

The Divine Service

Our Lutheran Heritage of Worship

Bulletin Inserts

Introduction

These bulletin inserts were originally written by Pastor David Miller for use at Trinity Lutheran Church, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This committee received requests for work of this nature, and we thought of these right away. Pastor Miller gave us permission to adapt and expand his work, and these are a result of that endeavor. They begin with worship in general, then the Divine Service in general, followed by the various parts of the Divine Service, and conclude with visual aspects of worship and aids to worship. They may be downloaded, copied, and used as you see fit. Biblical citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version. By using these, may you and yours gain deeper understanding and appreciation of our Lutheran heritage of worship.

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Worship (Part I)

We all have reasons for worshiping, whether it's giving God thanks for what He's done in our lives, or for fellowship with others in the faith, or just because it's the right thing to do. Whatever the reason, worship is mainly about the Lord's Church coming together to receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament. The scripturally-based Lutheran teaching about the Church is that it "is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly." (AC VII) God's nature is to give, so He visits us to deliver the benefits of His greatest gift, His crucified and risen Son, Jesus Christ. The forgiveness, life and, salvation that Christ won for us sinners on the cross is meted out to us in the Word, that is, through absolution, preaching, and the Lord's Supper. We receive the good things that the Lord provides because they keep us safe in His care and sustain us throughout our earthly life. God gives us a break from our daily labors just to receive His free gifts. Jesus is our Sabbath rest, as He says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) The Lord grants us a Sabbath rest from our effort, so we may receive the result of His perfect work done for us. He earned this by His own Sabbath rest on the seventh day, in the tomb, and gives it to us in altar, pulpit, and font. So whatever your personal reason is for worship, it is all about God's service to you. This is why it is called the Divine Service. He graciously gives you new life in Him again and again, filling you up with His overflowing goodness, which spills over to others and carries you through another week in the world.

Worship (Part II)

Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Matt. 11:28; Hebrews 4:1- 11). This explains why we worship on Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection. As a Sabbath rest, we drop everything and come to be served by God Himself. We receive passively because we have nothing to offer Him, but He offers us so much. He cleans up our messes from the week before and fixes our lives with the forgiveness of sins, given through Word and Sacrament. These gifts are important for they tell us that, in spite of a world that says we don't matter, the Lord of all does care for us, and that makes us special. On our deathbed, when everything fails and nothing is of value anymore, these gifts of God transform us from lowly sinners into glorious saints. With this confidence, we can go through our lives with joy and peace, knowing that God sets right our lives, lives that have gone so terribly wrong. We rest in this assurance! How does this happen? How does God come to us and deliver such gifts? His Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12), always at work on us. He convicts us of our sins and at the same time delivers an even greater measure of forgiveness for our sin. Jesus, the very Word made flesh (John 1:14), visits us through the Word heard in absolution, Scripture, and preaching, and in the visible Word of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through these means, Jesus is there to be seen and touched, in with and under the Bible, water, bread and wine, and delivers His grace to us. The Divine Service is purposely designed, as Scripture tells us (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Luke 24:32,35), to emphasize the gifts of His presence and pardon through Word and Sacrament. This is why we worship using God's Word. If you look at each part of the service, you will find Scripture references for everything. If you have the Word of God, you have the Word made flesh, Jesus, and His gifts. He comes to us now and always through such means; we have the living and abiding Word of God which remains forever. This Word is the good news that is preached to you (I Peter 1:23-25). This same Jesus comes to us today. He covers us with Himself in Baptism, and puts Himself into us through the hearing of His Word and the eating of the Lord's Supper, so that we may be like Him: living, active, and eternal. Thanks be to God!

Worship (Part III)

The Word of the Lord is living, active, and remains forever (Hebrews 4:12, I Peter 1:23-25). It is a Word that is alive and breathing, always doing for us what it says by forgiving us and giving us life and salvation. The Word does this because it is none other than Christ Himself, and He is the only source of abundant grace (John 12:14). He acts on us when we join Him in the depths of the baptismal font, hear His Word preached from the pulpit, and have His very life run through our veins in His body and blood, consumed at the altar (Romans 6, Romans 10:17, I Corinthians 10:16). If you have this real Jesus, present and visible, then you also have heaven, sainthood, and access to God the Father right before you every Lord's day. How can this be? Christ embodies the Kingdom to come; His Church triumphant is wherever He is. For we are His body, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (Matthew 3:2, 4:17; John 14:6; Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12:12,27; Ephesians 5:29; Colossians 1:24).

This means that heaven overlaps with this congregation every time our Lord steps in to deliver His Word to us, and wraps up that same Word in water, bread and wine. Heaven joins earth as we are ushered into His presence. This is why many churches have a depiction of the risen Christ over the altar to remind us of His true presence with us (Matthew 28:20). This is why pastors and assistants vest in white to remind us that we are included with the host of the faithful departed, who are adorned in their heavenly baptismal garments (Revelation 7:9). This is why we take part in the conversation of heaven, joining their worship as we sing as the heavenly choirs sing (Luke 2:14; Revelation 5:12-13, 19:5-9; Isaiah 6:3). Everything that we do in worship proclaims boldly and constantly that the Lord is physically present with us to deliver His gifts in Word and Sacrament. Anything that does not strongly and clearly proclaim this truth has no place in our worship.

Our Lord, and heaven itself, are only concerned to forgive us poor sinners and make us real saints, human beings of value and worth. Through grace the living and active Word gives us new life, life to its fullest and without end. We can then depart from our Lord's Divine Service each week with the peace which the world cannot give, because that peace has been given to us by none other than the eternally living Word Himself, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God!

Worship (Part IV)

Why do you think God created the world? Does He have low self-esteem and need to hear how great He is? St. John tells us that God is love (I John 4). Love is at His core, it is His very essence. And because love does not seek its own gain, but looks outward to serve others, God created the universe and everything in it, in order to have an object for His affection. This is why God waits on you hand and foot in His sanctuary during the Divine Service, in which He delivers His gifts to you in Word and Sacrament. The gifts of love that you receive flow from the greatest gift ever given, Jesus Christ Himself (John 3:16). This gift just keeps on giving, as He who showed love for you by laying down His life for your sake, shares His own holiness and life with you today (John 15:13). Could a greater gift ever be given?

As we understand what happens in worship, God serving us with the gifts of Christ, it is natural to have a response of thanks and praise. But what is true praise? How do we define a "praise service," a "praise band," a heart of praise. The Bible helps us find our answer, especially in Psalms 9, 22, 98, 100, 117, 146, and 147. They not only praise God because He is holy, worthy, mighty, exalted, and so forth, but they say *why* He is to be praised. He is ascribed praise for His mighty deeds in saving His people. Look, for instance, at Moses' song after the exodus (Exodus 15), or at Hannah's song (I Samuel 2:1-10), or Zechariah's Benedictus (Luke 1: 68-79), Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), or Simeon's Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32). They don't merely say how great God is, but give us reasons why He is a great God. God saves His people! We join in their canticles of praise because we share in the same story of salvation.

In the Divine Service we see, taste, touch, smell, and hear God's greatest act of salvation: Christ's crucifixion and resurrection to free us from slavery to sin and death, and to give us freedom, holiness, and eternal life. A true praise song is one that not only mentions how awesome Jesus is, but why he's awesome, that is, what He has done for us. Think about it, what is the best way to sing someone's praise? You could flatter them to their face, but it's much better to go and tell someone else about their great deeds. This is why it is the greatest form of praise to our Lord to share His wondrous works, His holy Gospel, with others, as well as with our own burdened hearts. God does not seek flattery. He is most honored when you and others receive His gifts. This is why all worship is "praise worship!" What could be more packed with praise than the Divine Service, in which you not only proclaim His mighty acts of salvation, but also receive the fruits of those very acts through Baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper? Christ's death and resurrection is applied to you each and every time the Lord gives to you. So show true praise to God

by receiving His gifts of salvation and sharing what you have received with others. This is most pleasing to God. He loves to serve, He loves to give, and He loves to love!

Worship (Part V)

As we finish our brief look at the true meaning of worship, we turn to Dr. Norman Nagel, former professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He gives us a great summary of the subject in his introduction to the hymnal *Lutheran Worship*, 1982, as follows:

“Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver, God. Saying back to Him what He has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is His name, which He put upon us with the water of Baptism. We are His. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where His name is, there He is. Before Him we acknowledge that we are sinners, and we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given us, and we, freed and forgiven, acclaim Him as our great and gracious God as we apply to ourselves the words He used to make Himself known to us. The rhythm of worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gives His gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build each other up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink. Finally His blessing moves us out into our calling, where His gifts have their fruition. How best to do this we may learn from His Word, and the way His Word has prompted His worship through the centuries. We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition. Each generation receives from those who went before and, in making that of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day – the living heritage and something new.”¹

¹ Lutheran Worship: 1982

The Divine Service (Part I)

The story told in the Divine Service is about the real world in which we live. This real world was created by God as good and right, but became terribly wrong. Our sins are evidence that this world has been infected with a virus from which we cannot escape. Everyone is able to see this evidence, especially in those who suffer emotional and physical pain from the consequences of sin, or in those broken by violence and tragedy, by sickness and death. Only God is able to make right what has gone wrong. He loved us so much that He was willing to send His son from heaven into our world in order to bear all our burdens – even to the point of death.

Hanging on a cross, Jesus shows the Father's mercy for us. His death makes right what had gone wrong, releasing our fallen world from its captivity to darkness and death. His suffering and death was traded for our life. Jesus the Creator entered into our creation as a creature for one purpose: to make all things new. From the moment of His conception and incarnation, the world has never been the same. Jesus came to live among us to show how God first intended us to live when He created us in His own image. That is why Jesus' journey took Him from heaven to this world and ultimately to the cross. Jesus experienced the full tragedy of our fallen humanity, becoming sin for us, so that He might reverse sin's curse and make right what had gone wrong. Jesus entered into this messy world of our making in order to be faithful even unto death and restore our flesh to God's image, making us whole. The empty tomb testifies that death could not hold Him. He has been raised from the dead. As those who have received the benefits of Christ's suffering and death, we also will live with Him forever in heaven.

The world can never return to the state it was before Jesus entered our cosmos in human flesh. God be praised! Therefore, the world's story cannot be told without Jesus' conception, birth, life, death, and resurrection at the center of that story. Now and forever the world and its story are marked by His Incarnation. As we confess in the Apostles' Creed, the very same flesh-and-blood Jesus who was "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father" continues to be present in His Church *in the Church's worship*. Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is now present among us in the preaching of the Gospel and the sacramental life of the Church. In order to tell the world its story, we must enter into the mysteries of Jesus' real presence and realize that Jesus, God-and-man, continues to be present among us in His flesh, telling us the story of a world made new in Him.¹

¹ Arthur A Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (10-11)

The Divine Service (Part II)

For Christians, life is a pilgrimage from Baptism to death, which is the entrance into eternity. When Christians put on Christ in Baptism, we begin our journey to a destination of full communion with Christ in heaven. In the baptismal font, Christ's story becomes our story. As we journey through life, we live under the cross where, through daily repentance and forgiveness, we die and rise with Christ in our baptismal lives. We are continually living in Christ as we hear His holy Word and feed upon His holy food, which will sustain us on the way. In Word and Sacrament, we hear the story of the world. That story is not some inert fact. The very telling of the world's story in Word and Sacrament brings us right into the story and changes us. Our pilgrimage leads us inevitably to our physical death, which is an entrance to full communion with Christ in His heavenly home. The goal of the journey is to live in Christ's presence forever and to feast at His table for eternity. The Christian pilgrimage is an incarnational life in Christ because from the moment we are baptized we are joined to Him and to His life, for He dwells in us and we dwell in Him.

As we journey from Baptism to death, we are accompanied by the song of the Church. Our response to God's story is sung through liturgical hymns. The liturgy takes us on a journey with Jesus from His birth at Christmas as we sing the Gloria in Excelsis, the hymn of the angels, to His death in Jerusalem as we sing about the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We also travel with Jesus during the Church year that begins with the celebration of His birth in Bethlehem, climaxes at Easter with His death and resurrection, and continues at Pentecost with the ongoing life in Christ as the Church, the body of Christ. To live as a Christian in the world is to be united to Jesus Christ, the source of all life, who cleanses us from our sins to make us a fit dwelling for His presence.

In order to tell the world its story, we must proclaim that in our liturgy of the Word and Sacrament the Creator of all things unites us to Himself for eternity. This life of communion with Jesus begins at the font and is sustained by Word and Sacrament every Sunday. His suffering and resurrected flesh restores our impure and unclean flesh to wholeness and wellness. Every baptismal font reminds us that we are washed from our uncleanness and have been given a new identity that defines our life by Christ's life – a life of forgiveness. Every pulpit reminds us that Christ manifests Himself in the Divine Service as He speaks to us about our new life in Him – a life of freedom from bondage. And every altar reminds us that our story is one of suffering and sacrifice, but that the story ends with resurrection and new life delivered to us in the body and blood of our Lord.¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service (11-12)

The Divine Service (Part III)

Our distinct Lutheran theology of worship comes to us from the New Testament liturgical structures of Word and Sacrament. What Christian worship is could be described from either the perspective of the Christian assembly or from the perspective of God. In most descriptions of worship, one hears the Church's perspective, that is, the Church gathers to praise, give thanks, and glorify God because of faith that grasps hold of the gifts of God in Jesus Christ. *Worship* is an appropriate word to describe our response to God's gracious activity in Jesus Christ, for worship defines our perspective, what we do in view of what God has done. Worship, then, would describe our reverence and praise, our service and adoration.

However, this description of the Christian community's communal activity on Sunday goes against the grain of Lutheran confessional theology. Lutherans seldom begin their theology from below, from man's perspective, but from above, from God's perspective. Martin Luther and the Reformation helped us to see that what is first and foremost in our worship is not our service and sacrifice to God, but His service and sacrifice to us. The gifts of Jesus are hidden in the simple means of water and Word, bread and wine. We join a world outside ourselves by receiving gifts from heaven in the flesh of Jesus and submitting ourselves to the great mystery that heaven comes to earth through this bodily presence of our Savior. We sometimes think of heaven abstractly, as somewhere "up there," but heaven is wherever Jesus is. Because Jesus is present among us in the gifts of Word and Sacrament, then heaven itself is present among us. It is the world of "angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven."

This mystery of heaven on earth is a biblical theology of worship. God does not need our worship and praise and service. But we do need His service, His presence, and His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Whatever praise we give to God, whatever honor is due His name, is our response to God's service to us.¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (16-17)

The Divine Service (Part IV)

What is significant in the worship of the Old and New Testaments, of Israel and the Church? Foremost would be the gathering around the presence of God, who offers Himself to His people. All the Old Testament saints gathered for worship to stand in the presence of God and to receive from God His Word, His direction, His guidance. God's presence was always tied to His saving intentions, for God was always present to save His people from their sins. The Israelite places for worship were houses of prayer for all the nations where they petitioned God on behalf of the world to "Hear us!" and to visit them with salvation.

Before the fall, the life of our first parents in the Garden of Eden was a life of worship. Adam and Eve were created to behold the glorious presence of their Creator in His creation and to worship Him. The essence of this worship is the response of the people of God to the presence of God, but the response is always dependent on the presence and on the blessings that proceed from that presence. When the virus of sin infected the world, our first parents were cast out of the garden. Their access to God would no longer be direct. The Old Testament is the account of God paving the way for the promised Messiah, who would reconcile the world to Himself and bring in a new creation. It's about access to God and His presence.

The entire Old Testament cultic system of sacrifices pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Messiah in a violent death for the sins of the world. The prophet Isaiah described it this way: "His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the children of mankind – so shall He sprinkle many nations." (Isaiah 52:14-15) The elaborate Passover liturgy that marked the height of Israel's worship was molded by the presence of the One who would end death by the sacrifice of His very own Son for sin.

Israel's worship was centered in God's presence and therefore in God's holiness. This holy presence attracted the people to God because it was the source of their salvation, but it also repelled them because they knew how dangerous God's holy presence was for those who were not worthy to enter it. Moses understood the consequences: no one could look upon God without the risk of death. Moses could only approach God's presence in the burning bush with his face covered and sandals removed because he was on holy ground (Exodus 3:2-6). God's presence on Mt. Sinai was so dangerous that He warned Moses, "Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death." (Exodus 19:12) Even the Ark of the Covenant as the place of God's presence was so powerful that it could strike down entire armies that looked upon it (I Samuel 6:19). When David had the ark carried into the hill country of Judah and oxen bearing the ark stumbled, Uzzah, a son of Abinadab, was struck dead for

reaching out and touching the ark, though he intended to keep it from falling (II Samuel 6:5-7).¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service (17-18)

The Divine Service (Part IV A)

God set apart one of the tribes of Israel, the Levites, to mediate God's presence for the people with rituals of cleansing that prepared them to enter God's presence worthily. This is why there are so many boundaries in the temple in Jerusalem, for one must be worthy to enter God's presence. Even in the New Testament, the presence of God through the words of the angel Gabriel caused Mary to be afraid (Luke 1:30), and Peter also was afraid to stand in Jesus' presence at the great catch of fish

(Luke 5:8-10). Both the angel Gabriel and Jesus proclaimed words of absolution when they said, "Do not be afraid," for they were telling Mary and Peter that they were worthy to stand in God's presence without perishing. For both the Old and New Testaments, the words ring true: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31)

The presence in the world of the Word made flesh (John 1:14) marks the redemption of the world. With the incarnation, worship is no longer the people of God gathered in expectation and hope for the salvation soon to be revealed. Rather, worship is the celebration of the presence of salvation that has broken through in Jesus Christ and now permanently resides in the world. Salvation has come *now* – it is here *today*. The entire creation receives now the benefits of the new, greater Second Adam who has come to re-create, renew, and redeem.

From the day of Pentecost, the apostles celebrated the presence of the crucified and risen Lord among them through their "teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread." (Acts 2:42) The early Church was a Eucharistic community gathered to commune with Jesus by hearing His Word and by receiving His body and blood. Although the early Church expected the Lord to return at any time, they were, in fact, living in the presence of end-time blessings in their simple liturgy of Word and Sacrament. The same holds true for us today. If salvation is here because Jesus Christ is present in our worship forgiving sins, then the Lord may return today, tomorrow, or in fifty years. The time does not matter because we have now the blessings of the *not yet*. The blessings for which we wait are ours, even though these blessings have not yet come to us completely. These blessings we receive by faith through Word and Spirit. By faith we enter His presence as unworthy sinners confessing our sins, cleansed by His blood through the forgiveness of sins. By faith we receive the blessing of the *not yet* even *now* in our ears when we hear God's Word read and preached. By faith we receive these blessings in our mouths as we eat His body and drink His blood. By faith we are called to His Church where we are surrounded by His saints and receive Christ bodily in ear and mouth. This is participation in Christ's flesh in a sinful world where there is suffering, tragedy, and death. We are not fully home yet, for that will come only when we enter into full communion with Christ at death or at His coming again in glory.¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service (18-19)

The Divine Service (Part V)

Early Christians believed that Jesus, the crucified and ascended Lord, was present with them through Word and Sacrament. This biblical eschatology is missing in many discussions about worship and liturgy today. In our liturgy we join all saints in one worshiping assembly because there Jesus Christ is present both in heaven and on earth. The saints in heaven and the worshiping congregation on earth manifest their unity in the one liturgy. In the liturgy the Church tells the world that its story is an eternal one because the presence of Jesus Christ, the eternal One, now dwells in the world.

The liturgy places us on a historical and liturgical line through God's great, objective, cosmic act of justification in Jesus Christ. We now have the same status in the kingdom of God as both the prophets of old and the saints in glory. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, and, with Christians everywhere, we rejoice in their presence. They are standing with us and joining their voices with ours in one glorious liturgy. The song of heaven is "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8) The song of the Lamb is "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and You have made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

Inaugurated eschatology, then, heightens the anticipation of the consummation in Christ's second coming. Following the New Testament pattern, worship is decidedly communal – not individualistic as is so much worship today. Individualism has become a core value of today's culture. The biblical culture of Jesus and the apostles would have had trouble recognizing their faith wrapped in the garb of modern individualism. At the time of our Lord, a person's identity came not from within, by what a person felt about oneself or one's deeds or accomplishments. Rather, a person's identity came from the outside, by the community. First-century Christians would not know where to begin with the individualistic worship of our world with its focus on our response to God, on our praise and thanksgiving, and not on the gifts given and received by the community of believers – the Body of Christ, His Church. In fact, when Paul addressed Christians in the congregations he founded, he seldom addressed individuals but rather spoke to communities whose identities came from their common confession of Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead. The communal character of our worship is not merely restricted to those in the congregation whom we see. Wherever Christ is bodily present in Word and Sacrament, there also are all the saints who have died and risen in Christ. They join us in our worship.¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (20-21)

The Divine Service (Part VI)

Lutherans, like the early Christians, believe that Christ is bodily present through Word and Sacrament, offering His people the gifts of heaven. The liturgy is, first and foremost, the activity of God who is serving us with His gifts. But it is also the Christian assembly whose right and privilege it is to stand in God's presence and receive His gifts for the sake of the world. Christians are agents of God in the world, for no one else in the world could do this service! And as Christians respond to the Word and the Sacraments, they respond in Christ, that is, their songs of praise, their prayers, and their confession of faith are not their own, but they are from the Christ that is in them, responding back to the Father through Him. And so both the gifts given and the gifts responded to are in Christ.

Here we see the origin of Luther's word for worship, *Gottesdienst*, God serving the world with His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Word and Sacrament. The liturgy is the context in which God acts to save His people and in which God's people respond. First, they receive the gifts God pours upon the world through the Christian liturgy, then, as representatives of the world, they respond to the gifts in acts of worship. The liturgy is where God is present in Christ to save us from sin, death, and the devil. This definition of liturgy may well have been endorsed by Luther, whose sole principle in reviewing the liturgy was justification by grace through faith.

Luther's reforms could also be described by the criteria of faith and love. Here again are expressed the two different perspectives on worship. When described in terms of justification, it is from God's perspective, what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, His objective acts that are present and proclaimed in the liturgy. The supreme expression of justification is in the liturgy. If our liturgies are to be Lutheran, they must be understood in the context of justification and justification in the context of the liturgy. God's solution to the fallenness of creation is now present in the Christian assembly. The end is here and celebrated because Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, is present offering the gifts of the wedding feast for His bride, the Church, through His teaching at the table and His presence in the meal. God proclaims to the world that the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is present among us through Word and Sacrament.¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (23)

The Divine Service (Part VII)

There is a common assumption today that the liturgy must reflect the common language and ethos of the current culture. If this is true, then liturgies will veer toward the pop culture in which we live. These culturally devised liturgies are at times exciting and entertaining, but are not transcultural. At most, they will give only immediate satisfaction. These liturgies then become just another expression of the culture's malaise, a feel-good, shallow, artificially uplifting sentimentality.

Furthermore, focusing on the centrality of the worshiper's experience in contemporary liturgies runs contrary to our Lutheran understanding of the hiddenness of the Kingdom in the world in which we live. The Church's liturgy is a humble expression and demonstration of the nature of the Kingdom. No matter how difficult our hymns, how untrained our organist, how weak our singing, God is present in our liturgy, offering His gifts of salvation. We dare not be seduced into thinking that the Kingdom comes by our own relevant production and performance. We must always maintain that the Kingdom is hidden under the humble means of God's proclamation of the new era of salvation in Jesus Christ through simple words, simple water, simple bread and wine. This is why our liturgies are sacramental and why they give what we need most: the forgiving mercy of God in Christ through which we are cleansed and made worthy to stand in His presence and receive His gifts. Believing that God is sacramentally present in our ancient but enduring liturgy is at the center of our understanding of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ and His salvation of the world through suffering and sacrifice. The liturgical structures of Word and Sacrament transcend all cultures and create our Lutheran theology of worship.

Lutheran worship is its culture, distinct from both the pop culture of secular society and the worship that characterizes most evangelical denominations in our country today. The Lutheran Church must develop and maintain its own cultural language that reflects the values and strictures of Scripture, not of the current culture. And this language can be shaped only by a biblical theology that affirms Christ's work of making right what has gone wrong in declaring us righteous and offering this righteousness to us through His bodily presence in our worship in Word and Sacrament. Our belief that Jesus Christ is present in worship binds our Church together as a community, confessing one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all. This community is the body of Christ, the Church. One day, the liturgical problems will no longer exist in the Church, for we will worship the Lamb in His kingdom that has no end. For now, however, we must continually remember that we have now the one God who is sacramentally present among us as Savior, and who continually invites us to the ongoing feast.¹

¹ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service* (28-29)

Procession

Parades are a way in which our communities communicate that there is something special to celebrate! Just think of the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, or St. Patrick's Day parades that we've probably all witnessed at one time or another. They're often some of the only opportunities that we have to see many of our prominent civil authorities in person. Similarly, the Church has always used processions as an opportunity to communicate that the greatest someone is making His way into our midst. During feasts and festivals of the church year it is a way to draw attention to an important milestone in our Lord's life, which was done for our salvation. It proclaims that there is a special holiday (holy day) to celebrate. It also tells us that our heavenly authority is personally walking among us to deliver His gifts, much like how those on the floats of the parade might pass out candy or other treats as they go by.

Processions, though usually not done every week, remind us of a reality that takes place whenever we come together for worship. Jesus promises, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20). The Lord gathers us together as His sacred assembly and puts His name on us at the Invocation: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Gathered in the name of Jesus, He is among us just as He guarantees. He is present to deliver His forgiveness to us in the spoken Absolution, shares the same holy words of the Gospel with us that He shared with the disciples and the crowds of his earthly ministry, and takes up residence in bread and wine with His very body and blood on the altar. Wherever God's Word is, there is the Word made flesh, Jesus. As the processional cross approaches us and passes by we are reminded of how God locates Himself among us through Word and Sacrament every time we come together to receive his grace in the Divine Service. Receiving the benefits of being in God's presence, that is, hearing His Word and being filled with his Holy Supper, we follow the cross out into the world. The Lord leads us out to bear Him, who we just received, to our hurting neighbors. We are His feet as we walk to our neighbor. We are His hands as we serve and care for our neighbor. And we are his mouth as we share the Gospel with our neighbor. As the Lord processes in among us in the Christian community, so do we process out, to carry that same Christ into our earthly communities.

Why have processions? Processions are reminiscent of our Lord's entrance into our midst through Word and Sacrament. The entrance of the cross and clergy remind us of Christ's entrance among us. But what does each role in the procession signify? Some of those roles can include Crucifer, Torch

Bearers, Gospel Bearer, and clergy.

The Crucifer, or the one who carries the processional cross, always leads the way. They act as a standard bearer who carries the symbol of the Christian faith. The cross is always a reminder of Christ Jesus and the way in which He accomplished salvation for us. Oftentimes, the crucifer actually bears a processional crucifix, which has the body of Jesus on the cross. This is the strongest cue that declares to us that Christ is visiting us in His holy sanctuary in a bodily way as He gives us his body to eat in the Lord's Supper.

The Torch Bearers, that is, those who carry the flame, also point to God's presence with us. He has used to fire throughout all of history to manifest his dwelling in our midst. It serves as another helpful reminder of how our Lord enters in. If acolytes are substituted for torch bearers then they also have the responsibility of lighting the candelabras and altar candles, which are a sign throughout the entire service of God's inhabitation of His holy house.

The Gospel Bearer, the one who carries the Gospel book into worship, is responsible for the handling of God's word. This is an important role since he helps to share with us how this Christ, represented by the processional cross/crucifix and fire, actually comes to us in the here and now. The word that was made flesh comes to us through the living and active word that we hear. The Gospel book that goes by is one example of Jesus' presence with us.

The clergy, but particularly the Celebrant, serves as another example of how our Lord comes to us. Clergy do not represent themselves, but stand in the stead and by the command of their Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Celebrant, the one to celebrate or consecrate Holy Communion, is another reminder of how our Lord is with us. The Gospel Bearer shows us that the Lord comes to us through the Word, but the Celebrant shows us that he also comes to us through the Sacrament of the Altar as well.

Processions communicate. With the processional cross and the torches they say, "Here's Jesus!" And with the Gospel book and the Celebrant they exclaim, "Here is how Jesus comes to us: Word and sacraments!" In the Divine Service our Lord drops down for a visit and serves us up a heaping helping of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Invocation (Part I)

The Divine Service begins the same way that our Lord's service to us began at Baptism. After conquering sin, death, and the devil through His death and resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). He instituted the Sacrament of Holy Baptism to distribute His victory to all believers by giving them a share in His cross and empty tomb (Romans 6:3-11). It is through those cleansing waters that a fallen humanity, conceived in sin, is reborn to be children of God (John 3:3-6). As sinners, we were destined to face a wrathful God, but as saints, the new, redeemed people of God, we are received into our Lord's presence in peace.

Just as we are only able to enter into the Lord's kingdom on account of the righteousness given to us at Baptism, so are we given the privilege to enter His kingdom here on earth as the Lord comes to His people with mercy and grace in His Word and Sacrament. The words of the Invocation, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," are most appropriate at the beginning of the service for it is the same Word that was spoken to us at our Baptism, our beginning as Christians. It gives a rationale for why we can approach God and under what terms He comes to us in blessing. The Lord's care for us as Christians starts at Baptism and the Invocation communicates that our Lord's ministering to us in the Divine Service begins on account of that same Sacrament. We have been gathered together not as the lost and the wicked who have no hope, but as the people of God who have each received the same regeneration of water and the Spirit. "Let us draw near [to the Lord] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).

The Invocation (Part II)

Why does the Lord begin His Divine Service with the words, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? It is to tell us that He is here with us in a real way. In fact, He is just doing what He has always done. After the Lord had dwelt with His people in the Most Holy Place in the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness, always on-the-go, David decided that He deserved better. This King of Israel therefore resolved to erect a permanent temple for God to inhabit and always be with them. David said to Nathan the prophet, "Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under a tent." But later, Nathan said to David, "Thus says the Lord: It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in. For I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up Israel to this day, but I have gone from tent to tent and from dwelling to dwelling... When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever" (1 Chronicles 17:1, 4-5, 11-12). And so it was that King Solomon, David's son, built a temple to the Lord.

Solomon had a question that we may also have at times. He asks at the dedication of the temple, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" He wondered how could our infinite God possibly be contained in one place? How could we know that God is here, present with us in a special way? Solomon continues his prayer by remembering the Lord's promise: "You have said, 'My name shall be there'" (1 Kings 8:27-30). Because the Lord put His name on the temple He was there. With the name came also the presence.

We too may have confidence when we are in the Lord's House, that because He puts His name here, that is, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," so He is undoubtedly with us. Jesus also promises that His name bears His presence: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20). He is here with us in His Holy Word and Sacraments, just as He promised to be with us "always, to the end of the age," through baptizing (Sacrament) and teaching (Word) (Matthew 28:19-20). It is because His name promises His company that He begins His time with us in His name. "Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

The Invocation (Part III)

The words of our Baptism, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," do something. God's Word is never an empty promise, but always does what it says. We know this because "the word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). "It is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). It "is at work in you believers" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It "is not bound" (2 Timothy 2:9), but is "living and abiding" (1 Peter 1:23). This was demonstrated at creation when the world was created by the Word. God spoke, "Let there be..." (Genesis 1) and it happened. Later, the Word made flesh spoke to a dead man, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43) and he was brought back to life. For us today, our Lord creates faith in our hearts by His Word as "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). In the same way, each time those words of your Baptism are proclaimed to you, something special happens.

Those words make you God's own, just as you might put your name on your possessions to show your ownership of them. These words give His name to you, just as a father would give his child his last name to show that he or she belongs to the family. By receiving that divine name at the font we are made different people, children of the heavenly Father. Since the Lord makes you His you are therefore no longer the devil's or even your own. Rather, "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23), redeemed with the blood of Christ. Because you are His, He stamps His name on you for all eyes to see in heaven and on earth and under the earth. The seal of His name sets you apart and reserves your seat in God's kingdom (Revelation 7:3; 9:4).

That name, with which we are inscribed at Baptism, seems to get marred daily by the soiling of our sin, making it worn, faded, and weathered. However, when the Invocation is spoken upon us once again at the beginning of the Divine Service, our Lord renews it and recalls our adoption as His children. The living and active Word of our Baptism gets reapplied to us every time we call on God's Name. We are made new with the words that were spoken at the font, just as we received a fresh start when we got wet with water and the Spirit long ago. Through our regeneration each week (and even daily!), we are made a new creation. "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Confession and Absolution

Jesus began his earthly ministry proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15) In our worship of Jesus, the incarnate Word, we continue to be called to repentance and faith. Martin Luther, in the Small Catechism, reminds us that our Baptism "indicates that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

One place in which we practice this daily contrition and repentance is at the beginning of the divine service. As we remember our sin and hear the good news of our forgiveness in Christ, we are led to examine ourselves, so that we may eat of the bread and drink of the cup in a worthy manner, discerning the body. (I Corinthians 11:27-29)

We begin with confessing our sins. In doing so we acknowledge our need for the gifts God will give us in Word and Sacrament. Luther again tells us in the Small Catechism, "Confession has two parts. First that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven."

The second part, the absolution, is based on the Office of the Keys, which, again according to the Small Catechism, is "that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent." This is given by Christ in Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 18:18-20, and John 20:22-23.

Martin Luther, and his associate Philip Melancthon, wrote a letter about the form and role of absolution. They wrote that "each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith, and as being a comfort to those who believe in it."¹ Thus, at the beginning of the divine service we confess and repent of our sins, and are given the aid and comfort of forgiveness, as from God Himself.

In the various settings of the divine service in our hymnal, there are a number of different wordings for confession and absolution. Whichever one we use, we ourselves express our contrition and repentance, and hear the good news of forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ.

¹ LW 50:77

Psalmody - Introit and Gradual

From the Song of Moses after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1-21) to the singing of psalms and hymns in our congregation's services, the Church of God has offered Him praise, prayer, and thanksgiving through song. Indeed, even in eternity the saints and the angels sing praise to God, as we see in Revelation 5:9-10, and Revelation 15:3-4. The hymnbook of the Bible is the book of Psalms. These specific prayers, praises, laments, and proclamations have remained a distinctive element of biblical worship. The apostle Paul encourages us to "Address one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." (Ephesians 5:19)

In the various settings of the divine service in the Lutheran Service Book, psalmody is suggested in two places. The first is at the beginning of the service of the Word, where the choice is given of the Introit (a selection of psalm verses which announce the theme of the Sunday or festival), the Psalm of the Day, or an entrance hymn. After the Old Testament reading, there is a choice of the Psalm of the Day, or the Gradual, another psalm selection. Some teachers have suggested that the antiphon (the repeated verse of the Introit), is the best clue to the theme of that day's lessons. There is a plethora of different ways these choices are made, but the Psalms are too central to biblical faith and worship to be considered optional or superfluous. These are not just words of the ancient faithful to God, but the Word of God to His people for our up-building in faith.

The worship of the Old Testament was as much a divine service of God's real presence to forgive and sanctify His people, as is ours today, where the Gospel is proclaimed purely and the Sacraments administered rightly in accordance with Christ's institution. Among places the proclaimed Word was found in Old Testament worship was the Psalms themselves. The sung proclamation carried with it prophetic power. These words are not merely human reflections about God, but also inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Psalms not only speak of God's salvation and justification of His people, but in them the Word communicates that salvation to the hearers for their faithful reception and reliance on God and His promises.

Martin Luther advised, "We approve and retain the Introits of the Lord's days and the festivals of Christ," and "the Gradual of two verses shall be sung."¹ Luther was convinced that the proclamation of Christ Jesus was proclaimed in the Psalms. Luther also wrote, "The Psalter ought to be a dear and beloved book, if only because it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly and so depicts His kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom that we may call it a little Bible."²

So, whether through Introit, Gradual, or whole Psalm, we learn the main theme of the day's readings, as well as hearing God's own Word.

¹ AE 53:22, 24

² Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, #3167

The Kyrie

As you walk through the Gospels, you'll notice that people tend to say one thing when they encounter Jesus: "Lord, have mercy" (Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30–31; Mark 10:47–48; Luke 17:13; 18:38–39). They understood that He had come to rescue the world and so they looked to Him for help as well. And that's just what our Lord did. One by one, He ushered in a new creation by turning blindness into sight, lameness into dancing, sickness into health, demoniacs into saints, and death into life. Everyone wanted a share in that. It was an act of faith to look to Jesus as the Savior from our ills, and it was the voice of faith that spoke the timeless words, "Lord, have mercy."

Kyrie eleison ("Lord, have mercy") are the ageless cries that Christ heard in the Greek New Testament and He still hears this plea from His Church even now. We have ruined ourselves, ruined others, and have been ruined by others, and so we cry out to our God to be made new again.

In the ancient world, the king would sometimes visit a village or city. Anticipating his coming, villagers would line the road waiting for him to appear, and as he entered the city they would cry, "Lord, have mercy!" Amid their shouts, one could also hear petitions from the crowd for gifts that most reflected the king's mercy, such as food, protection, lower taxes, and always and most important, peace. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem is an excellent example of this. (Arthur A. Just Jr. *Heaven on Earth: The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service*, 189.)

In our sanctuary, Christ our King rides into our midst through His Word and Sacraments to deliver to us His peace. As He visits us, we shout to Him for rescue from ourselves and this world.

It may seem strange to have a cry for mercy following the Confession and Absolution, that is, after we had just received forgiveness from Him. However, "Lord, have mercy" isn't only a plea but a confession of faith. This exclamation recognizes that our Lord is merciful and that He does show mercy to us in the Divine Service. It then makes sense to make a faith statement that the Lord is the source of mercy right after He shows you His rich mercy by putting you back together by His Holy Absolution. "The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made" (Psalm 145:9).

The Hymn of Praise (Part I)

What do people do when God delivers them? They sing! Let's look at a few examples. Moses and Miriam sing about the Lord's act of deliverance from their Egyptian enemies and their restoration as a people again who could now worship their God without restriction (Exodus 15:1-18; 21). Hannah sings because she was delivered from her barrenness and received a son from the Lord who would be tied to the Messianic lineage (1 Samuel 2:1-10). And David sings a song about his deliverance after the Lord defeated the enemies of Israel (2 Samuel 22:2-23:7). Where there's deliverance, there's song.

It then makes sense that we too sing a song because the Lord delivers us from our sin, death, and hell. Just a bit before the Hymn of Praise, we confessed our sin and were delivered by the forgiveness of Holy Absolution. After that, we sang the Kyrie, "Lord, have mercy," recognizing that our Lord who just absolved us is the true source of mercy. Now, at this point in the Divine Service, we sing about how God delivers us.

The Hymn of Praise can be one of two songs. Most commonly it is the Gloria in Excelsis, but sometimes we may also sing This is the Feast. Both of these are true hymns of praise that speak of how God delivers us. We may sing This is the Feast instead of the Gloria in Excelsis if it is the Easter season of the Church Year or if there is a feast of victory (Holy Communion) offered in the service.

The Gloria in Excelsis includes the song of the angels at Jesus' birth, recalling how He, the Word made flesh, entered into our skin to be our Deliverer (Luke 2:14). It also recalls the words of St. John the Baptist who pointed to Christ saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The Gloria gives a rationale as to *how* He delivered us. It is appropriate for us to join the angels' song because we enter into this same deliverance through the Word and Sacrament of the Divine Service.

This is the Feast can also be used as the hymn of praise (Revelation 5:12-13; 19:5-9). They were delivered through the tribulations of this world and entered into the feast of victory for their God. It speaks of the Lamb, who was slain, and how he has begun His reign. We receive a foretaste of this feast to come and join in their song as we, ourselves, are delivered through the body and blood of the slain Lamb in His Supper.

The Hymn of Praise (Part II)

The ancient Hymn of Praise, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, can be traced back in the Church's liturgy to as early as the 2nd century AD. It is the song of the angels who sang of the birth of Christ Jesus in Bethlehem in St. Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:14). Upon that exclamation, the heavens were declaring that God and man, heaven and earth were reconciled through the Word made flesh. This is why they could say that God was glorified in the highest and people on earth now had peace. It is in this Jesus that the divine and flesh came together again in a new reconciled relationship.

We sing it in the Divine Service because our incarnate Lord shows up in our midst through His Word and His Sacrament. He joins us to bring heaven and earth into one restored community by making peace with us and our heavenly Father through the forgiveness of sins. And He never comes alone but rather brings the whole company of heaven with Him. We, therefore, enter into the heavenly choir to sing of this wonderful act of salvation that He does for us. We are just as excited about this news as heaven is because it never gets old to us, we never stop needing to hear it, and we love to tell others about it.

There is something very specific about the *Gloria's* message. It speaks of God entering into creation and actually stepping into human skin. Our Lord, who is spirit, becomes real earthly stuff! This doesn't cease to happen with the incarnation, but still continues to happen today. This is why we sing of the God-becomes-stuff message in the Divine Service. He becomes that Word which bounces from a pastor's voice box and then rattles around in the ears of those in the pew. As that Word became flesh in a stable, He also becomes water at Holy Baptism, and swaddles Himself in bread and wine on the manger of the altar. The fact that Jesus is present, in the flesh, continues to play out as He takes on these physical forms in which He promises to be. He makes Himself available to us through the means of Word and Sacrament for the same reason that He became flesh in the first place: forgiveness, life, and salvation! The next time you sing the Gloria, picture Your Lord before you, with the saints and all the angels around you, singing this joyful proclamation.

The Hymn of Praise (Part III)

The first part of the Gloria In Excelsis is the song of the angels: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth.” There is much more to this Hymn of Praise than meets the eye. You’ll notice that it is a Trinitarian hymn that addresses each person of our triune God:

“Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:

We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:

You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.

For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, **with the Holy Spirit**, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.”

This hymn is structured so that it speaks to our heavenly Father as though we were before Him in His very presence. That’s because in worship, we are!

Then, there’s the address to Christ Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of the Father. Notice that we refer to Him not only as Lord God but as Lamb of God as well. This gives us a rationale for why we are able to come before the heavenly Father: “You take away the sin of the world.” He was the perfect sacrifice that took away our sin and therefore makes us acceptable in God’s sight. We ask Him to “receive our prayer” because He interceded for us. He is the messenger through which our petitions are delivered worthily to the Father.

It might seem like the Holy Spirit gets treated like chopped liver because He’s only mentioned at the very end of the hymn and there isn’t a specific petition to Him or any detail as to His work or importance. This is because “the Holy Spirit has called (us) in the true faith”¹ so that we are able to approach the Son to intercede for us and therefore make us worthy to be received by the Father. The Holy Spirit never wants attention for Himself but always desires to bring us Christ, just as Jesus promises, “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 15:13-15). The Spirit comes to us to deliver the gifts of Christ through the Word and Sacrament of the Divine Service.

¹ Luther’s Small Catechism: Explanation of the Third Article of the Creed

The Salutation

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

You've probably said this a lot over your life, but did you ever stop and ask yourself what does it all mean? Is it just a nice greeting? If so, why doesn't the pastor just say, "Good morning"? Is it just a well-wish? If so, then why doesn't the pastor just say, "I wish you all the best"? Is it just nice liturgical banter? If so, why doesn't the pastor say, "There's some good coffee waiting for you after the service" and the congregation responds, "Yup, can't wait!" There must be more to the Salutation.

We might get a clue as to the importance of this moment in the service when we recall what the Salutation was before the 1960's when it would've sounded like:

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

The statement "And with your spirit" sounds deeper in meaning than a mere greeting, well-wish, or chatter. The word "spirit" is powerful in its implication. It's more than earthly conversation, but has to do with higher things. Note that the congregation is the one saying this. It is because they recognize that this man is their pastor. Looking back at John chapter 20, we see where mere mortal men are given the Lord for a special purpose. "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending 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 anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.'" (John 20:21-23). Just as Jesus was sent to deliver the Gospel to the world, so these men are the new sent ones, the apostles, to serve as Christ to the Church and deliver to her His gifts of forgiveness. To equip them for this special mission, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean that they didn't have the Spirit to begin with, because, if that were the case, then they couldn't have believed in Jesus as their divine Savior. Instead, they received the Holy Spirit for a special purpose, to be Christ's feet, hands, and mouth to the people to distribute the Lord to them through Word and Sacrament.

The Salutation comes as the Service of the Word is heightening toward the Collect of the Day, the readings, the sermon, and the creed. It comes again as the Service of the Sacrament begins its climactic climb through the liturgy of Holy Communion. Because it is through Word and Sacrament that the Lord is with you, it makes sense for the pastor to declare this, "The Lord be with you." And because the congregation recognizes their shepherd as the one to deliver the Lord to them, they refer back to his ordination when the Holy Spirit was first with his spirit saying, "And with your spirit." It is an intimate dialogue between a pastor and his people, since they share in a special relationship.

The Collect of the Day

The Collect of the Day is exactly what it sounds like. It collects the prayers of God's people in relation to the theme of the day. Its placement right after the Salutation tells us that it is the beginning of the climax of the Service of the Word. The Service of the Word began with the Kyrie and then the Hymn of Praise, but it's starting to build to its climactic moment with the Salutation and the Collect of the Day. The intensity will continue to build as the service continues with the Old Testament and Epistle readings, and will reach its highest moment with the reading of the Holy Gospel and the sermon. Because it is so tied to the readings appointed for that day, the Collect of the Day helps to communicate the common theme of the readings so that we may prepare our hearts for God's Word. It prayerfully helps us find our place in His message of Law and Gospel. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer" (1 Peter 3:12).

Readings

You're probably thinking, "I know why we have God's Word in the service, so why talk about it?" Well, you might not be aware of why we have the readings that we have and how they are structured. The readings, also called the lectionary, follow the Church Year. The Year begins with Advent, when we anticipate the arrival of our Lord, and then Christmas celebrates that arrival. Epiphany, which means "manifestation," is a time to see just who this Word made flesh is and what He's about. Then, Lent intensifies our focus on the climax of His mission of salvation for us as we follow Him to the cross. Easter is the celebration of His work that is finished as Christ is raised from the dead. Fifty days later, after He ascends into heaven, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit so that the Church is never alone. The season following Pentecost and Trinity Sunday teaches us about who we are as the Church on earth now and how God continues to work in us and through us. The lectionary supports the themes of each season as it shares them with us in God's Word.

For many centuries the Church followed the One-Year Lectionary, which has the same set of readings appointed for a particular Sunday each year. In the 1960s, the Three-Year Lectionary was introduced, which cycles through three years of appointed readings. Today, our churches use either the One-Year (Historic) Lectionary or the Three-Year Lectionary.

In the Old Testament we read from the prophetic Scriptures, those holy writings that looked forward to the coming of Christ. In the Old Testament reading we are hearing from the patriarchs and prophets. The voice of the Church of Israel is still heard today because we are one with them through faith in Christ. In reading from one of the Epistles (letters), we are reading from the apostolic Scriptures, those holy writings that flowed from the proclamation of Jesus Christ. In these letters the apostles speak as eyewitnesses and representatives of Jesus. The preaching of the apostles is still heard in the Church today for we are and will always be the apostolic Church. Finally, with the reading of the Holy Gospel we come to the first high point of the Divine Service. In the Gospels we hear the accounts of the Four Evangelists (Gospel writers) who tell us what Jesus said and did. While the Gospels are history, they are more than mere biographies of Jesus. He is the risen and ascended Lord so He is truly speaking to us. While all the words of Scripture are Words of Jesus, it is in the Gospels where we hear directly from our incarnate Lord. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).

The Hymn of the Day

St. Paul encourages us in Colossians, chapter 3: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." He recognizes that music and song may be used as a vessel to carry God's Word to us. Hymnody is therefore a very helpful means through which the Word of Christ dwells in us richly to teach us and admonish us.

The Hymn of the Day is the most important hymn within the context of the Divine Service. It ties together the common theme of the particular readings and sermon. Because of this, the Hymn of the Day is never chosen at random but is intended to aid us in better grasping the readings and to meditate upon them. Ever relevant to the readings, it also prepares us to receive the sermon. Everything works together for a cohesive purpose. The Service of the Word includes the Collect of the Day as a specific prayer that gathers our petitions relative to the day's theme, then we hear that theme predicted in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the Gospel of Christ, then the Hymn of the Day continues to sharpen our focus, and the sermon will finally apply it all to our lives. Each element of the service strategically builds upon the former and works together to deliver a common message.

The Psalms of the Old Testament were sung by the Levite choir to address the needs, cares, and concerns of the Hebrew people and how the Lord has and will continue to fulfill them. Martin Luther also understood the usefulness of hymns to deliver God's Word. He said, "I have no pleasure in any man who despises music. It is no invention of ours: it is a gift of God. I place it next to theology. Satan hates music: he knows how it drives the evil spirit out of us." May we ever hear and sing to others the Law and Gospel of God's Word through hymnody!

The Sermon (Part I)

This one's obvious, right? Well, have you ever thought about the difference between a sermon and a Bible study? The key difference is that the sermon is *proclamatory*, declaring the good gifts of God's grace to be yours, while a Bible study is *descriptive*, teaching you about the gifts of God. Think of it as the difference between actually biting into a turkey leg on Thanksgiving and just hearing about the menu. With a Bible study, you hear about the menu of forgiveness, life, and salvation that God has planned for you. Through preaching, God actually bestows this bounty to you in a real, tangible, and personal way.

If you look back at all the sermons in the Bible, be they the books of the prophets, Jesus' own sermons in the Gospels, or the brave proclamations of the apostles in the book of Acts, you'll find God's Word spoken through the lips of men. His Word is consistent and agrees with everything else that is written, but it nevertheless delivers what it promises. This is why preaching has such a close tie with the readings for the day. It is an application of the text through God's Law and Gospel to the congregation. Because the preacher is bound by God's Word, his words are not his own but the very words of Christ. And those words have power and authority!

Just think of all that the Lord says about His Word. He says that His Word "shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." He also guarantees that it is "living and active." And He promises that it is "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." The Scriptures also give us countless examples of its efficaciousness. God created the world with the Word, "Let there be..." He calmed the stormy sea with "Be still!" He healed many with "Be healed." He raised the dead man with "Lazarus, come out!" He declared the sin of the world forgiven with "It is finished."

This same Word preached from pulpits has the power to crush sinners with the weight of the Law and resurrect saints with the life-giving promise of the Gospel. Even if you say, "I didn't get anything out of the sermon today," if the Word was preached, then it was still living and active. For "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ."¹

¹ Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 10:17

The Sermon (Part II)

All preaching in the Scriptures proclaims Law and Gospel. Both must be present in order for the full message of God's Word to be made clear. The Law heaps upon us our Lord's expectations and commands and always accuses us of how we fall short of those requirements. This is so that we are never too comfortable and relaxed in our sins nor trusting ourselves and our own achievements. We are simultaneously saints and sinners in this life while we carry with us a sinful flesh, so we continually need to hear the Law. It causes us to despair of our own works and to look for a solution outside of ourselves, driving us to faith in Christ alone. The Gospel functions as a soothing balm to cool our heated consciences and burning fears terrified by God's fiery wrath. It is the proclamation that we have a God that has taken matters into His own hands because we could never pay for our sins ourselves nor ever merit even the slightest favor before the Lord. Instead, Jesus has borne the weight of our transgressions and has suffered completely the full wrath of the heavenly Father so that there is nothing left but love and compassion for us. He took all our sin so that we wouldn't have any guilt left. He endured our punishment so that God would not have anything more to inflict upon us. And the Gospel is even more: Christ in place of our sins gives us holiness and righteousness by crediting His perfect life of obedience to us. Our Jesus doesn't only extinguish an infinite inferno but even bids us drink of the living water and quench our thirsty souls through eternal bliss with Him and all the saints.

If a sermon does not accuse you of your sins through the Law and absolve you with the blood of Jesus through the Gospel, it is not a true sermon according to the examples of preaching in the Scriptures. Think back on God's preaching to Adam and Eve in the garden, Moses and the prophets' teaching to the children of Israel, Jesus' teaching to the Pharisees and His disciples alike, and the apostles preaching to the early Church in Acts and the epistles. Everywhere, we see the Law convict the hearts of its hearers and the Gospel grant relief to them through Christ's person and work for their sake. In this way, each sermon is a kind of Confession and Absolution. The Law through its demands pricks your conscience and pries a silent confession from you. The Gospel quickly runs to absolve you through its application of Christ's own death and resurrection to you. May you ever hold dear this quintessential and Scriptural model for all preaching, for without it there is no preaching at all.

The Creed (Part I)

In the Divine Service, sometimes the Creed is placed after the reading of the Holy Gospel and sometimes it is placed after the sermon. Either placement is intentional, as we confess with our own lips the very Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom we just heard about in the Gospel narrative or as He was proclaimed to us through the Law and Gospel of preaching. In a way, it is the congregation's "Amen" ("let it be so") to what has been declared to us. The Creed, which is named after the first two words, "I believe" (*Credo*), is a statement of faith in this Triune God who is active in our lives through creation, redemption, and sanctification.

Having heard about the Lord's work in our world, we make this proclamation our own by declaring it true with our own mouth. We all make the same confession of faith because what we believe is not anything that we came up with individually, but rather something objective that has been passed down to us. Moses' divine interactions were delivered to the community of Israel; Christ relayed the message of His Father to His disciples; and those disciples, having been sent out as apostles, now share Jesus' teaching and life with us. The Church has given us a language and way of speaking about God, which He first gave to her. As a part of the Church, we borrow these same Scriptural words from her and make them our own.

We do so, saying, "I believe," not, "We believe." Nobody can speak for us, but we must make our own confession of faith (Romans 10:9). However, as a gathering of individuals who all share a common faith, we join in true unity and fellowship with one another by saying that we all believe the same thing. It is a true gift from our Lord that we are able to be with others who share a common worldview by looking through the eyes of Christ. May we ever be one body in the one Spirit—"just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The Creed (Part II)

Have you ever wondered why at some services we confess the Apostles' Creed and at other services we use the Nicene Creed? There is no set rule, but it has become a tradition in many churches to use the Apostles' Creed when there is no Holy Communion, and then confess the Nicene Creed in the full Divine Service with both the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament. Both Creeds uniquely state our Christian faith. It is good to keep them both in our repertoire, so that we are ever mindful of what we believe as the Christian Church.

The question might remain though, why use the Apostles' Creed at the service without Holy Communion and why use the Nicene Creed at the service with Holy Communion? It is as simple as altar fellowship. With the Apostles' Creed, the Christian Church has had a simple and succinct statement of faith concerning the Holy Trinity and our salvation through Christ alone. One of the earliest references to the Apostles' Creed is from St. Ambrose in AD 390, despite its use in the church for centuries prior. However, this Creed seemed incomplete in its confession of Christ as both Son of Man *and* Son of God. One priest from northern Africa named Arius could confess the Apostles' Creed, but could at the same time believe that Jesus was a lesser God and didn't share equal divinity with the Father. It became necessary for the Church to teach further about Christ. So, bishops from all over the Roman Empire came together at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 to root out this false teaching of Arius and to come up with a fuller explication of Jesus as "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made." This confession of faith made certain that Jesus shared fully in the same divine essence as the Father and the Holy Spirit and was just as much God as they. If Christ was not fully God then the Gospel would be destroyed since anyone less than divine couldn't die a perfect, sinless death and so atone for the sins of the whole world.

Because we come to the altar of the Lord to participate in a familial meal that shows not only communion and unity with God but also with one another, we want to ensure that we all confess the true faith together. Arius could have honestly confessed the Apostles' Creed and at the same time would have meant something very different than we would. If he communed with us then it would be a false fellowship, since we would hold to differing beliefs. So to demonstrate our full and unbreakable fellowship with one another as the Church that confesses a common faith, we say the Nicene Creed together

before communing as one Body. This Creed demonstrates that we are all one in our belief of the doctrine of the Scriptures, just as the Sacrament demonstrates that we are made one Body as we each receive the very body of Christ. May we, being made in God's divine image, ever reflect the Holy Trinity through confessing our common Creeds together and practicing a genuine altar fellowship. We reflect the unity of the Trinity, the Three in One, as we ourselves, though many, are made one in the one Christian faith.

The Prayer of the Church

In every good relationship there is communication. A telltale sign of a hurting relationship is when communication ceases. Such a lack of communication may indicate that the two parties have given up, don't care, or are irritated. We can be confident that our Lord will never stop communicating with us, for He is always speaking to us through His Word. This Word communicates that He will never give up on us because He has sent Jesus Christ into our world to revive our relationship. Nor will He ever grow apathetic because in Christ Jesus He has shown that He will go even to the great lengths of the cross for us. Nor will He become irritated with us because Jesus has appeased the Father's anger toward our sin by suffering in our place. Rather, His Word communicates that He cares very deeply about His relationship with His people and nothing will ever stop Him from telling us this again and again.

In the Divine Service through His Word and Sacrament He continually retells His love to us. Through the hymns, responses, and collects we speak back to God the Word that He first gives to us. It is by this Holy Spirit-filled Word that we are able to offer up acceptable thanks and praise to Him. Yes, even these hymns and versicles are prayers! They play an important part in our conversation with God. However, the Prayer of the Church is a very special time of prayer when we present not only our needs as the Church but also the cares and concerns of the world to God our Father.

Being the Body of Christ, we act as priest and intercessor for the world, just as Christ is the Mediator for all mankind and reconciled us to God. When we pray the Litany, we intercede on behalf of the world. We bring Christ to the nations, acting as His feet, hands, and voice, but we also bear the world to the Lord's throne of grace in prayer. This is because outside of the Church the world does not have access to God, for it is in His Church that He pays earth a visit through Word and Sacrament to deliver life to the dying world. So that the world can receive the Lord's blessing and have its cries heard, the Church brings the governments, communities, families, and individuals of the world to God in prayer.

St. Paul tells the young pastor Timothy to do this in his congregation: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all... I desire then that in every place the men

should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (1 Timothy 2:1-8). May we ever communicate with our Lord, for He has established a relationship with us.

The Offering (Part I)

The Bible's first words are, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). That means that anything in the heavens and the earth find their origin in God. This is true for everything in our lives as well. The material used for the houses we live in, the textiles used for the clothes we wear, and the food we eat are all made by the Creator's first words, "Let there be..." Even the human hands that build, sew, and farm these important necessities in our lives are from the Lord. We cannot take credit for anything that we receive or earn or make because without the Lord's creative work, we would not have anything. Each day is so rich and exciting, like Christmas morning, because we receive countless gifts from our God.

If the Lord created everything and loans it out for our use and benefit then we cannot take personal ownership of it. It is not ours to do with as we so desire, but everything is given to us to do as God desires. The question then is what is God's desire? What is His purpose for giving the gifts that He gives? In summary, it is love. St. John tells us that "God is love. Jesus details what this love looks like: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13). Love is defined by sacrifice. Love gives of itself for the sake of others. God gives wonderful gifts to us without condition and without receiving anything from us in return. This is because He is love. The Lord invites us to share in this kind of love by taking those gifts that He first gave us and sharing them with others. He tells us to "love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31, Leviticus 19:18). We are to keep the love that we received moving. We are to give of that with which we have been blessed so that we may bless others also.

This is what makes the offering special. It is a confession of faith that what God has given you is not yours to hold onto, but is His creation on loan to you. You reflect such a divine Giver's love when you love like He does. You lay down yourself for the sake of others. As those gifts find themselves in the offering plate, you see God gifting the Church and providing for her through you so that the Gospel can be preached and the needs of the flock can be supplied. Just as Jesus took delight in His own self-sacrifice for your salvation, may you ever find satisfaction in supplying for the needs of others.

The Offering (Part II)

One thing we can learn from the Bible's history and through our own history in the Church is that God works through *stuff*. Look at how He is with His people in a burning bush, or a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, or in a dove, or in tongues of fire. Today, He's with us in water and bread and wine. Most often though, God works through people though. Just think about how He used a man like Noah to preserve the righteous and two of every type of creature. Or consider His use of Joseph to save Egypt from a famine and provide a good spot for His people to dwell. Keep also in mind how Moses was used to deliver those same people from the cruelty and idolatry of the Egyptians to the religious freedom and prosperity that came with the Exodus. Most importantly, remember how God used the flesh of His own Son to make full payment for the debt that His people owed Him for their sins. It was only through the person of Jesus Christ that all His faithful for all time are delivered from everlasting death.

In much the same way, God cares and provides for His people through the stuff of you. Through your contributions He is able to provide His Church with a facility to gather together and meet Him. Through your gifts He is able to gift those assembled with His own Word and Sacrament. Through your donations He is able to supply also for the daily needs of the community. It is through the offerings of the Church that everyone is fully cared for and every need is fulfilled. When those offerings cease the Holy Ministry also ceases and people go without. It would be a rejection of the very Divine Service in which you participate to not donate toward its cause in the Offering.

Just as it was through Christ that the spiritual needs of all were met, so it is through good stewardship that those gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation are also shared with all. It is so exciting to be a part of the Lord's work. Through you, the Lord works to grant His good gifts of grace and mercy to others. That means that with every check that you write and every coin that you drop in you act as a better Noah, Joseph, and even Moses, because you provide for others not only in this life and body but invest in their eternal wellbeing. Every last cent then serves as a contribution to the mission of the Church. May you ever be the Lord's instrument to give life to this dying world, through the Word of life and the bread of life!

The Preface

The Preface has a very ancient history, originating from the liturgy of Hippolytus, the bishop of Rome in the late second and early third centuries. It begins the Service of the Sacrament with the familiar Salutation that we heard near the beginning of the Service of the Word, "The Lord be with you... And with your spirit." Because the Divine Service consists of the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament, it makes sense that the congregation acknowledges at both points in the service that the pastor has the Spirit of God through his ordination to publicly preach and administer the sacraments. In the early Church, this was important because it helped to solidify the pastor's relationship to his people at a time when many false teachers and ones who had received no ordination at all wrongly stepped into the pastoral role.

The second exhortation to "Lift up your hearts" was to remind the people to fix their attention on the holy things of God in preparation for the Sacrament. It alludes to St. Paul's words in Colossians 3:1, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." In the Divine Service, we are to seek after the body and blood of Christ which is present with us in bread and wine, as high heaven is brought low and our low spirits are made high in our union with Jesus at the altar.

The third exhortation, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" is the thanksgiving of the Church for the gift of the Sacrament which the Lord provides His people. This follows in the tradition of what Christ Himself did before receiving the meal of the Last Supper: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them." We also give thanks as we, ourselves, are participants in that same banquet, called the Lord's Supper. This giving of thanks is why Holy Communion is sometimes called the Eucharist. It is a great gift of God through which He is present for us and makes us benefactors of His death and resurrection. We, therefore, give Him utmost thanks.

The Proper Preface

The Preface does not only consist of the three responsive versicles that were covered last time, but builds up to the Proper Preface. It gets its name because it is determined by the propers of that day, which are “proper” for the time that day falls on in the Church Year. For example, it would not be “proper” to use the Proper Preface appointed for Christmas at Easter. The function of the Proper Preface is multifold. First, it is a rationale of the third versicle of the Preface: “It is right to give Him thanks and praise.” It explains why it is right to give Him thanks and praise. It recalls what Christ has done for which we give thanks: “It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

Second, it relates the moment in Christ’s life that we are celebrating at any given time in the Church Year to His presence with us in His Holy Supper. One great example is the Proper Preface appointed for Christmas: “for in the mystery of the Word made flesh You have given us a new revelation of Your glory that, seeing You in the person of Your Son, we may know and love those things which are not seen.” This speaks of the incarnation of Christ at His nativity, which was a visible presence among us. It is then our prayer to “know and love those things which are not seen” which includes His invisible incarnation of His body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine.

Third, it reminds us that because Christ is physically present with us in the Sacrament on the altar, we are before our very Lord “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven.” Heaven meets earth at the altar as we join in with all the saints in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom. We will therefore join in the song of heaven in the Sanctus to come next.

The Lord's Prayer

Why is it that we ALWAYS pray the Lord's Prayer before the Words of Our Lord, even if we prayed it at a Baptism earlier in the service? It is because the answer to the Lord's Prayer is right under our nose—or more properly understood—right on top of the altar. This is made clear when we look carefully at the structure of the Lord's Prayer.

First, the fourth petition, Give us this day our daily bread, and the fifth petition, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, are connected by a coordinating conjunction, which signifies that two clauses go together and explain each other. That is, the daily bread for which we pray is bread that is to forgive us our trespasses. The only bread that can do that is Christ, "the living bread that came down from heaven." He promises, "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51).

Second, note that the most central petition of the Lord's Prayer is the fourth, "Give us this day our daily bread," making it the very heart of the prayer. Just look at this:

Introduction: Our Father who art in heaven.

First Petition: Hallowed be Thy name.

Second Petition: Thy Kingdom come.

Third Petition: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Fourth Petition: Give us this day our daily bread.

Fifth Petition: And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Sixth Petition: And lead us not into temptation.

Seventh Petition: But deliver us from evil.

Conclusion: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Third, the request for our daily bread emphasizes bread that is not for you or me alone, but it is corporate bread, something that we all eat together. One name for the Sacrament of the Altar is Holy Communion, because we all commune with one another and partake in this shared bread.

The placement of the Lord's Prayer before the Words of Institution in the Divine Service testifies to the fact that this prayer is fulfilled in the Sacrament of the Altar. One book entitled, *Worshiping with Angels and Archangels: An Introduction to the Divine Service*, has this to say about its placement prior to the Words of Our Lord:

The Lord's Prayer is the chief prayer of the Christian Church, and it is prayed here at the chief event of the Divine Service. As children of God, we call upon

"our Father" as we prepare to encounter Jesus in His Supper, acknowledging that in the Sacrament He will answer our petitions. The congregation prays, "Thy kingdom come," then receives the kingdom of God in the coming of Christ in His body and blood. We pray, "Thy will be done," then witness salvation being distributed. We pray for forgiveness of sins and hear Christ's own Word proclaiming that in His death He has accomplished everything needed to "forgive us our trespasses."¹

The Lord's Prayer is truly the Eucharistic Prayer as each petition is answered in the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper. Through Christ's holy body and most precious blood our heavenly Father's name is hallowed, His kingdom comes to us, His will is done to us on earth as it is in heaven, we receive our daily bread and forgiven our trespasses, we are led out of temptation, and delivered from all evil. What a blessing to see this prayer answered right before our very eyes!

¹Scot A. Kinnaman, *Worshiping with Angels and Archangels: An Introduction to the Divine Service*, (CPH 2006), p.35.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Do you pray before meals? Well, if it's good to thank the Lord for the food that He has put on your earthly table which nourishes the body, then it's certainly "good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks" for the heavenly food that God puts on our altar which feeds the soul. Jesus gave a prayer of thanks when He instituted this Holy Supper for the first time. We hear in those Words of Institution: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples." In like manner, before distributing the sacred elements, it is right to follow Christ's example and pray a Prayer of Thanksgiving before taking a bite.

This isn't done to necessarily reenact the Last Supper in the upper room, as if we were putting on a play with the Lord's Supper to visually portray the chronology of events as they unfolded in Jesus' passion. No, this is done because we, with grateful hearts, wish to thank the Lord for the benefits of the Sacrament, this giving of thanks is where the Lord's Supper gets the name "Eucharist." The Greek word for giving thanks is "eucharistia." We give thanks for this gracious meal that delivers the very body and blood of our Lord that was crucified and raised up again for our forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving is also an opportunity to be reminded again and to proclaim to one another of the blessing and treasure in the Lord's Supper. In its structure, we always hear of how the Lord promises to "forgive, renew, and strengthen us" with the Sacrament. It also declares what it is that we receive in the bread and wine, as we do indeed "eat His body and drink His blood as He bids us do in His own testament." And, we pray that the Lord would "grant us faithfully to eat His body and drink His blood" so that we may receive this holy gift worthily in faith. This prayer also tells us that we are not alone, but gathered "from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end." In saying this, we recognize that we are joined by God's presence and the whole company of heaven to participate in their very worship and to feast with them.

Sanctus

The Sanctus, or the Holy, Holy, Holy, is the conversation of heaven that the prophet Isaiah heard when he had an encounter with the Lord. Isaiah tells us, "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim.... And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!'" (6:1-3). As he mentions, it was in the very temple of Jerusalem that he saw into the heavenly throne room that is usually hidden from human eyes. We know that God was indeed physically present on earth in the temple for it says that "the train of his robe filled the temple" and the seraphim's song also says so: "the whole earth is full of his glory!"

We, ourselves, sing this song during the Service of the Sacrament because we are about to receive Christ Jesus our King as He sits before us on the altar in His body and blood, As He visits us in the Sacrament, heaven and earth meet and the last line of the Proper Preface is fulfilled: "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:" and we join in with that wonderful heavenly chorus, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of power and might: heaven and earth are full of Your glory." The second part of the Sanctus is the song of Palm Sunday, when Jesus was met with loud hosannas riding into Jerusalem as a lowly King to go to His passion. We also receive our King as He rides into the New Jerusalem, the Church, on lowly bread and wine. We join in with His people singing, "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" (Matthew 21:9). Though He doesn't go to suffer and die for us again like He did following His Triumphal Entry, He does deliver the benefits of that cross to us as we receive peace and pardon in the Sacrament.

The Words of our Lord

The high point in the Service of the Word is the proclamation of the Holy Gospel. Now, we come to the high point in the Service of the Sacrament, which is The Words of Our Lord also taken from Gospel accounts. You may have heard them called the Words of Institution, since they are the very words with which Christ instituted His Holy Supper. Or, you may have even heard them referred to simply as the Verba, which is Latin for “words.”

These words of Jesus promise that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to the bread that we eat and the cup that we drink. Jesus pledges that the bread “is My body, which is given for you” and that the cup “is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Just as it was through the words “Let there be...” that God created the world and through the words of Jesus that demons were exorcised, sins were forgiven, the sick were healed, and the dead were raised, so do these words of Christ have the power to make miracles happen today. This miracle is that it is no ordinary bread and wine on our altar but the true body and blood of Christ Jesus to feed us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation. As He says, “this do in remembrance of Me.” He repeatedly comes to us again and again in this sacred meal.

Only when The Words of Our Lord are spoken do we have confidence that we truly receive the Sacrament of the Altar. For God binds Himself to His Word of promise. The body and blood of Christ are not, in, with, and under the bread and wine because of a magic formula that the pastor speaks (*ex opere operato*) nor is it dependent upon the faith of the communicant receptionism, but rather it is a pledge and guarantee that God Himself will continue to fulfill. The Lord will never lie to you, trick you, or change His mind. Thanks to these words, you may trust that you receive the grace of Christ as He meets you at the altar for your benefit.

The Pax Domini

These words, "The peace of the Lord be with you always" take us back to the evening of the first Easter day. On that occasion, the disciples had the doors locked for fear of the Jews. They knew the death of their innocent Lord at the hands of the Jews and they were afraid their number was next. But something amazing happened when their resurrected Christ appeared to them in the flesh. He showed them his hands and side and declared to them: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). St. John tells us that they were glad when they saw Jesus. Having seen the risen Lord in the flesh they could now have peace that their discipleship was not in vain and that they had peace with God. Christ's work of salvation had reconciled the Lord's relationship with all mankind since the sin of the whole world was punished on the cross. There was now no hostility between them. And this peace could give them confidence in the midst of earthly dangers because they now had an eternal life that nobody and nothing could take away from them.

When the pastor elevates the bread and wine and announces, "The peace of the Lord be with you always" it is a re-presentation and proclamation of this Easter event. Just as the disciples beheld Christ's flesh after being raised out of death, so do we see with our own eyes, His very risen body and blood when we see the elements. We may approach the altar in faith with confidence knowing that God is here not in wrath but in peace. At the end of the service, we join in Simeon's song and say that because of the peace that we receive in the Sacrament we may "depart in peace." We can go boldly back into the world because we have a peace-full eternity with God waiting for us.

We respond to this Word of peace with "Amen" because we believe that the resurrected Christ is in our midst to bring peace to us. We do not say "And also with you" like we would when we hear "The Lord be with you" at the Salutation and Preface. The pastor is the mouthpiece of Christ to proclaim His gift of peace to you. Our only response to all of our Lord's gifts is a faithful "Amen."

The Agnus Dei

There is a beautiful symmetry between the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament as we sing to the Lamb of God, which is what Agnus Dei means. Just as we sang the Gloria in Excelsis as a hymn of praise: "Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God: You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us" so now we sing the Agnus Dei as a hymn of praise: "Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us." Before, we sang to Christ, the Lamb of God, as He was present with us through His Word, but now we sing to Him as He sits on the throne of His altar in His very body and blood.

Through the Preface we proclaimed that heaven has joined earth as the Lord has entered our midst and is before us, along with "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven." Now, with the Sacrament of the Altar having been consecrated and ready for distribution, there is no doubt that the Lamb has ushered us into His throne room. We therefore sing to the Lamb as the saints of heaven do (Revelation 5:12-13; 19:5-9). This Lamb is going to continue to do for us in this sacred meal what He came to earth to do long ago: "take away the sin of the world." As He promises. His body and blood which He distributes to us is the same as that which was given and shed for us "for the forgiveness of sins" on the cross.

The words, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," were first spoken by St. John the Baptist when Christ Jesus was drawing near (John 1:29). We join in with the Baptist and point out to ourselves and one another that this same Christ has drawn near to us in His Sacrament. May we ever praise this Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Through His Sacrament, He has mercy on us and grants us peace!

Nunc Dimittis

At Christmas, we celebrate the advent of Immanuel, "God with us." Eight days after his birth, Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem. Luke's Gospel records there was a man named Simeon present in the temple when Jesus was brought there. This man had one foot in the Old Testament and the other in the New Testament as the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would not taste death before seeing the Lord's Christ. Upon holding this baby Messiah in his arms, Simeon exclaimed the well-known words of the Nunc Dimittis, which is Latin for "Depart in peace." Holding his salvation in his very arms, Simeon said, "O Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." He could now die happy, confident that through this little child redemption was now made his.

This song is not only Simeon's but is our own song. Perhaps even more ours than Simeon's. The timing of this canticle in the Divine Service makes this very clear. It comes just after the distribution of Holy Communion, when this same Christ is presented in the temple of the New Jerusalem, the Church. We have taken this Jesus not only in our arms like Simeon, but we have held him even closer as we have received Him into our very souls through the eating and drinking of His true body and blood. And whereas Simeon was looking forward to the redemption that His Savior would accomplish, we receive that forgiveness, life, and salvation in this Sacrament. Thanks to the Lord's benefits, we may "depart in peace," knowing that even if we were to die on our way home from church that we would be received into the everlasting arms of our heavenly Father. May we ever boldly sing Simeon's song as history repeats itself at an altar near you.

The Aaronic Benediction

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, thus shall you bless the people of Israel; you shall say to them: The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.’” (Numbers 6:22-27)

This blessing receives its power, content, meaning and purpose from the Word of God. The act of blessing has the divine Word as its object, and therefore gives a gift that is creative and flows through the Spirit of God. In other words, the ministry of the Word delivers Christ and His Spirit to God’s people. It conveys God’s gifts as freely given to people, communally and personally, as they are ready to receive them.

Blessing is a foundational action in both Judaism and Christianity. It acknowledges that since God is our Creator, we do not need to fabricate life for ourselves or make something of ourselves by our own performance. Instead, we receive everything from God. Blessing enacts God’s grace as something that we cannot achieve, but always only receive. When we bless, we are like channels that pass on to others what we do not possess ourselves, good things from God that we ourselves do not control. By blessing we live by God’s grace and pass it on to others.

Since the triune God is rich in grace, giving richly to those who confess Jesus as their Lord (Romans 10:12-13), blessing is also the basic gesture of a pastor. Pastoral blessing delivers the full measure of Christ’s blessing to believers and the blessing of the Creator to unbelievers. Even though the ministers of the Word are stewards of God’s riches, they themselves do not possess what they pass on to others. Like beggars, they themselves give only as they receive. Their capacity to bless comes through faith in God’s promises and from prayer for themselves and others.

The delivery of blessing relies on the grace of our Lord Jesus, who, though He was rich, yet became poor for us, so that through His poverty, we might become rich (II Corinthians 8:9), with the Holy Spirit and all spiritual blessings. Blessing operates under the cross. The Apostle Paul describes the state of the one who blesses as “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing and yet possessing everything.” (II Corinthians 6:10) When we receive the blessings of God in faith, we are rich in blessing. (Proverbs 28:20) In receiving, we can also pass along, indeed must pass along, all the riches of God’s grace.

Liturgical Colors (Part I)

The Lord loves beauty. He created a beautiful garden, teeming with beautiful creatures and life. (Gen. 1, 2) Wherever He dwells with his people on earth with grace and mercy, He gives them a place of beauty to come and receive that Eden again as heaven meets earth. For example, the tabernacle was full of ornate and artistic craftsmanship. (Ex. 31:1-11) Solomon's temple also exhibited splendor and majesty through the artistry therein. (1Kings 7:13,14) So too, does our Lord meet us, His Church, in the Sanctuary, where He returns us to a rich Eden. We dine on the choicest fruit from the tree of the Cross, Christ's very body and blood, to nourish us with forgiveness, life, and salvation. Clear, crystal streams of living water flow to us in the font to satisfy our parched soul. Green pastures stretch out before us as we, His flock, listen to the voice of our Good Shepherd through his under-shepherd, the pastor. All ecclesiastical art points to the heavenly reality that the church is a holy place where divine gifts are given and received.

Since such beauty communicates to us that our Lord is with us and for us, church buildings and adorned with awe-inspiring and Gospel-communicating appointments. Just to name a few examples, rich paraments on the altar and pulpit, vestments on the pastors, and banners share a common color that is not only stunning but is meant to silently communicate the life of the Church to us. Since the Church is Christ's body, it only makes sense that her life revolves around her Lord's life. Therefore, each color says something about which festival or season of Christ's life we are celebrating.

Color is a powerful thing, for we are psychologically wired to make associations with particular colors. Think of how new parents oftentimes choose to paint the nursery pink if they know their baby will be a girl or blue if a boy. The standard four colors of the church year do the same thing. Violet, white, green, and red have their own associations with different milestones in the life of Christ and his Church. Other colors such as blue, rose, scarlet, black, and gold have been added over time to contribute a richer palette to the eye of the parishioner. Each time you come to church, take a look at what color your pastor is wearing and what color adorns your altar.

Parts II-X, which follow, will explain the significance of our Liturgical colors and what they mean for you as a member of our Lord's body.

Liturgical Colors (Part II)

Advent: Blue

The church year revolves around the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It makes sense that we would begin with His entrance into this world, which is Advent, His 'coming'. The season of Advent is one of hopeful anticipation for such a Savior. It is filled with the cries of John The Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2) He is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight." (Is. 40:3) We heed the cries of the voice in the wilderness and prepare our hearts for His arrival in the flesh, for He is Immanuel, which means 'God with us'. Whenever we might host a new guest we usually get the house in order. So we also do this when the Light of the world arrives to illumine our darkness. We get our hearts in order not by overcoming sin, but by confessing it and looking to our Incarnate Lamb of God to take it away. He is our only hope!

Advent utilizes the color blue, which symbolizes 'hope'. Our hope is faith in the promise that we are not left in our sins, but receive a fleshly Messiah who bears these sins in His body and puts them to death on the cross. Only a God who is born just as we are could do such a mighty act of salvation for us. This brings us to the second reason for using blue for Advent: The color associated with the Virgin Mary has traditionally been blue. She is usually depicted dressed in blue, and festivals associated with her also utilize blue. Mary is not given importance in and of herself, but only receives significance because it is through her that our incarnate Lord received His flesh and bones. We use the color of the mother of our Lord because she has brought forth the God-man to fix our broken state, our broken lives, and our broken world.

Historically, Advent used the same color as the Lenten season, violet, because of its introspective and subtly penitential associations. The use of blue for Advent is helpful because it distinguishes Advent from the season of Lent. Come soon, Lord Jesus!

Liturgical Colors (Part III)

Third Sunday in Advent: Rose

Rose is one of the most overlooked colors of the church year. It has been traditionally used on the third Sunday in Advent. Historically, when the One-Year Lectionary was used exclusively, this Sunday was called *Gaudete* (Rejoice) Sunday, because the texts were less penitential in nature, and focused on the anticipation of the Lord's coming. This Sunday gives worshipers a taste of the joy to come (Jesus' Birth).

The Advent wreath's candle for this particular Sunday is also rose-colored. Since paraments reflect the liturgical color of each season, it makes sense that if possible, rose-colored paraments would also be used on this Sunday. The other candles on the wreath are either blue or violet, whichever color a particular congregation uses during the season of Advent. Before the second half of the twentieth century, however, violet was always used during Advent, blue being later introduced in the 1960's as an option. Because the wreaths previously usually consisted of violet candles, the color rose comes from blending the violet of the previous Sundays with the white of the upcoming Christmas celebration. By combining the color of the Advent season with the white of our Lord's Nativity, we have made a whole new color that communicates to us the closeness of our Lord's Incarnation.

Rose is an encouragement in the middle of our Advent preparations, when we "prepare the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight." (Mark 1:3) Our joy is increased as we get ever closer to our Lord's arrival. Rose is a wonderful expression of the joy that we find in Christ Jesus, our Word made flesh. (John 1:14) The use of Rose is optional, however, and congregations using the 3-year lectionary may choose to use one color consistently throughout Advent for candles, vestments, and paraments.

Liturgical Colors Part (IV)

Festivals of Christ and of the Saints: White

White symbolizes joy, celebration, gladness, light, purity, and innocence. Because of this, it is used each time we celebrate a particular event in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. These events include His Holy Nativity, Epiphany, Baptism, Transfiguration, Resurrection, and Ascension. These are the greatest festivals of the Church Year, and therefore ought to reflect the utmost joy and gladness. Since they also commemorate Christ, the Light of the World (John 1:9, 3:19), the sinless Son of God and Son of Man, and the Lamb without blemish (John 1:29,36), white is most appropriate.

Scripture also says that the saints fall asleep in Christ, (1 Cor. 15:6,30) for they have been baptized into Him. (Rom. 6:3) Therefore they share white, the color of their Lord: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:14) This is why the color of the baptismal garments worn in ancient times and sometimes used today are the white of Jesus Christ. In the same way, the funeral pall that covers the casket is the white of Baptism. It visualizes for us the fact that we leave this fallen world clothed with the same Christ of our Baptism. (Gal. 3:27) The albs and surplices of pastors are also white to reflect this heavenly reality. All commemorations of saints who die a natural death, like All Saints Day, utilize white paraments. As we look forward to a perfect new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness, let us "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him". (2 Peter 3:13,14)

Liturgical Colors (Part V)

The Seasons of Epiphany & Pentecost: Green

The liturgical color green symbolizes growth and fulfillment. The season of Epiphany is all about the growth of the Christ child, who was just born at Christmas. Three magi visit this little God incarnate at the Epiphany, but the season goes on to unfold who Jesus is and what he has come to fulfill. At His baptism he says, "Let it be (that I am baptized) now; for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. 3:15) From Christ's baptism onward, we see what the Word Incarnate has come to fulfill; to accomplish for us those things which we never could do for ourselves. He lived a life of perfect obedience on our behalf, suffered unto death for the punishment that we deserve, and rose from the dead to grant us new life. Everything that Christ came to fulfill through the Visitation of the Magi, His Baptism, and His Transfiguration points to his sacrifice on the cross for us.

Having fulfilled all righteousness and having accomplished salvation for all mankind, our Lord delivers the benefits of His cross and resurrection through His Word and Sacraments. The Church, gathered around such gifts, continues to be fed and nourished by her Lord. The season after Pentecost shows that even though Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father, He is still present with us physically through His means of grace. These gifts not only give us real contact with the risen Christ, but they deliver the forgiveness, life, and salvation won for us from His cross and resurrection. This keeps the Church healthy and strong as we receive these gifts in faith. Green reminds us of the growth and fulfillment that we receive and continues to come to us through the Church. At the font, we began our growth as children of God. Through His Word and Holy Supper we feast on a nutritious banquet that fulfills the promises of Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us "taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Ps. 34:8)

Liturgical Colors (Part VI)

The Season of Lent: Violet

The season of Lent utilizes violet as a sign of royalty and penitence. Violet evokes these qualities through historical associations with the rich ruling class and the process of making this color. In ancient times, it was very costly to dye cloth violet because it required the limited resource of the blood of snails. One Biblical example of a merchant of violet-dyed goods was Lydia, who was baptized by St. Paul. (Acts 16:14, 15) Violet became the color of contrition because it required a sacrifice of life and money.

Violet is an appropriate color to use for Lent since Jesus, King of the Jews, rode into Jerusalem to rule His people from His cruciform throne. He was crowned with twisted thorns, wrapped in a violet cloak, given a reed scepter, and was paid a mocking homage. (Matt. 27:27-31) Nevertheless, He is the Lord of all, whose kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36) He is worthy of such royal violet because He has defeated the forces of hell that had staked their claim on this world of sin and death through His victory on Golgotha. He has brought back His kingdom once and for all from the tyrannical foe through the precious riches through his noble blood. Through his self-sacrifice, He has soaked His creation with the dye of His own blood to make His Church part of the royal bloodline. It cost His very life to wash His kingdom with this costly dye. Through His death we are made a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession. (1Peter 2:9) We are dressed in regal garments dyed with His blood at the font, and He hosts us with a feast fit for a king through His very body and blood he sacrificed, to make us co-heirs of a heavenly inheritance with Him. (Rev. 7:14, Gal. 3:29) Violet reminds us that though we bow before our Heavenly King in humble repentance, He has shown us mercy in the cross of His passion. He even grants us gracious gifts of lordship with Him through His Word and Sacraments by transforming us to be as He is, kings with Him.

Liturgical Colors (Part VII)

The Sunday of The Passion and Holy Thursday: Scarlet

In some church traditions, the color scarlet is used for the Sunday of The Passion, the beginning of Holy Week. The Sunday of The Passion follows the Procession of Palms, and is meant to show us what the Triumphal Entry was about. Scarlet is a variant of red and violet, a blood-red hue; it is a solemn color since it evokes our Lord's blood that was shed on Calvary. Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent and gives us a sober reminder that God created us out of dust, and it is to that same dust that we shall return (Gen. 3:19). Through Adam, death came into the world, and sin has been passed down through every generation, including our own (Rom. 5:12). Because the wages of sin is death, all have earned an eternal death of alienation from our Creator (Rom. 6:23). However, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh to become one of us, so that He could answer for our sins, suffer our hell, and die the death that we deserve - all for us. The blood-like color of scarlet represents our Lord's blood that is on our own hands, since it is our fault that He had to go to the cross. Yet, even more, it signifies the sacrificial love of Christ who went willingly to make us into sinless saints, no matter what His cost. Scarlet even points to that same blood that comes to us today through The Lord's Supper, particularly on Holy Thursday. The blood of Christ continues to atone for our sins and makes us clean in the waters of the font, and the elements of the Holy Supper. Our Lord's Passion causes us to meditate on His suffering and gives us reason to rejoice in His great love. "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

Liturgical Colors (Part VIII)

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday: Black

Black is associated with ashes and with repentance. In the Old Testament, ashes were an outward sign of contrition of sins. Man is a lowly, miserable sinner, in contrast to a perfect, just, and holy God. Ashes remind us of our mortality; Because of sin, we are destined to return to the ashes-dust from which we came (Gen. 3:19). The opportunity to 'put on ashes' on Ash Wednesday is a visual sign of repentance that demonstrates that we are helpless in our condition and can only look to God to grant mercy. It not only evidences repentance, but looks in faith for compassion.

Black, which is associated with sorrow over sins, is most appropriate for Good Friday. On this day, we remember our connection to the first Adam, and how his wrongs play out in our lives, while we look to the second Adam to make right our wrongs through Christ's death on Calvary. Whereas the first man, a gardener, sowed the seeds of sin, death, and decay in the Garden through a tree, Christ has grown a new creation by planting the tree of the cross in the soft earth of Golgotha.

We know the gravity of our sin, and repent, for the Son of Man had to die in order to make atonement for us. However, Good Friday is not a funeral service for our Savior; we have restrained joy, for we know that our Lord is merciful, slow to anger, and abounds in steadfast love. We are confident of this because He has heard our cries and has borne the brunt of the punishment that we deserve on His own shoulders. He did this all out of love, and we reverently rejoice that He has indeed done this for us. It truly is a Good Friday, as our Savior shows us the magnitude of His love for us, so that we are not left in the ashes of repentance that began Lent on black Ash Wednesday, but are brought into the cleansing rivers of Baptism, the purifying flow of His blood from the altar, and the sweet word of His declaration, "It is finished." (John 19:30)

Liturgical Colors (Part IX)

The Resurrection of Our Lord: Gold

Gold is a regal color associated with riches and kingly attire, and is reserved for Easter, the greatest of festivals in the Church year. It is used especially for our Lord's resurrection from the dead for it is through His rising that He has established His kingdom. Jesus Christ, through His suffering, death, and new life from the grave, has bought back His creation from the grip of sin, death, and the devil with His holy precious blood. It is through the laying down of His life and taking it up again that He has ransomed us as our Redeemer. Since Christ has made a perfect once-for-all payment for our sin, all of God's enemies that also come after us have been stomped down and made His footstool. We celebrate the renewed lordship of our Savior and the life that He pours out lavishly on the world through His victory on Easter Sunday.

Our Lord is the head of His Church, which is His body. As in childbirth, the head appears first, and the body follows. Jesus, after conquering the ravages of sin, the sting of death, and the ruler of this world, rose triumphantly from the tomb to new life. Since we are His body, we too will be raised to glory with Him on the Last Day. We will share in the marvelous splendor that is His, for we shall be like Him. The gold of Easter is the glory and splendor of our Lord but also is ours as well through Christ Jesus. The Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in His wings! (Mal. 4:2a) Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Liturgical Colors (X)

Pentecost and the Commemoration of Martyrs: Red

Red symbolizes fire, and therefore, red is appropriate for the Feast of Pentecost and those festivals of renewal in the Holy Spirit, like Reformation, church dedications an anniversary of a congregation, missions, Confirmation, and Ordinations. The red of fire began when the Church grew out of the Pentecost event, when the Gospel was preached to all nations and in every language as the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles as tongues of fire. (Acts 2:1-21) The same Spirit continues to come to the Church today through the 'God-breathed' or 'God-Spirited' Word. (2Tim. 3:16) The Holy Spirit comes to comfort us through the Office of the Holy Ministry in which that Word is hidden in Preaching and the Sacraments. Our Lord breathed on those whom He sent out, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:22-23) It is through this means of grace, which flow through this Office of Christ, that we breathe-in the Spirit of our Lord. We receive new life into our nostrils just as Adam did at creation. (Gen. 2:7) Through Baptism, Absolution, Preaching, and the Lord's Supper, we receive the very life and Spirit of Jesus. We are made new creatures, just like Adam before his fall and our own fall into sin. Again, we can live eternally with our Lord in paradise.

Red is also the color of blood, and is reserved for commemorations of those saints who were martyred, including most of the Holy Apostles and the Holy Innocents. The color red is also used on Holy Cross Day because it is a tribute to the sacred cross on which our Lord shed His most precious blood.

The Sanctuary (Part I)

Does God seem inaccessible, unapproachable, or hidden? This is because to sinful men...He is. Ever since all mankind fell into sin with Adam and Eve we have lost access to God (Genesis 3:22-24). The unholy can't be in the presence of the holy without fatal consequences (Exodus 33:20). Atheists who demand tangible proof for God's existence are hard pressed to find it, since God hides out of love and mercy, so that we don't suffer His wrath. However, God always sets up a place where we can meet Him in grace. Whether it be the altars of Abraham (Genesis 12:7; cf 22:2; 12:8; cf 13:3-4; 13-18), Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:25; 33:20; 35:1-3, 7), or Moses (Exodus 17:14-16; 24:4-8), the tabernacle (Exodus 29:45), or the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:13), God promises to be physically there for His people.

Today, the Church is where our Lord greets us, for Christ tells us that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20). In this place, Jesus showers us with pardon and peace as He, the Word, comes to make us acceptable in God's sight according to the manner He has instituted (Matthew 28:19-20; 26:26-29). He makes the walls of our church His sanctuary, which by definition means "sacred place" or "place of refuge." This is the spot where a holy God comes to make us into holy people through holy things. We find refuge from the unholy things that we say and do and an unholy world that tries to drag us down with it.

In His holy sanctuary He brings us back into Eden. If you look at our church on a map, you will see paradise pinpointed. Christ, the new Adam has righted the old Adam's wrongs, and stops by this sanctuary to make new creatures out of us in Him (Romans 5:12-21). By a tree, disobedient man has enslaved the world under sin and death, but by the tree of the cross, the God-man Jesus has freed us from our sin and turned our necropolis into a budding garden. He recreates us at the font, as the Spirit hovers over the face of those waters. He says "Let there be saints out of these sinners" with His Word, and God sees that we are good. He gives us the fruit of His body and blood from the tree of His cross, which does not lead us into sin like the forbidden fruit, but gives us new life and access to God again. Welcome to paradise!

The Sanctuary (Part II)

God remains hidden out of love and mercy. If He came in His full holiness we'd be crispier than bacon, for the holy cannot come into contact with unholy sinners like us (Exodus 33:20). Rather, God always has a place of His choosing in which He visits us in grace. For example, He dwelled with His people of old in the Jerusalem temple. There on Mt. Zion, He sat on the Mercy Seat (also called the Ark of the Covenant) in the Most Holy Place (also called the Holy of Holies), between two angelic figures (Exodus 25:17-22; 8-9). Even though God made Himself accessible, it was on limited terms. Only the high priest could enter behind the curtain to the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9:7).

However, Christ, our Great High Priest, has made perfect atonement for our sin, and gives full access to God to all whom He has sanctified with His blood (Hebrews 9:7). This is one reason why the temple curtain to the Most Holy Place was torn in two when Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross was made (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). At our church, the architecture of our sanctuary deliberately emphasizes our access here to God. He dwells graciously with us, which is why the Christian sanctuary reflects the layout of the tabernacle and temple. It is split up into three main parts just as the earlier tabernacle and temple were: the narthex is like the portico, the nave is like the Holy Place, and the chancel is the Most Holy Place. You'll notice, however, that we do not have a curtain dividing the nave from the chancel, because we have full communion with God!

Now having full access to God as forgiven saints we are able to approach Him in all holiness, fully confident that our Lord looks upon us in mercy. Jesus' perfect blood covers us through Holy Baptism and His Holy Supper, which lets us enter into His presence in a way that even the High Priest couldn't dream of. Rejoice! We can now approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

The Sanctuary (Part III)

The temple and the altar of the Old Testament foreshadowed the coming messiah, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9-10). The temple was where God dwelled benevolently with His people, and the altar was where the sacrifices were offered on their behalf, making it possible to approach Him. In Jesus, we see that He is the fulfillment of the temple (John 2:19-22; Revelation 21:22). He is Emmanuel, "God with us," and the Word that became flesh and dwelled (literally "tabernacled") among us (Matthew 1:23; John 1:14). He is not only the temple, where we have access to God, but He's also the Great High Priest and the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Hebrews 4:14; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). Our Lord, the fulfillment of this sacrificial system, is represented in the altar. This is why our attention in worship is always directed there.

At the altar in the chancel our Lord meets us. The Mercy Seat of the Old Testament is combined with the altar of sacrifice, because the two are joined together in the person and work of Christ. God's presence is truly with us as He locates Himself on the altar just as He did on the Mercy Seat. However, Jesus also shares with us the benefits of His sacrifice as the Lamb of God on the cross when He hides His very body and blood in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians). He willingly offered Himself as the perfect once-for-all sacrifice on the cross as the Great High Priest (Hebrews 10:1-18). Some churches have a statue of the risen Christ over the altar who still wears His wounds to remind us of what we receive there. God is indeed present at the altar in veiled fullness just as He was in the temple in Jerusalem, but He's also there to make you partakers of His saving work. The forgiveness of sins that He has won for us as He Himself made payment on our behalf is distributed from the altar.

Our focus is at all times on the altar and ought to always be so. It is front and center because it is where our Lord makes Himself available, forgives our sins and gives us access to Him. He makes us priests with Him (1 Peter 2:9). He washes us (Acts 22:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5), anoints us (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:20, 27), and vests us with sacred garments in Holy Baptism (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14; Revelation 7:14). He also cleanses us with His blood and bids us to eat of His sacrifice in His Holy Supper. He does this to make us just like the high priests of old who were prepared to enter God's presence (Leviticus 16; 7; 1 Corinthians 10:18). Here, in this sanctuary, we are prepared and given all of our Lord's priestly privileges and have greater communion with Him than any priest of antiquity. Having been made a royal priesthood, let us offer sacrifices of thanks and praise for all that Jesus, our temple, priest, and sacrifice, has done for us! (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1).

The Sanctuary (Part IV)

The attention-grabber in the sanctuary is always the altar, the figure of Christ. It is front and center, after all. It is where our Lord meets us with His true fleshly presence and mercy in the Sacrament of the Altar. However, the Lord is truly present and delivers His grace through Holy Baptism and His Word as well. This is why the other attention-grabbers of the sanctuary are the font and pulpit.

The font is the entry point for the Christian life. It is not only where our new life in Christ begins, but is always a present reminder that, having been cleansed of sin, we may now enter blameless into God's presence (Hebrews 10:22; Acts 22:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; Revelation 7:14). Since the font always has renewed significance for the Christian, it is clearly visible at all times. It should never be off in some far corner of the sanctuary, forgotten about until the next baptism takes place. Rather, it is a constant reminder of how God has cleaned up the mess of our sin and continues to keep us spotless through the water and Word.

The pulpit is a big and bulky station for preaching. There is a reason why pastors use it to preach their sermons: it hides them. Sure, they could walk up and down the aisle, flailing wildly and putting on a show while they preach, but that would put the attention on the man and not on God's Word. Preaching is God delivering His Word to His people through the humble means of a man's voice box. The point is not on how inspiring or entertaining he is, but the attention is on the most important, relevant, and timeless message that we always need to hear: Law and Gospel, repentance and forgiveness, our problem and Jesus' solution. Because of this, the preacher hides. It's not about him, but it's about the message that God delivers through him. The pulpit's heavy, massive presence also communicates that all preaching is anchored in God's Word, which is an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (Hebrews 6:19). The Gospel promise of God's Word is always sure and certain; therefore the pulpit is fixed in one spot.

Because we receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament from the altar, font, and pulpit, "Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song!" (Psalm 95:2).

The Sign of the Cross (Part I)

Isn't making the sign of the cross a Roman Catholic thing? Well, yes and no. It is in that they do it, but not in that they were the first to do it or are the only ones that practice this tradition. They do not have an exclusive claim to it because it was practiced by the earliest Christians. For example, St. Tertullian of Carthage, who lived c. 160-220 AD, said, "At every coming in and going, in putting on our clothes and our shoes, in bath, at table, lying down or sitting, we mark our foreheads with a little sign of the cross." Origen of Alexandria, who lived c. 184-254 AD, referenced this act saying, "All the faithful make this sign in commencing any undertaking and especially at the beginning of prayer or of reading Holy Scripture." Also, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived c. 313-386 AD, also encouraged signing with the cross: "Let us not be ashamed to confess He who was crucified. Be the cross our seal, made with boldness by our fingers on our brow and in everything; over the bread we eat and the cups we drink, in our comings and in goings; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we awake; when we are travelling, and when we are at rest." The sign of the cross was undoubtedly an important part of the Christian life for the early Church.

Do Lutherans also make the sign of the cross? Martin Luther himself also exhorts Christians to make the sign of the cross. In His *Small Catechism* he states that it is a good practice that accompanies prayer. When he teaches us how to pray in the morning and evening he suggests that "In the morning when you get up" and "In the evening when you go to bed" we "make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father, and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." There's no question that this is a good practice for each and every Christian as we remind ourselves of who we are in Christ, marking ourselves with the universal Christian symbol that makes all the difference for us. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."¹

¹ Tertullian, *de Corona* 3.

Origen, *In Ezekiel* 3.

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 13:36.

Martin Luther, *Small Catechism: Daily Prayers*.

Galatians 6:14.

The Sign of the Cross (Part II)

There's a reason why the cross is the most worn, displayed, and recognized Christian symbol. St. Paul says, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." He also says a little later, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" and "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The cross of Christ is the heart of the Christian faith, and it is our everything. When Satan tries to make us take back our sin we can point him to Calvary where those sins were nailed and put to death in the crucified body of our suffering Savior. Our sins are no longer on our shoulders, but have a new address at the cross. They are far removed from us. Because our sins doesn't stick to us, we are made to be holy, blameless, and righteous people. We now have freedoms unimaginable, for we no longer have to worry about our last hour, whether or not God will take care of us, or if we'll ever amount to anything. Through the cross of Christ, we have "become a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession...Once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God's people; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy."

The sign of the cross is so important because it gives us identity, purpose, and hope. It has something to say about every aspect of our lives and reminds us who we are in the shadow of the cross. We are baptized people, washed and cleansed of our sin through our co-crucifixion with Jesus, as St. Paul also reminds us: "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Baptism takes us to cross and the tomb, leaves our sins there, and raises us up with Christ to walk as new, revived, ever-living saints! This is why the Rite of Baptism gives several opportunities to mark the baptized with a sign of the cross; it is a visible sign of an invisible reality. The baptized are joined to the cross of Christ. For example, the pastor says, "Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your + forehead and upon your + heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified." Each time we hear the words of our Baptism, "In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit," we are reminded of our new identity in Christ and so we may make the sign of the cross. With

St. Paul we say: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."¹

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.; 1 Corinthians 2:2.

¹ Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 2:20.

The Sign of the Cross (Part III)

The cross is the heart of the Christian faith and defines our lives as disciples of Christ. It reminds us that we are joined to our Lord's cross and empty tomb through Holy Baptism. Our sins are put to death on Calvary and we now have new birth as saints thanks to Christ's passion, death, and resurrection on our behalf. We now live sanctified lives, kept holy by receiving again and again gifts from the cross. Jesus Christ has made perfect once-for-all payment for our sins, and continues to share such grace with us over and over through His Holy Word and Sacraments.

The Augsburg Confession of 1530, our first Lutheran statement of faith, agrees that the cross of Christ is the heart of the Christian faith. Article IV is concerned with this most precious Gospel: "human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins." This Gospel is made yours again and again as it is reapplied to you. Article V, which follows, shares how that Gospel gets to you: "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the Gospel". Throughout the Divine Service, the pastor serves as God's deliveryman and brings the abundant riches of the cross to you through Word and Sacrament.

Because he delivers gifts from the cross, the pastor makes the sign of the cross over you, which helps you to identify when a gift is being given. Of course, the whole Liturgy, being the Word of God, is a gift. However, there are particular points in the service when the pastor doles out particular gifts of grace from God to those in His care. When your pastor marks you with the sign of the cross at the times indicated in your hymnal (T), he hands over to you the limitless benefits of forgiveness, life, and salvation from our Lord's cross. The Invocation, the Holy Absolution, the Peace of the Lord, the distribution of the elements of the Lord's Supper, and the Benediction are a few examples of moments when the Lord gifts you through the pastor and, acknowledging that the Lord has indeed gifted you, it is good to make the sign of the cross as you use body language to say "Amen" ("Let it be so") with your whole self. The interaction between the pastor marking you with the cross and you marking yourself with the cross right afterwards communicates to yourself and others that a sacred gift is given and this gift is received.

Stained Glass

Stained glass is intentionally utilized in the Sanctuary rather than clear glass windows. This serves both practical and theological function. Practically, it keeps us from being distracted with what's "out there" and keeps us focused on what's happening in here. Imagine if we did have clear windows, we might be captivated by the cars whizzing by and the pedestrians traveling down the sidewalks. Theologically, the stained glass forces us to forget about the outside world and pay attention to what takes place during the Divine Service. After all, St. Paul exhorts us: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 4:8) What could possibly be more true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy than our Lord serving His gathered guests with His gifts of Word and sacrament? St. Paul also writes: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:2-3) What could ever take place during the liturgy that is less than the things that are above? Since heaven meets us right here in the Sanctuary, we ought to be attentive to our Lord as He speaks through the mouth of the pastor to share with us a Word of comfort and peace, and we should always be alert to His gracious blessings of celestial food and drink as we feast on His very body and blood hidden under bread and wine.

However the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Sometimes our minds do wander. We might find ourselves drifting off during the sermon. We might start thinking about the lawn that needs mowing that afternoon or begin deciding on where to go for brunch. We might even start to feel less and less awe in the Lord's house and need something to remind us of where we really are. Many times stained glass helps us to refocus. Often, Christian symbols or even saints of the Bible are depicted on stained glass. This preaches to us with the visual Word. The cross, for example, is a very powerful image that reminds us of what our sin deserves and what our Savior has done for us. Or, a depiction of Jesus, angels, or saints proclaims to us the hidden reality that we are surrounded by angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

An image's ability to point us to Christ and His work for us is God-pleasing, and is why the Lord even commissioned artists to work on the ornamentation of the Tabernacle and Temple. (Exodus 31:1-11; 2 Chronicles 2:13-14) It was to point all eyes to God. These objects and images served as silent messengers that spoke to the sense of vision, which is exactly what stained

glass still does for us today. The liturgical arts manifest the Gospel visibly just as Christ is God circumscribed in the flesh.

Vestments (Part I)

Have you ever wondered why your pastors wear those funny flowing robes? Have you thought to yourself, don't these guys know we're not in the middle ages anymore? Pastors aren't trying to follow the trends, but instead wear such clothing because of who, what, and where they are.

The word vestment is Latin for "garment", and these unique garments are typically worn in worship. We usually think of only the clergy wearing vestments, but keep in mind that acolytes and lay assistants are vested as well.

Whenever heaven comes to earth in the Scriptures, special garments are mentioned. Think of the angels at the empty tomb and the ascension (Matthew 28:2-3; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10) of Jesus when He is transfigured (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29). Such garments are described as dazzling, like lightning, intensely white, and radiant. This is because those who come into contact with God reflect His glory, His holiness, His purity (Exodus 34:29). His saints and all those that have communion with Him share in this together.

Because Jesus is here in Word and Sacrament, so are His saints. This is why the Church is called the body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:15; 5:23). We are each members of His body. So, if His body is on the altar, there are His saints kneeling beside you. If His Word is preached to you, there are His saints sitting next to you. If He's taking a dip at the font, there are His saints as eye-witnesses of the baptism. We confess this truth in the Preface, "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven..." So, it only makes sense that if heaven joins us here, those the Lord uses to deliver His gifts would look the part.

Having been baptized into Christ, we have each received our own robes of righteousness (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14; Revelation 7:14). Pastors reflect this saintly reality by wearing white robes in the chancel and deliver heaven to you through the Lord's gifts. As acolytes enter into God's presence in the Most Holy Place, the chancel, they wear robes to show that they have put on Christ and may confidently approach Him in righteousness. Elders and lay assistants wear them because they are helping to serve the congregation through such heavenly means. And the choir even has robes to join in the holy chorus. Don't feel left out just yet – you are wearing one too from your own baptism!

Vestments (Part II)

You'd probably expect policemen, firefighters, and soldiers to wear a uniform, right? How about your pastor? Pastors also wear uniforms, which are called vestments. Such clothing makes them stand out similar to the uniform of a civil servant. Vestments also have a practical purpose. Just as the uniforms of policemen, firefighters, and soldiers help them to perform their functions, so do vestments help pastors perform their duties.

If you are in danger then you'd probably look for someone wearing a badge. Likewise, if your house is on fire you'd wait until you saw the firefighters coming your way to breathe a sigh of relief. Similarly, if you're facing a spiritual crisis you might look to a man wearing a clerical collar. You can be sure that someone wearing vestments is in the Pastoral Office and can give you the good gifts that God delivers through that Office. If you would like Holy Baptism for yourself or your child, look for the guy in the collar. If your conscience is bothering you and you'd like private absolution, look for the guy in the collar. If you hunger and thirst for the body and blood of Christ, look for the guy in the collar. Vestments help the pastor perform His duty by both being recognizable and showing you that he's not speaking of his own human authority but is God's mouthpiece (as long as what he speaks corresponds with God's Word.)

Civil servants who wear uniforms usually don't do so to impress others or to make themselves feel important. Rather, they wear them to show that they're servants, and this is why pastors put on vestments. It is to remind both you and themselves that they're here to serve you in the way that they can. Such servant clothes visibly prompt the kinds of tasks they have been given to do through Word and Sacrament ministry, and also help to remind those men in the Office that it's not about them. Wearing vestments not only helps us to see God acting behind the pitiful man to bring His Gospel to you, but also helps the man to remember that he is there to be as Christ to the people in his care. So, next time you see a collar, a stole, or a chasuble, think about how these vestments function as a servant's uniform, in which the pastor is to deliver God's gracious gifts to you.

Vestments (Part III)

The most common and basic vestment that pastors wear – and the one you’ve likely seen the most – is a white robe, which is called an alb. The alb serves as the undergarment for all other liturgical vestments and is a reminder of the robe of righteousness with which all Christians have been clothed through baptism (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14; Revelation 7:14). It is the Christ which we have all put on that hides our sinfulness and covers our iniquities. It is one of the first vestments worn by the clergy of the early Church, which came from the long linen tunic worn by the Romans in those times. In fact, it gets its name from the Latin, *tunica alba*, which literally means “white tunic.”

There are a couple of reasons why this is still worn today. First, vestments are the emblems of the Office of the Holy Ministry, which are meant to cover the man so that the congregation doesn’t see him but is directed instead to look to Christ who has called that man to deliver His gracious gifts to them (Matthew 28:16-19; John 20:19-23; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 2 Corinthians 5:20). Second, these vestments have a rich historic tradition that portray the connection and continuity with the whole Christian community, past, present, and future. We, “with prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors of all times and places”, are gathered together as our Lord’s guests in His sanctuary.¹ The alb is a great reminder that heaven has touched down to earth in the person of Jesus as He comes to wait on us hand and foot: to wash us clean, to speak a Word of comfort and hope to us, and to serve us His Holy Supper. It makes sense why the alb is usually worn by the pastor – he is Christ’s hands and mouthpiece to give you the riches of Word and Sacrament in the Divine Service, where heaven joins us at the altar in the Feast of the Lamb.

Other vestments such as the cassock and surplice – which will be explained next – are consequently reserved for services such as Daily Offices like Matins and Vespers. These other vestments are worn because in those services our Lord more particularly comes to us through the spoken Word and not Holy Communion. Vestments always remind us of where we are (heaven on earth) and who is serving us (Christ Himself). Thanks be to God!

¹ John Pless, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, *Leaders of Worship*, 223

Vestments (Part IV)

Our common street clothes these days tend to be a t-shirt and jeans, but back in the middle ages men were dressed in cassocks. These vestments are the black ankle-length robes that you see pastors and sometimes assisting laity wear. The name is derived from Middle French, *casaque*, which literally means “long coat.” It is easy to see the longstanding influence that this style of garment has had even on our own fashion today. For example, if you take the lapels of any coat or blazer and put them together you’ll see that they form a collar with a square opening in the middle of the throat much like the cassock. While these garments have gone on to other styles and cuts, the clergy have held onto their use as vestments. They are distinguishable from the common dress of the laity when out in public. In fact, the black clerical shirt and collar are modeled after the cassock. The main difference is that instead of a single garment as was typical in centuries past, it is divided up between a clerical shirt and black pants. However, in worship the cassock is still worn in its characteristic form when worn with a surplice. The clerical shirt and black slacks under the pastor’s alb serve as a representation of the cassock during communion services.

The surplice is the white vestment that is worn over the cassock. The term surplice comes from the Late Latin, *superpelliceum*, which literally means “over fur.” Many cassocks were lined with fur to keep the wearer warm, and so the surplice went over them. This vestment is similar in form, function, and theological rationale to the white alb. This is worn by clergy and sometimes lay assistants in worship without communion. The minister who does wear the cassock only wears the surplice when he presides, since the place he stands on is considered holy ground because Christ is at work through him to deliver His gifts of Word and Sacrament. Thus, the surplice is put on when in the sanctuary or other places where the pastor serves the people, such as the graveside. It is not worn outside of a worshipful context. Like the alb, the surplice represents the heavenly garment that all Christians have received at baptism (Gal. 3:27, Rom. 13:14; Rev. 7:14). When Jesus delivers His grace and mercy through the pastor, heaven touches down to earth. It is only fitting that the pastor dressed the part to help remind us of this fact. He therefore vests himself with the surplice just as he is robed in righteousness with all the saints.

Vestments (Part V)

Why do pastors wear that shawl-like scarf around their necks; is there a draft or something? Not quite, that vestment is called a stole. It is derived from the Greek word *stola* that denotes a long, flowing robe, similar to those worn by the Jewish scribes in the Gospel accounts (Mark 12:38; cf. Revelation 6:11; 7:9, 13). It is a visible mark of the Office of the Holy Ministry. There is no question that someone who wears a stole is a pastor.

The stole has its origins in the world of the Greeks and Romans. Philosophers and scholars would wear a garment that was similar to, but quite larger than, the stole, called the *pallium*. Over the first few centuries it was reduced down to the size of a scarf like today's stole. Roman senators adorned such a garment as an emblem of their service to the citizens they governed. It symbolized a towel used for wiping the perspiration that resulted from working hard on behalf of the people.

Not only do pastors work hard in service to the flock they shepherd, but they have been given a great responsibility by the Lord. Theologically, it represents the "easy yoke" of our Lord, under which all under shepherds have been placed (Matthew 11:30). It is "easy" in that it is a pleasure to tend to one's flock, to share in their joys and to give them the peace of Christ in the midst of sorrows. However, it is at the same time a "yoke." Pastors are not on their own schedules but are always on call to do the Lord's work. Nor are they free to preach their own opinions and ideas but are confined to the Word of God (1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2).

Therefore, the stole is a mark of the preaching Office. The pastor bears the easy yoke of preaching the Gospel to his flock in the midst of every situation, helping them to interpret their circumstances in light of our Lord's cross. You can almost think of the stole as the staff of our Lord, the Good Shepherd, wrapped around the necks of His undershepherds and guiding them through His Holy Word. It is a mark that through the pastor, which literally means "shepherd," your Good Shepherd leads you to the green pastures of His kingdom; beside the still waters of Holy Baptism and where the cup of His Holy Supper overflows with goodness and mercy all the days of your life (Psalm 23; cf. Isaiah 25; Revelation 21).

Vestments (Part VI)

If you've ever been on a sports team then you know all about uniforms. The point is to look the same as the others on your team in color and design. A player on your team blends in as a teammate. The only difference is that you maintain a certain amount of individual identity by your unique number and name. Even your position on the team may be advertised on your uniform, like in hockey the "C" stands for captain and "A" stands for assistant captain. Vestments are much the same way.

Last week, we looked at how the stole signifies that a pastor has been given the role of preacher. Similarly, the chasuble signifies that a pastor has been given the role of celebrant during the Lord's Supper. Only worn by the one who officiates at the altar, it gets its name from the Latin word *casula*, which means "little castle" or "little house." This refers to its extensive poncho-like nature. The chasuble always matches the color of the rest of the team, as far as looking like the paraments and other vestments. However, the cut of the vestment helps us recognize the different position or role that this particular pastor plays in the Divine Service. Because the celebrant matches the rest of the team, he shares in the team's objective to share the Gospel and must only say and do what God's Word says. Each "player" helps meet their team's objective through their particular position. The stole shows that the preacher shares the Word of God through his sermon. The chasuble shows that the celebrant shares the Word of God by presenting the Word in visible form through the Sacrament of the Altar.

Distinguishing between the roles of the pastors is helpful because the chasuble reminds us that we will receive the gift of our Lord's body and blood. If we are visiting at another altar that shares our confession of faith or know someone who is visiting at our own altar the chasuble clearly shows us which pastor we should speak with before receiving the Lord's Supper. The celebrant is the one who will surely give you the Lord's Supper, so it's good to meet the "host" of the heavenly feast beforehand.

The chasuble also offers one more way for the pastor to cover himself up and hide in his vestments so that the focus is not so much on him as a man, but on the Office of Christ in whose stead and by whose authority he speaks. If it was about the man himself then he would wear a snazzy suit and a flashy tie, but it is never about a man trying to impress. It is always about Jesus and what He promises to do even through such a lowly man. Therefore, the pastor covers himself up so that he is camouflaged in the color of the liturgical season and hidden behind his vestments.

Acolytes

Did you know that there's an ancient tradition behind the duties of acolytes? The word acolyte actually comes from the Greek word *acolytos*, which literally means *companion, attendant, assistant, or helper*. Such assistants date back even before the early Church, originating in the Old Testament. For example, Samuel was an acolyte for the priest Eli (1Samuel 3:1) and Elisha assisted the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:21). The acolytes that serve in worship assist the pastor in delivering God's presence to the people.

Their main duty is to light candles, which is of no small importance. By bringing flame to the Sanctuary, they tell us that God is here to be present with us. Our Lord has often hidden Himself behind fire. He was in the burning bush with Moses (Exodus 3:1-6), He led His people Israel by a pillar of fire by night in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:24; Numbers 14:14; Nehemiah 9:12, 19), continued to manifest His presence through the light within in the Tent of Meeting and Temple (Exodus 27:21; Leviticus 24:3; cf 1 Samuel 3:3), and sent the Holy Spirit upon His Church in tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Christ also calls Himself the light of the world, who was sent to illumine our darkness (John 8:12, 9:5, cf John 1:9; 3:19; 12:46). Because our Lord is present with us in worship through His Word and Sacraments, acolytes are given the important job of lighting candles to represent God's company with us.

The service of acolytes should enhance your understanding of worship. Their lights remind you that God is indeed present with you today in a way that is much like how He visited His people of long ago. The light symbolizes His illuminating Word, which is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path as He gifts you with divine wisdom. It also truly represents His presence as He hosts you by washing you in the waters of the font, speaks to you from the lectern and pulpit, and feeds you at His altar. "Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" (Psalm 4:6).

Alter Linens

The altar is where our Lord meets us in His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Because of this, it didn't take long in the early Church before altars were made to look more like the body of Christ that rested on them in the bread of the Sacrament. Some were even shaped in such a way that they resembled a sarcophagus or tomb, long and rectangular. Many altars also have five crosses engraved into the stone, wood, or marble to represent the five wounds of Jesus. In this way, the altar is understood as more than a mere object, but is deliberately the focal point of worship because it represents the presence of our Lord. It is upon this altar that He gives us the fullness of His flesh to eat and His life-giving blood to drink, so it makes sense that the altar would take on the form of Christ's body.

Some churches see the altar as a sign of the presence of Christ in such a way that they anoint it just as the women went to the tomb to anoint and prepare the body of their crucified Lord. While our tradition is not usually to anoint the altar, we do dress it and thus follow in the footsteps of those women as they also came with burial linens. It was Jewish custom to prepare bodies for burial by wrapping them up in special cloths. The altar linens are reminiscent of the burial dressings that our Lord's body received. The fair linen, which is the long strip of cloth that goes lengthwise over the top of the altar, as well as the corporal, which is the smaller cloth on top of the altar, are examples. The fair linen may also have five crosses just like the altar. In 1521, Hans Holbein the Younger painted *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (see below). This was meant to be an art piece to go across an altar, which further illustrates the Church's general understanding of the altar as a tomb.

It might strike us as very odd to practice a burial custom in our Lutheran tradition. We tend to focus much on the resurrection, as we should, especially when it comes to the Lord's Supper. We eat and drink not a dead body and blood, but His eternal body and blood that nourish us with His same everlasting life. However, just as you can't split up Jesus' human nature and divine nature without destroying who He is as our Savior, so it is not wise to split up His crucifixion and His resurrection. They go together. After all, you can't have a resurrection without a dead body to raise up. Also, it was Calvary, not the empty tomb, where He gave His body into death for us and shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins. The Lord's Supper combines both Good Friday and Easter to grant the benefits of His sacrifice to us and at the same time gift us with a share in the resurrection life that is forever His. You can think of the altar linens as visually demonstrating our Lord's sacrifice just as a crucifix would. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (1 Cor. 11:26)

The Choir

Have you ever wondered why we have a choir? Choirs began back in the Old Testament. In the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, there was a choir of Levite priests. They were appointed by King David to sing before the presence of God: David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy. (1 Chronicles 15:16) Their praises in the temple were to tell of the wondrous works that God had done for His people. That is, His benevolent presence, His love, His mercy, and His grace; all located in that place. Many of the psalms were written for choir use in the temple. The voices of the choir blended with heaven as they joined in with the angels' song (Isaiah 6:3; cf. Luke 2:14; Revelation 4:8, 10-11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12) They directed those in worship to enter into a divine place where all saints, past and present, join together in one voice.

The purpose of choirs today is to do the same. We hear the good news of what God has done to deliver us from the perils of this life through Jesus Christ. However, they do not seek to take a stage for themselves and perform for us. Instead, they are strategically placed behind us to push us into the entrance of the Church's song around the throne of the Lamb. He brings His saints with Him to an altar near us to pay us a visit in His Holy Word and Sacraments. Our attention is always on His presence at the altar, but the choir behind us leads us to sing of the forgiveness, life, and salvation won through the Lamb's unparalleled once-for-all sacrifice. Let us sing out with one voice and join in heaven's song together!

The Eternal Flame

From ancient times, the Hebrew people kept a continual flame burning in the Tabernacle and Temple. This was in accord with what the Lord instituted to Moses: "You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn. In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel." (Exodus 27:20-21) This perennial light was called *ner tamid*, which can be translated as "eternal flame" or "eternal light." It is common today for Jewish synagogues to maintain this practice, despite the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70. The significance of the Sanctuary Lamp was to serve as both a testimony to God's presence on earth and His constant satisfaction with His people displayed through the perennial sacrifice that was always burning day and night as a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

The Christian Church in later times continued the practice of having an Eternal Flame. They had the understanding that, like the Tabernacle and Temple of the Hebrews, the Church was the pinpointed site of the Lord's promised dwelling with His people. The Roman Catholic Church used the Eternal Flame to tell all who entered into a church that the Lord is home in His temple because a consecrated host from the Sacrament would be reserved and put into a monstrance, which can also be called a reliquary or "tabernacle." This was done so that God's presence, Christ's very body, was always before us. The ever-burning light was a beacon pointing to the fact that God condescends to us in His Sanctuary, as He meets us in the flesh on the altar.

We, as Lutherans, stick to the Lord's Words of Institution, where He bids us to "Take, eat" and to "Take, drink" and not to "Take, show and tell." However, we do maintain the practice of having a Sanctuary Lamp because its unending flame is reminiscent of the Lord's unceasing presence with us. Even if He isn't put on display for our eyes, He is indeed with us in a special way that He doesn't promise to be anywhere else. He washes us at the font, speaks to us from the pulpit, and feeds us at the altar, as the work of Christ is applied to us through water, preaching, and bread and wine. Our Lord is with us only in love, for Christ is our perennial sacrifice who intercedes for us day and night at the right hand of God the Father. All things point to this fact, whether it be the stained glass, a statue of Jesus, a crucifix, banners and paraments or even the Eternal Flame. God comes to His holy Sanctuary promising: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

The Hand of Blessing

St. Paul writes that pastors, being in the stead of Jesus Christ, are stewards of the divine mysteries. They are to manage and handle the gifts that God has to give to His people through Word and Sacrament. It is therefore every pastor's pleasure and responsibility to share the blessing from on high with his congregation. That blessing is always sharing Christ with the Church. Jesus comes with healing through forgiveness, life, and salvation in water, bread and wine, and the Word. So, it only makes sense that we use visible signs to convey such invisible realities.

When the pastor puts the name of the Lord on us in blessing through the Word, whether it is with Baptism or the Invocation, the Absolution, or the Benediction, he gives us the one who is that very Word, Jesus Christ. Our Lord reminds us of this fact as He says, he who hears pastors hears Him. In receiving that name of the Lord through the Word of God we receive His divine presence. For example, at the dedication of the First Temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon asked how they could be certain that God would dwell there. In response, the Lord promised that He would locate Himself there because He put His name on the temple. When you have the Lord's name, you have the Lord's presence. Placing His name on us, we become His temple as He dwells within us.

Pastors then oftentimes make a special sign or gesture of blessing when they reapply God's name to the people. Not only does he trace the sign of the cross over them, but he can use his fingers to make the shape of two Greek letters, χ (chi) and ρω̄ (rho). These are the first two letters in Jesus' title of Christ (meaning "anointed one"), or in Greek: Χριστός (Christos). The first and second fingers form the chi and the third and fourth fingers along with the thumb form the rho, with the wrist as the tail of that letter. This molds the symbol of Christ that appears below. A pastor may also raise three fingers to represent the three persons of the Trinity, while holding the thumb and forefinger together to form a circle, representing the divine unity of the Trinity. This gesture of blessing is to our eyes what the Word is to our ears. We not only get to hear the Lord's name placed on us in blessing, but we also get to see the name of Christ put on us as well. We can walk away with confidence that the Lord goes with us to our home, our work, or anywhere else that we go because we have received the blessing of His name.¹



¹1 Corinthians 4:1; Matthew 28:19b; cf. John 20:19-23; Numbers 6:24-26; Luke 10:16; cf. John 13:20; Galatians 4:14; 1 Kings 8:27-30

Hymnals (Part I)

Lutheran hymnals can be summed up quite simply: God's Word. This Word is living and active, powerful enough to pierce to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart like a two-edged sword (Hebrews 12:4-13). In short, it cuts us to the heart with the Law of God. However, it is also packed with the power of God for salvation to everyone who hears its soothing Gospel (Romans 1:16). Since all Scripture is God-breathed (or literally translated "God-spirited"), the Holy Spirit is at work on the hearts of all who hear the Law and Gospel of God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16).

Because of this, the liturgy, which has been passed down through the Church for millennia, has always kept God's Word at the heart of all worship. Thumb through the Lutheran Service Book and you will see a Scriptural citation next to practically every part of every service. Even the hymns, with their rich, Christ-centered Biblical imagery, paraphrase God's Word. *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, for example, relies on the text of Psalm 46, which unpacks how in Christ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Martin Luther encouraged the Church to utilize music as a vehicle for proclaiming the Law and the Gospel. He said, "Next to theology, I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honor."¹ Music was a means to put the living Word on the lips of God's people and provide a way to memorably carry the doctrine of the Church throughout one's daily life.

It's important that we don't stunt God's Word. We could sing, "Praise be to the LORD" over and over for a hundred times. This would be God's Word, sure, but it would lack the rich explication of the salvation accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ and would not explain *why* He is to be praised. Without the thorough scope of Law and Gospel we would not know that we are sinners in need of a Savior. This is why our Synod has made it a condition for a church to acquire and hold membership only if she agrees to make "Exclusive use of doctrinally-pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school."² The reason why we have agreed on the exclusive use of doctrinally pure hymnals, is to be unified as one Church. Hymnals provide us with doctrinally-sound liturgy, hymns, and prayers that help us to worship our Lord and receive His good gifts in spirit and truth. They not only share God's Word, but proclaim its fullness as only Christ crucified and risen can. When the complete message of Law and Gospel in God's Word is proclaimed, sinners are forgiven, hearts are cleansed, and the dead are raised. Alleluia!

¹ Carl F. Schalk. *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1998), 55.

² Article VI 4 Constitution of the LCMS

Hymnals (Part II)

A Lutheran Hymnal is: God's Word. The Lutheran hymnal expresses the fullness of that Word in both our Lord's Law and Gospel. We are convicted of sin and granted faith to cling to our Savior alone. It is so rich with God's Word that its liturgies, rites, and prayers have stood the test of time. This makes the hymnal not only a weekly resource for the Christian in corporate worship, but a daily resource for this life of discipleship.

Quite often, we do not know how to express our thoughts and feelings, our guilt or shame, our cares and concerns, in words. Ready-to-use prayers provide us with the words that we search for. Too often, however, we have words that express the cares and concerns of our sinful hearts all too well. The words that flow don't always express the truth of God's Word. For example, we tend to pray for success, painlessness, and a life of ease. It's easy to pray for things that make us more independent from Him than it is for things that make us more dependent on Him. In other words, we try to bully God into giving us what we want and not what we need. The Lord never promises that He'll give us our immediate desires, but only that which is best for us in His infinite wisdom. Sometimes we need crosses and trials to mold and strengthen our faith. This ultimately is the most gracious thing that God gives, for He makes us better through it all. Using the prayers of the hymnal, we learn to pray as we ought and to ask God for things that we might not have asked for on our own. What if Jesus never gave us the Lord's Prayer, would truly we pray, "Thy will be done"? We might never think beyond our own petty wants.

The hymnal provides us with daily prayer for ourselves and our families. One example is the Psalter (1-150), which addresses every possible joy and concern in our lives. The Psalms plug us in to the prayers of the Church of all times and places, as well as Jesus. There are also Daily Prayer Offices such as Matins (219), Vespers (229), Morning Prayer (235), Evening Prayer (243), and Compline (253) that are a great way to begin or close your day in prayer and meditation. Other services and resources for our prayer life include the Service of Prayer and Preaching (260), looking back at what happened to us at our Baptism (268) and Confirmation (272), Responsive Prayer 1 & 2 (282; 285), the Litany (288), Daily Prayer for Individuals and Family (294), as well as various prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for every occasion (305). There are also ways to set up a scheduled prayer life, like a Daily Lectionary (299) and Table of Psalms for Daily Prayer (304). The Creeds, like the Athanasian Creed (319), put the Church's faith on our lips and into our hearts. Martin Luther's Small Catechism (321) ought to daily remind us of the faith that has been made our own. In addition, putting prayer into song can be very helpful as the text not alone articulates the cares of the heart but so does the tune through music. There are over six hundred different hymnic prayers available to us. The Lord has truly provided us with a rich resource for lifting up our prayer and praise, not only in our pews but also in our daily vocations. Thanks be to God!

Paschal Candle

Christ calls Himself “the Light of the World” (John 8:12). Just as God led His people as a pillar of fire by night at the Exodus (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:24; Nehemiah 9:12, 19), so does Christ illumine our darkness in the midst of the wilderness wanderings of our own sin-dimmed lives. He meets us at church to lead us out of the sin, death, and hell that we find ourselves in with His unending supply of grace and mercy. The Paschal Candle, sometimes called the “Easter Candle”, is a visible reminder of the Word [made flesh] that is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105), as we encounter His guiding presence in His sanctuary much like the people of old did in the pillar of fire.

All Paschal Candles share some common characteristics that point to our Savior as the saving light. For example, the central design or focus of the candle is the cross, the location of Jesus’ saving work through His suffering and death in our place. Also, it is typical to have an A (Alpha) and Ω (Omega), which stand for our eternal Lord, the One who was, who is, and who is to come (Revelation 1:8; cf 21:56). Often, there are five “nails” or grains of incense for each one of the five wounds of Jesus. Usually, the current year is on the candle to highlight the abiding presence of Christ for our time as well. The Paschal Candle is always the biggest candle in the whole Sanctuary, because He is always our focus of worship. He is both the Giver and at the same time the Gift.

The Paschal Candle leads us through the different seasons of the Church Year. It is generally only lit during the fifty days of Easter, when it is reintroduced anew each year at the Vigil of Easter. Then, it is placed near the altar and remains lit for every service to remind us that our resurrected Lord is with us and that we will shine brightly like Him at our own resurrection. At the Ascension of our Lord, the Paschal Candle can be extinguished after the reading of the Holy Gospel to symbolize the change from His earthly presence with us to His Sacramental presence. At the Feast of Pentecost, the candle is then removed from the chancel and taken back down to its place at the Baptismal font, to indicate Christ’s presence with us in the sacred waters. Throughout the rest of the Church Year, after Easter, it is typical to only light the Paschal Candle for Baptisms. At Christian funerals, the Paschal Candle may also be placed at the head of the casket to connect the promise made at Baptism, where the deceased was crucified, buried, and raised with Jesus (Romans 6:3-10). The Paschal Candle also reminds us of our resurrection on the last day (1 Corinthians 15). Our union with Christ through His death and resurrection in Baptism plays out in our body, when

we, ourselves, die and are raised again. “Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD” (Psalm 4:6).

Pews

Does it really seem necessary to have such cold, hard, uncomfortable seating in church? Why can't the church just catch up with the times and ditch the pews? Don't we want people to feel comfortable and at home in the church? These questions may have drifted through our minds a time or two, but there is actually a reason why we still continue to sit in the pews of centuries past despite the many modern developments in chairs and seating.

To be honest, pews are truly a relatively new phenomenon. Ancient Israel never had a spot to take a load off in their places of worship. Our Nave in the Sanctuary is modeled after the Holy Place of the Tabernacle and Temple, which didn't have seating. Instead, everyone was expected to stand. After all, it was the closest place to God's earthly presence that the people could come, so it would have been very inappropriate to be in a relaxed position. Rather, standing was a reverent posture for the Lord's house as it demonstrated attentiveness and proper respect and admiration toward God. Think of when you're meeting someone of great honor for the first time. You usually wait for them to invite you to have a seat with them before making a bold move and getting too comfortable in a chair. How much more honor do we show to our holy, just, and omnipotent Lord? The early Church followed the tradition of standing for worship, recognizing that God is in the midst of His people through Word and Sacrament. Many Eastern Orthodox churches still practice this today, where seating is very sparse. Usually it is reserved only for the elderly and others with special needs. Not until the late medieval period did seating become integrated into the churches of the West.

For us, pews have a lot to say about where we are and what we do. They aren't the coziest, and this is intentional. We should never feel too comfortable in God's presence, but always have a healthy fear and awe of the Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Pews thusly assist us in staying alert and attentive to the rich gifts that God gives us through the Word of His liturgy and the means of grace. We are ever focused on what that Word says about our sinfulness and the forgiveness of that sin through Christ Jesus. Also, pews are meant to be communal. That is, their bench-like nature encourages Christian fellowship by having us all sit together in common pews. Instead of individual seating, which promotes individualism and division, we share the same pew with others, which illustrates that we, though many members, are still one body. We don't spend too much time sitting during worship, but when we do we are reminded of whose presence we are in and who we're with. As we meet Christ our Head at the Font, the Pulpit, and the Altar, the pews tell us that we receive Him together as His

Body, the Church. Let us use every opportunity in our worship and practice to proclaim this fact, even when it comes to how we sit.

Postures of Piety

Read through the Bible and you'll notice that whenever humanity comes into contact with God something happens. They drop. Moses lay prostrate before the Lord, petitioning on behalf of the people. After Elijah went head to head with the prophets of Baal, the people fell prostrate and confessed the true God after seeing His power made manifest. When the glory of the Lord filled Solomon's Temple after its dedication, everyone knelt with their faces to the ground before the Lord. People even knelt before Jesus, understanding Him to be the Lord God incarnate. The whole heavenly host also falls before the throne of God in humble worship. Therefore, when we enter into His very presence in the Sanctuary crying, "Lord, have mercy!" like those lepers, blind, deaf, and sick who knelt at Jesus' feet, it only makes sense that we should show reverence as well.

In churches where kneelers are present, it may be the practice to kneel during certain parts of the service. Even if we do not kneel, genuflect, or lay prostrate before the altar, we can still show reverence. One thing that we can do is to show reverence by slightly bowing the head and acknowledging Him as Lord, which is called *reverencing*. This is most often done when people approach His altar, where He abides with us in bread and wine. The altar area is called the Chancel and serves the same purpose as the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and Temple. We, as sinners, approach Him humbly. This is why the pastor, the acolytes, the communion assistants, the ushers, the altar guild, and anyone else stepping into the Lord's presence reverence the altar.

There are other times when reverencing is appropriate. The Scriptures tell us that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth". It is Scriptural to reverence the name of Jesus. At doxologies, especially the *Gloria Patri*, which is when we say, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit" it is also appropriate to slightly bow our head as we acknowledge that the Lord is here and that we have access to Him, joining the heavenly host in ceaseless worship. This communicates to ourselves and to one another, including setting an example for our children, that something special is taking place. The Lord is answering His peoples' plea of "Lord, have mercy!" by visiting us and delivering His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.¹

¹ Deuteronomy 9, 1 Kings 18:39, 2 Chronicles 7:3, Matthew 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 17:24; John 18:6, Revelation 5:8; 7:11

Prayer Postures

Where does it say in the Bible “Thou shalt fold thy hands, bow thy head, and close thine eyes when thou prayest”? Well, it doesn’t. However, we’ve all been taught to do this at some point in our lives. While it’s not commanded, such a posture can help us understand what prayer is. There’s an old Latin churchly saying: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which literally translates, “the law of prayer is the law of belief.” This simply means that how you put your faith into practice through prayer and worship will actually shape and reinforce that which you believe. Folding your hands when you pray can in fact help to mold your theology of prayer.

The history of this prayer posture dates back to the legal and military customs of medieval feudalism in Europe. When approaching a lord or monarch, the vassal would kneel with hands clasped before him. This was a vassal’s gesture of dependence upon the lord as well as a pledge of allegiance to him. The vassal was at the mercy of the lord and in a sense was fearing, loving, and trusting in that lord for what he needed. The lord would then respond by promising protection or supplying that vassal with other particular needs. He would show his favor toward the vassal with a gesture of his own. The lord would reciprocate the vassal’s outward clasped hands by reaching out his own two hands and wrapping them around the vassal’s. This showed that the wish was granted, as good as done. An obligation or contract was made between the two parties.

We, as lowly creatures, humbly come before the Lord in prayer. We petition Him for our needs of body and soul. God promises to hear us through prayer (Luke 11:9). We can be confident that if even evil earthly men like those lords of old can grant the requests of common vassals then our heavenly Father who has made us his dear children through Baptism will indeed listen to us intently and answer our prayers according to His good and gracious will (Luke 11:13). The prayer posture of folded hands teaches us that we come to God in humility and seek His mercies fearing, loving, and trusting Him above all things. We can be certain that God wraps his hands around our praying hands in favor. He will grant us our requests according to His Word. It is therefore fitting whenever we are in conversation with the Lord God Almighty to position ourselves with hands folded, holding them out in hopeful and expectant reliance on Him, and ready to receive His blessing. So, next time you fold your hands during the Prayer of the Church, at the altar rail, or whenever you are accustomed to doing this, think about what your posture communicates to yourself and to others. As we cry, “Lord, have mercy!” the Lord loves to respond with His boundless mercy.