has only suffered at the hands of doctors who have taken all her money. There is an added dimension to her suffering; the discharge of blood makes her unclean according to ceremonial law (Lev. 15:19-27); she is therefore isolated from society and the temple.

Note the progression of the text. Afflicted, she hears of Jesus and His ability to heal. Having heard the Word, she believes; and her faith moves her to go to Jesus, to enter into His presence. She touches His garment; and because she has come in contact with the Son of God, she is healed.

Following the miracle, Jesus singles her out of the crowd. She is trembling and fearful, conscious of the presence of God. However, Jesus praises her, for the faith she has received has made her well. His benediction is twofold: "Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction" (5:34). Not only is she healed of her physical affliction, but she is now also forgiven and at peace with God.

One further thought about this miracle, as well as the others that Jesus performs. What happens to the blindness, the deafness, the paralysis and the speech impediments when Jesus heals the sick? Do they just vanish into thin air? No. They are taken by the Savior into Himself. Even as He exchanges our sin for His righteousness, so in these miracles He also exchanges His health for their afflictions. Thus Matthew 8:16-17: *When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses."* One grows more and more awe-struck by the staggering load that He bears to the cross.

The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36) Last Sunday of Epiphany

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus demonstrates to three disciples that He is indeed both God and man—that He is the Lord, present with them in the flesh.³⁷ As He is transfigured, He

³⁷ The Transfiguration is indeed a story of comfort for the Christian. We do not see our Lord in His glory yet; however, we are certain that we will be redeemed, for Jesus displays His glory before He goes to the cross. Therefore, though we must suffer death, we have the hope of His glorious Kingdom which awaits. Thus TLH #135 (cf. LW #89), "Tis Good, Lord to Be Here:"

Continued on next page

speaks with Moses and Elijah about His exodus (ἐξοδον)³⁸, a testimony that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and that He has come to deliver His people by His death.

As He did at Jesus' baptism, God the Father once again confirms that Jesus is His beloved Son. Note the Father's command to the disciples: "Hear Him!" God the Father points the people of God to His Word. After all, Jesus will not be gloriously transfigured for long; soon He will be bloodied and dying on a tree. While the disciples' eyes may tell them to doubt, the Word of God will tell them that this is all part of God's plan.

The Transfiguration is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. From then on in the Gospels, He is headed for the cross, suffering and death. The Transfiguration is celebrated at a turning point in the church year, the last Sunday of Epiphany. This season of light ends with the glory of the Transfiguration; three days later, on Ash Wednesday, we begin the trudge to the cross through the forty days of Lent.

Table Fellowship (Luke 10:38-42)

Throughout His journey from birth to the cross, Jesus enjoyed "table fellowship" with sinners. It was common for a teacher, when invited to dinner, to teach before the meal; Jesus took part in this tradition as well. One such occurrence, a profound and startling one, takes place in the home of Mary and Martha. As Martha bustles in preparation for the meal, Mary sits at the feet of Jesus as He teaches the Word. Finally, Martha objects to Mary's apparent sloth, only to receive a rebuke from Jesus: *And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:41-42).

The rebuke may ring strange upon our ears, for the Lord appears to praise inaction above labor. However, we must examine the context: Jesus is present with Mary and Martha, proclaiming His saving Word. Mary, recognizing the presence of the Lord and the gifts that He has, sits at His feet to receive them; Martha, interpreting this as an opportunity to work for the Lord, busies herself with the meal at the expense of receiving the Word. "But if she doesn't prepare the meal, how will they eat?" we might wonder, except, that she is attempting to feed the One who provides food for 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes. It is not that the task of preparing a meal is sinful; but Martha is laboring when she ought to be receiving.

This text is a profound comment upon worship: When the Lord is present to give grace, those present are to receive it, not cloud the time of His visitation with other extraneous things. Worship for the Christian is a time in the presence of God; it is a time of reception, not of labor.

Moving On....

It may appear strange at first that we cover so little material about the ministry of Jesus in a study of this scope. This is done for two reasons. First, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate how God is present with His people throughout history; the texts we have examined fulfill this purpose, proving that Jesus is God, present in the flesh. *The rest of the Gospels can be read with joy within this context: God is present in Christ, and look what God does for His people when He is present with them!* This explains the second reason: Because the four Gospels are about

3. Fulfiller of the past,
Promise of things to be,
We hail Thy body glorified
And our redemption see.

4. Before we taste of death,
We see Thy Kingdom come;
We fain would hold the vision bright
And make this hill our home.

³⁸ Many translations render ἐξοδον as "departure;" though not wrong, the word fails to connect Jesus' Passion to the Exodus of the Old Testament. The NKJV renders the word "decease," which is terribly inadequate.

nothing else than the Incarnate Presence of God with His people, a comprehensive examination would require scrutiny of every verse—far beyond the scope of this study. The presence of God with His people for their salvation is not just another theme in the Gospels; it is the theme.

The Passion

Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:29-44) *Palm Sunday*

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, once again in fulfillment of prophecy (Zech. 9:9-10). This is stunning enough; but far more astounding are the shouts of the multitude that gathers to worship Him: " 'Blessed *is* the King who comes in the name of the LORD!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Lk. 19:38). From Matthew 21:9, we know that they also shout out "Hosanna!"—"Save now!"

These cries are from Psalm 118:25-26, which we have already examined. Remember that, in the psalm, these are the praises of the people of God sung when God is present with His people.

It is why the Pharisees are so scandalized at the shouts of the people; they are declaring in no uncertain terms that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. Furthermore, note that the people cry out, "Save now!" He can save because He is present there. He will save them, but not by being crowned and enthroned as they might expect. Rather, He will save them by being crowned with thorns and enthroned on the cross to die for their sins.³⁹

Many will reject Him; therefore, after the Triumphal Entry, Jesus mourns for the city and declares judgment for her, because "you did not know the time of your visitation" (19:44). Indeed, many of Jerusalem's inhabitants will face judgment because the Lord Himself was present for their salvation, and they did not believe Him, or like the salvation He offered, or like how He accomplished their salvation on the cross.

We need to be careful, too. The Lord declares that He is present for our salvation by His Word and Sacrament. Our sinful nature goads us to look elsewhere. But we dare not neglect the means of His visitation.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (Luke 19:44-46; John 2:19-21)

After the Triumphal Entry, Jesus cleanses the temple, driving out the merchants and moneychangers who are using the house of God for personal gain as they change money so that pilgrims can purchase sacrificial animals.⁴⁰

³⁹ The paradox is well illustrated by two different hymns about the Triumphal Entry. "O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee" (TLH #58/LW #19), an Advent hymn, captures the joy and glory of the day. On the other hand, "Ride On, Ride On, In Majesty" (TLH #162/LW #105), a hymn for Holy Week, makes clear that Jesus is riding into Jerusalem in order to die for the sins of the world. Contrast a verse from the former and two from the latter:

O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee
2. Thy Zion strews before Thee
Green boughs and fairest palms,
And I, too, will adore Thee
With joyous songs and psalms.
My heart shall bloom forever
For Thee with praises new
And from Thy name shall never
Withhold the honor due.

Ride On, Ride On, In Majesty
1. Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark! All the tribes hosanna cry.
O Savior meek, pursue Thy road,
With palms and scattered garments strowed.

5. Ride on, ride on, in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die.
Bow Thy meek head in mortal pain,
Then take, O Christ, Thy power and reign.

⁴⁰ One of the interesting, and often-overlooked events of Jesus' Passion is the closing events of the life of Judas. After confronting the chief priests and receiving no sympathy, Judas runs to
Continued on next page

The account in John 2:19-21 is especially helpful for our study. Scholars are divided as to whether or not this is the same cleansing as that of Palm Sunday, or if Jesus cleansed the temple earlier in His ministry. In any event, His reasons for cleansing it in John 2 would undoubtedly be the same as that of Luke 19—to restore His Father’s house.⁴¹

After Jesus cleanses the temple in John 2, the Jews demand a sign of His authority. The sign Jesus offers is this: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews reject this as absurd, since the temple has taken 46 years so far to build. But the profundity is found in 2:21: "But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

Jesus is declaring that God's presence with His people is changing residence. If we define "temple" as "where God dwells among His people," the temple has been a stone structure in Jerusalem. Jesus now declares that the new "temple" is Himself, the Incarnate Son of God; *He* is God dwelling with His people.

The Last Supper (Matt. 26:26-30) Maundy Thursday

The institution of Holy Communion, a means of grace, is well known as the significance of Maundy Thursday. What may not be so apparent to many is that Jesus is establishing His presence with His people for the rest of time. In instituting the Lord’s Supper, the Lord is saying, "I’m not going to be flesh-and-blood-visibly-present with you for much longer. But God has always been present with His people; how will I be with you from now on?" The answer: "Take and eat, this is My body. Take and drink, this is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins." This is how the work of the Kingdom continues, for the Lord is present there. Although we don’t base faith on reason, it is perfectly reasonable that Jesus establishes a mode of Real Presence the night He is betrayed; it is far more reasonable than believing that He institutes a Real Absence, a meal that is only symbolic.

Don’t forget that this takes place when Jesus and disciples are celebrating the Passover meal. Jesus, the Passover Lamb, is about to die for our sins so that the Lord will pass over our iniquity and grant us eternal life. The Lord passed through Egypt, taking the lives of firstborn sons in all the homes not marked by blood; now He marks His people with His own blood so that He might make them His forever.⁴²

the temple courts and hurls the money into the temple building itself. There is food for thought on two points. First, there is irony: Five days after Jesus overturns the tables and spills the money used to purchase sacrificial animals, Judas spills the money in the temple that is used to purchase *the* Sacrifice, the Lamb of God. Second, overcome with despair and spurned by the chief priests, what does Judas do? He is not just returning the money to the priests, though they don’t want it. In throwing the money into the temple, he is throwing the Son’s purchase price at the Father.

⁴¹ Briefly, some scholars maintain that Jesus cleansed the temple twice—at the start of His ministry and again at the end. Others hold that there is only one cleansing of the temple, and John puts it early in His Gospel to foreshadow events to come. Why would John do so? Remember what John 1:14 declared, that the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us. John has already declared that God who has been present in the temple is present in the flesh, in the body and blood of Jesus. By putting the cleansing of the temple in chapter 2, the evangelist has Jesus Himself confirming that He is God, present with His people.

⁴² Thus Luther in his Easter hymn, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands" (TLH #195:3):
Here the true Paschal Lamb we see, Whom God so freely gave us;
He died on the accursed tree—So strong His love!—to save us.
See, His blood doth mark our door; Faith points to it, death passes o’er,
And Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!

There is another interesting discussion⁴³ with bearing on our study of God's presence among His people. Prior to the Last Supper (and the institution of the Lord's Supper), Jesus washes the disciples' feet in John 13:1-20. Peter protests at first; but Jesus declares that, unless Peter is washed, he has no part with the Lord. Peter then reverses his objection, requesting that Jesus wash also his hands and his head; but the Lord declares that whoever has his feet washed is completely clean. Many have theorized that this is the baptism of the disciples, for Jesus applies water and His Word and makes them clean; it is without argument that the Lord is present there with that water and the Word! However, John 4:2 makes clear that Jesus Himself baptized no one; nevertheless, the footwashing certainly has baptismal overtones to it.

Whether or not the footwashing is Holy Baptism, it does reinforce that Jesus is the new temple, where God is present with His people. Remember: In John 1:14, the Apostle declares that the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us; in John 2:21, Jesus is declared the new temple.

Previously, we noted that priests had to wash their feet and hands in the basin outside the tabernacle before they entered, or they would die (Ex. 30:20-21). If they washed feet and hands, they were clean to enter into the presence of God. Jesus washes only the disciples' feet, but declares that they are thereby completely clean. Shortly thereafter, He institutes the Lord's Supper, giving His disciples His own body and blood. In the Lord's Supper, as they receive the bread and wine, the disciples enter into a deeper communion with Jesus than they have ever had before. Today, so do we.⁴⁴

The Crucifixion (Matt. 27:35-51) Good Friday

One can talk about the crucifixion for hours. But note:

- ◆ At the cross, *the Lord is present with His creation for their redemption*; in response, the world only scoffs and demeans Him. But rather than come down from the cross and save Himself, the Lord endures the shame and uses His death to save His murderers.
- ◆ Jesus is still fulfilling prophecy as His garments are divided (27:35; cf. Psalm 22:18).
- ◆ He is acknowledged a King (and even wears a crown, though of thorns) but His royal presence is mocked (27:37). How like the sinful nature to take the holy things of God and not just deny them, but mock them. We do well not to make light of our Lord's means of grace.
- ◆ The destruction of the Temple is an accusation (40), and a twisted one; Jesus never claimed that He would be the one who destroyed the temple, only that He would rebuild it. In fact, though Jesus is put to death and His body/temple is "destroyed," He will raise it up in three days. He does not come down from the cross to save Himself. He stays on the cross to save us.
- ◆ The chief priests and the scribes are horribly lost in their sin (42-43), for they do not understand that Jesus is the King who is dying for their sins.
- ◆ Christ is dying for the sins of the world and thus is damned and abandoned by God (46).⁴⁵

⁴³ A succinct treatment can be found in Scaer, *Baptism*, pp. 96-99.

⁴⁴ "Just as the Old Testament priests washed themselves in pure water, before they could enter the holy precincts of the temple, Christians have Baptism. Just as the Old Testament priests consecrated themselves with the blood of the sacrificial lamb, Christians receive Christ's blood in the Lord's Supper. And when Christ gives us His very body and blood in the bread and wine, He is really present, just as He is present in heaven and just as he was present to His disciples. In fact, says Pastor [John] Kleinig, when we worship, Jesus is actually more accessible to us than He was to the disciples. He is closer to us, more intimately connected, since He has taken us into His cross." (Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 111)

⁴⁵ This stark truth is perhaps never better stated than in TLH #153 (cf. LW #116), "Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted" (verse 2):

*Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning, Was there ever grief like His?
Friends thro' fear His cause disowning, Foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him, None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that Justice gave.*

- ◆ The veil of the Temple is torn in two! This thick (approx. 12-inch) curtain is torn from top to bottom, the opposite of how man would do it. The explanation for the torn curtain that is commonly given is that there is no longer a human mediator required between God and man, for Jesus is our high priest who intercedes for us (Heb. 4:14-16). However, there is an additional, astounding truth here: God declares that He is no longer present with His people by means of the temple. He is present, but in Christ by His means of grace. (BTW, can you imagine the terror on the faces of the priests when they entered the temple and realized they were staring into the Most Holy Place, believing that the Lord was still present there...?)

On the Third Day...

Resurrection (Matt. 28:1-10)

Hours can be spent discussing the resurrection of Jesus. Let it suffice for now that the temple called Jesus is raised up in three days. Jesus—body, blood and all—is alive and present with His people, having accomplished their salvation. Because He is risen, He can continue to save—and give us His body, blood and all.⁴⁶

Thomas, the Doubter (John 20:19-31)

When looking at this text, here are a couple of points to emphasize. First, the resurrected Lord greets His disciples with “Peace be with you.” As we’ve seen in Psalm 122, Micah 5, and Haggai 2, the Lord was to come and bring peace between God and man. Jesus can offer this peace—forgiveness and righteousness—because He is risen and present to give it.

Second, when Thomas sees Jesus, Jesus instructs Thomas to place his fingers in the nail marks and his hand in the sword wound; this is Jesus—body, blood and all raised from the dead.

Third, it is helpful to note how the chapter ends: “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). The Lord proclaims His Word so that we might believe and be saved. This is why it is so important that a Church remain faithful to Word and Sacrament ministry, as we see also in the Great Commission.

The “Great Commission” (Matt 28:18-20)

Just prior to His ascension, Jesus takes the eleven aside and speaks the “Great Commission.” He declares that they are to go and make disciples, by means of Holy Baptism and the Word (“teaching them all I have commanded you”). *The means of conversion are Baptism and the Word of God.* These are the God-given instruments of the Church for evangelizing the unbeliever. (As Holy Communion is not given to effect conversion, but is for those already confirmed in the faith, it is not part of the Great Commission.)

By Baptism and the Word, disciples will be made; by Word and the Lord’s Supper, they will be nurtured. In other words, by Word and Sacrament, the Lord will be present with His people until

⁴⁶ Footnote 42 already quotes verse three of Luther’s Easter hymn, “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands” (TLH #195). Verses 1 and 5 make a startling connection: Jesus, risen from the dead, is now present to feed us His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins!

1. Christ Jesus lay in death’s strong bands,
For our offenses given;
But now at God’s right hand He stands
And brings us life from heaven;
Therefore let us joyful be
And sing to God right thankfully
Loud songs of hallelujah. Hallelujah!

5. Then let us feast this Easter Day
On Christ, the bread of heaven;
The Word of Grace hath purged away
The old and evil leaven.
Christ alone our souls will feed,
He is our meat and drink indeed;
Faith lives upon no other. Hallelujah!

the end of time. *Jesus is doing nothing else than commanding His disciples to bring people into His presence by the means of grace.*

The Ascension (Lk. 24:44-53) The 40th Day (A Thursday) after Easter

Just before He ascends into heaven, Jesus again announces that all has happened to fulfill the Scriptures, and tells them to proclaim the Gospel to people about the forgiveness of sins. He also tells them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes, and then ascends into heaven, no longer bodily-visible to His disciples.

The return of the Son to the Father is cause for rejoicing by His people; we give thanks that Christ ascends because the work is done—the plan for our salvation is concluded. There is, however, an additional truth in which we rejoice: Jesus takes His body with Him as He ascends into heaven. He has not left His human nature behind. He has therefore paved the way for the resurrection of the body unto life everlasting; because He is there, body and all, we can be confident that we will be, too.⁴⁷

So, Jesus is no longer present, in visible flesh, with them. He has, however, left with them His Word and Sacraments; and by these gifts He will be just as present among them.

The Early Church

Pentecost and the Days that Follow (Acts 2) Pentecost

The story of Pentecost is well known, taking place ten days after the Ascension as the apostles wait in Jerusalem for power from on high. The Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles, and they preach the Gospel to the multitude. Three thousand are baptized that day. In other words, evangelism is happening according to the Great Commission: disciples are made that day by baptizing and teaching.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This provides an excellent illustration for something we mentioned briefly in speaking of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness: the idea that Jesus is our example, as in "Since Jesus endured temptation and did not sin, it's up to you to do the same." This motif doesn't work as well with the Ascension: "Since Jesus ascended into heaven, it's up to you to do the same." This does, however, provide us with an excellent opportunity to discuss how Jesus is our example. He is not our example to teach us what we must do. He is our example in what He does for us. He set the example of enduring temptation perfectly, and then He credits that example to us. (Therefore, the Father sees you as perfectly enduring temptation, because He sees His Son. Because He ascended into heaven, He demonstrated by His example that we will ascend into heaven, too. That Jesus paves the way for our ascension into heaven, body and all, is caught in verse 5 of "See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph," TLH #218:

*Thou hast raised our human nature On the clouds to God's right hand;
There we sit in heavenly places, There with Thee in glory stand.
Jesus reigns, adored by angels; Man with God is on the throne.
Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension We by faith behold our own.*

⁴⁸ We ought to remark, too, about the work of the Holy Spirit, who is viewed by many today as sort of the "wildcard" of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, invoking the mysterious and undefined work of the Holy Spirit has been the justification used by some to establish doctrines that are not supported by Scripture. However, the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify "by bringing [us] to faith in Christ and by imparting to [us] the blessings of redemption" (SC Enchiridion(1943), ¶163). Far from working apart from Word and Sacrament, these are the means by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. This is the theme of many Pentecost hymns, including TLH #236, two verses of which are printed here:

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A couple of sidenotes regarding Pentecost:

1. The Pentecost Conversions

Reading through Acts 2, it is remarkable that 3,000 people are baptized that day. However, this text has been misused for some errant teachings and practices in the Church. Some have speculated that a church that doesn't experience similar success must be off track, or perhaps the Spirit isn't working as powerfully as in earlier times. Others have used this as a reason to baptize adults first and catechize later.

And examination of the historical context is helpful. Pentecost was one of the three great festivals of Judaism (along with Passover and Yom Kippur); as we mentioned before, historians say that the population of Jerusalem could swell to a million, possibly even three million for these festivals. These pilgrims were devout Jews from all nations (Acts 2:5); who but the devout would make the pilgrimage? Such believers had been well-instructed in the Old Testament; they knew well the prophecies of the Messiah and were waiting for His coming.⁴⁹ Essentially, all they are waiting for is the name of the Messiah and the news that He has come. On Pentecost, Peter announces exactly that.

Therefore, the 3,000 baptisms are remarkable, but not impossible or even unlikely; these devout pilgrims have received all the instruction they need, except the last piece of the puzzle: the name of the Messiah. And, if there are a million pilgrims in the city, it's not all that statistically unbelievable that .0003% of them hear the sermon and the name of Jesus, believe and join the Church that day. In fact, many in the Church Growth Movement today might consider those results rather disappointing.

One should not derive from the 3,000 baptism at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit is less powerful today; nor should it be assumed that a church that is declining in membership or only growing slowly is acting apart from God's will. Rather, the Church is called upon to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, trusting that the Holy Spirit works when and where He pleases—as He promises to do in these means of grace.

1. Creator Spirit, by whose aid
The world's foundations first were laid,
Come, visit ev'ry humble mind;
Come pour Thy joys on humankind.
From sin and sorrow set us free
And make Thy temples worthy Thee.

3. Plenteous of grace, descend from high
Rich in Thy sev'nfold energy;
Make us eternal truths receive
And practice all that we believe.
Give us Thyself that we may see
The Father and the Son by Thee.

⁴⁹ This is a pattern throughout the book of Acts for the Baptism of adults: Thorough catechesis precedes Baptism. One might point to the story of Philip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39) or the Conversion of St. Paul (Acts 9:10-18) to argue that adults may be baptized after a minimum of catechesis; in these two stories, Philip and Ananias instructed their respective catechumens for only a short time. However, an examination of the text reveals that the Ethiopian official was a devout believer who had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship, and was even in possession of a scroll of Isaiah; likewise, St. Paul was a Pharisee, well-instructed in the Word before his journey to Damascus. Both men received the instruction needed to complete their catechesis, and then were baptized.

Not coincidentally, this is also the pattern of Luther's Small Catechism. The catechumen firsts hears the Law (the Ten Commandments), then the Gospel (the Creed). Saved by the grace of the Gospel, he can now call upon God as His Father (the Lord's Prayer) and receive His means of grace (Baptism, Office of the Keys). Catechized in these doctrines, he is then prepared for the Lord's Supper.

2. Tongues in the Book of Acts

Acts 2 is sometimes used by charismatic churches to show the need for signs and wonders, namely the speaking in tongues, as proof of the Spirit in the Church today; after all, the disciples spoke in tongues at Pentecost. However, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

For one thing, the tongues that the disciples spoke were other, known human languages (Acts 2:8). Nowhere in Scripture is there evidence that tongues are some sort of “secret prayer language;” this doctrine is derived from sources apart from Scripture.⁵⁰ (Some point to “tongues” as a spiritual gift as proof. However, anyone who has studied foreign languages knows that some are more gifted at learning them than others!)

For another, speaking in tongues is accompanied in Acts 2 by a loud rushing wind and tongues of fire. Speaking in tongues occurs twice more in the book of Acts: at the home of Cornelius (Acts 10:46) and in Ephesus (Acts 19:6). So what? Turn to Acts 1, where Jesus tells His disciples, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). Pentecost happens at Jerusalem. Cornelius’ house is in the area of Judea and Samaria, and Ephesus—outside of this area, was considered part of the ends of the earth. Each time part of Jesus’ commission to the disciples is fulfilled, the Lord marks this with some special signs. Pentecost, the start, has fire, wind and tongues; the other two have tongues.

We don’t have loud rushing wind and heavenly fire in our worship today, but that’s okay: We still have the same Baptism and Word that the apostles had on that Pentecost. It is by these means of grace that people are brought to faith.

And Beyond (Acts 2:46-47)

How is the Lord present with His people. The people gather at the temple to hear the apostles proclaim His Word, and then “break bread” together, a euphemism for the Lord’s Supper. This is the worship of the New Testament people of God. Baptized, they gather for Word and Sacrament.

From there, Christianity will spread throughout the world—by the public preaching of the apostles and the personal witnessing of individual Christians. Those who hear are baptized—often with their entire families (including children);⁵¹ where the early Christians meet, they celebrate the Lord’s Supper.⁵²

The End

Heaven (Rev. 4,5,7,21,22)

The Scriptures do not spend much time describing what heaven is like. However, surveys of these chapters of Revelation reveal this about heaven: Heaven is where God is visibly present with His people for eternity. Revelation 21 is illustrative of this marvelous truth. Take, for example, the joyful announcement of the following verses (emphases mine):

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, **the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them**, and they shall be His people. **God Himself will be with them** and be their God. (Rev. 21:3)

⁵⁰ Furthermore, it is absurd to classify “speaking in tongues” as proof of salvation, a position held by some pentecostal groups. “Speaking in tongues,” or ecstatic utterances provided by God, has been a hallmark of many false religions throughout the ages, and is a feature of Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses today.

⁵¹ Cf. Acts 16:15, 33.

⁵² Out of sixteen chapters, the *Didache* already devotes two chapters (9, 10) to the Lord’s Supper.

But I saw no temple in it, for **the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple**. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for **the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light**. (Rev. 21:22-23)

The condition of Eden is restored; there is no more sin, so the people of God—who have seen Him only by faith in Word and Sacrament—now see Him face to face in heaven, for eternity, without judgment. We therefore might describe heaven as “where God is present.”

Hell (Matthew 25:41-46)

Nor do the Scriptures spend much time describing the particulars of hell. However, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus tells the goats to depart from Him. For those who have lived their lives wanting nothing to do with God, God grants them their wish for eternity. Scholars appear divided as to whether or not God is completely absent from hell, or if He is simply absent in His gracious mode. Either way, to be separated from God and all of His good gifts is the greatest torment imaginable. We therefore might describe hell as “where God is not present.”

Part 2: A Brief Survey of Christendom

...By the favor of God, the priests among us attend to the ministry of the Word, teach the Gospel concerning the blessings of Christ, and show that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ's sake.

This doctrine brings sure consolation to consciences.

The doctrine of good works which God commands is also added.

The worth and use of the sacraments are declared.

Apology to the Augsburg Confession XXIV:48

Introduction

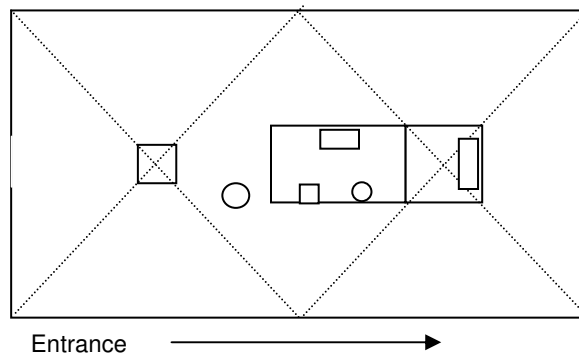
Why are we Lutheran? What's the difference? Does it really matter? In the age of ecumenism and inter-denominational agreements, these are questions often asked. It is vital that they be answered with clarity. Lutheran doctrine is unique, distinct from the theology of any other Christian church body.

Are those unique features to be treasured and proclaimed? Many argue that the answer is no, that those differences serve only to divide Lutherans from others, and that such divisiveness is contrary to God's will. Indeed, the differences in Lutheran doctrine often lead Lutherans to a feeling of loneliness or embarrassment, for they prevent us from doctrinal agreement and participation with others where other church bodies find such compromise so easy to make.

But what are these differences, these unique features? What makes Lutheran doctrine distinct? Because doctrine determines worship, part 2 is included in this study. Its purpose is to show the distinctive Scriptural teaching that makes Lutheran doctrine distinct—and correct.

Some Comparisons

Think back to the tabernacle arrangement on page 10 (page 6 of the student book). At the center of the two parts of the tabernacle area were the altar for burnt offerings (where a **sacrifices for sins** were offered) and the Most Holy Place (where **God was present** with His people).⁵³



The diagram below shows the two foci around which Lutheran doctrine is built: justification by grace through faith alone for the sake of Christ⁵⁴ (because Jesus was **sacrificed** for our sins) and the **Real Presence** of our Lord. These two doctrines make the Lutheran Church distinctly Lutheran.⁵⁵ Christendom can be divided into the three circles of this Venn diagram.⁵⁶ Those who

⁵³ It is interesting to note that in Revelation 14:17-18, two angels appear for the harvest and judgment of the world. The first appears from the temple building (τοῦ ναοῦ) of heaven, and the second from the altar. While we can draw no sure conclusions, does this suggest that the world is judged because of its rejection of Christ's sacrifice and presence? And that believers are saved by their faith in the same?

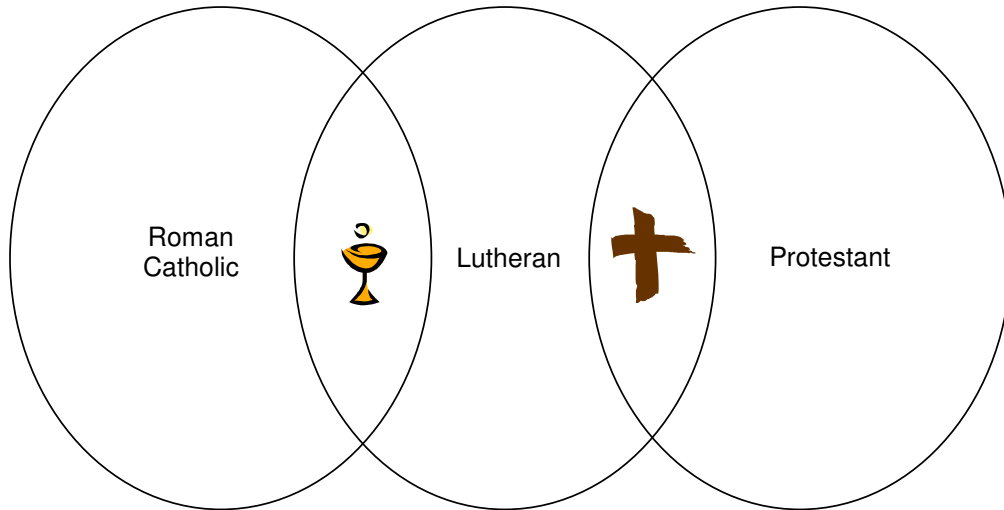
⁵⁴ Hereon, this will be termed as "Justification."

⁵⁵ Another way of expressing this is that church bodies are usually seen as evangelical (Protestantism) *or* sacramental (Roman Catholic), but not both. In the Lutheran Church, evangelicalism *and* sacramentalism meet:

"Imagine a church that is both evangelical—proclaiming the free forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ—and sacramental, centering its spiritual life in the regenerating waters of baptism and the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion....Imagine, in short, a church that has some of the best parts of Protestantism and the best parts of Catholicism.

"...Such a church exists. It goes by the admittedly inadequate name 'Lutheran.'" (Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 114)

retain the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacraments, but reject Justification, will find themselves in the camp of Roman Catholicism (the left circle). Those who retain the teaching of Justification, but reject the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacraments, will find themselves in the “Reformed” or “Protestant” camp (the right circle). Lutheranism embodies both of these doctrines and thus is the only church within the center circle.



For a little more introductory detail, the table below helps illustrate how these three circles have been differentiated since the time of the Reformation:

	Real Presence, but not Justification	Real Presence and Justification	Justification, but not Real Presence
Church Bodies	Roman Catholic	Lutheran	Reformed (Reformed, Presbyterian, Anglican, Episcopal, Baptist, etc.) Arminian (Methodist, etc.) Holiness (Nazarene, etc.) Pentecostal (Assemblies of God) Unionizing (Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, etc.)
Type of Reformation	Institutional	Doctrinal	Ethical
Primary Theologian(s)	Aquinas	Luther	Zwingli, Calvin, Arminius
Methodology of Interpreting	Aristotelian philosophy	Scripture interprets Scripture	Platonic philosophy

⁵⁶ One could draw a fourth circle, one that cuts across all three but fails to encircle either “Justification” or “Real Presence.” This would represent liberalism, which usually denies the authority of God’s Word. Liberal church bodies have little use for either doctrine represented on the diagram.

Scripture			
View of Lord's Supper	Transubstantiation	Real Presence	No Real Presence
Pattern of Reform	Keep all doctrine and rites. (Counter-Reformation)	Keep what is Scriptural, discard what is condemned by Scripture. <i>Adiaphora</i> to be used in Christian freedom. (Reformation)	Discard all and start over (The "Radical Reformation")
Worship Characterized by:	Historic Liturgy	Historic Liturgy and Preaching	Preaching
View of Lutherans	"Too Protestant"	?	"Too Catholic"

Type of Reformation⁵⁷

After 1517, all three groups each experienced some sort of Reformation. Among the Lutherans, it was primarily a reformation of doctrine—a return to the doctrine of justification by grace alone for the sake of Christ. Among the Roman Catholics, it was institutional reform, as they sought to repair some of the abuses of power exposed in the turmoil of the Reformation. Among the Protestants, the Reformation was primarily ethical. While considering doctrinal reform important, the thrust of the Protestants was a reform of morals and behavior among Christians. This can be seen in the focus of respective leaders: Luther spent his remaining days preaching, teaching and writing about theology. Calvin, on the other hand, spent several years trying to turn Geneva into a Christian city by enacting laws to control behavior and curb sin.

Primary Theologians

Among the many, the one man most responsible for systematizing Roman doctrine is Thomas Aquinas, who lived during the period of scholasticism. Luther, of course, heads the list of Lutheran theologians, and is acknowledged in the Lutheran Confessions as "the most eminent teacher of the churches which adhere to the Augsburg Confession."⁵⁸ Among the various Protestant church bodies are various theologians. Ulrich Zwingli was one of the earliest, and led the charge both in ethical reform and in denial of the Sacraments. John Calvin attempted a mediating position between Zwingli and Luther, and is known—among other things—for the doctrine of "double predestination," the teaching that God saves some and damns others. Jakob Arminius, on the other hand, championed the doctrine of free will, that man was responsible for his salvation or damnation.

Methodology for Interpreting Scripture/View of the Lord's Supper

Admittedly, we'll be painting some very broad-brush strokes in this section, but this is only intended to introduce a general idea of how each group pictures Scripture. Aquinas was well-schooled in Aristotelian philosophy, and made use of this system of logic as he systematized Roman Catholic doctrine. Zwingli, on the other hand, was well-versed in Platonic philosophy, and Reformed theology still bears those marks today. Luther, trained in Augustinian theology, finally produced a method of interpretation that serves as a hallmark of Lutheran exegesis today: Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

⁵⁷I first heard these distinctions from a tape of Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn entitled "Whatever Happened to the LCMS?" a lecture given at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Decatur, Illinois, on November 11, 1995.

⁵⁸"Since Dr. Luther is rightly to be regarded as the most eminent teacher of the churches which adhere to the Augsburg Confession and as the person whose entire doctrine in sum and content was comprehended in the articles of the aforementioned Augsburg Confession and delivered to Emperor Charles V, therefore the true meaning and intention of the Augsburg Confession cannot be derived more correctly than from Dr. Luther's doctrinal and polemical writings." (FC SD VII:41)

For an example of how these three methods clash, there is no better illustration than Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.

According to Aristotle, any material thing on earth is made up of two parts: substance and accidents. The substance is what makes it what it is, while the accidents are the attributes that derive from it. For instance, a tree has many accidents, including roots, branches and leaves—these are attributes it possesses because it is, in essence, a tree.

Aquinas modified Aristotle just a bit, teaching that the substance and accidents of a thing could be separated from one another. For instance, even if you remove the roots, branches and leaves—even if you strip away the accidents, what remains is still, in essence, a tree. Therefore, it is possible for something to change in appearance, but not in essence; likewise, *it is possible for something to change in essence, but not in appearance.*

In the Lord's Supper, taught Aquinas, the physical elements are bread and wine, with both essence and accidents. However, during the Mass, the bread and wine are changed *in essence* from bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. They still retain the accidents—they look like bread and wine, but the essence has changed completely. This is the doctrine of Transubstantiation (a “change in substance”): The bread and wine change to Christ's body and blood, and there is no bread and wine left.

While Aquinas studied Aristotle, Zwingli studied Plato. In one of the most famous excerpts of Plato's *Republic*, the Greek philosopher describes his philosophy of reality. We do not see actual reality, he taught, but only perceptions of it. Reality is somewhere beyond our comprehension.

To illustrate, Plato described a cave in which we face a wall. Behind us, a fire burns; and between the fire and us are material things. The fire casts the shadow of these things on the wall we face; we only see the shadow of things, not the actual things themselves. So it is in life, said Plato; we only see a shadow of what is real.

Platonic philosophy seems apparent⁵⁹ in the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper, articulated there more by Calvin than Zwingli. Calvin taught that in Holy Communion, we receive only bread and wine; however, during the Supper the believer is spiritually transported to where Jesus is really present, in heaven. Therefore, the bread and wine are only shadows—or symbols—of Christ's presence; the Lord is really present in heaven, beyond our sight.

Luther rightly saw the danger of interpreting Scripture within a philosophical system. Philosophy is of man, while Scripture is the Word of God. To interpret Scripture according to philosophy is to make man the master over Holy Writ. That Scripture might be rightly understood, Luther's approach was simple: Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

1. The Church is to derive doctrine from the clear passages of Scripture, and some passages are clearer than others. For instance, “Thou shalt not kill” is clearly a prohibition against murder, not a command to abstain from food offered to idols.
2. Where a text in Scripture isn't quite so clear, where should one turn for help in interpretation? Not to Aristotle or Plato or any source of human wisdom, but to texts of Scripture which are clear.

⁵⁹ I offer the disclaimer that my understanding of Plato is far from comprehensive, and would invite comment and correction by others if my conclusions here are incorrect.

3. Where a text in Scripture remains unclear after that, the Church is not to guess and establish doctrine, but simply admit that we do not know what it means. Theologians may speculate; but they must admit that their thoughts are, at best, speculation, and not dogma.

Therefore, when interpreting the Words of Institution, Luther rightly saw that the Lord's words were clear: "This is My body...this is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins." Against the Roman doctrine of Transubstantiation, he could point to passages such as I Corinthians 11:26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." Clearly, the bread is still bread. Against the Reformed notion that Christ was not present in the Lord's Supper, Luther could point to passages such as I Corinthians 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" Luther's argument was not defended by philosophy, but by the Word of God itself.⁶⁰

Pattern of Reform

Because the three groups saw different needs for reform, the pattern of reform varied. In the Roman Catholic Church and its institutional reformation, there was no need to dispense with the liturgy or rites. In the Lutheran Church and its doctrinal reformation, the liturgy and rites which conformed to Scripture were kept; those condemned by Scripture were eliminated. (Those things neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture, *adiaphora*, were to be used in Christian freedom and in service to the Lord and His Church.) Reformed leaders, seeking an ethical renewal, saw a need to dispense with all liturgy and rites of Roman Catholicism—even to the extent of breaking stained-glass windows. This was called the "radical Reformation."

Characterization of Worship

With its high view of the Sacraments, Roman Catholic worship is characterized by an emphasis on the liturgy—so much so that a sermon is not necessarily a part of the service. With its denial of the Sacraments, Reformed theology is characterized by a strong and lengthy sermon, with little or no liturgy whatsoever. Lutheran worship, with its twin foci of the Gospel and the Sacraments, is characterized by both liturgy and preaching.

View of Lutherans

Because Lutherans began the Reformation and broke from the Catholic Church, Lutheranism is viewed by Roman Catholicism as being far too Protestant. Because Lutherans retain the liturgy and Sacraments, Protestants normally consider Lutherans to be far too Catholic.

The question arises: How do Lutherans view themselves? Bombarded especially by Reformed and "pop evangelical" theology in Christian bookstores and broadcasting, Lutherans often have a low opinion of themselves and Lutheran doctrine. It is far better, however, that they find their identity in what Scripture says, and not in the opinions of man.

Some Explanations and Illustrations

Once again: If a church body preserves Real Presence but not Justification, what happens? The Lord is there, but His presence and work isn't enough; *if we are not saved by grace alone, then there is something left that man must do in order to attain salvation*. What is left to be done may differ a bit among church bodies. Thus Roman Catholicism:

⁶⁰ The Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence is sometimes called "consubstantiation," meaning that the body of Christ is there with the bread and the blood of Christ is there with the wine; however, the two are still distinct entities. This, however, is not quite right: Christ said, "This is My body...This is My blood;" not, "My body is with the bread...My blood is with the wine." Therefore, Lutheran doctrine holds that the bread is both bread and Body at the same time, indistinguishable, and the wine is both wine and Blood at the same time. Luther's famous catechetical "in, with and under" phrase is meant to describe this, not consubstantiation.

Church Bodies that Confess the Real Presence, but not Saved by Grace Alone	
Church Body	What is left to be done to be saved?
Roman Catholic	We must perform good works to earn merits for eternal life

On the other hand, what happens if a church body preserves Justification, but not the Real Presence? In that case, the Christian is saved by grace; but how can he be sure that he has received salvation? The certainty of our salvation is no longer in God's service to us in His means of grace, but in something else instead. This certainty is usually found in the works of man, done in order to prove, confirm or accept the work of Christ for salvation. Thus the Protestant denominations:

Church Bodies that Confess Saved by Grace Alone, but not the Real Presence⁶¹	
Church Body	How can you be certain you are saved?
Reformed Reformed Presbyterian Anglican Episcopal Baptist ⁶²	I am certain because of the good works I do and the Christian life that I lead. If I were not saved, I would not be able to live the God-pleasing life that I am living. But because I am saved, I have chosen to follow His sovereign will.
Holiness Nazarene	I am certain because, not only am I living a God-pleasing life, but I am also getting better and better. It is conceivable that I can attain perfection in this life.
Arminian Methodist Baptist ⁵⁵	I am certain because I have chosen Jesus as my Savior and Lord. (Methodism: Furthermore, I have had this decision confirmed by an emotional experience.)
Pentecostal Assemblies of God	I am certain because I experience various manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues.
Unionizing Churches Disciples of Christ Church of Christ	I am certain because, rather than focus upon doctrinal issues, we have renounced divisive doctrines and set about to do good works.

If it isn't in God's work, then too quickly we are told to find our certainty and hope in our work instead. In other words, if a Lutheran is asked, "How can you be certain you are saved?", the answer is "I am certain because of what God does: He has washed my sins away in Baptism, He forgives me by His Word, and He gives me His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. Because He faithfully does these things, I am certain of my salvation."

It should be noted, too, that if a church body denies either Justification or the Real Presence in the means of grace, the one that they still confess becomes twisted. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church confesses that Jesus is "really present" in the Sacrament; in fact, Roman Catholicism goes further than Scripture to make the philosophical (and unscriptural) claim that the bread and wine are turned (transubstantiated) into Jesus' body and blood. However, because they deny Justification, the Lord's Supper is not a means of grace. Instead, the Lord's Supper is interpreted to be a good work whereby man re-sacrifices Jesus for sin.

⁶¹ This table displays some of the general teachings and differences among Protestant denominations; of course, there are other variations as well. Some churches, heavily influenced by fundamentalism, teach that God still intends to be present for the Jews through the temple in Jerusalem; for others, He dwells in the heart. If God cannot be present apart from the Jerusalem temple, the temple must be rebuilt to facilitate Christ's return. We thus see a "Christian Zionism" movement today.

⁶² The Baptist Church teaches that each individual is able to discern God's will for himself. Therefore, while the Baptist denominations are technically part of the Reformed branch, there are many Arminian Baptists to be found as well.

Likewise, if a church body preserves Justification but rejects the Real Presence in the means of grace, salvation isn't quite by grace alone. In teaching that we are saved solely by God's work, many a Protestant church body teaches, "Jesus died to take away your sins, and *all you have to do is accept Him* as your Savior." Suddenly, human effort is involved in salvation, so it's not quite salvation by grace alone anymore.

Our certainty rests on the promises and work of God, because He is present in His means of grace to forgive. But if a church denies the Real Presence, it must point people elsewhere for certainty, comfort and hope.⁶³

This has a profound effect on worship.⁶⁴ Remember, Lutheran worship is Divine Service, where the Lord is present to serve His people with the forgiveness of sins He has won on the cross.⁶⁵

⁶³ In speaking of Real Presence, we speak especially here of our Lord's bodily presence in the Lord's Supper; He is, however, as present in the other means of grace. Because Jesus is present with us in His means, He is present with us *outside of us*. This is consistent with what we've seen in our study of the Scriptures so far: When God is present with Adam and Eve in the Garden, He is with them outside of them—He is not just present in their hearts. Likewise, when God speaks to Moses in the burning bush, He is present with Moses outside of Moses. With the pillar of cloud/fire at the time of the Exodus, and the cloud of glory in the tabernacle and temple, the Lord is with His people outside of them. He is not just in their hearts, but present apart from their hearts, too. This is most evident, as well, in the Incarnation, where Jesus assumes human flesh and dwells among us. Therefore, it is entirely consistent with, and faithful to, Scripture to expect the Lord to be present with us now outside of us—in His means of grace. This is also a great comfort for the Christian: even if he cannot "feel Jesus in his heart," he can be sure that the Lord is still present in His means of grace.

However, this teaching is denied by Protestant denominations. Take, for instance, this paragraph from Theodore Epp, from his book *Portraits of Christ in the Tabernacle* (see bibliography). After describing God's "outside presence" in the Garden of Eden, the burning bush, the Exodus pillar of cloud/fire, the tabernacle, the temple, and the incarnation, he describes the Lord's presence today as this: "After Jesus Christ finished His work on earth, He ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer (see John 14:17;16:7). *Today, when a person trusts Christ as his personal Saviour, the Holy Spirit is given to him as the earnest, or pledge, of all that God is going to do for the individual (see Eph. 1:14). Because the Holy Spirit lives within every believer, each believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (see I Cor. 6:19). Think of it! The Holy Spirit indwells those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as personal Savior. All that we are belongs to Jesus Christ because He has bought us with His shed blood and has sent the Holy Spirit to live in us.*" (Italics mine)

This is the general conclusion of Protestant denominations: Although the Lord was present with His people, outside of them, throughout the Scriptures, He is no longer present that way today. Why? Because these church bodies teach that "the finite is incapable of containing the infinite;" therefore, Jesus cannot be present, for instance, in bread and wine. This however, raises the question: Then how could God be present in a burning bush or a pillar of cloud? How could Jesus be present in human flesh?

Epp's doctrine stands in stark contrast to Luther: "Thus in the Old Testament faces of the Lord were the pillar of fire, the cloud, and the mercy seat; in the New Testament, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the ministry of the Word, and the like. By means of these God shows us, as by a visible sign, that He is with us, takes care of us, and is favorably inclined toward us" (AE 1:309).

⁶⁴ In fact, this has a profound effect on all aspects of doctrine and practice. For further study, some examples of how differing practices result from this foundation doctrine are included in the appendix to this book.

⁶⁵ Again, Luther: "Thus it is good that the Sacrament of the Altar is honored with bended knee; for the true body and blood of the Lord are there, likewise the presence of the Holy Spirit and the promise of the Word of God, which should be heard reverently. For God works there, *Continued on next page*

However, if a church body denies either Justification or the Sacraments, worship will no longer focus what God does and has done, but *what remains for man to do*. In Roman Catholicism, worship will inevitably focus on what man must do to please God and secure salvation. In Protestant denominations, worship will focus on what the Christian must do to be certain that He has been saved.⁶⁶ In both cases, justification is skewed. In the case of Roman Catholicism, it must be earned by works; in Protestantism, it is either predestined (and cannot be lost or refused) or received by man's work of commitment. Also, in both cases, the Sacraments are twisted. As we noted above, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Holy Communion makes it man's act of re-sacrificing Jesus; in Protestantism, the Sacraments are either empty symbols of remembrance, or man's work of showing his commitment to God.

In summary: If a church teaches both that salvation is accomplished in Christ and the Real Presence, then worship will focus on the Lord and what He has done. This is the basis of Lutheran worship. *However, if there is something left to be done, or if the certainty of our salvation is found in what we do, then worship will naturally turn from a focus on Christ to a focus on what we are to be doing.*

Some Quick Thoughts on Closed Communion

The Lutheran Church bases its doctrine of Closed Communion upon the Word of God, and rightly so. Such a presentation can be found in many sources, and there is no need to reproduce them here. However, the author submits for your consideration a few additional items to keep in mind.

1. Closed Communion is practiced not only out of obedience to the Word of God, but also out of love for the unprepared visitor. Throughout Scripture, we see that the unbeliever or unrepentant cannot enter into the presence of God for good, but only for judgment. When someone unprepared is welcomed to the altar for the Lord's Supper, the pastor and congregation are exposing them to the Real Presence of Christ; however, because they are unprepared, they receive Him to their judgment. Although friendly in appearance, such an invitation is far from Christian love. It is a bit like inviting a visitor to the Old Testament Temple to take a peek behind the curtain into the Most Holy Place, though the judgment for such an act would have been far more swift and final there.

and the Lord shows Himself. In Moses this is sometimes called the face of God. He means God is present and appears to me. Here it is certainly fitting for me to rise or to fall on my knees. And the appearance and faces of God we experience are equal to, yes, superior to, all the appearances in the Law of Moses. When I approach Baptism, I must certainly conclude that nothing human is being done there. But the water is a veil or a means. So is the Word with which God is veiled. Behind these [Eucharist, Baptism, Word] stands our Lord God, and they are faces of God through which He speaks with us and works in every person individually. He baptizes me; He absolves me and gives His body and blood through the tongue and the hand of the minister. For God works salvation in Baptism. And this is the presence or form and epiphany of God in these means. Therefore we do the right thing when we bow and revere God when He speaks with us. If we do not do so with our bodies, we should at least do so with all our hearts. And in Baptism, of course, our eyes and hearts should be directed to the manifest appearance in the Jordan, where the voice of the Father is heard from heaven, the flesh of the Son is seen, and the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove. Thus also in our Baptism." (AE 8:145)

⁶⁶ In the author's experience as a pastor, this becomes very apparent in children's Christmas programs. A Lutheran program will focus upon the birth of Christ, God's gift to the world for the forgiveness of sins; no greater gift could be given. A Reformed program, however, turns the message of Christmas around, and children are often bidden to give themselves to Jesus for Christmas, as this is the best gift they can present.

2. It is often thought that Closed Communion is a sectarian doctrine of a few Lutherans; some have recently put forth the theory that Closed Communion is a recent invention, a new doctrine! Nothing could be further from the truth. A survey of early Church documents clearly demonstrates that only those who were catechized were allowed to the Supper; in fact, all others were excused from the service before the service of Holy Communion began.

Furthermore, Closed Communion is not a uniquely Lutheran practice. It is the standard practice of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and even some Protestant denominations (e.g., Reformed Presbyterians). Strictly from a statistical standpoint, more Christians practice Closed Communion than not!

All that said, most Protestant denominations practice open Communion, and the brief survey we have just concluded should demonstrate the reasons why. Since Jesus is not bodily present in the Meal, it is not a communion with Him but a communion with one another; therefore, it is only appropriate to include all Christians in the Supper. Also, because Jesus is not bodily present there, it is only bread and wine; one cannot be guilty of judgment for abusing His body and blood (Heb. 10:29) if His body and blood are not present to be abused. Finally, despite the variations noted in the survey above, all Protestant denominations teach that (a) we are certain of salvation because of evidence in our lives (b) the Lord's Supper is merely symbolic, and therefore (c) the Lord's Supper is a work of man to show his obedience to Christ's command. Because of this, the doctrine among these church bodies is really quite similar, and thus doctrinal disagreements often appear too inconsequential to deny altar and pulpit fellowship.

A Couple of Important Points and Observations

So, before we move on to a study of the liturgy, a couple of important points.

1. Lutheran doctrine is distinct. It is neither Roman Catholic, nor is it Protestant. Because it embraces both the Real Presence and Justification by grace alone, it is a theology that stands alone.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Pastors are sometimes criticized because, when presented by others with music, devotional books or other materials for their evaluation, they ask "Is it Lutheran?" This often subjects them to the criticism of being too parochial and narrow-minded. But, if it isn't from a Lutheran source, it likely fails to preach either justification by faith alone or the Real Presence of God among His people.

The consequences of this are greater than one might expect. Church bodies that omit one of these two doctrines must replace it with something else instead, and the replacement naturally points away from the omitted doctrine. A common example are firms that market "non-denominational" or "trans-denominational" teaching materials. When asked if the materials include information on the Sacraments, the marketer will usually apply that trans-denominational materials cannot because not all denominations believe that the Sacraments are means of grace; however, he will cheerfully add that Lutherans can add sacramental theology into the materials as they teach it. However, those materials have already replaced the Sacraments with something else, such as the teaching that "you can be certain of salvation because you feel Jesus in your heart." In that case, the materials deny the sacraments in favor of mysticism; if one can feel Jesus in his heart, what need is there for the means of grace? However, the Sacraments are not just quaint accoutrements that Lutherans add on to the primary doctrines of Christianity to fit their personal preference; these are the means of grace by which God is present with His people. "Non-denominational" materials are not purely non-denominational; they are Protestant in theology, excluding the theology of sacramental churches. "Trans-denominational" cross over some denominational boundaries—those of Protestant denominations. However, once again—sacramental theology is excluded.

Sadly, in our present day, the question "Is the material from a Lutheran source?" is no longer an adequate question. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has entered into altar and
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2. The second point explains why we're looking at this just before a study of the liturgy: As a general rule, church bodies that confess the Real Presence are liturgical, while denominations that reject the Real Presence are not.

What does this indicate about the nature of the liturgy...?

a. A man by the name of Prosper of Aquitaine said it best: "*Lex orandi, lex credendi.*" Translated generally, it means that what a church believes will determine how it worships, and how a church worships will determine what it believes. This should be rather obvious: If a church rejects salvation by grace alone, then this will not be a focus of its worship. If a church rejects the Sacraments as means of grace, then it will not make the Lord's Supper an important part of God's plan of salvation.

b. Remember what we said up above: *If there is something left to be done, or if the certainty of our salvation is found in what we do, then worship will naturally turn from a focus on Christ to a focus on what we are to be doing.* The liturgy does not encourage such a theology of worship. Rather, the liturgy serves as a vehicle by which God comes to serve His people by giving them the forgiveness of sins (we'll discuss this more in the introduction to Part III), and the people then respond to what God is doing in the service. Because Protestant denominations generally teach that worship is about what we are to be doing for God, the liturgy usually comes under criticism for a number of reasons:

- "The liturgy is too repetitious in form. Because we say it every Sunday, it isn't meaningful to us anymore." This is a common complaint, and a seemingly valid one if one has a Protestant theology of worship. Why? Because according to Protestant theology, we find the certainty of our salvation in what we are doing or what we are feeling. Therefore, Protestant worship will focus on what we are doing or feeling. If we repeat something enough so that we can say it without concentrating on the words, then we conclude "the words have lost their meaning." Protestant theology then reasons, "I find my certainty of salvation in what I do and how well I do it. If I'm daydreaming through the service because I know the words so well, I don't find much comfort there. Therefore, the worship needs to be different all the time to hold my attention."

On the surface, this argument is appealing, but consider these thoughts.

First, is it accurate to say "the words have lost their meaning"? No. Just because we have said the Lord's Prayer so often that we can say it without thinking does not mean that the Lord's Prayer is meaningless. The problem is not with the Lord's Prayer, but with us and our sinful nature. We should not be surprised when afflicted with random thoughts and daydreams during worship, because the last thing our Old Adam wants us to do is hear the Gospel. But let us not blame the words of the liturgy for our sinful nature and predilection to daydream.

Second, the criticism of repetition is often accompanied with "we always do the same thing, week after week after week." Is this true? If you take the hymnal, read and sing through the parts of the liturgy that we sing each Sunday (the ordinaries), you will find that it takes about twelve minutes for a Divine Service which includes Holy Communion. That means that at

pulpit fellowship with several Reformed church bodies, a *de facto* declaration that the sacraments are, at best, optional. On the other hand, with their participation in the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Roman Catholic Church, their confession of justification by faith alone is also called into question. The query "Is it Lutheran?" cannot just mean, "Does the source of the material call itself Lutheran?" It must mean, "Does the material confess the same doctrines as Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, the norms of our faith and doctrine?"

least 75% of the “material” of the worship service (the hymns, sermon, readings) are different from week to week.

Third, the repetition in form is of great comfort. Distracted by the Old Adam, the Christian may even daydream through the words of Absolution. But because the form is the same, he can be sure that Absolution has been spoken, and that the Lord has forgiven him his sins—even that distracting, sinful daydream.

- “The liturgy is too repetitious in content. It goes back to the same subject matter—the Gospel—each week. The Gospel is important, but there is so much more to the life of the Christian. Shouldn’t we focus on those things too?” Yes, but not in worship. The purpose of Divine Service is to bring you into communion with God, to strengthen and nurture your faith by His presence in His Word and Sacrament. The Christian life follows from this, but should never replace it.

Many churches do follow this route, however, focusing worship on the life of the Christian, how he is supposed to live, and what he is supposed to do. However, in doing so, worship neglects the Lord and His presence. It is the equivalent of holding a celebration, then ignoring the Guest of Honor to discuss other, unimportant matters. When the Lord is present, all should point to Him.

C. S. Lewis gives eloquent warning in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*. In the following passage, Screwtape instructs his nephew Wormwood (both are demons) on how he is to lead a man away from the Gospel:

The real trouble about the set your patient is living in is that it is *merely* Christian. They all have individual interests, of course, but the bond remains mere Christianity. What we want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call “Christianity And.” You know—Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychological Research, Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform. If they must be Christians, let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring. Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing.⁶⁸

Lewis’ warning is one to be heeded. To turn Divine Service from a focus on the Gospel and Christ’s presence to something else is to step away from the faith. Let us rejoice in the “mere” Christianity of our Lord’s holy presence among us for the forgiveness of sins.

- “Worshippers don’t get to do much. They are essentially spectators who just sit and watch the pastor. Laypeople should be more involved by singing solos, giving testimonies, reading the lessons, preaching occasionally, etc.”

A Lutheran theology of worship disagrees: For one thing, the worshiper is involved continuously by responding to the goodness of God through the confession of sin and the Creed, liturgical responses and hymn singing. But this is only the response to the worshipers true involvement, for the worshiper is involved continuously by hearing the Word and receiving forgiveness. One might liken it to a surgery: The patient is highly involved by receiving medical care, even though it is the surgeon who is far more active. (I’ve never met a patient who asked to make an incision or two in order to be “more involved in the surgery”!) Likewise, the Great Physician comes to heal us of our sins in worship, and we are involved by being healed. “Being involved” in the worship service, then, doesn’t mean reading the

⁶⁸ Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1959. Page 115, emphasis his.

lessons out loud, but hearing them and receiving the forgiveness that the Lord delivers through His Word.

- “The liturgy isn’t emotional and motivational enough.” To this criticism, the first question is, “Emotional and motivational enough for what?” The response will be something like “For me to want to go out and do something,” or “For me to be excited.”

Now, let us be careful here. It is wrong to be excited or to want to do something? Certainly not. But at the same time, this can be a symptom of a Protestant theology of worship. If the certainty of salvation is found in your emotional experience (as in the Methodist church), then a worship service will be unfulfilling if it is not emotionally charged. Likewise, if the certainty of salvation is found in the good works you are doing, but the worship service isn’t about motivating you to go and do, then the service will seem woefully inadequate.

The liturgy is not designed to teach about human works or be an emotionally-exciting experience, because that is not the goal of worship. The goal of worship is to give out the forgiveness of sins by proclaiming the Word of God and distributing the Sacraments, and that is the design of the liturgy as well. However, as one grows more cognizant of the Lord’s grace and work in the Divine Service, he may very well experience emotions of gratitude, excitement, and more.

Furthermore, the liturgy announces the presence of God, and the Lord’s presence calls for worship on the part of those present. Moses threw himself prostrate before the Lord at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6), as did John in his vision (Rev. 1:17). Isaiah decried his sinful condition (Is. 6:5) as did Peter (Luke 5:8). The presence of God does not call for frivolity, but reverence.

An additional, and no less important, point is this: Remember that the Lord often works in ways that seem ordinary, hidden, even scandalous. For unbelievers watching the people of Israel in the wilderness, they were simply following a cloud in a terribly roundabout way to the Promised Land. To those without faith in Old Testament Israel, God’s people stood outside a building to worship a God who couldn’t be seen. Near the conclusion of the Gospels, the Son of God appears as a bloodied and crucified criminal, not the Savior of the world. Likewise, words, water, bread and wine are each by themselves very common and ordinary things. Yet these are the ingredients which God uses as His means of grace. The liturgy (much of it verbatim God’s Word) proclaims the Gospel and thus gives forgiveness; the fact that it may appear ordinary and common to the human eye in no way degrades it. The Lord is present in His Word; this we believe by faith, even if we do not see it with our eyes.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Gene Edward Veith, Jr. puts it well: “It seems strange to think that Christ is actually present in such a saving way in that little styrofoam-like wafer of bread or in the small sip of astringent wine. Or that God speaks to us in a literal book of ink, paper, and binding. Or that the pastor’s sermon is used by the Holy Spirit to create faith in our hearts. These are rather spectacular claims for what goes on in an ordinary church service, with its weakly sung hymns, babies crying in the background, and everyday people fidgeting in their pews. It’s hardly credible to think that such a mundane and frequently dull setting could be the seen of such high and holy spiritual presence.” Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, p. 55.

Martin Luther declares the same in a different context: He is warning his hearers to take neither the means of grace, nor faithful pastors, for granted: “...The high and mighty scorn us because of our gospel and sacraments. What folly, they say, that I should let myself be baptized with water poured on my head, supposedly to be saved thereby; or that some poor parish pastor, barely able to put a coat on his back, should pronounce forgiveness and absolve me from my sins; or that by receiving bread and wine in the Sacrament I should be saved. On that basis they despise a Christ-preacher. For it goes with the territory to be despised by reason of Christ’s poverty. As a result, when a man becomes a preacher he is more despised than some lowly
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One final thought: There will be times in the life of every Christian where he is so battered by trial and suffering that he has no energy left with which he can summon up emotion; at such times, a service that is designed to motivate will only accuse him when he fails to be motivated. Whether Christians are joyful or in the depths of depression, the liturgy proclaims to them the objective truth of the forgiveness of sins, found in their Savior who is present in the means of grace.

- “The liturgy isn’t helpful for children.” This oft-made assertion also fails to stand up to scrutiny. Children learn by repetition; and as they learn the liturgy, they can participate in the service along with the grown-ups that they love to mimic.

Furthermore, I would contend that there is no better worship form for all ages than the liturgy. Shortly after accepting a call and moving to a new church with a different hymnal, I was tucking my two-year-old son into bed one night when he looked at me and said, “Father...?” He never called me that—it was always “Daddy”, but I replied, “Yes?” “No!” he said sharply, paused, and then said, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. We’re all done. Amen.”

Granted, the “we’re all done” instead of “world without end” wasn’t quite right, but the boy had picked up the *Gloria Patri* in a few short weeks of sitting in the pew and listening to the liturgy.

At the same time, another pastor in the area was caring for an elderly man in a coma. Because the man had sung the liturgy all his life, the pastor continued to sing the liturgy to him throughout the days he remained comatose. He later revived, and told his pastor what a comfort it was to review the liturgy in his mind in the days when his body would respond to no command; in those words he heard—and had—the hope of eternal life in Christ.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the liturgy is an excellent instrument. It is simple enough that a toddler can learn, yet teaches doctrine so profound that a man near death finds comfort. This is indeed a form of worship for all ages—through the ages.

- “The liturgy doesn’t say what I mean.” This may be an accurate statement. However, the liturgy is not designed to proclaim the personal beliefs of individual human beings; it proclaims the faith of God for His people. This, the faith of God, is what grants forgiveness and salvation; therefore, we as Christians are to abandon our personal beliefs that conflict with His Word, and gladly hear and learn His Word instead. (To the statement “Pastor, the liturgy doesn’t say what I mean,” one pastor replied, “Then you must learn to mean what the liturgy says.”)

The liturgy proclaims the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in God’s Word and Sacraments for our good.⁷⁰ If *lex credendi, lex orandi* is true, then any church that denies the Real Presence will

knave of no reputation. There is no station in life quite as scorned and humble as that of a preacher. That happens not because of us or the preacher, but because Christ is despised on all sides in the world. No wonder that the aristocrats and plutocrats say, Why should we believe some tramp-like, beggarly cleric? Why doesn’t our Lord God send us a fine pulpit-prince to preach to us? Him we would believe. However, just as Christ’s preachers are despised, so people also despise his baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar. Virtually no peasant retains respect for them, let alone burghers or nobles. Under the papacy people mocked at indulgences and pilgrimages, and yet they were highly regarded. Now, however, the prevailing word is, Huh, if all you can do is preach about Christ and faith, I’m fed up with that already, I’ve heard it all many times before.” (House Postil, vol. 1, 3rd Sermon for Advent 1, ¶14)

⁷⁰ Thus verse 2 of TLH #69, “Arise, Sons of the Kingdom” (emphasis mine):

Arise, ye drooping mourners! The King is very near;

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have doctrinal problems with what the liturgy proclaims. This is generally true: Protestant denominations which reject Christ's presence in the Sacraments rarely feature the liturgy. Yet the joy of the liturgy is that, line by line, it proclaims to you that Christ is present to forgive your sins by His Word and Sacrament.⁷¹

Away with grief and sorrow! For, lo, your help is here.

Behold, in many a place—O blessed consolation!

You find Him, your Salvation, Within His means of grace.

⁷¹ "Christ has flesh, but in it there is the full Divinity. God has offered Himself to us in Christ. Christ came into the flesh to be with us in Baptism and at the Holy Supper. Every spirit who is at pains to teach that Christ does everything through the sacraments is of God, is glad to hear about Christ, and gives thanks. For he understands that Christ is his and that He came in the flesh. Therefore this has been stated emphatically: Behold, this is the test of a spirit, whether he is of God or of the devil." (Martin Luther, AE 30:286)

Part 3: Real Presence and Divine Service

Wherever the pure Gospel comes,
there the great liturgy of the true church revives.

And wherever men seek genuine liturgy
they cannot avoid facing the question,

“What is the Gospel?”

Hermann Sasse, “Liturgy and Lutheranism”

Introduction

We finally arrive at a study of the liturgy, and the thesis of this section continues what we have studied thus far: *The liturgy of the Church proclaims that none other than Jesus Christ is present with His people for their good, forgiving sins and granting eternal life.*

Before we examine the service, it is a good idea to take a moment to become familiar with two crucial terms:

- **Divine Service:** This was Luther's term [German: Gottesdienst] for worship, and a helpful one indeed. "Worship" implies that the action begins with us: "We worship God." This puts us in the driver's seat, but it is not so. At the heart of Divine Service is not that we are there to serve the Divine, but that the Divine is there to serve us! As Jesus washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper—and made them clean with His body and blood, our Lord comes to create in us clean hearts by His Word and Sacrament. Do we worship? Yes, but only in response to what He first does for us. The Order of Matins begins with this profound confession from Psalm 51:15: "O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." We can only praise God when first by His grace He opens our lips to do so.
- **Liturgy:** Borrowed from the Greek, its original and literal meaning is "service of the people." It's technically a government term, referring to tasks that people did as service to their country. For instance, landowners were often required to maintain any public roads that ran along their property; this was their *leitourgia*, their service. (A common comparison might be if your town requires you to keep the sidewalk in front of your house shoveled free of snow.) The original term "liturgy" is a bit confusing for us, and perhaps a better word could have been used. However, the intention of the early Christians was apparently to say "the best way we can serve those around us is to receive God's forgiveness and then respond and proclaim it to others." Perhaps when we think of "liturgy" today, we should think of "Service of the people—by God," for it is God who serves His people in the Divine Service.

There is a rhythm, and ebb and flow to the liturgy. The action begins with God: He speaks His Word and gives us grace, and we then respond with praises for what He has done.

Although *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Lutheran Worship* don't make it particularly clear, there are actually three different services during a Communion service on Sunday morning. There is first the service of preparation, which is the corporate Confession and Absolution. There is then the Service of the Word, followed by the Service of Holy Communion.

This structure, especially the service of the Word and Holy Communion grow out of the practice of the early Church. The structure of the Service of the Word is modeled in part from synagogue worship; there, the rabbi would read selected Scriptures and teach from them, as did Jesus in Luke 4:15-30; one can see the resemblance today, especially in the services of Matins or Vespers. As Jesus taught in the synagogue, so He also ate with people and taught them at the meal (Luke 10:38-42); it was customary at such meals for an esteemed guest to teach before those assembled ate. At those meals, Jesus was present with people for their salvation.

Worship for the early Christians grew out of the practice of the Lord's Supper, and the worship service took on two distinctive parts resembling the preaching of the synagogue and Jesus' dining with people. In the first part, the pastor would read the Scriptures and preach from them; this portion of the service was open to all—confirmed Christians, confirmed Christians under church discipline, and catechumens. This portion of the service concluded with prayers. After the prayers, catechumens and those under church discipline were dismissed from the service—the

doors were closed to them before the Lord's Supper began. Only those Christians prepared for the Sacrament were allowed to stay. (Hence the term Closed Communion.)⁷²

Development of Divine Service: The Early Church⁷³		
Synagogue Service Readings from Scripture ↓ Exposition	Table Fellowship Instruction by Guest/Teacher ↓ Meal	Early House Church Open Service of the Word ↓ Dismissal of Non-Communicants ↓ Closed Service of Holy Communion

The Service of Preparation

The Service of Preparation is a substitute for a nearly-lost practice of individual Confession and Absolution before receiving Holy Communion. Pastors would hear private confession and grant absolution prior to Sunday, and the penitents would then be admitted to the altar at the Divine Service. This was—and is—a helpful and responsible practice; however, corporate Confession and Absolution has been around since the Early Church as well.⁷⁴

The Progression as Congregations Grow in Size				
Early Church Individual Confession & Absolution Service of the Word Service of Holy Communion	⇒	Later... Individual Confession & Absolution Entrance Rite Service of the Word Service of Holy Communion	⇒	Present Form Service of Corporate Confession & Absolution Entrance Rite (Introit) Service of the Word Service of Holy Communion

Why preparation? For the Lord's Supper, certainly. However, it is also preparation to come into the presence of God: worshipers are going to hear His Word, and thus hear Him. Communicants are about to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. We saw earlier that the high priest, before entering the Most Holy Place, had to be washed clean in the basin outside the tabernacle: The service of preparation is to forgive sins to prepare worshipers to step into the presence of God.

⁷² One of the stranger arguments by liberal Lutherans today is the contention that Closed Communion is a novelty introduced by Lutherans in the last few hundred years, and that the early Church knew of no such practice. Nothing could be further from the truth: The *Didache* clearly states, "But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.'" (Didache IX:5). Note the reason for the practice: unbelievers are not to come that close to the presence of God.

⁷³ The two tables on this page are culled from a lecture by Dr. Art Just entitled "Liturgy is the Life of the Church," presented at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Decatur, Illinois, on March 9, 1996.

⁷⁴ Werner Elert reports this to be true in *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*. Didache 14:1 reads, "On the Lord's Day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold Eucharist, after confessing (προεξομολογησάμενοι) your transgressions that your offering may be pure...."

The Invocation

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Ghost. (Matthew 28:19)

The Invocation announces the Name of the true God. Up front, we proclaim who is here, trusting that He keeps His promise to grant us forgiveness, life and salvation. The invocation should not be viewed as a work of the people that invites or permits God into the service and space. It is, rather, a proclamation of what God has begun and continues.

However, more to the point, we start out with the Invocation to point us to Baptism (Mt. 28:19) and the work of the Lord for His people. In Baptism, the pastor makes the sign of the cross upon us and we are clothed with Christ by water and the Word (Gal. 3:27); the righteousness we have in Baptism is full, all that we need to get us into heaven. Why do we need to receive forgiveness? Because we still sin, and that sin leads us to unbelief and death. If you like, picture Baptism as a robe of righteousness. As we sin, we are slowly easing ourselves out of the robe. Forgiveness gets rid of sin and secures the robe back upon us.

In the absolution that is about to follow, we are returned to our baptismal grace as our sin is taken away. Therefore, the service begins with the invocation to remind us that we are baptized in the name of the triune God; it is very proper to make the sign of the cross at the Invocation to remind us of our Baptism.

One other way to put it is this: The Invocation is an incomplete sentence, a dependant clause. It doesn't have a subject, verb or object. What is the rest of the sentence? Not "We begin..."; that implies that worship is something that we preside over, when it is actually God's service to us. No, the beginning of the sentence is "I baptize you..." The sentence begins at our Baptism and is completed at the start of the service, to announce that the salvation first given in our Baptism is being renewed here.

So, the service begins with Baptism every Sunday, to remind you that God has made you His child. And because you are His child, He speaks to you, strengthens you, and feeds you at His Supper table.⁷⁵

The Confession of Sins

Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God, our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness. (cf. Heb. 10:22)

Although this text is not verbatim Scripture, it bears a strong resemblance to Hebrews 10:22. To appreciate the text in Hebrews, as well as the pastor's call to confession, it is helpful to make a quick outline of Hebrews 10 and its progression:

Hebrews 10

¹For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ²For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have

Commentary

I. Animal sacrifices did not by themselves justify or take away sins in the Old Testament, but served as a reminder of sin. (vv. 1-4)

⁷⁵ The early Church illustrated this adoption by God with poignancy. A catechumen did not hear the baptismal formula until his baptism; then he received the new name—the Trinitarian name. Furthermore, a catechumen did not hear the Lord's Prayer until his baptism, either; as a catechumen, he was ushered from the service before it was spoken as part of the Communion liturgy. But once he was adopted by God through baptism, he could now pray, "Our *Father*..."

had no more consciousness of sins. ³But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year. ⁴For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.



⁵Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. ⁶In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of Me -- To do Your will, O God.' " ⁸Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law), ⁹then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. ¹⁰By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. ¹¹And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. ¹⁴For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.



¹⁵But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, ¹⁶"This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," ¹⁷*then He adds*, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." ¹⁸Now where there is remission of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.



¹⁹Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²²**let us draw near with a true heart** in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.



²⁴And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

This leads to the question: What Sacrifice does justify? See the next verses.



II. Jesus Christ is
A. The Sacrifice Who justifies once for all (vv. 5-10)
B. The High Priest who offers the Sacrifice and sits in the presence of God for eternity (vv. 11-14)
So, Christ is the Sacrifice who justifies. But how does He deliver that forgiveness to us? See the next few verses.



III. By the work of the Holy Spirit, our sins are no longer remembered for the sake of Jesus, the Sacrifice. (vv.15-18)
And where does the Holy Spirit work to remove our sin? By His means of grace; the progression towards worship becomes clear.



IV. We enter the Holiest (where God is present):
A. By Christ's living body and blood—**the Lord's Supper**.
B. Because our hearts and bodies have been washed with pure water—**Baptism**.
C. Because we remain in the confession of the **Word**.
Faith, given in these means of grace, produces good works. What are they? See next set of verses.



V. The good works are, first and foremost:
A. Continuing attendance the Divine Service and thus receiving forgiveness.
B. Exhorting one another to do the same.

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²⁶For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

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³²But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. ³⁵Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ³⁷"For yet a little while, *And* He who is coming will come and will not tarry. ³⁸Now the just shall live by faith; But if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." ³⁹But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

The progression of Hebrews 10 explains the purpose of the Confession at the start of the service, and is summarized by the call to confession. We are gathered for Divine Service, anticipating the body and blood of Christ as we enter into His presence. Therefore, the service begins with Confession and Absolution, a renewal of the righteousness first granted us in our Baptism. Confident in that forgiveness bestowed in Holy Absolution, we can then progress further into the service—first to receive His Gospel aurally in the Service of the Word, then to receive His Gospel orally in the Lord's Supper.

✠ *Our help is in the name of the Lord,
 R Who made heaven and earth.* (Ps. 124:8)

Psalm 124 is a psalm of praise to God because He has not allowed the enemies of the righteous to overcome them. The name of the Lord who made heaven and earth has been placed upon you in Baptism. Therefore, no sin is too great that this Lord at the cross has not overcome it; you

What are the opposite?

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VI. Sinful responses to the Divine Service include:

A. Willful sinning (v. 26-27), in the context of turning from grace and the sacrifice for sins—turning from the assembling together in Divine Service. (If we turn from this true forgiveness, there is no other forgiveness to be found.)

B. Trampling the Blood of the covenant, treating it as a common thing and thus insulting the Holy Spirit. (v. 28-29) (Denying His presence, maintaining that we receive only bread and wine in the Sacrament, would certainly qualify.)

C. Consequence: God's judgment (v. 30-31)

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VII. Exhortation to hold to this Divine Service, despite persecution. In the presence and doctrine of God lies the certainty of salvation.

are forgiven. Furthermore, if the God of heaven and earth declares you righteous and forgiven, who will override His verdict? No one. Therefore, forgiveness is an absolute certainty.

In contrast, one might use the example of Greek mythology, with its vast assortment of gods. Not all Greek gods were considered equal; Zeus was far more powerful than, say, Bacchus. Therefore, if Bacchus favored you, well and good; but if Zeus did not, he could override Bacchus and carry out his anger.

We do not live at the hands of frivolous Greek gods. However, we do face all sorts of trials and afflictions, devilish temptations that would lead us to doubt God's omnipotence, love and care for us. However, the Lord is still greater than all of these things. St. Paul declares this truth as well in Romans 8:

What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)

Indeed, what a joy it is that no less than the Maker of heaven and earth gives us help and forgiveness! When He declares His people forgiven, nothing can change the verdict.

*Y I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;
R And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)*

Psalm 32 is a marvelous psalm of Law and Gospel. Watch the progression of the psalm, from guilt to confession to absolution to faith and salvation.

¹A Psalm of David. A Contemplation. Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven, *Whose* sin *is* covered.

²Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.



³When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.

⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah



⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. **I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.** Selah

A declaration that the man who is forgiven is blest. Against this backdrop, David will describe his sin and forgiveness.



Refusing to confess does not hide it from the Lord, but rather invites His wrath.



He confesses (says the same thing about his sin as God says), and God forgives him. God forgives David for the sake of Jesus, who would come and die for his sins. When we speak this verse in the liturgy, we are confessing our sins to the same God with faith in the same grace--for the sake of Christ, who has come and died for our sins.

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⁶For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him.
⁷You *are* my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah

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⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.
⁹Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule, *Which* have no understanding, *Which* must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you.
¹⁰Many sorrows *shall be* to the wicked; But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him.
¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all *you* upright in heart!

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The godly make confession by faith, and they do so at a time when God may be found—when God is present. Therefore, we make confession in Divine Service, where God is present especially to forgive us. Because of the absolution we receive, we are indeed godly in Christ. Therefore, we have God's deliverance and protection.

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The psalm switches so that the Lord is the one who speaks and instructs. Contextually, the instruction of the Lord is Law and Gospel, sin and grace. He bids the hearer not to stubbornly resist forgiveness and hold on to sin, lest the hearer suffer the sorrows of the wicked. Rather, He proclaims the joy of forgiveness for the righteous who are absolved.

The message of the Psalm is stunning. Were we saved by our goodness and good works, the last thing we would want to do is confess to the Lord all of our faults and iniquities. In trying to impress God with our self-righteousness, it would be foolish to confess to Him our unrighteousness. However, we are forgiven for the sake of Christ, who has died for our sins; by faith, we confess our sins—confident that the Lord will forgive, not punish, us for the sake of His Son.

The Confession

O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being.

In this case, the confession of sins is not a text from Scripture, but rather a summary of our sinful condition to which all the Scriptures attest. For instance, Romans 5:6-10 summarizes what is happening in confession and absolution:

⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

While we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8) and shed His blood for us. We are justified even now, and the Lord continues to grant us His Word and blood to strengthen and preserve us in the one true faith unto live everlasting. Therefore, we confess our sins. *Why? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (I John 1:9) We confess not to be judged, but to be forgiven.

O, almighty God, merciful Father...



...I, a poor miserable sinner...



...confess unto you all my iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee, and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment.



But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them...



...and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being

Note the titles we use as we confess. As the almighty God—the Maker of heaven and earth, He is the One who can declare us righteous and not have the verdict overturn. However, He is also our merciful Father; He does not hear our confession as a harsh judge about to hand down a sentence, but as our merciful Father who has given His own Son to save us from judgment.



These words are sometimes met with resistance as we honestly admit what we are, perhaps because we don't understand their meaning. But "poor" and "miserable" are chosen with care! Poverty and misery walk hand in hand with being a sinner; James 5:1 declares that the godless are poor and miserable, even if they are wealthy and happy, for they lack the Lord and His grace. The Lord condemns many in Laodicea for the same poverty and misery (Rev. 3:17), for they have turned away from the Gospel. These things are true:

- By nature we are poor, for we lack salvation and the treasures of heaven.⁷⁶
- By nature we are miserable, for we are apart from God and His grace.⁷⁷
- By nature we are sinful, without faith and acting contrary to His will.

It must be noted that this poverty, misery and sin is a matter of faith, not sight. Even if all seems well, even if we are wealthy and happy and apparently good, by faith we confess our need for forgiveness and salvation.



Remember that "confess" means to "speak with" someone, or to say the same thing. We do not surprise the Lord with our admission of guilt. We simply agree that what He says about us in His Word is true.



This, too, is confession. We are sorry for them not because we feel sorry (though God grant that we do), but because God's Word declares them to be sin.



And this, too, is confession—joyous confession. As we have already agreed with the Lord about our sinfulness, we rejoice to agree with Him about His goodness and mercy. In other words, we have first said, "Lord, I agree with you that I am a sinner who deserves judgment. But I also agree with you that for the sake of Christ you will not judge me." We remind the Lord of His promise, that He has no choice but to forgive us for our sins. For the sake of Jesus, He will declare us righteous.

⁷⁶ And to such as are poor and confess their poverty, the Lord has come to preach Good News (Is. 61:1; Lk. 4:18; 7:22)

⁷⁷ One word for miserable in the New Testament is *ταλαίπωρος*, used in Romans 7:24. The former is St. Paul's famous cry, "O *wretched* man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" after he has described his inability to keep God's Law and his frequent sins of commission and omission. But what is the answer? "I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Ro. 7:25)

Thus we make confession. In the words of Hebrews 10:22, we approach God with a true heart and great confidence, knowing that the Lord will forgive us and declare us righteous by His means of grace.

BTW: The Uniqueness of the Means of Grace, and the Consequences if We Don't Realize It

For us to understand and appreciate Divine Service, we must understand that God forgives for the sake of Christ *by His means of grace*. A common, non-Lutheran notion is that prayer is a means by which God forgives us: We pray, and God “zaps” us with forgiveness. If this is what we believe, then we will neither appreciate prayer nor the means of grace. Prayer is not a work we do in order to earn forgiveness by going through the motions; we pray in response to God's Word, and God answers according to His Word through means. For instance, let's take the fourth and fifth petitions of the Lord's Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

We pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and God answers as He has promised. However, that doesn't mean that bread appears out of nowhere and lands on the table. God works through means: He provides us with employment so that we have money to purchase groceries, He provides farmers to grow grain, bakers to bake, and shopkeepers to sell. When we bring home the food from the store, God has kept His promise and answered the fourth petition.

We pray, “And forgive us our trespasses,” and God answers as He has promised. However, that doesn't mean that we are suddenly “zapped” with grace because of our efforts in the prayer. God works again through means: He provides us with Baptism, Absolution and the Lord's Supper. When we receive these things, God has kept His promise and answered the fifth petition.

Now, this must be said, too: God's Word is a means of grace. When we pray “and forgive us our trespasses,” we are praying God's Word; and therefore, by His Word, He grants us forgiveness even as we pray. So, to the question, “Does God forgive us when we pray?”, the answer is no...and yes. No, He doesn't forgive us because of our work of praying. Yes, He does forgive us by His Word within our prayer.

It may sound like a trivial distinction, but if we believe that it is our praying that gets forgiveness from God, then we believe that God forgives sins apart from His means of grace. If we believe that God forgives sins apart from where He's promised, two dangers develop right away. For one, it means that we're looking for grace where God hasn't promised it to be. For another, we lose an appreciation and reverence for the means of grace, where God has promised to forgive our sins.

The Absolution

Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

The words of Holy Absolution are again not verbatim from Scripture, but declare forgiveness as Christ has bidden.

Upon this your confession...

No one, save the Lord, can judge hearts; man can only judge verbal confessions and outward actions. The pastor therefore announces exactly that: Assuming that the confession made by the lips of those gathered is true, he goes on to announce that their sins are forgiven. (Obviously, if someone says the words but is not repentant, he is not forgiven. This is not because God's Word of absolution isn't effective, but because the unrepentant sinner refuses to receive it.

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...I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word,

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It is not the pastor who forgives you, but Christ Himself speaking through the pastor. Within the words of absolution is a confession of the truth that God has instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry. This is covered in the Small Catechism quite well:

“Confession embraces two parts. One is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.”⁷⁸

Again, it is not the pastor forgiving you, but God forgiving you by His Word. The pastor speaks this absolution at the bidding of Christ, who entrusted His Church with the Office of the Keys in John 20:21-23: *So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

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...announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins...

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Note both “announce” and “forgive.” The absolution is an announcement of the forgiveness Christ has won. But it is not merely informative, but effective. God created the heavens and the earth by speaking; Jesus healed simply by speaking. God’s Word is powerful and accomplishes things! (cf. Is. 55:9-11) In the absolution, the Lord actually gives forgiveness to His people.

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...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

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Holy Absolution is proclaimed in the name of the Triune God for two reasons: To announce that this is God’s work and service to you, and to declare once again that this forgiveness renews your Baptism.

R/ Amen

The people of God respond, “Yea, yea, it shall be so,”—for so God has promised. There is no doubt that forgiveness has been given.

This ends the Service of Preparation. Forgiven, the people of God are readied to hear the Lord’s Word and to come into His presence at the altar.

The Service of the Word

The Divine Service contains two types of components: The ordinaries and the propers. The ordinaries are those parts of the liturgy that are ordinarily used each Sunday. The propers are the parts that change from week to week, that are proper for a given Sunday of the church year.

The Introit

“Introit” is from the Latin word for “entrance,” and the Introit is the “entrance psalm.” It is a proper, changing from Sunday to Sunday.

In medieval times, the faithful would gather for Divine Service throughout the early morning hours. In the time before the service started, they would chant many of the psalms and thus learned them by heart. When it was time for the service to start, the priests would make their entrance

⁷⁸ 1943 edition, page 19.

from the rear of the church. As they entered and processed toward the altar, those gathered would sing the entrance psalm for the day to signal the beginning of the Divine Service.

What made the *Introit* special over the other psalms on a given Sunday morning? As we do today, the church followed a lectionary, a series of assigned Scripture readings for the year. The *Introit* was carefully chosen to be the psalm that summarized the Scriptures for that day. Normally, that psalm is bracketed by an antiphon, another relevant Bible verse that is spoken before and after the psalm.

This explains the names in the church year that fall strange upon our ears. For instance, the Sundays in Lent are called *Invocavit*, *Reminiscere*, *Oculi*, *Laetare*, *Judica* and *Palmarum*. The Sundays after Easter are called *Quasimodogeniti*, *Misericordias Domini*, *Jubilare*, *Cantate*, *Rogate*, and *Exaudi*. Where do they get these names? These names are the first words of the *Introit* for that day, in Latin.

Take, for instance, *Jubilare*, the third Sunday after Easter. In Latin it's pronounced "JOO-bil-LAY", but we see the English word "jubilare," to be joyful. How does the *Introit* for *Jubilare* Sunday begin? "Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands...." "Jubilare" in Latin means "to make a joyful noise."

If you look at the Scripture readings for that day, you will see the theme of joy throughout. For instance, the Gospel lesson is John 16:16-23, in which the Lord says to His disciples, "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (v. 22).

Many church bulletins today put a summary of the lessons in the bulletin, to alert people to the "theme of the day." The Church has done so—from Scripture itself—for centuries: When people hear the *Introit*, they are hearing a summary of the lessons for that Sunday.

The Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

"Gloria Patri" in Latin means "Glory be to the Father," deriving its name from the first phrase. Although it appears to be a separate part, it is actually the termination of the *Introit*; when the *Introit* is completed, and the theme of the day has thus been announced, the congregation declares that all the glory belongs to God who has saved us from our sin. They are therefore declaring that all that is done in worship should be to the glory of God.

This part of the liturgy is not straight out of Scripture; however, it certainly reflects the faith proclaimed by the Revelation 1:4-6.

⁴John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John ascribes all glory to triune God: The One "who is and who was and who is to come" (reminiscent of "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be") is in reference to the Father, and "seven Spirits" is a term for the one Holy Spirit; and then John speaks of Jesus, "who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." After the Gospel, John ascribes glory. Hearing of God's goodness in the *Introit*, and knowing that the Divine Service is all about the Gospel, the congregation does the same.

The Kyrie

Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us.

“Kyrie” is Latin for “Lord”, and the *Kyrie* also derives its name from its first word. Many times throughout the Old and New Testaments, people call upon the Lord to have mercy (cf. Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30-31; Mark 10:47-48, Luke 17:13; 18:38-9). Having heard the theme in the *Introit*, the people respond by calling upon God to have mercy and forgive their sins, as He has promised. The *Kyrie* has been part of the liturgy since at least the end of the fourth century.

It is the author’s understanding that, in New Testament times, “have mercy” was not a plea confined to the Church. When a king or ruler would ride through his domain, people in need would gather along the way and call upon him to grant some sort of special dispensation—perhaps some money or other gift. And perhaps the ruler, hearing the plea, would stop and be merciful to the one in need. Then again, perhaps not. In the New Testament, when people called upon Jesus to have mercy, He did. He healed, He cast out demons, He forgave sins. When we call upon Jesus to have mercy, we know that He will keep His promise and have mercy upon us, too.

Now, this may sound a bit silly, but it is an important point. When Jesus was walking through Jericho, people in Jerusalem weren’t lining up on the streets and calling upon Him to be merciful. Why? Because He wasn’t in Jerusalem—He was in Jericho. People called upon the Lord to have mercy because He was present, right there, to be merciful. When the congregation calls upon the Lord to have mercy in the Divine Service, it is a confession that the Lord is present in that place to have mercy. It is a confession of faith that the Lord is present in His means of grace to grant forgiveness, life and salvation. The *Kyrie* is not abstract: it is not, “Lord, wherever You are, have mercy on us.” It is, “Lord, because You have promised to be here with us by Your Word and Sacraments, have mercy upon us through these means.”

The Gloria in Excelsis

*V̄ Glory be to God on high:
R̄ And on earth peace, good will toward men.
We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for
Thy great glory.
O Lord God, heav’nly King, God the Father Almighty.
O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
That takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer.
Thou that sittest on the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.
For Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord.
Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen*

The *Gloria in Excelsis* (Latin for “glory in the highest”) has been part of the liturgy since at least 530 A.D. It is composed of two distinct parts: A divine announcement of God’s presence, and the response of the people of God.

In other words, merry Christmas! The first two lines of the *Gloria* are Luke 2:14. These are the words that the angels sing to the shepherds in the field the night that Jesus is born. The night that the Son of God is born in human flesh into this world, the event is so significant that myriads of angels announce this new presence of God. The shepherds hear this announcement and go to Bethlehem to see the Christ child. Afterwards, what happens? “Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them” (Luke 2:20).

Without Christ's birth, He could not have gone to the cross to die for our sins; had He not died on the cross, there would be no grace for us—and therefore no means of grace to receive in the Divine Service. So, on Sunday morning, the Church sings the *Gloria in Excelsis*, with reason. For one thing, by it the Church confesses that Jesus is the Word made flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, that the Infant was Immanuel, "God *with* us." For another, the Church sings this because, by the means of grace, the same Jesus is coming to be present with us for our salvation.

By the way, the *Gloria in Excelsis* is traditionally not sung during Advent and Lent. Why? Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas; the song is omitted in Advent so that it has a profound meaning for Christmas—once Christmas arrives, the congregation sings of Christ's arrival in the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Concerning Lent, Christ's birth is a time of visible glory, when the glory of God shines, angels sing, and the star points the way to Bethlehem. Lent is the season that journeys to the cross, where our Lord is stricken, smitten and afflicted; there is no visible glory on Calvary, for the Son of God is forsaken by all. Once Easter arrives and the tomb is empty, the Church returns to singing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, for the Lord is with His people having triumphantly and gloriously conquered death itself.

After we sing the angels' announcement, the *Gloria in Excelsis* continues with a response like the shepherds, praising God.

We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for Thy great glory.

A quick look reveals that it devotes a portion to each person of the Trinity:

O Lord God, heav'nly King, God the Father Almighty.

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, That takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

Thou that takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer.

Thou that sittest on the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

Jesus is declared to be the Son of God and the Lord God, which is the miracle of the Incarnation. At the same time, He is also declared to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. What a contrast! The Son of God is destined for the cross to be sacrificed for our sins. Risen again and seated on the right hand of God the Father, He has mercy upon us and receives our prayers.

For Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord.

Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen

The song ends confessing the Trinity, including the Holy Ghost, all of equal essence, glory and honor. Do not mistake this miracle: The all-powerful Son of God is born to Mary, wears diapers, and will grow up to die on the cross for you. That is the wonder of Christmas, and so we sing of it throughout the year.

The Salutation

℣ The Lord be with you.

℟ And with thy spirit.

Especially meaningful since we've just sung of the Incarnation, this is not an abstract wish, but a statement of presence. It is used among the people of God elsewhere, but it especially finds its way into the liturgy because of Luke 1:26-38. There, when Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to be the mother of Jesus, the angel begins by saying "The Lord is/be with you." The Lord is with

Mary, physically present, a microscopic cell or two—and Lord of heaven and earth! What Gabriel says, he means.

When the pastor says this to the people, it is once again not an abstract wish. It is a statement that the crucified and risen Lord is not far away, but He is present with His people by His means of grace. This is the first of three times it is used in the service, and the service is slowly building to the Lord's Supper, when we take into us Christ's body and blood just as surely as Mary had it in her. If Christ is with us, forgiveness is, too.

The congregation responds "And with thy spirit." The precise meaning of "spirit" and whether or not it should be capitalized has been lost and is debated today. However, the import of the response is a recognition that the pastor is the called and ordained servant of the Word who is called to administer publicly the means of grace. This phrase is sometimes called the "little ordination."

The Collect for the Day

The collect is a proper, changing from week to week. It is called the collect because it is a summary of the teachings of the days' texts *collected* into a corporate prayer. For instance we look at the prayer for Jubilate Sunday.⁷⁹ In the lessons for the Sunday of "joy," we are taught that true joy comes from being the people of God, even though that might mean suffering in this world. Therefore, the collect for Jubilate reads,

*Almighty God, who showest to them that be in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen*⁸⁰

Like the Introit, the Collect for the Day declares the theme and thrust of the Scripture readings.

The Readings

Liturgical congregations normally follow a lectionary for the readings. A lectionary has assigned readings for each Sunday of the church year, as well as for major festivals. There are many lectionaries of various quality in existence.

In preparing a lectionary, the goal is to cover all of the doctrines of Scripture in a year's time. A typical procedure for constructing a lectionary goes like this: Gospel lessons are first chosen for each Sunday and festival of the church year. Once they are chosen, an Old Testament reading is selected with the same doctrinal emphasis. The epistle is usually selected with the same theme as the other readings. However, sometimes a lectionary will spread the reading of an entire epistle over several successive Sundays,⁸¹ in which case the epistle reading may not fit with the other two.⁸²

Normally, the congregation sits for the Old Testament and Epistle readings. The epistle is normally followed by the Gradual, which came into use because at times the pastor might move

⁷⁹ For more information on Jubilate and the liturgical year, see Part 4 where we take a brief look at the liturgical calendar.

⁸⁰ *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 70.

⁸¹ This is called *lectio continua*, or "continued reading."

⁸² It is a helpful exercise, and excellent preparation for both pastor and layman, to examine the readings for the Sunday. Examine each text—including the Introit, writing down the doctrines that are found in each one individually. Then compare the readings, looking for the theme or themes that run through all of the texts. Compare these themes to the collect for the day.

from the lectern⁸³ to another position, perhaps in the center of the congregation as a symbol that the Word dwells among them. During this time of movement, the Gradual would be spoken or chanted by the pastor or choir. The Gradual is a proper for the day, and further highlights the theme of the readings. For instance, the Gradual for Jubilate is:

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
The Lord hath sent redemption unto His people. Hallelujah!
It behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead: and thus to enter into His glory.
Hallelujah!

As the pastor's movement was in preparation for the reading of the Gospel, so are the words of the Gradual to prepare for the hearing of the Gospel, where those present will hear of the Lord's incarnate life, ministry and firsthand words.

Following the Gradual, the congregation responds. *The Lutheran Hymnal* provides three different responses:

1. The congregation may respond with a single "Hallelujah!" Having heard the Word of the Lord in the Gradual, they respond that it is proper to give all praise to God. This is also sung by the multitudes who stand *in the presence* of God in Revelation 19:1-6. And, in Revelation 19:9, the Lord declares, 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' Indeed, we sing hallelujahs before the Gospel as our Lord is present by His Word, and as we prepare for the Lord's Supper where the Lamb of God gives us Himself.

2. The congregation may respond with a threefold "Hallelujah!" for the same reason. In some liturgical traditions, the priest or pastor holds up the Scriptures as the congregation sings, that it might be clear that the people are acknowledging that the Lord is present by means of His Word for their good.

3. The congregation may respond with the Sentence for the Season; this is a response that changes each liturgical season. For instance, having heard the Gradual on Jubilate Sunday, the congregation would respond with the Sentence for the Easter Season, "Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Hallelujah!" This sentence acknowledges the doctrines of the Gradual.

Having sat for the first two lessons, the congregation then stands for the Gospel, which is read last. The Gospel receives special recognition because it is in these readings that we hear of our Lord's incarnate life and ministry, and it is where we hear Him speak. A quick outline of the Bible could be this:

Old Testament: The Savior is coming.
Gospels: The Savior is here!
Epistles: The Savior has come.

When an honored guest is coming to a place, those in attendance may be seated; however, when he arrives, all rise to honor him. So it is with the Gospel lesson: the congregation stands to honor the Lord who comes to earth in the Gospels. It is a recognition of His incarnate presence.

Immediately prior to the Gospel lesson, the congregation sings, "Glory to you, O Lord;" immediately after, "Praise to you, O Christ." Again, this is not praise sung to One who was

⁸³ The position for the reading of the lessons has varied: at times, they have been read from the pulpit; at other times, the altar. The lectern is actually a rather recent innovation.

present 2000 years ago, or who is far away in heaven; the Lord is present with us by His Word to forgive us.

The Creed

The Creed is a confession of the faith that Scripture proclaims. Where the Invocation declared the name of God, the creed declares in a nutshell who God is and what He does for us.

Historically, the Apostles' Creed is the church's baptismal creed, while the Nicene Creed is the creed for Holy Communion. Therefore, the Apostles' Creed is said by people when a baptism takes place, and then is repeated daily as part of personal prayer; the Nicene Creed is then used on Sunday mornings. However, when the Sunday service does not include Holy Communion, the Apostles' Creed is used in America. The use of the Athanasian Creed is normally reserved for Trinity Sunday.

Creeds are no child's play. The three ecumenical creeds listed above are carefully-crafted confessions of faith, formulated in the face of persecution and heresy both to clarify what the Church believes and what it rejects.⁸⁴ A quick—and not exhaustive⁸⁵—survey of the Apostles' Creed is a helpful exercise:

⁸⁴ To appreciate the confession of the three ecumenical creeds, the following are offered in contrast.

First, from the Unitarian Universalist Association:

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life.

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.

Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

(Source: Tract #7212 from the Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, MA)

The next is an example of a modern creeds within Christendom, admittedly and hopefully an extreme example which reflects far more emotional than doctrinal content:

Continued on next page

The First Article

I believe...	Historically, the Creed begins with a first person singular article: "I," not "we." To be among a group of people who believe these doctrines is not sufficient for salvation; one must have faith as an individual (Hab. 2:4). Furthermore, this is about belief, about faith—not just knowledge. Even the devils know all about who God is, but their knowledge is not a saving faith (Ja. 2:19). Thus the Creed is not merely a recitation of fact, but a confession of faith.
...in God the Father Almighty,...	With this short phrase, we confess the existence of God, contra atheism and agnosticism. We confess that He is almighty—omnipotent, contrary to those who would teach that the Lord has limitations. Furthermore, we declare that the Almighty God is our Father; He is not just some powerful being "way out there somewhere" (as deism teaches) but the Lord who has given His Son to die for us that we might be His children (Jn. 20:17).
...Maker of heaven and earth.	We then confess what is true about the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), contrary to theories of evolution, etc.

The Second Article

And in Jesus Christ...	We declare that He is "Jesus"—our Savior (Mt. 1:21), and the Christ—the one chosen by God for the task (Acts 10:38). In doing so, we deny the teaching that He is merely one Savior among many, or a good man who is unable to save.
...His only Son...	In declaring this truth (Jn. 3:16), we reject those who teach that Jesus is among many sons or children of God. (Mormonism would be one example.)
...our Lord;...	We confess our relationship to Jesus: He is our Lord (Mt. 28:18), and we therefore submit to Him and His Word. He is not merely an advisor whose counsel we reject; nor is He a butler who exists to carry out our whims.

I believe in God, who places joy in our souls, dancing in our toes and songs in our hearts. I believe God wanted gladness to flow like a river and so created a bountiful earth with plenty for all to share.

I believe in Jesus, who turned water into wine, partied with outcasts and sinners, and touched the broken so they could leap and dance. I believe Jesus opened the doors and set an extra place so we could feast.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, who prompts us to smile, who sends us invitations to come and dine, who nudges us to openness and tenderness. I believe the Spirit is present every time we gather to break bread and is always urging us to live joyfully and walk hopefully.

Forever, I will live in the embrace of God and be a witness to resurrection joy.
(*Sourcebook of Worship Resources*. Canton, OH: Communication Resources, Inc., 1994. p. 3)

⁸⁵ One source for further study is the enchiridion to the *Small Catechism*.

...Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,...	In affirming the divinity of Jesus (Lk. 1:35), we reject the popular teaching of historical criticism which states He was only a human being.
...Born of the Virgin Mary;...	We also confess the humanity of Jesus (Lk. 1:35), thereby rejecting the teaching that Jesus is only divine and did not become human. Both the humanity and divinity of Christ are necessary for our salvation. If one of His natures is denied, salvation is lost.
...Suffered under Pontius Pilate,...	This places Jesus' work in history. His work of redemption at the cross is not some fable from "another time" of mythology; His life on earth is not merely a legend. The mention of Pontius Pilate puts Him in history at a place and time. (Jn. 19:1-3)
...Was crucified, dead and buried;...	Here we declare His death on our behalf (Jn. 19:30). Numerous heresies have declared that Jesus did not die on a cross, did not actually die, nor was He buried.
...He descended into hell;...	We confess He did so to proclaim His victory (1 Pet. 3:18,19). While this phrase of the Creed is not under great attack these days, it is still the truth declared by Scripture. He shows His victory over the devil by His triumphant descent into hell. Therefore, we rejoice to confess this marvelous doctrine.
...The third day he rose again from the dead;...	We declare the resurrection of the dead (Acts 10:40-41), contrary to all sorts of liberal theology that denies the resurrection and leaves Christ—and us—in the tomb.
He ascended into heaven...	We declare that the Lord has ascended (Acts 1:9-11) to prepare a place for us; in doing so, we once again declare the error of those who teach that He did not rise from the dead.
And sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty...	We confess that Jesus sits at God's right hand (Eph 1:20-23), a position of activity and deliverance: <i>His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.</i> (Ps. 98:1b; cf. Eph. 4:10-12)
...From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	Here we confess, contrary to much popular teaching, that Jesus will return and that He will return to <i>judge</i> (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Third Article

I believe in the Holy Ghost...	We confess the third person of the Trinity (Mt. 28:19), contrary to all those who deny the Trinity.
...the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of saints;...	We hereby declare that the Church is the work of the Holy Ghost (Eph. 2:19-22; Rom. 8:9), contrary to those who consider it to be man's activity.
...The forgiveness of sins;...	We next declare that forgiveness is the work of the Holy Spirit, not our doing in whole or in part (Eph. 2:8,9), contrary to synergism, Arminianism, etc. Because this forgiveness is delivered by the means of grace, we also hereby confess that the Spirit works by these means of grace.
..The resurrection of the	Here we confess our hope (Jn. 5:28-29), contrary to all those who

body;...

deny such a resurrection.

...And the life everlasting. Amen

Here we confess the doctrine of eternal life, contrary to reincarnation and other ideas that our existence is cyclical or that another death awaits us after the resurrection (Rev. 7:15-17).

The Sermon

Normally, the sermon is based upon the lectionary's theme of the day, or a facet thereof, for that given Sunday. The purpose of the sermon is to apply the Law and Gospel of one or more of the readings to the hearer in the pew. The sermon is different from a lecture in Bible class. The lecture is foremost for the imparting of knowledge of the Word of God; the preaching is foremost about the bestowal of forgiveness by the Word of God.⁸⁶ One pastor remarked that the sermon is a 20-minute order of confession and absolution, in which the preacher declares the Law of God and condemns sin, and then declares the Gospel of God and the forgiveness of sins to God's holy people.

The Offertory

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit.* (Ps. 51:10-12)

The offertory, offering and prayers serve as the conclusion to the Service of the Word. Each is a response of the people of God for His grace and provision.

The offertory is taken directly from Psalm 51, David's psalm of confession after his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of Uriah, her husband. 2 Samuel 11 provides the narrative. David lusts after Bathsheba and commits adultery with her, conceiving a child; after he fails to trick her husband Uriah into sleeping with her, he arranges for Uriah to be murdered in battle. When Uriah dies, David makes Bathsheba his wife. Thus far, he has broken the fifth, sixth, eighth and tenth commandments. By marrying Bathsheba, he also becomes owner of Uriah's land, thus violating the seventh and ninth commandments. He has broken the law of the land and sullied the office of king, transgressing the fourth commandment. It goes without saying that David has sinned against God, spurning His name and Word; thus the first three commandments fall as well.

The prophet Nathan is given the unenviable task of preaching the Law and confronting the king with his sin in the following chapter, 2 Samuel 12. The use of a parable exposes David's wrongdoing, after which Nathan declares to David his transgression. He condemns David's sin, declaring "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7); he then shows the king's depravity especially in light of all that the Lord had done for David. He also prophesies judgment for David's sin.

The Law exposes David's sin, and he repents. Nathan is quick to absolve the penitent king, declaring "The LORD has also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13); although the earthly consequences remain, the eternal consequences are placed upon the Son of God at the cross. David is forgiven for his sin.

The penitent king then writes Psalm 51, a declaration of God's mercy. David makes no claim that he deserves forgiveness because of his own righteousness, but repeatedly declares that the Lord forgives out of His mercy.

⁸⁶ However, the two cannot be separated. The Word of God taught in Bible class still imparts forgiveness, and the Word of God proclaimed in the sermon still imparts knowledge.

Verses 10-12 of Psalm 51 form the offertory, sung by the people of God following the sermon. As they gather, they are guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments in thought, word and deed. In proclaiming the Law of the sermon, the pastor has declared to them what Nathan declared to David: “You are the man [or woman] [who has sinned against God and deserves death]!” And in proclaiming the Gospel, the pastor also declares to the penitent people of God, “The Lord has also put away your sin; you shall not die.”

Having heard of Law and Gospel, of their sin and God’s grace, the congregation responds in the words of Psalm 51. They pray that God would keep His promise—as He has promised to do! He promises to forgive our sins, and He promises to be present with us—especially in the Lord’s Supper, as the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace. David’s words magnificently declare the truth (and demonstrate the rhythm of Law and Gospel) of the Divine Service today.

The Offering

The offering is also an act of grateful response for God’s free gift of salvation; members are not paying the bill for a clean heart, but rather giving thank-offerings in recognition of God’s goodness, and to support the ministry of Word and Sacrament by which the Lord is present with His people.

The Prayers

Like the offertory, prayer continues the response of God’s people. By His grace, the people of God pray that His will be done, and entrust to Him their petitions. They do so in response to the Word—and asking only that which is in accordance with His Word, knowing that the Lord who gave His Son for their sin will hear their prayers.

The prayers signal the conclusion of the Service of the Word; one will note, for instance, that the prayers in “The Order of Morning Service Without Communion” (TLH, pp. 5-14) are followed only by the Benediction. In the early Church, it is at this point that those not prepared for Holy Communion would be ushered out and the doors closed before the Service of Holy Communion.

The Service of Holy Communion

The Preface

With the preface, the pastor and congregation prepare themselves for the Lord's presence in Holy Communion.

☩ *The Lord be with you.*
℟ *And with your spirit.*

We have already discussed this salutation, which first takes place just before the Collect of the Day. Let us just note that, in connection with the angel's announcement to Mary in Luke 1, how fitting to repeat this salutation as the Lord is about to be bodily present with His people in His Supper.

☩ *Lift up your hearts.*
℟ *We lift them up unto the Lord.*

This is called the *sursum corda*, Latin for "lift up your hearts." The exact implication of these words appears to have been lost over time, and research is currently being conducted to re-discover the whole import of the words. The likely meaning is that, as those present have had their hearts cleansed by the Lord (as recognized in the Offertory, above), this is now an announcement and recognition that they are about to enter Christ's presence at the altar.

The *sursum corda* is not a passage of Scripture, though an interesting passage to examine is Lamentations 3:21-66. Verses 21-33 constitute the most famous passage in Lamentations, where the prophet rejoices in God's mercy and kindness, despite the destruction of Jerusalem. Verses 40-41 read, "Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD; Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven." The context is that God refuses to hear the prayers of His disobedient people, and is no longer present with them; in fact, the Lord has covered Himself so that He no longer hears their prayers (vv. 43-44). The people of God therefore lift their hearts in confession of their sin. A few verses later (55-58), Jeremiah declares,

I called on Your name, O LORD,
From the lowest pit.
You have heard my voice: "Do not hide Your ear
From my sighing, from my cry for help."
You drew near on the day I called on You,
And said, "Do not fear!"
O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul;
You have redeemed my life.

To the penitent people of God, the Lord now draws near to grant them forgiveness, life and salvation in the sacrament. What glorious news! The Lord does not hide His face from them, nor does He refuse to hear their prayers. For the sake of Jesus, He pleads their case and declares them innocent. For the sake of Jesus, He draws near with grace; for the sake of Jesus, He hears the Lord's Prayer that the congregation will soon pray.

☩ *Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God.*
℟ *It is meet and right so to do.*

It is indeed meet, right and salutary to give thanks to God, especially because He is present among His people for their good. This truth is proclaimed throughout the Scriptures. For instance...

- In I Chronicles 16, the Ark is brought to the tabernacle that David has erected in Jerusalem. A large part of this chapter is a psalm written by David to commemorate the occasion. The mighty saving acts of God are the subject, the presence of God is a theme, and for this He is the object of frequent thanks (vv. 4,8,34,41). Verses 8-12 call upon the people to tell of His wondrous works and seek His face, so the Word and the presence of God are correlated. In verse 29, the people are bidden, "Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!" Worship takes place in the presence of God.

- II Chronicles 20:21 doesn't use the word "thank" in the NKJ. However, "His mercy endures forever" is in common with the I Chronicles 16 text above. The context is that the Moabites, Ammonites and others have joined to attack Judah and King Jehoshaphat. The king declares a fast (likely of repentance) for the people, then implores the Lord for deliverance as he publicly prays in the temple court. His argument is not that God must save them because of the merits of His people. Rather, Jehoshaphat calls upon God to save them because He is present among them, and promises to hear and save (8-9). As all ages in Judah stand "before the Lord" (13), Jahaziel the Levite declares by the Holy Spirit that the battle is the Lord's, for He is with them (17); the people worship the Lord. The following morning, Jehoshaphat exhorts the people to believe in the Lord and His prophets for salvation—the king points them to the Word of the Lord. The people respond with thanks and praise, declaring (as in I Chron. 20), "His mercy endures forever" (21).

- The people of God give thanks to the Lord also in Revelation 11:17. Here, the 24 elders give thanks to God because He judges the nations of the world and rewards the prophets, saints and those who fear His name. Then, verse 19: "Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there was lightning, noises, thunder, an earthquake, and great hail." Once again, grace and Presence are intertwined themes for the people of God, while the world suffers judgment for rejecting God's grace.

The congregation is thus bidden to give thanks to God. In faith, they respond that it is indeed proper to do so.

The Proper Preface

Different seasons of the church year have appointed for them different proper prefaces. As the Introit and Collect for the day give a brief summary of the day's theme, the proper preface gives a brief summary of the season's theme. However, the proper preface does more than that: It serves as a bridge between the season and the presence of God on that Sunday in Holy Communion. Each proper preface expands on the great mystery that the God described within them is present with His people, in, with and under the bread and wine. For instance, the proper preface for the season of Advent reads:

[It is truly meet, right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to Thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty everlasting God:] Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared, proclaiming Him the Messiah, the very Lamb of God, and calling sinners to repentance, that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He cometh again in glory. Therefore with angels and archangels....

The proper preface for Advent declares the wonder of the Incarnation—that, as prophesied, the Son of God took on human flesh to call us to repentance and deliver us from sin. He consented to the Incarnation, knowing that many would mistreat, wound and even crucify Him; He did it anyway, to save His people. This same "very Lamb of God" promises and consents to be present in the Sacrament today to deliver us from the wrath of God by giving us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

The profundity of the proper preface may not be understood until one sees the paucity of the service without it. *The proper preface puts Christ at the center of the Lord's Supper.* A church that does not confess the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament will use this time to emphasize that the sacrament is about the unity of believers; thus the focus quickly becomes the guests of the feast, not the Host who has died and risen to provide it.

Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying:

These words express a profound truth and added blessing of the Real Presence of Christ among His people. To put it simply, at the Lord's Supper, heaven and earth come together. Christ is present with His Church Triumphant in heaven, and He is present with His Church Militant that remains on earth. Because He is present with both at the altar, the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant are together in Christ.⁸⁷

Next to the gladsome news of the resurrection of the dead, this is perhaps the greatest comfort that the Church can proclaim to those grieving the death of those who have died in the faith—for they are part of “all the company of heaven.” Although they remain on earth and their loved ones in heaven, together they sing praises of God in the presence of God.⁸⁸ When the congregation sings the *Sanctus*, it is not singing in preparation for the heavenly chorus that awaits; Christians gathered for the Lord's Supper literally are singing with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. Thus the Lord's Supper truly is a foretaste of heaven: Christ is present with us, and we sing with the heavenly host.

⁸⁷ “‘Heaven on earth’ is the Eucharist according to the Eastern church. Thus Sergius Bulgakow could describe the Eastern liturgy under the title ‘Le ciel sur la terre.’ This calls to mind the legend of the origin of the Church in Russia, which tells how Wladimir, Prince of Kiev, sent messengers to the various religions of the East. When they attended the liturgy at the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople ‘they did not know whether they were on earth or in heaven.’ This, then, decided the question which religion Russia should accept. From the devotional literature of the Lutheran church, we quote from a prayer by Scriver, ‘Dass dein Abendmahl mein Himmel auf Erden werde.’ (Sasse, Hermann. *This Is My Body*. Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1976. Page 326, footnote 61.) Translated, Scriver's prayer reads “Let your Supper be my heaven upon earth.”

One is also reminded of C.S. Lewis' comment in his preface to *The Great Divorce*: “I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself” (Lewis, C.S. *The Great Divorce*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1946. Page 7). Though Lewis did not write this comment in a sacramental context, perhaps we can amplify his point: The Christian, who comes into the presence of God in the Lord's Supper, has a foretaste of heaven while still on earth. Those who reject the Lord and His grace suffer a bit of hell even now as they reject His gracious presence; yet in the blindness of sin, they do not know it.

⁸⁸ In Scandinavian Lutheran Churches, the communion rail is traditionally curved in the shape of a semi-circle—or at least a part of a semi-circle. Why? The reason is profound: The rail is a part of a circle because it is part of a circle that extends past the altar and into eternity. It symbolizes that those communing at that altar are joined by the angels, archangels and the whole company of heaven. During a funeral sermon, then, the pastor may very well say of the one who has died: “He is not dead, but he now worships from the other side of the altar.”

It is also interesting to note that many gravestones of early Christians were engraved with “Remember me.” This was a reference to the Lord's Supper, where they would be together with their Christian loved ones in Christ.

The Sanctus

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory;
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He, Blessed is He,
Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest.*

Isaiah 6:3 (cf. Rev. 4:8); Psalm 118:26; Matthew 21:9

As heaven and earth come together in the Lord's Supper, we sing the *Sanctus*, which is technically made up of two songs: The *Sanctus* (which we'll call the *Sanctus proper* to tell it apart from the entire *Sanctus*) and the *Benedictus*.

The *Sanctus proper* is from Isaiah 6:3. This is Isaiah's vision of the Lord in His temple (presence language!). Around the throne fly seraphim—part of "all the company of heaven"—who sing "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts":⁸⁹ the whole earth *is* full of his glory. When Isaiah sees this vision and realizes that he is in the Lord's presence, he falls on his face and declares he is a dead man, for he is a man of unclean lips and has seen the Lord. He confesses his sin, and a seraph touches his mouth with a hot coal and declares him clean. In other words, Isaiah confesses and receives absolution from God who is present there with him.

We see a variation (a second verse?) of the *Sanctus proper* sung once again in Revelation. In John's vision of heaven, the six-winged beasts (the seraphim of Isaiah 6 have six wings as well) before the throne sing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." This is a song sung in heaven in the glorious presence of God.

The *Benedictus* comes from Psalm 118:23. Psalm 118 is part of the "Great Hallel," or "great praise," a collection of five psalms sung at the Passover. The psalm is undoubtedly messianic, and portions of it normally serve as the *Introit* for Easter Sunday. The psalm begins with thanksgiving for the eternal mercies of God, especially in light of attacks and oppression by enemies. It declares that the Lord saves from death, and proclaims "The stone *which* the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone" (v. 22); this is a prophecy of our Lord, as Jesus himself confirms in Matt. 21:42. Near the end of the psalm, the psalmist proclaims, "Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD" (vv. 25-26). These verses produce the *Benedictus*: "Save now," in Hebrew, is "Hosanna," as we sing in the *Sanctus*. We also sing "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" as part of this hymn. But look at the rest of verse 26; this praise is located at the "house of the LORD," the Temple, where God is present with His people in the Old Testament.

While the *Benedictus* has much to teach from Psalm 118, we miss the greater impact if we fail to see it fulfilled in the New Testament. When Jesus triumphantly enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds greet Him calling out: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9). When Jesus enters Jerusalem, this multitude of believers greets Him as the Son of David—the Messiah. They declare that He is the Savior who is promised, who comes in the name of the Lord. And they cry out "Hosanna!"—"Save now!" The Lord is present in Jerusalem, and He has come to save now; in less than a week, His body and blood will hang on a cross to save them from their sin—the building block will be rejected, but will become the chief cornerstone. (Note the proximity! The crowd quotes Ps. 118 in verse 9, and Jesus quotes Ps. 118 in verse 42!). The Lord is present to *save now*.

⁸⁹ "Lord of hosts" is sometimes translated as "Lord God of Sabaoth." "Sabaoth" is not related to Sabbath, "rest." It refers to the almighty power of God, that He is the Lord of the hosts of heaven.

The *Sanctus* is an ancient part of the liturgy. As he grew up, the Lord Jesus Himself sang this with those gathered at the synagogue. Little did the other worshipers in Nazareth realize that they were singing this to Mary's Son, for they were worshiping in the presence of the Son of God!

Remembering the Proper Preface above, note the structure of the *Sanctus*: the *Sanctus proper* is sung in Scripture by the hosts of heaven; the *Benedictus* is sung in Scripture by the Church on earth. In this structure, the *Sanctus* declares once again that heaven and earth are coming together because Christ is present in both places in the Sacrament. (Or, better, both places are in Christ!) In the liturgy, the people of God on earth sing the *Sanctus* with the angels, archangels and all the company of heaven because they too are coming into the presence of God; Christ is giving them His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. He is riding into our midst—not on the foal of a donkey, but in bread and wine. We are no less in the presence of God than the seraphim, Isaiah, John, or those who worshiped in the synagogue with Jesus.⁹⁰

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.
Forever and ever. Amen* (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4)

The placement of the Lord's Prayer in the midst of the preparation is intentional. As we are coming into the presence of God, we acknowledge by the Lord's Prayer what our relationship is with Him: We are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19; cf. Gal. 2:6-7). Jesus bids us to pray to our heavenly Father, who considers us His beloved children (Lk. 11:9-13). Therefore the Christian prays to his Father in heaven, trusting that the Lord will faithfully grant him every blessing.

A survey of the Small Catechism's explanation of Lord's Prayer quickly reveals that this prayer is a summary of the Gospel: For the sake of Jesus, God hallows His name among us, sends His kingdom to us, continues to grant us forgiveness according to His will, etc. For at least the past 17 centuries, the Church has recognized a special significance to the fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," in connection with the Sacrament; namely, God uses ordinary bread and wine as the means by which His Son comes to us to hallow His name, bring us into His kingdom, etc.

The Words of Institution

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

After the same manner also He took the cup when He had supped, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." (Mt 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22-24; Lk. 22:19-20; I Cor. 11:24-25)

⁹⁰ cf. Footnote 17

God's Word is effective—it accomplishes what it says. As the pastor proclaims the Words of Institution, it is the Lord Himself who, by His Word, is doing what He says: He is present—body and blood, in/with/under the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

The Words of Institution are not just a recital of something that happened in the past, on the night that Jesus was betrayed. They are a "consecration;" by His Word the Lord Himself consecrates the elements and is present in them.

The Pax Domini

✠ *The peace of the Lord be with you alway!*
℟ *Amen*

Rom. 5:1; Heb. 13:20; Lk. 2:14; Jn. 20:19

In the Church today, we become a bit sloppy in our use of the word "peace," particularly the "peace of the Lord." This is a specific term, referring to the forgiveness of sins and all the treasures of heaven received with that forgiveness. It is not a generic description of the absence of strife or violence; indeed, the Christian should expect strife and trial in this life.

Observe how Romans 5:1-2 speaks of peace: *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* We have peace with God because we are justified—forgiven and declared righteous—by faith. This comes through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that "we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand," the same Christ who is present with us in Holy Communion to grant us grace, faith and peace.

Hebrews 13:20-21 further clarifies the connection between Christ and the peace of God:

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Here the peace of God is directly tied to the "blood of the everlasting covenant"—the same of which Jesus speaks in the Words of Institution when he declares, "This is the New Testament in My blood."

In other words, the peace of God comes with the forgiveness of sins. The peace of God therefore comes when Jesus is present, because Jesus is present by His means of grace to forgive sins. To illustrate, we can point to two texts, one of Christmas and one of Easter. When the angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem, they sang "Glory to God in the highest, and *on earth peace*, goodwill toward men" (Lk. 2:14). They announced that peace was on earth because the Savior was now on earth; the Peace of the Lord was present. Furthermore, when Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, His first words were, "Peace be with you" (Jn. 20:19). Jesus was *present* with them, and even makes clear the following week that He is *bodily present* with them (Jn. 20:27); in both cases, He announces that He is there to bring peace, for He has died for their sins.

Therefore, the *Pax Domini* in Holy Communion. Jesus is body-and-blood present with His people. It is a respected tradition for the pastor to elevate the wine and bread as he faces the congregation and declares the *Pax Domini*, for the purpose of the *Pax Domini* is to say, "Christ

Jesus is here to forgive your sins. By these means of bread and wine, the peace of the Lord is with you."⁹¹

The Agnus Dei

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace.

John 1:29

The *Agnus Dei*, ("Lamb of God") is sung after all has been prepared and the distribution is about to begin. The first line comes from John 1:29. John the Baptist has been preparing the way for the Lord by his preaching in the wilderness. As many ask, he denies that he is the Christ, declaring that the Christ will come. Soon after, Jesus appears at the banks of the Jordan to be baptized, His ministry about to begin. Seeing Him present, John declares "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Note that, at His Baptism, the cross is already in the picture. John calls Him the "Lamb of God," and the Lamb is going to be sacrificed; this is how Jesus will take away the sin of the world.

When the *Agnus Dei* is sung in the liturgy, all has been prepared for Jesus' coming to us with His body and blood in the Sacrament. As John, we now expectantly look toward the altar and acknowledge that the Christ is present with us. Therefore, we sing, "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us." This is repeated three times, the third time ending "grant us your peace;" this is, once again, an acknowledgment that Christ comes to grant the peace of God—Himself and the forgiveness of sins.

Let us not take these words for granted; they are an important confession of faith. Throughout history, Reformed churches have deleted the *Agnus Dei* from the liturgy as a testimony that Christ is not present in the Lord's Supper.

The Distribution

Take, eat; this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins. May this strengthen and preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting!
Take, drink; this is the true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, shed for the remission of your sins. May this strengthen and preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting.

⁹¹ In early liturgies, it was customary to celebrate the "kiss of peace" at this time. The congregation was segregated: men worshiped in one part of the sanctuary, women in another. For the kiss of peace, each would turn to his neighbor and kiss them full on the lips. Why? The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Rejoicing that the Lord was present to forgive them all their sins, the kiss of peace was an acknowledgment that the people of God held no grudges against one another.

In recent times and for obvious reasons, the "kiss of peace" has been substituted by the "handshake of peace." At this point in the service, members are invited to shake hands with those around them and say "The peace of the Lord be with you." What they are saying is profound: "Christ is present in the Sacrament to grant forgiveness and peace to all who come with right faith and penitent hearts. I hold nothing against you, and pray that you receive Him this day for your benefit." However, the handshake often deteriorates into a secular greeting and too often is used by congregations as a "break for warm fuzzies," a relief from the formality of the liturgy in order to humanize the goings-on. However, if we understand that the liturgy is proclaiming the presence of Christ, why would we want a break from it? Why be distracted from the awesome truth?

Those prepared for Holy Communion now come and receive the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. The very same Jesus who died and rose again is present, giving His body and blood for us. And because Jesus is really present there, we are strengthened and preserved unto life everlasting.⁹²

Once again, the words of the distribution are an important confession of faith, for they confess that we are receiving the *true* body and blood of Jesus, nothing less. These words will not be found in a Reformed service.

The pastor may dismiss communicants from the altar with the words "Depart in peace." These are the same words spoken by Jesus to two women to whom He ministered in the Gospels: The woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:34) and the sinful woman (Luke 7:50). In each case, a key element in the text is that the women are absolved of their sin. This declaration on the part of the pastor is not just a fine wish, but a declaration that the communicants are at peace with God, for God has come to them to sanctify and preserve them.

The Nunc Dimittis

*Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word
For mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation: which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people,
A Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of Thy people Israel.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Luke 2:25-35*

The singing of a post-Communion canticle is an ancient tradition. In the early church, the congregation would sing Psalm 145, including vv. 15-18:

¹⁵The eyes of all look expectantly to You,
And You give them their food in due season.
¹⁶You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.
¹⁷The LORD *is* righteous in all His ways,
Gracious in all His works.
¹⁸The LORD *is* near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.

They would also sing Psalm 34, including:

⁸Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good;
Blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him...
¹⁸The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

⁹² One must not pass up the observation that this presence of Christ brings about a communion that surpasses that of the high priest in the Most Holy Place of the temple in the Old Testament. The priest was present in the temple with God; in the Lord's Supper, the Temple—Christ—gives Himself to eat and drink. This connection is taught in Lutheran hymnody, as in TLH #316, O Living Bread from Heaven:

*2. My God, Thou here has led me Within Thy temple's holiest place
And there Thyself hast fed me With all the treasures of Thy grace.
Oh, boundless is Thy kindness, And righteous is Thy pow'r,
While I in sinful blindness Am erring hour by hour;
And yet Thou com'st not spurning A sinner, Lord, like me!
Thy grace and love returning, What gift have I for Thee?*

The Greek liturgy began the use of the *Nunc Dimittis*, directly from Luke 2:29-32. This is the song of Simeon, the man whom God had promised would not see death until he saw the Christ, the consolation of Israel. Directed by the Holy Spirit, Simeon takes the Infant, flesh-and-blood Jesus in his arms and sings the *Nunc Dimittis*, acknowledging that he has seen the long-awaited Christ.

The congregation makes the same confession of the Christ's presence to save. As did Simeon, we also hold in our hands the body and blood of Jesus for our salvation. He is as present with us as he was for that faithful man in the temple courtyard long ago.

The Thanksgiving

<p>☩ <i>Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good.</i> ℟ <i>And His mercy endureth forever.</i></p>

"His mercy endures forever" is a praise of God throughout the Old Testament. There is a huge correspondence between this thanksgiving and the presence of God for the forgiveness of sins:

- Earlier, we witnessed it in I Chronicles 16:34,41, when the Ark of the Covenant (the seat of God's presence) is brought to the tabernacle.
- II Chronicles 2-6 chronicles the building of the temple. During the dedication of the temple in 5:13, the people sing this phrase and *it is then that the cloud fills the temple*. In 7:3,6 this is the praise of the people as fire from heaven consumes the dedicatory sacrifices and the glory of the Lord fills the temple once again.
- Earlier, we also looked at II Chronicles 20, where Judah is under attack. Mattaniah declares to Jehoshaphat the Word of the Lord, in part saying, "You will not *need* to fight in this *battle*. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD *is* with you" (20:17). Hearing this news, Jehoshaphat appoints a choir to accompany the army, and the choir sings "Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever" (20:21).
- In Ezra 3:11, the people sing to the Lord, "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Why? Because the foundation for the temple has just been laid, and the people rejoice that the Lord's house is being constructed once more.
- Several psalms contain the Post-Communion Thanksgiving in its entirety: Psalm 106:1b declares Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!* For His mercy endures forever. The psalm goes on to declare God's righteous acts of leading His people out of Egypt and through the desert, and praises Him for remembering His covenant.
- Psalm 107 begins the same way, then declares how God saves His people from death and feeds them. In the middle of this psalm, the people are bidden to exalt Him in the assembly of the people; it connects the goodness and presence of God to the worship of Israel.
- Psalm 118 begins and ends the same way, and repeats "His mercy endures forever" in verses 2, 3, 4. As we discussed with the Sanctus (the Benedictus), this psalm is messianic; the eternal mercy of God is in Christ.
- In Psalm 136, each verse concludes with "His mercy endures forever. The psalm praises the Lord for creation and for the Exodus, and the penultimate verse declares "Who gives food to all flesh, For His mercy endures forever" (136:25).
- In Jeremiah 33:11, the Lord declares that His oppressed people will declare, "Praise the LORD of hosts, For the LORD is good, For His mercy endures forever." Why? Because He will restore them and forgive their sins. How? By keeping His promise and sending "A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this *is the name* by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (33:15-16).

Time and time again, the mercy of God that endures forever is connected to His presence with His people, and specifically with the Incarnate Christ. Having just received the body and blood of our Lord for the forgiveness of sins, it is most appropriate that we make the same confession: His

mercy endures forever. After all, the Lord still grants mercy through the Lord's Supper, as He has promised He will do until the end of time.

☩ *As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup:*
℟ *Ye do show the Lord's death until He comes.*

This versicle and response is directly from I Cor. 11:26.

St. Paul writes these words just after He has recorded the Words of Institution; this, too, is a profound text that has far more meaning than first appears. Indeed, some take this text to mean that the Lord's Supper is merely a remembrance of Jesus' death, that it is simply a symbol and not a sacrament. However, remember that God's Word is living and active! When the Lord's death is proclaimed, the Gospel is proclaimed; and by the Gospel, sins are forgiven. Therefore, Paul is proclaiming that God forgives sins by the sacrament of Holy Communion! It is a means of grace.

Following v. 26, Paul then warns of judgment for those who commune unworthily, specifically warning against a failure to examine oneself or to discern the Lord's body. In addition to these reasons, after this study thus far, can we pose another one? It is reasonable and Scriptural to maintain that it is harmful for the impenitent sinner if he comes into the presence of God. As St. Paul declares in I Cor. 11, this is true regarding Christ's presence in Holy Communion

The Post-Communion Collect or Thanksgiving

The Post-Communion Collect serves as a thankful response for the gift of forgiveness granted in the Sacrament. Having received the forgiveness of sins, the Christian thanks the Lord and prays that he might not fall into unbelief and sin, and away from the faith that the Lord has bestowed upon him.

The first of the two options in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is the response of faith to the grace of God; now that the people of God have been forgiven, they have been set free from sin to live "in faith toward Thee and in fervent love toward one another."

The second gives thanks for the forgiveness granted in the Sacrament, then prays that the Lord might continue to preserve His children, as He has so promised; and that His children might continue to serve Him by His grace.

The Dismissal

The dismissal is composed of the Salutation, the Benedicamus, and the Benediction.

The Salutation

☩ *The Lord be with you.*
℟ *And with thy spirit.*

The Salutation is repeated for the third time in the service. The exchange that declares the presence of God in the service of the Word and in the service of the Sacrament is used once again, joyfully declaring that the Lord is present with His people.

The Benedicamus

☩ *Bless we the Lord.*
℟ *Thanks be to God.*

The *Benedicamus* is not from any certain Scripture verse, but rather a summary of our thankful response for all of the goodness of God. To bless is "to speak well of," and so we speak well of the Lord by proclaiming His mighty works (especially His Gospel) to all who will hear. The Christian is compelled to do so out of thankfulness for redemption.

Several times in the psalms, blessing the Lord is connected to many of the themes of Divine Service and the liturgy:

- *To the Word:*

I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons. (Ps. 16:7)

- *To the temple:*

My foot stands in an even place; In the congregations I will bless the LORD. (Ps. 26:12)
Behold, bless the LORD, All you servants of the LORD, Who by night stand in the house of the LORD!

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.

The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion! (Ps. 134)

- *To Presence and Deliverance:*

I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. (Ps. 34:1ff)

Bless the LORD, O house of Israel! Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron!

Bless the LORD, O house of Levi! You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!

Blessed be the LORD out of Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!

- *To angels and the hosts of heaven:*

Bless the LORD, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word.

Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure.

Bless the LORD, all His works, In all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!
(Ps. 103:20-22)

- *To Eternal Life:*

The dead do not praise the LORD, Nor any who go down into silence.

But we will bless the LORD From this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 115:17-18)

The Benediction

<p>☩ <i>The Lord bless thee and keep thee;</i> <i>The Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee;</i> <i>The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.</i> <i>R/ Amen, Amen, Amen.</i></p>
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The Benediction is taken directly from Numbers 6:24-26, given by God as the way that the priests were to bless the children of Israel. By these words, the priests put the name of God on the people for their blessing (6:27), for they were His people. As members of the new Israel, God's holy people saved on account of Christ, we receive this blessing at the end of the service.

Note the threefold structure of the Benediction; as we began in the name of the Triune God in the Invocation, so we go forth with His blessing. He blesses—well-speaks—us with His Word, and by that Word grants us faith and keeps us in the faith. He makes His face shine upon us, present with us for our good, for the sake of Jesus. (The “shining” of God’s face upon His people is an Old Testament phrase of His presence for their good; cf. Num. 6:25, Ps. 31:16, Ps. 67:1, Ps. 80:3, Ps. 80:7, Ps. 80:19, Ps. 119:135, Dan. 9:17). He lifts His countenance upon us—presence language again, and grants us His peace by giving us forgiveness for the sake of Jesus.

The people of God respond with a threefold "Amen." Yea, yea, it shall be so.

Part 4: Other...

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach,
that those ought to be observed
which may be observed without sin,
and which are profitable unto
tranquility and good order in the Church,
as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

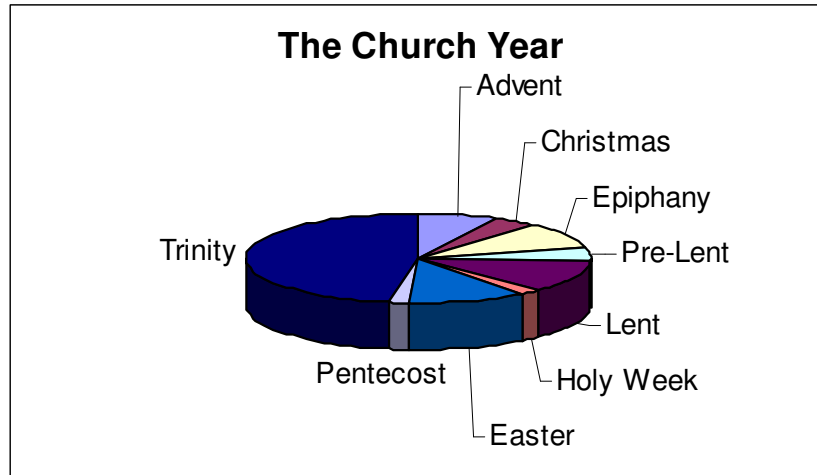
Nevertheless,
concerning such things,
let men be admonished
that consciences are not to be burdened,
as though such observance was necessary
to salvation.

Augsburg Confession XV:1-2

The Church Year

In Part 3, we examined the Divine Service line-by-line to learn about the structure of a single Sunday. However, Sundays do not stand alone, disconnected from the rest of the year; they are, in fact, part of a year-long liturgical calendar that ties all Sundays and church festivals together.

The purpose of the liturgical calendar is to teach. As worshipers go through the different seasons of the church year, different themes predominate. The lectionary is tied into this as well: A well-constructed lectionary will take the congregation through every major biblical doctrine in a year's time. The following table is a brief description of the church year, followed by some remarks.



The Half-Year of Our Lord

Advent

- The First Sunday in Advent
- The Second Sunday in Advent
- The Third Sunday in Advent
- The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Christmas/ The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord (Dec. 25)

- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day
- The First Sunday after Christmas
- The Second Sunday after Christmas

The Epiphany of Our Lord (Jan. 6)

- The Sundays after Epiphany (1-6)
- The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Last Sunday of Epiphany)

(Pre-Lent)

- Septuagesima Sunday
- Sexagesima Sunday
- Quinquagesima Sunday

Lent

- Ash Wednesday
- Invocavit: 1st Sunday in Lent

Reminiscere: 2nd Sunday in Lent
Oculi: 3rd Sunday in Lent
Laetare: 4th Sunday in Lent
Judica: 5th Sunday in Lent

(Holy Week)

Palmarum/Palm Sunday: 6th Sunday in Lent
Monday of Holy Week
Tuesday of Holy Week
Wednesday of Holy Week
Maundy Thursday
Good Friday
Holy Saturday/Easter Eve

Easter

The Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord
Easter Monday
Easter Tuesday
Quasimodogeniti: The 1st Sunday after Easter
Misericordias Domini: The 2nd Sunday after Easter
Jubilate: The 3rd Sunday after Easter
Cantate: The 4th Sunday after Easter
Rogate: The 5th Sunday after Easter
The Ascension of Our Lord (40 Days after Easter)
Exaudi: The 6th Sunday after Easter

Whitsunday/Pentecost

The Half-Year of the Church

**The Feast of the Holy Trinity
Sundays after Trinity (22-27 weeks)**

General Notes

The calendar is divided into two halves: The Half-Year of Our Lord and The Half-Year of the Church. The Half-Year of Our Lord presents to us the life of Christ: We begin in Advent with prophecies of His birth and the preparing of the way, see Him born at Christmas and made known at Epiphany. After the Transfiguration, we see Him trudge toward the cross throughout Lent, then die on Good Friday. Easter announces the Resurrection, followed by His Ascension and the birth of the Church on Pentecost. The Gospel lessons follow the life of Christ, and the other readings support the Gospel lessons.

Once the Church is born at Pentecost, the Half-Year of the Church begins with Holy Trinity Sunday. The lectionary readings address a variety of doctrines during these weeks, though one can often detect a subtle connection from week to week. For instance, as the church year enters into the last few weeks of the Half-Year of the Church, readings are likely to exhort the Church to endure times of trial, then speak of judgment on the Last Day.

Notes on Specific Seasons

Advent

Advent is the time of preparation in the church year before the celebration of Christ's birth. *Since all of the Old Testament prepares for the coming of the Savior, Advent preparation for Christmas is indeed significant.* During the Advent season, worshipers are likely to hear Old Testament

prophecies of the Savior's birth, as well as the New Testament stories that precede the birth of Jesus, such as the visit of the angel to Zechariah in the temple.⁹³

The color for Advent is traditionally purple, the color of royalty and mourning. It is appropriate on both counts: In Advent, we eagerly await the Prince of Peace, Jesus our King. However, even in the midst of anticipating Christmas, we soberly realize that Jesus is born so that He can go to the cross for us.

In recent times, some churches have adopted blue as the color of Advent; blue is apparently a color of preparation or expectation, though there is little historical precedent. This has had some controversy with it: Blue is also the traditional color for the Virgin Mary, and some contend that the use of blue is an attempt to elevate her status above that which the Lord would have her keep.

In any event, the message of Advent: The Savior is coming soon.

Christmas

After four weeks of preparation, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Christmas lasts twelve days (hence the twelve days of Christmas) until the Epiphany of our Lord. During this time, worshipers should hear Gospel lessons about Jesus' birth and childhood.

The color of Christmas is white, the color of joy and purity. The message, unequivocally, is that of the angels to the shepherds: Christ the Savior is born.

The Epiphany of Our Lord

The Gospels record Jesus' birth and a few stories of His childhood; the calendar reflects the same. Only 12 days after Christmas, The Epiphany of our Lord begins, teaching us about the ministry of Jesus; so important is this that, in the early Church, the two major festivals of the year were Easter and Epiphany, not Easter and Christmas. Traditionally, the first Sunday after the Epiphany tells us of the Baptism of Jesus; and it is then that He begins to go from town to town, declaring the Kingdom of God. During the Epiphany season, we hear stories that tell us Who Jesus is and what He does, even as the multitudes said to one another, "Who is this Man?"

The season of Epiphany ends with the Transfiguration of our Lord, when it is proven by His Father that Jesus is the Son of God. It is a time of light and a time of glory; thus, while the color for Epiphany is green (symbolic of life), the Sundays which celebrate our Lord's Baptism and Transfiguration are both white. Indeed, if the multitudes' question is "Who is this Man?", God the Father gives the answer at His Son's Baptism and Transfiguration, at the beginning and end of Epiphany: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).

After the Transfiguration, Jesus sets His eyes toward Jerusalem and makes His way to the cross to die. Thus we move from Epiphany to Pre-Lent and Lent as we follow Him to Calvary.

Christmas is always on December 25, so the dates of Advent and Epiphany are always set: Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas, and Epiphany begins 12 days after on January 6. However, the rest of the calendar is determined by the date of Easter, which moves around. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of Spring (the vernal equinox); therefore, it can fall anywhere between late March and late April. If there is a full moon at the

⁹³ In some lectionaries, you may be surprised not to hear, say, of the angel's visit to Mary in Luke 1. That's because this story, the Annunciation, has its own holiday on March 25.

start of Spring, Epiphany may only last one Sunday; if the moon is not full until late April, Epiphany can last six weeks.⁹⁴

Pre-Lent

Pre-Lent is made up of the three “gesima” Sundays: Septuagesima (70), Sexagesima (60), and Quinquagesima (50). These do not mean that there are exactly 70, 60 and 50 days toward Easter, but rather serve as general mileage markers along the way. Although the lectionary readings for these Sundays vary, the message is that although the Christian faces struggle along the way, salvation is his because Christ has suffered for him.

Varying between congregations, the color may be either green or purple, a carry-over from Epiphany or a precursor of Lent.

Lent

Lent comprises the forty days before Easter, excluding Sundays. As Jesus walks toward Calvary, we take up our cross and follow Him throughout these weeks; however, on Sundays, the Gospel lessons point us not to His passion but to His promised victory over sin. The Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Lent historically records the Temptation in the Wilderness, which—not coincidentally—lasted 40 days. (Thus Lent reminds us of Jesus’ active obedience on our behalf, as well as His passive obedience on the cross.)

The Sundays in Lent are known by their Latin names, named after the first phrase of the *Introit*: *Invocavit* (“He shall call upon Me”), *Reminiscere* (“Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies”), *Oculi* (“Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord”), *Laetare* (“Rejoice ye with Jerusalem”), and *Judica* (“Judge me, O God”). *Palmarum* is named for the palms of Palm Sunday.

The color for Lent is purple, again a symbol of royalty and mourning. On Palm Sunday, the King will ride into the city, only to wear a crown of thorns and die beneath the sign that declares He is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

During Lent, churches normally sing no hymns or canticles containing the word “Alleluia;” the church fasts from this expression of praise until it sings it on Easter morning. The *Gloria* is usually omitted as well: this is the joyous Christmas carol of the liturgy, and this joy is also reserved for the Easter celebration.

Some churches carry other traditions. For instance, a church with a large pipe organ may reduce the number of stops used each Sunday until only a thin melody is heard on Good Friday. On Easter Sunday, the organist literally pulls out all the stops and the organ explodes in an abundance of joy.

Holy Week

Holy Week is the climax of the church year, from which the rest of the church year derives its meaning. In these few days, Christians celebrate Christ the King’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), His institution of the Lord’s Supper (Maundy Thursday), His crucifixion (Good Friday), and His Resurrection (Easter Sunday).

Maundy Thursday is celebrated each year to remind us of the Lord’s gift of Holy Communion; although He is about to die, rise and ascend into heaven, He institutes the means by which He will still be body-and-blood present with His people until He returns in judgment. Even though the Last Supper is followed quickly by the agony of Gethsemane, the Maundy Thursday service is a service of joy, for here the Lord provides the Meal by which He is with us always, even to the end

⁹⁴In lectionaries that omit a Pre-Lent season (such as the ILCW 3-year series), the numbers are different: If there is a full moon at the start of Spring, Epiphany may only last four Sundays; if the moon is not full until late April, Epiphany can last ten weeks.

of the age. Churches diverge in how they celebrate: Some, recognizing that Jesus' betrayal happens that evening, retain the color purple and continue to omit the *Gloria in Excelsis*; at the end of the service, the altar may be stripped bare in preparation for Good Friday as the congregation and choir chant Psalm 22 or 51. Others, recognizing the joyful gift of Holy Communion, change the paraments to white and sing the *Gloria* during the service.

Good Friday is the climax of Holy Week, leading to the eighth day of Easter. Separated, neither has meaning: without Good Friday and the crucifixion, the price for our sins is not paid. Without Easter and the resurrection, we still have no hope. On this darkest of days, however, our salvation is won; it looks like defeat to the world, but it is on the cross that Jesus wins the victory over sin. The service is usually somber with the liturgical furniture stripped bare, and the Tenebrae service (service of darkness) is often used. However, the service does not end in despair; "It is finished" announces that sin is defeated and we are forgiven. Although they leave in somber silence, worshipers know that Easter is coming soon.

The service for Holy Saturday, when held, is set aside to celebrate two phrases of the Apostles' Creed: "buried," and "He descended into hell." The service declares the news that Christ descended into hell to declare His victory over sin and death; however, it is still a time of solemnity as Christians wait for news of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. The liturgical furniture remains bare, no candles are lit, and the organ is not used.

Easter

"*He is risen!*" shout the people of God on Easter morning, the Festival of the Resurrection of our Lord. Alleluias are sung, the organist pulls out all the stops, and the *Gloria in Excelsis* is returned to the liturgy. The liturgical furniture is adorned with white paraments, and flowers often bedeck the sanctuary. This is the oldest and highest festival of the church. Death has lost its sting, and the grave has no power anymore.

The Easter season lasts for forty days, the same number that the Lord remained on earth between His resurrection and ascension. The Sundays of Easter are each named for the *Introit*: Quasimodogeniti ("As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word"), Misericordias Domini ("The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord"), Jubilate ("Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth"), Cantate ("Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!"), and Rogate ("Ask and you will receive"), and Exaudi ("Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice!"). All of these *Introits* reflect the Lord's grace and blessings for His people, given for the sake of the crucified and risen Christ.

The Ascension of our Lord is always celebrated on the Thursday between Rogate and Exaudi, forty days after Easter Sunday. It is the coronation day of Christ the King. By ascending with both divine and human nature, He opens heaven to us. Sitting at the right hand of God, He has authority over all time and space. However, He is not confined to heaven: He remains present with His people by Word and Sacrament.

Pentecost

Ten days after the Ascension, and fifty days after Easter is the climax of the Easter season: Pentecost. This is sometimes called "the birthday of the Church," for it was on Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was sent to the apostles and they began to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. The color of Pentecost is red, symbolic of fire and blood (Christ's blood which cleanses us from sin, as well as the blood of the martyrs). The altar flowers may be bridal red roses—a reminder that the Church is the bride of Christ.

Trinity Sunday

Throughout the church year thus far, we have heard of the Father sending His Son, His Son dying and rising again, and His Son sending the Holy Spirit. On the Sunday after Pentecost, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Trinity, acknowledging the mystery of God's essence as one God and three persons. The color is white, rejoicing in the Triune God.

The Trinity Season

The Sundays after Trinity, the remainder of the church year, declare the work that the Triune God does in the Christian's life. The color is green, symbolic of life, and the Trinity season is actually divided into four parts, each surrounding a church festival.

Trinity I, the first five Sundays, continue to teach us of the Holy Spirit's work in the Church—how the Church originates by the work of the Spirit, and how the Spirit continues His work within the Church.

Trinity II, "St. John's Tide", encompasses the 6th through 18th Sundays, roughly following the festival of St. John the Baptist (June 24). John the Baptist declared, "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30); this is a short description of the Spirit's work of sanctification, the theme of Trinity II.

Trinity III extends from week 19 through 25, and draws its theme from St. Michael and All Angels (Sept. 29). The theme of this time is the Christian's struggle against Satan; fittingly, Trinity III ends at about the time the Church celebrates the Reformation.

Trinity IV is very short, no more than 2-3 Sundays in length. Positioned at the end of the church year, the theme is the "end times" and the hope we have of Christ's return. The year ends with the hope that the Savior is coming, even as it begins with the same hope at the start of the year with Advent.

Designs and Confessions: Church Architecture

A Bit about Worship Space

The truth that Christ is present with His people by His means of grace should have a profound influence on the place wherein He gathers His people; indeed, one can tell much about the confession of a church by the architecture and appointments of their worship space. Lee Maxwell sums it up nicely:

...The place where believers meet is important. After all, the church is also the assembly of people who hear the Gospel and use the Sacraments. Those people must assemble somewhere, and the character and purpose of their assembly require that the place of the assembly be appropriate for what is going on. It would not seem appropriate to serve a formal dinner with china and crystal on a picnic table. Likewise, the place where God's Word is heard and the Sacraments received should be in a setting that is conducive to that hearing and receiving and does not detract from it in any way.

The most important reason, however, for being concerned about where God's people are gathered is not because the nature of worship is corporate *but because it is sacramental*. Where the Gospel is rightly preached and the Sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, *there God has promised to be. This means that the place of worship is not just symbolic of God's presence but is the place where he is really present*. Where God is present demands the utmost of respect and reverence, as Moses experienced in the wilderness: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Accordingly, our churches today need to be shown that respect and, in turn, further that spirit of reverence. As one writer put it, "Well-appointed worship space helps thoughtful worshipers reflect and say, "We have been in the house of God today."⁹⁵

Some Vocabulary

Nave: The portion of the worship space in which the congregation sits. *Nave* is from the Latin for boat (as in "navy"), and early symbol of the Church: By the floodwaters of Holy Baptism (I Pet. 3:18-22), the people of God are rescued from death and brought into the ark of the Church.

Chancel: The chancel is the portion of the worship space in which the altar, lectern and pulpit are located. The font may be in this space as well, though not necessarily. Chancel is from the Latin word for "lattices" (*cancelli*), as latticework originally separated the nave from the chancel. This relates well to Song of Solomon 2:39, "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice." In Divine Service, the Bridegroom is present with His Church, though unseen.

Sanctuary: Sanctuary has two meanings. In general conversation, the sanctuary designates the entire worship space: nave + chancel = sanctuary. In a narrower sense, the sanctuary (*sanctus*, "holy"), designates the area immediately around the altar, marked by the Communion rail.

Lectern: A lectern is a "reading stand" (e.g., lecture), from which the Scriptures are read to the congregation. This is actually a later innovation to the liturgical furniture; some churches, following an older tradition, have removed the lectern and have the Scripture lessons read from the pulpit.

Pulpit: The word pulpit apparently is another bit of nautical terminology; it refers to the very front of a whaling ship from which the harpoon was cast. It is from here that the pastor proclaims the Word of God to the people in the sermon.

⁹⁵ Maxwell, Lee. *The Altar Guild Manual*. St. Louis: CPH, 1996. Page 29, emphases mine.

Some Diagrams and Designs

A diagram of a common Lutheran worship space may be found on page 29 of the student book.

One can see a similarity between this architecture and that of the Old Testament tabernacle (see diagram, p. 6). The nave corresponds roughly to the courtyard, the chancel to the Holy Place, and the Sanctuary (narrow sense) to the Holy of Holies, where the Lord is present with His people.

Note also the furniture of the worship space. Beyond seating for pastor and congregation, each piece of furniture represents a means of grace—each confesses the presence of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.⁹⁶ The pulpit and lectern are in place to symbolize the preaching and reading of the Word of God. The altar stands front and center because of the Lord's Supper, the climax of the Divine Service. The font, of course, is where the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is administered and received. It may be in the chancel; it may also be in the rear of the nave or the narthex to symbolize that we enter the Church through the waters of Holy Baptism.

Beyond these pieces of furniture, the chancel usually features candle stands. Like the tabernacle and temple lampstands, these candles remind us of the presence of God in our midst. The lighting of the candles by the acolytes is an important statement of what is about to happen in the Divine Service: the Lord is coming to be with His people for their good.

The architecture of a building is usually an indication of what the congregation confesses. For example:

- In a traditional Reformed style, the pulpit is placed front and center, obscuring the altar (if the altar is included). This is because the Reformed Church regards Holy Communion as merely symbolic; therefore, the principal focus of worship is upon the proclamation of the Word.
- The altar, originally freestanding, eventually was pushed back into the wall in the Middle Ages. The reason for that was because the Lord's Supper was misinterpreted to be a secret rite practiced by the priest on behalf of the people. Therefore, the priest kept his back to the people and consecrated the elements out of their sight.⁹⁷ In many churches today, the altar is freestanding so that the pastor can consecrate the elements while facing the people. This removes the misunderstanding that the pastor is conjuring some sort of sorcery. Facing the congregation, the pastor proclaims to them the Words of Institution, and they hear what the Lord is doing by that Word to be present with His people.
- In many evangelical churches today, the front of the worship space is a raised platform with very little furniture or artwork. This is purposeful, for it focuses all the attention on the speaker or preacher, wherever he may roam on the stage.
- Some modern churches are built in a circular or semi-circular fashion, so that those in the congregation are actually facing one another across the space. The intent of this style is to emphasize the community of those gathered, the corporate nature of worship.
- Some modern church sanctuaries are multi-purpose rooms with moveable and removable furniture. These rooms can be rearranged for different worship services, and all sorts of non-worship events may take place in the room throughout the week. This is often an economic

⁹⁶ TLH #467, "Built on the Rock the Church Shall Stand," is a marvelous testimony both to the presence of God with His people, as well as the purpose of church architecture and furniture. Verse 6 reads,

Here stands the font before our eyes, Telling how God did receive us;
Th' altar recalls Christ's sacrifice And what His table doth give us;
Here sounds the Word that doth proclaim Christ yesterday, today, the same,
Yea, and for aye our Redeemer.

⁹⁷ If you ever wondered...In consecrating the elements, the priest would utter the Words of Institution in Latin. "This is my body" in Latin is "hoc est corpus." *Hoc est corpus* slurred began to sound like "hocus pocus," which is where this expression for a magic trick is derived, as transubstantiation was thought to be a magic trick performed by the priest's authority.

move. However, it also teaches that worship is just one of many activities happening at that congregation.

- Some church buildings feature unique designs that make a bold statement. One instance is the chapel at Valparaiso University. The font is not located in nave or chancel; instead, the baptismal party must descend a spiral staircase to the font on a lower level. The purpose is to symbolize the death and resurrection that takes place in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). This author once visited an Episcopal Church in western Oregon, in which the walls of the nave were built with dark stone, while the chancel was designed with white marble, brilliantly lit. As the worshipers approached the rail for Holy Communion, they came out of darkness and into light.

Architecture teaches what a congregation believes. The key to remember is this: *When something is emphasized in a church’s architectural planning, something else is de-emphasized.* When something is declared to be important, something else is declared to be less important. In the examples above, what is played down as less important?

As with the liturgy, the architecture of a church should draw the worshiper’s attention to the real presence of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The Clothes Make...A Confession of Faith *Vestments and the Clothing of the Worshiper*

Vestments

The origins of the pastor's vestments are really quite ordinary; they are not based upon the clothing required for priests in the Old Testament (Ex. 28), nor are they borrowed from other religions. Rather, they developed out of the common clothing of the Roman Empire. On a daily basis, Roman citizens wore an inner tunic and an outer cloak. In Lutheran churches today, the pastor may wear a white surplice over a black cassock, equivalent of the tunic. Or, he may wear a robe called an alb, the equivalent of the inner tunic. In some churches, he dons another robe overtop the alb, called a chasuble, for the celebration of Holy Communion; this is the equivalent of the outer cloak. The pastor also wears a stole, a yoke of cloth with the color of the liturgical season.

The robes of the pastor serve three purposes. Vestments mark him as the "called and ordained servant of the Word"; while non-ordained assistants may wear an alb, the stole marks the pastor as one who is called into the Office of the Holy Ministry. Second, vestments conceal the man. When a pastor is vested, you cannot tell if he is wearing a suit by Sears or Gucci. One cannot be distracted by the flash of a tie or pattern of a shirt. When the pastor vests, it is a declaration that his person and personality are unimportant. He is there to proclaim the Word of God and to point to Christ, not himself: After all, it is Christ who speaks His Word in the midst of the congregation, not the pastor.⁹⁸ Third, by wearing the vestments that have been worn throughout the church's history, the pastor connects himself to the faith confessed by the one holy Christian and apostolic church. By his dress, he declares that he is not teaching anything novel, but is passing on the faith given by the Lord to His Church.

Although vestments have a rather ordinary beginning, symbolic meanings have been attached to them over time. The white alb normally covers a black clergy shirt, a reminder that our sin is covered by Christ's righteousness. The clerical collar is much the same; it, too, has common origin. However, it has been pointed out that the shirt is normally black except for the white collar at the throat—a reminder that while the pastor is a sinner, the Word he proclaims is the Word of God.

Congregational Clothing

What about the dress of the congregation? There is much talk today about informal dress, and many churches offer "blue jeans" or "come as you are" services. Pastors often hear that "the Lord doesn't care what we wear, since He is looking at our hearts." However, one does dress according to the event one is attending; a man will wear a tuxedo to a wedding and shorts to a barbecue, but not vice versa. When someone important is present, people usually dress accordingly.

In Divine Service, the Lord Himself is present with His people to save them from eternal death with the forgiveness of sins He has won on the cross. The presence of God should move us to dress in a reverent fashion, should it not?

That said, however, perhaps it is not the best route to insist on a dress code for worship; in this rears the ugly head of legalism. Rather, it is far better to continuously proclaim the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ who has died for the sins of the world. As people grow in faith, they will dress appropriately. Even then, one man's idea of reverent dress is different from that of another; it is best to remain relatively unconcerned about congregational attire.

⁹⁸ One might draw the analogy of judge presiding over a trial. A black robe and a desk hide all but perhaps the knot of his tie. He is there to be heard, not seen. His rulings are important, not his appearance or person.

Movement in the Presence of God
Why We Stand, Sit, Kneel, Turn, and More

In worship, positioning and movement should all point to the presence of Christ for the forgiveness of sins:

- The pastor faces the altar when he is confessing the creed with the congregation or praying on behalf of the congregation. He faces the nave when proclaiming God's Word, for he is called to declare it to the people present. There are other, intentional, liturgical movements as well. For instance, the pastor may intentionally walk to the baptismal font before declaring the Absolution to connect the two together: by absolution, the penitent sinner is restored to his baptismal grace.
- Those seated in the nave normally sit or kneel to receive the Lord's gifts; as the Lord kneeled and washed His disciples' feet, He serves forgiveness to His people in the Divine Service. In response to God's grace, the people rise to sing, pray, or speak.
- There are, of course, exceptions. If the congregation does not kneel to receive the Absolution, the people normally stand; it is a symbolic gesture on their part of respect for the present Lord and their unworthiness to receive such a precious treasure. Also, the congregation stands to hear and receive the Gospel; it is in the Gospel that they hear Jesus speak, and they rise for this lesson as they would when a dignitary entered the room.
- Some movements are quite technical. A pastor might always turn to the liturgical south during the service, (facing the altar, the right). This is because, in the Middle Ages, that is where an altar boy stood with the Bible; the minister never wanted to turn his back on the Holy Scriptures. The pastor may turn to the south each time as a reminder of faithfulness to the Word. He may also, at the end of the service, turn to the north; this completes the circle and announces the conclusion to the service.

Such movements are not obligatory. In other words, a pastor who does not turn to the south is not declaring his rejection of the Scriptures; nor is someone who sits through the Gospel lesson announcing a disrespect for the Lord. All of these movements are to assist in proclaiming that the Lord is present for the good of His people. If these movements become distractions—or are perceived as obligatory—they may need to be dispensed with for a time.

Appendix

Flow Charts of Doctrine and Practice

The effect of a church body's confession or denial of "justification by grace alone" and the Real Presence in the means of grace is by no means confined to their doctrines of salvation. Rather, all sorts of doctrines are affected. And where doctrine is affected, so is practice.

The next five pages present flow charts for five different subjects: faith, prayer, good works, worship and music. (These charts are suitable for copying for overheads, etc.) Hopefully, by examining the progression of thought on each page, the reader will better understand how different church bodies arrive at different conclusions about these important doctrines.

Faith

Protestant (Arminian)

Jesus has done everything to save me on the cross.



Now, all I have to do is believe it, and I will be saved.



Therefore, faith is the part that I have to do, the “believing it.” Faith, believing in God, is something that I come up with.



The proof of this is the Word of God: Acts 16:31 says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” God’s Word is informative: It tells me what to do.



Therefore, believing is up to me.

Lutheran

Jesus won salvation for me by dying on the cross.



Because I cannot believe by my own reason or strength, Jesus gives me forgiveness by the means of grace; by forgiving me, He also gives me faith.



Therefore, faith is not something I do, but it is a gift of God that enables me to trust His Word.



Acts 16:31 does say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” This is God’s Word, and God’s Word is *effective*: It accomplishes what it says. When God said, “Let there be light,” light came into being. When Jesus told the paralytic to rise and walk, the man was healed by Jesus’ speaking. When God in His Word says, “Believe,” He’s effecting faith in me. He’s enabling me to believe by His grace.



Faith, therefore, is a gift of God.

Prayer

Roman Catholic

God has given me grace in Baptism so that I can do good works to earn salvation.



Prayer is a good work that I can do.



Prayers may include thanksgiving, praise, and requests.



Therefore, God is pleased merely by the repetition of prayers.

Lutheran

God has made me His child and given me faith. His will is best.



Prayer is the breath of faith. God wants me to pray to Him as a child asks his father.



Prayers may include thanksgiving, praise, and requests.



God promises to answer prayers prayed in Jesus' name—according to His Word.



Therefore, I can study God's Word and thus know what He has promised. Then I can ask Him to fulfill those promises He has made.



Where God doesn't make specific promises, I pray "Thy will be done," knowing that God's will is best.



Because God's will is always best, prayer is not a device to try to change His mind or alter His will.

Reformed

I have become a child of God because I believe that Jesus has died for my sins.



Because I am a child of God, I have the opportunity to pray.



Prayers may include thanksgiving, praise, and requests.



Prayer is an opportunity to ask the Lord for things that I need.



As my faith grows stronger, I can discern what I need; not just by studying God's Word, but by examining my heart.



There are times when God doesn't make specific promises about situations, and doesn't make His will known.



In many of these cases, God is leaving the outcome to me. As long as I have enough faith, I will receive that for which I ask.

Good Works

Roman Catholic

God has given me grace in Baptism so that I can do good works to earn salvation.



Therefore, I must do good works.



Good works are motivated by the Law.

Lutheran

God has saved me solely by Christ's work. Our works have nothing to do with salvation.



As a Christian, anything I do against God's Law is a sin, a bad work. Anything I do in accord with God's Word is a good work.



Jesus has set me free from sin. Therefore, He has set me free to do good works.



I therefore will do good works not out of obligation, but out of thanks for what Jesus has done; not to earn freedom, but because I'm free.



(To do bad works—to sin—is wrong; this is what Jesus set me free from.)



Good works are motivated by the Gospel.

Reformed

Jesus died on the cross for me. I am saved because I believe it.



I know I have Jesus in my heart because I'm doing better than I was: I'm doing more good works than I was before.



To continue to be sure that I have Jesus in my heart, I must continue to do good works.



(If I stop doing good works—or do some bad ones, it therefore means that...I don't have Jesus in my heart? Or I'm moving in that direction.)



Good works are motivated by the Law.

Worship

What you believe determines how you worship; and how you worship determines what you believe. –Prosper of Aquitaine

Lutheran

I am certain of my salvation because God has done it all. Jesus died on the cross to win forgiveness for me.



Jesus gives me the forgiveness He won through the means of grace. As long as I am on this earth, I need this forgiveness on a continual basis.



The purpose of worship is Divine Service: Jesus comes and serves us by giving us forgiveness via the means of grace.



Therefore, the focus of worship is Christ and what He has done to save us, as well as the forgiveness He gives by His means of grace. If I am forgiven, I will go forth and do good works.



Repetition in the liturgy is not a bad thing, because it confesses that we are receiving these same gifts of God again and again—as we need to.

Protestant

Jesus died on the cross to take away my sins. If I believe that, I have Jesus in my heart.



I am certain of my salvation and that Jesus is in my heart because I am doing better than I was before. (see “Good Works”)



The purpose of worship is twofold, both having to do with good works.
1. The worship service itself is an opportunity for me to show my love and devotion for God; this is pleasing to Him, and assures me of my faith.
2. The worship service should encourage and empower me to go and do good works throughout the week.



Therefore, the focus of worship is to motivate me to go and serve.



Repetition in worship is not a good thing, because it gets old fast. When something gets old, it's harder to keep doing it with the enthusiasm and adoration that I need.

Music

What you believe determines what you sing; and what you sing determines what you believe. –Pauls of Boise

Lutheran

The certainty of my salvation lies in what Jesus has done for me. If I am forgiven, then I have faith, eternal life, and I am set free to do good works.



Music should back up what is true about salvation and worship. Therefore, the focus of music should be on the Lord and what He has done for us.



Therefore, the Lord should be the subject of music (the Doer), and we should be the object (the done-to). Rather than singing of our love for God, we should instead sing of God's love for us.



Not only does this accurately reflect Scripture, but there's another benefit: When we sing what is true about God, we are singing His *effective* Word. In other words, as we sing God's Word, the Holy Spirit is at work through that Word to increase our faith.



One more thought as to style: Because we are singing God's Word, God is present with us. Therefore, music should be reverent, for it is sung in the presence of God.

Protestant

Jesus has died on the cross to take away my sins. Because I believe this, I have Jesus in my heart. I am certain I have Jesus in my heart because I am living a Christian life.



Living a Christian life isn't easy. Along with worship, the purpose of songs should give me opportunity to declare my love for Jesus, and to inspire me to go and do good things.



Therefore, we should be the subject of the song (the doers), and God should be the object (the Done-to). Rather than singing of God's love for us, we should be singing of our love for God.



One more thought as to style: Because the purpose of music is to encourage me to go and live the Christian life, the style of music should be whatever motivates me. (And that means different styles for different people.)

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Some Additional Resources for Further Reading

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