

## An Introduction...

What is Lutheran worship?

Jesus speaks and we listen. His Word gives us what it says it will give us: faith, life, and salvation. And our faith, which comes alive through the Word of God, acknowledges God's gifts with eager thankfulness and praise. **We receive from Him;** and then return thanks! Our worship music is an obvious and important part of our thankfulness, because it expands and elevates our praise of our gracious God—the Giver of all good things.

As our worship continues, we say back to Him what He has said to us; in doing so, **we confess what is most true and sure.** We are His, for His name was put upon us with the water of our Baptism. We acknowledge this at the beginning of the service. Where His name is, He is present. And in His presence, we acknowledge that we are sinners, so we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given to us, and because we are freed and forgiven, we praise Him again as our great and gracious God. He chooses to make Himself known to us in the forgiveness of sins.

The rhythm of our worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gives His gifts, and together we receive and thank Him. Also, **we build one another up** as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our worship continues as Jesus gives us His own body and blood. Finally, His blessing moves us out into our calling, where His gifts find many ways to express themselves. We learn from His Word the best way to live.

His Word has prompted worship throughout the centuries. We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition. Each generation receives from those who went before; and, in making that tradition of worship its own, each generation adds the best of its own day to pass on to the next. In that way, our worship is a living heritage!

*Adapted from Lutheran Worship, CPH (St. Louis, 1982).*

# A Narrative And Scriptural Commentary

on

## Our Lutheran Worship

### PART ONE:

#### ✠ The Opening Hymn ✠

The high and holy worship of God is faith in Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh. Such faith is created and sustained by God's Word and service to us. In our worship, the Lord comes to us in His Word and Sacrament to bless and enliven us with His gifts. This service is not something that we do for God, but His service to us to be received in faith. Therefore it could be said that the liturgy is God's work: He gives, we receive.

The opening hymn reorients our hearts and minds. It acclimates us to God's rhythm. Through music and song our hearts are prepared to receive what God has to offer.

Scripture Readings: Exodus 15:1-18; John 4:20-26; Hebrews 8:1-6

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### PART TWO:

#### ✠ The Invocation ✠

From God's Word, we know that wherever God puts His Name, there He is to bless. In the Old Testament, the Temple was the place where God graciously caused His Name to be present.

For us Christians, God has put His Name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—on us in Holy Baptism. Our worship begins: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Every service is for the hallowing of the Lord's Name. God's name is holy, as the Small Catechism reminds us, “when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and we, as the children of God, also lead a holy life according to it.”

Scripture Readings: I Kings 8:27-30; Matthew 28:18-20; John 16:23;  
I Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 2:18; Colossians 2:9-10, 3:15-17

### PART THREE:

#### ✠ The Confession and Absolution ✠

We enter into the life of heaven only through the forgiveness of sins. To confess our sins is to speak the truth about our lives. God seeks that truth in the heart and on the lips. To confess our sin is to agree to God's just verdict that we have sinned against Him and so deserve only death and hell.

The truth of our sinfulness is answered by the truth of God's forgiveness for the sake of the suffering and death of His Son. From the lips of a pastor "called and ordained" as a servant-slave of the Word, we hear God speaking absolution, the forgiveness of sins. This is not because of the merits of the pastor, but only because of Jesus Christ. To that forgiveness, faith says, "Amen"—that is "Yes, it is true." As worshipers, our "Amen" is the great word of worship; it indicates that God's gift has been received.

Scripture Readings: Psalm 32:5; 51:1-16, 124:8; John 20:19-23;  
Romans 7:14-8:4; Hebrews 10:22-25; I John 1:8-10

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### PART FOUR:

#### ✠ The Psalm and Entrance Hymn ✠

In ancient times the entire congregation entered the church in a solemn procession, singing psalms and songs. We also enter upon the main part of our worship with the Psalm or entrance song. The Psalm is made up of God's own words, which sets the tone. It also may give the theme for the various Sundays and festivals of the year. Having received the Lord's forgiveness, we are glad to "enter His courts with praise and thanksgiving."

Making this entrance, we give God praise and thanksgiving. Therefore we lift our voices in song. In traditional worship this may be the *Gloria in Excelsis* which means "Glory be to God on high." In other settings, we lift our voices in hymns or other spiritual songs. In doing so, we join the angels of God who sang to the shepherds at Bethlehem.

Scripture Readings: Psalm 100; Matthew 21:6-11; Revelation 5 & 6

## PART FIVE:

### ✠ The Salutation and Collect ✠

The pastor works in the congregation as Christ's servant. The vestments he wears indicate that he is not speaking on his own, but as one sent and authorized to represent Christ Jesus. As the authorized representative of the Lord he says, "The Lord be with you." The congregation responds, "And also with you." Pastor and congregation are bound together in this salutation, or greeting, as the pastor begins to pray the Collect of the Day on behalf of the gathered congregation.

The Collect is a short prayer that "collects" in one short petition all that we are asking God to do for us on the basis of the Word, which we are about to hear read and preached.

Scripture Readings: Judges 6:12; Ruth 2:4; Ecclesiastes 5:1-3;  
2 Thessalonians 3:16; 2 Timothy 4:22

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## PART SIX:

### ✠ The Scripture Readings ✠

In Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul tells us that the Ascended Christ gave gifts to His Church: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers. These gifts are seen in the Divine Service as we hear God's Word read and proclaimed.

First, we hear from a Prophet in the words of the Old Testament Reading. After the Scripture is read, we hear, "This is the Word of the Lord." The Lord's Word is then embraced when the congregation responds in thanksgiving: "Thanks be to God." In this way, the Church confesses the Bible reading for what it is: the Holy Word of God.

Next, we hear from an Apostle in the words of a New Testament Epistle. From the Apostle we are given words that help prepare our hearts to hear the voice of Jesus and instruct us in our daily lives. Therefore, this serves as a "bridge of praise" that links us to the life of Christ.

Finally, we hear from an Evangelist in the words of the Holy Gospel. In the Holy Gospel, we are given the Word of Life, Jesus Christ. The congregation acknowledges the Lord's presence in His Gospel by standing. We may also mark this reality by repeating the words of Peter, "Hallelujah! Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

Scripture Readings: Psalms 113-118; John 6:67-68; Acts 2:42  
Ephesians 4:11; Jude 3; Revelation 19:1-6

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## **PART SEVEN:**

### **✠ The Hymn of the Day, Sermon, and Creed ✠**

Following the readings, our praise continues in the Hymn of the Day, which is our sung confession of the faith. As the Word of God lives in us it brings forth songs of faith and love. This hymn reflects the particular theme of the Scripture readings which we have heard.

In continuity with the Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists, the pastor stands in our midst to deliver the Lord's message of Law and Gospel in the sermon, explaining and applying the Scripture we just heard. The pastor is God's appointed mouthpiece in the congregation. Through him the Chief Shepherd's voice sounds forth to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify His flock.

Having been taught the Word of God, we confess our faith in His Name. The Creed is how we say back to God what He has first said to us. In the Creed, we acclaim the truth of the Triune God and His work of salvation, accomplished for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Since the Creed is a summary of the faith, in confessing it we are saying "Amen" to the main content of the entire Gospel: our salvation is possible only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Scripture Readings: Luke 10:16, Colossians 3:16

## **PART EIGHT:**

### **✠ The Offering ✠**

Having received from the generosity of the Father who is the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift, we now give of the gifts which we have been given. Following the pattern of the church in 2 Corinthians 8-9, the congregation collects gifts to support two things: the proclamation of the Gospel and works of mercy among those in need. The Offering symbolizes the “spiritual worship” of Christians and is offered in response to God, as the Holy Spirit unites us in an act of fellowship.

Scripture Readings: Psalm 51:10-12; Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 8-9

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## **PART NINE:**

### **✠ The Prayer of the Church ✠**

God's Word is always primary in worship. We speak only as we are spoken to. Gathered in Jesus' Name, we bring our petitions and thanksgivings before Him. These prayers grow out of hearing His Word. This prayer is called the Prayer of the Church. In it the Priesthood of All Believers does its priestly work of making “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all men, for kings and for all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.”

Scripture Readings: I Timothy 2:1-6

## PART TEN:

### ✠ The Preparation for Holy Communion ✠

Drawn toward the gifts of Jesus' Body and Blood, our hearts are lifted up in thanksgiving and praise. The *Sanctus* brings together the song of heaven's angels in adoration of the Holy Three-in-One and the acclamations of Palm Sunday: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." We join in this eternal praise and adoration of the Triune God with "the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven."

The Lord's Prayer, the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples to pray, is our "table prayer", which we use to prepare ourselves to come to the Lord's Table.

Scripture Readings: Lamentations 3:41; Psalm 50:14, 69:30, 86:4, 100:4;  
Matthew 6:9-13, 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; Luke 11:2-4, 21:28; John 12:4;  
Ephesians 3:14-15; Hebrews 13:21; Revelation 1:6

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## PART ELEVEN:

### ✠ The Words of Institution, *Pax Domini*, and Distribution ✠

The pastor speaks the Lord's own word; through these words God has chosen to give and bestow the Body and Blood of Christ. The Sacrament of Jesus' Body and Blood is the vehicle for peace. Showing them His wounds, the Risen Lord declared His peace to His disciples on Easter Evening. That same peace is given with the Lord's Body and Blood.

We come to the Lord's Table spiritually hungry and thirsty and He feeds us with His Body and refreshes us with His Blood. It is the Lord's Supper. As Martin Luther said, "Our Lord is at one and the same time chef, cook, butler, host and food."

Scripture Readings: Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 11:23-26;  
Ephesians 2:13-17; I Peter 1:19-20

PART TWELVE:

✠ The *Nunc Dimittis* and Closing Prayer ✠

Having received the Lord's Body and Blood for our salvation, we go in peace and joy singing Simeon's song from St. Luke, chapter 2.

Before we leave the Lord's Table, we give thanks, asking that the saving gift of Jesus' Body and Blood would have its way in our lives, strengthening us in faith towards God and fervent love toward one another. Holy Communion draws us outside of ourselves to faithfully love Christ and our neighbor.

Scripture Readings: I Chronicles 16:1-10; Psalm 107:1; Luke 2:29-32

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PART THIRTEEN:

✠ The Benediction and Closing Hymn ✠

The Name of the Lord is the beginning and the end of the our worship service. We are again marked with the Lord's Name in the Benediction—that word of God's blessing from Numbers 6, in which He grants us His grace and peace. With the Lord's Name sealed on us in Holy Baptism we were drawn together. Once again, with that same Name, He sends us back into the world. He sends us to the places of our various callings to live by the mercy we have received. We are to be living sacrifices to His glory and for the good of our neighbor .

Scripture Readings: Numbers 6:22-27; Romans 12:1-2

