

# Understanding What Makes Worship Lutheran

*Southern Illinois District  
The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*

*2007 – Second Edition*

*[Prepared for Congregational Visitation  
Mandated by 2006 Convention Action]*

## Understanding What Makes Worship Lutheran<sup>1</sup> ...For the Visitation – 2006-2008

### **Introduction**

**One of the best summaries of the nature of worship in the Lutheran Church is found in the introduction to Lutheran Worship:**

*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 our Baptism. We are His. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where His name is, there is He. 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 has used to make Himself known to us. The rhythm of our worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gifts His gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another 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 from 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 tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day – the living heritage and something new.<sup>2</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> The question might better be phrased: “What makes worship Christian?” We start with this question (“What makes worship Lutheran?”), however, because this is the way it is usually asked among us. But even the way the question is asked can be misleading, as though there is a minimal number of elements we have to have to be sure worship is Lutheran. Our purpose here is to ask how we can confess the fullness of the Gospel in our worship. That’s what makes worship not only Lutheran, but Christian, centered in the gifts of the Blessed Trinity.

<sup>2</sup> *Lutheran Worship*, Concordia Publishing House, 1982, p. 6.

**The purpose of this present document** is to help us discuss the Biblical and Confessional issues surrounding our conversations regarding various forms of worship in use among us. Please work through the points below, seeking God's help to confess together the fullness of the Gospel of Christ in our worship. In essence, therefore, the question we ought be asking is, "What makes worship Christian?" It is not simply a matter of taste (though preferences of taste often enter in) but a matter of how we are called faithfully to communicate the saving and life-giving Word of God in our day and time, and in our congregations. Work through each of the statements below to discuss carefully the issues according to Scripture and our confessions (which are drawn from Scripture). May God bless your study and our dialog together.

- 1) In Christian worship according to the Lutheran confessions, **we repeat back to God what He has first said to us.** We speak what we have heard from Him in His Word, for that is what is most true and sure (the "formal principle" of our theology). *"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."* (1 Corinthians 2:12-13 NIV). This does not mean that every word of our worship must be a direct quote of Scripture, but that every word and thought must "ring true" with Scripture. For instance, in the three ecumenical creeds **we summarize** in **our** language (taught by the church of all places and times) what **God says** about Himself in His Word. Our theology is drawn from and normed by Scripture.
- 2) **The center of our life together in the body of Christ, indeed also our worship, is the doctrine of justification by faith alone,** the "article on which the church stands or falls." In other words, the church lives by the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, her crucified and risen Lord (the "material principle" of our theology), as we confess in AC IV –

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.<sup>3</sup>

When this teaching functions at the heart of our life together, the goal of Lutheran worship is to receive by faith the gifts of God (forgiveness of sins, life and salvation) and to give these gifts of God to others. All this also results in thanksgiving and praise to God, beginning here in time and continuing before His throne forever (Revelation 7:9ff), all *"to the praise of His glorious grace"* (Ephesians 1:6). See also a companion document, "Welcome to the Divine Service!"<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (The Confession of Faith: 2, IV, 1-2). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>"Welcome to the Divine Service!" prepared by Pastor Jeff Hemmer of Hope Lutheran in Jerseyville, IL, for lay people, emphasizes how every part of our worship is centered in God's gift, particularly the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. It is worth your study and discussion as part of our present process.

- 3) Therefore, everything in worship needs to revolve around the **forgiveness of sins given in Word and Sacrament**, just as a wheel revolves around its hub and axle. **Christ is the center, the sum and substance of our worship.** He comes to give His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation through His Word and Sacrament. We respond in Spirit-worked faith and in thanksgiving and praise. As Paul writes, *“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on man’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”* (1 Corinthians 2:2-5 NIV). See also Romans 10:8-17, et al.
- 4) **All worship follows a form – a liturgical form.** Whatever you may call it – high liturgical, traditional, blended, contemporary, new song, even informal – it doesn’t matter, there are words spoken or sung that follow some kind of form or pattern. Even if in a given congregation the form changes completely from week to week, there is still a **liturgical form**, that is, **an order that is followed.** What shape that form takes is another question, but every service has a liturgical form – it has to, for the only alternative is total chaos. (See Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33).
- 5) As Lutherans we believe **the shape and content of all our liturgical forms or patterns of worship must be Biblical and confessional.**
- a. Biblical – meaning that the forms use Scripture, follow Scripture, are normed by Scripture, are consciously Trinitarian, and are centered in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead for us (formal principle).
  - b. Confessionally Lutheran – meaning that the central focus is on the forgiveness of sins, that is, receiving the gifts God wants to give (material principle). To believe in Christ is to look to Him for the forgiveness of sins, as we confess in the Apology:
 

Christ says in Luke 7:47, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, because she loved much.” But he interprets his own words when he adds: “Your faith has saved you” (v. 50). Now Christ did not want to say that by her works of love the woman had merited the forgiveness of sins. Therefore he clearly says, “Your faith has saved you.” But faith is that which grasps God’s free mercy because of God’s Word. If anybody denies that this is faith, he utterly misunderstands the nature of faith. And the account here shows what he calls “love.” The woman came, believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. **This is the highest way of worshiping Christ. Nothing greater could she ascribe to him. By looking for the forgiveness of sins from him, she truly acknowledged him as the Messiah.** Truly to believe means to think of Christ in this way, and in this way to worship and take hold of him.<sup>5</sup>
  - c. Biblical and confessional worship (See Matthew 28:18-20) is very consciously Trinitarian. “And the catholic faith is this, that we worship

---

<sup>5</sup>Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 1, III, 31-33). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 127f (emphasis added).

one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.”<sup>6</sup>

- 6) Our response of praise and thanksgiving to God is not a work we do to obtain a higher standing in God’s eyes, but is the Spirit-worked glad response of praise and thanks to God for His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation in Jesus Christ. Worship is faith in action! **We believe the highest worship of God is to receive His gifts.**

It is easy to determine the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the law. **Faith is that worship which receives God’s offered blessings;** the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers.<sup>7</sup>

Some would say the liturgy is the work of the people. Others would say that the liturgy is the priest or pastor working on behalf of the people. There is some truth in both statements, but the heart of the matter is this: **In the Lutheran understanding, liturgy is Christ’s work for the people** (which also evokes our response of faith). We celebrate, remember and receive Christ’s work for us, delivered to us in Word and Sacrament, and put to use by us in faith. (See Ephesians 2:17-22, *et al*). Traditionally, we have distinguished the sacramental and sacrificial actions in worship. Sacramental actions are those places where God is working in Christ on our behalf. Sacrificial actions are our responses of faith, love, thanksgiving and praise to God’s work.

- 7) Liturgical forms ought to teach. No, **all liturgical forms DO teach. What people pray they will believe.** We must realize that everything in our liturgical forms – what we say, what we sing, the music we use and the orders we follow – will teach people what to believe and to say about God. Therefore, the content of each worship service must be Biblical and must properly divide and apply Law and Gospel. Whatever the worship “style,” great care must be taken regarding the content of our liturgical forms because **what our people pray they will believe.** Our hymns sing the theology we believe and teach. We repeat back to God what He has said to us. *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:15-16 NIV).* What you win them with you will also win them to. Lutheran worship is multi-sensory, involving motion, sound, sight – everything teaches something. *“The chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ.”*<sup>8</sup>

- 8) **Lutheran worship is participatory.** It is not a performance by a few to be watched by the many. Our culture trains us to be spectators at sporting events,

---

<sup>6</sup> *Athanasian Creed, Lutheran Service Book*, p. 319.

<sup>7</sup> Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 1, II, 49). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 114 (emphasis added).

<sup>8</sup> Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (The Confession of Faith: 3, III, 3). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 56.

concerts, etc., to sit back and watch. Only if something exciting happens do we “get into it.” Worship ought be counter-cultural, at least in this – we are not spectators but *participants*, drawn into the worship of the Triune God in heart, soul and mind. Lutheran worship forms (whatever the “style”) need to *involve* the worshiper in the action, that is, to *receive* the gifts of God in faith and to *respond* to them in lives of love, thanksgiving and praise. “*This is the work of God, that you believe in the One He has sent*” (John 6:29). (Discuss: Do the forms in use in your congregation truly do this? Why or why not?) By His Word and Sacrament given in worship, Christ Himself comes to feed, to strengthen, to forgive, to enliven His people with His Spirit.

...thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. So children pray, “I believe in one holy Christian church.” Its holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, albs, or other ceremonies of theirs which they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures, but it consists of the Word of God and true faith.<sup>9</sup>

- 9) God speaks. We listen and then repeat back to Him what He has said to us. Because this exchange of faith is at the heart of our worship, **those who are planning worship for God’s people must consider at least these questions:**
- a. As we are planning, we need always to ask: Is it Biblical? Is it Christ-centered? Does it make justification by faith alone clear? Does it properly divide Law and Gospel? Or are these two doctrines confused? Does it clearly draw us into the worship of the Blessed Trinity, in Whom alone is life? Is there a thorough-going use of Scripture (not just a verse or two taken out of order)?
  - b. What is appropriate to the particular day in the church’s year?
  - c. What themes rise from the Scripture Lessons appointed or chosen?
  - d. What songs are appropriate to the day? What do these songs teach?
  - e. Is the music appropriate to the lyrics and what we are trying to teach about God? Do the songs keep Christ as the focus or do they focus too much on us? What is the emotive function of the hymns (appropriate use of major and minor keys)? Consider what it is that you are “trying to do” with a particular song? Is it an appropriate use?
  - f. Do the various songs and liturgical forms extol what Christ does for us? Or do they center in what we have done? If the focus is too much on us, then Christ for us begins to fade into the background. Whether contemporary or otherwise, songs that put the focus mostly on me or my feelings often assume the Gospel and may lead us to trust our efforts or decision rather than Christ – and that is idolatry. (Count up the “I’s” and the “me’s.” Who is doing the verbs?)
  - g. Do the various songs and liturgical forms have theological depth? There are songs that may be fun to sing, or favorites people love, but have no substance. They may not be wrong (in fact they may repeat a line of

---

<sup>9</sup>Tappert, T. G. (2000, c1959). *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church* (The Smalcald Articles: 3, XII, 2-3). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p. 315.

Scripture) but if they have little depth of theology, a steady diet of such songs will not feed the people much spiritual food. Historically, Lutherans have sought to provide a balance of rich theological fare in our hymns.

- h. As Lutherans we believe one of the purposes of our hymnody and our singing is to draw our people into the rich theology of the Bible and our confession. Worship planners need to ask – what are we teaching by this song? Does this draw God’s people deeper into His Word? Is the focus on Christ? Over the course of the year, do we draw people into the full range of our Biblical theology by what we sing? Remember, in faith we confess to God and before the world what God has said to us.
- i. Is everything we do in the service done well? Is there an appropriate variety? (There is much room for creative use of the many resources available to us within the structure and forms of the historic liturgy we have received.)
- j. Is the sermon connected to the rest of the service? Does the sermon properly distinguish law and Gospel, making real connections to the lives of the people? (We have not dealt specifically with preaching here, but much of what we have said here would apply also to preaching.)
- k. In your discussion, we recommend you examine *Lutheran Service Book*, our Synod’s new hymnal, which, in the opinion of many, gives us the best of the best from many resources.
- l. Have you talked with your brothers in your circuit about what you are doing in worship? Pastors walking together in a Synod are accountable to each other and are exhorted by Scripture to do everything possible to preserve the “*unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” (*Ephesians 4:3*). Do discuss in your circuit gatherings what you are doing and why.
- m. Note also that your building and how it is laid out will also either support or detract from a good understanding of Lutheran worship.

**10) Worship planners must also remember our commitment as members of the Synod to fulfill the conditions of membership, one of which is: “Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school.”<sup>10</sup>**

---

<sup>10</sup> 2004 Handbook of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Constitution, Article VI, p. 13. This does not mean that we can use ONLY materials from one of our three officially adopted hymnals (otherwise we could not use newly written songs before they are approved by a synodical convention) but it DOES mean that everything we use MUST be biblical and confessional, i.e. doctrinally pure (see items 1-8 above!). Who decides? Ultimately, every pastor is responsible before God and to his congregation (and the Synod!) for the doctrinal content of what is used in worship. (But that is also why Synod helps in this matter through the doctrinal review process of any materials published by CPH, etc.) This involves judging not only what a song or worship form does say, but also considering what might be consistently left out. Please note also our commitment, as members of the Synod, to the objectives of the Synod, which include: “ 6. *Aid congregations by providing a variety of resources and opportunities for recognizing, promoting, expressing, conserving, and defending their confessional unity in the true faith.* 7. *Encourage congregations to strive for uniformity in church practice, but also to develop an appreciation of a variety of responsible practices and customs which are in harmony with our common profession of faith.*” (2004 Handbook, p. 12, *emphasis added*).

Our worship forms must be doctrinally pure. The basic question to ask is: Does this form or song keep us at the shallow level of common clichés or does it truly draw the worshiper into a deeper understanding of and participation in “*the faith once delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3)?

**11) Liturgy in the Lutheran Church is intended to be evangelistic** in that worship is to be centered in the Gospel and is to bring the Gospel into the lives of sinners who need it. People by nature try to squeeze life out of created things and look to the natural order for all the good gifts that come only from communion with the Triune God. The Gospel of Christ, on the other hand, frees us from this idolatry in which we are ensnared by our sin and brings us into the joy of the worship of the one, true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in Whom alone is life. The divine service is intended to draw people into the worship of God forever – remember, the highest worship of God is to believe His promises and to receive His gifts. Therefore, all our liturgical forms need to connect people to Christ and truly bring His gifts into their lives. Where the Word of God is, there is life, and life forever. Virtually every one of our hymns includes some aspect of the way of salvation in Christ. Worship centered in the Gospel and focused on the Triune God produces evangelists, that is, people who bring the Gospel to others and invite them to hear the Word of Life. For the church evangelizes to draw people into the worship where God gives life. Jesus said, “...*true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him*” (John 4:23). Here in the divine service the Father seeks worshipers so that He may give life in His Son and through His Spirit.

**12) Lutheran worship is rooted in the worship of the church of all ages and all times.** We are not alone in our worship, nor are we the first to think about worship. While we must be relevant to our context, this is not at the expense of our connection to the church that has gone before us and will be here long after we are gone (should the Lord tarry). No church uses the liturgy exactly as the church fathers did – even they adapted and refined the treasures they had received from others. We benefit from what sustained them, as we pray those who follow us will benefit from what sustained us.

**13) Once more, in Lutheran worship, we repeat back to God what He says to us,** receiving His promise in faith and, in response, living in His love in Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Our Lord Jesus came among us as one who serves. We conclude with this emphasis from the introduction to the Synod’s new hymnal, Lutheran Service Book:

*Our Lord is the Lord who serves. Jesus Christ came into the flesh not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. On the cross He offered Himself as a spotless sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Through His perfect life and death, He accomplished forgiveness and*

*salvation for all before the Father in heaven. By His empty tomb and ascension into heaven, He declared His victory over sin and death to all the world. Seated now at the Father's right hand, He graciously serves His Church with the gifts of salvation. On the Last Day, He will come again to gather His elect from every nation to celebrate the feast that will have no end.*

*Our Lord serves us today through His holy Word and Sacraments. Through these means, He comes among us to deliver His forgiveness and salvation, freeing us from our sins and strengthening us for service to one another and to the world. At Holy Baptism, He puts His name upon us, pours His Holy Spirit into our hearts, and rescues us from sin, death and the devil. Through Holy Absolution, He pronounces forgiveness again and again. With His holy Word, written in Scripture and preached into our ears. He daily proclaims His abiding love for us through all the joys and sorrows of life in this world. In His Holy Supper, He gives us His own body and blood to eat and drink as a priceless gift to nourish and strengthen us in both body and soul.*

*The Lord's service calls forth our service – in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to Him and in loving service to one another. Having been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we receive His gifts with thankfulness and praise. With psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we joyfully confess all that God has done for us, declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Our song joins with the song of every saint from every age, the new song of Christ's holy people, declaring, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12).<sup>11</sup>*

*In the name of Jesus!  
+ Herbert Mueller  
Southern Illinois District  
The Week of Epiphany II, 2007*

---

<sup>11</sup> *Lutheran Service Book*, Concordia Publishing House, 2006, p. viii.

## Welcome to the Divine Service!

As the name suggests, this is God's service. It is here that He has promised to meet us and give us the *gifts* He generously wants to lavish on us. Pay careful attention to what's going on around you because there's a unique pattern to worship in a Lutheran church.

First of all, notice the **pastor**. He is the one sent by God to give out His *gifts*. His white robe symbolizes the holiness of Jesus Christ, which is the first *gift* we have been given. His robe covers his clothes, just as Christ's holiness covers our sins. Also notice the direction the pastor faces. When he faces the congregation, he usually is speaking as God's representative to us. When he faces the altar, he speaks as our representative to God.

The service begins **in the name** of the Triune God: **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. It is in this name that we were baptized (Matthew 28:19-20), the time when God gave us the *gifts* of new life and faith in Him and made us His children (Romans 6:3-4). We speak the name of the God who comes into our presence.

Next, we **confess** our sins: the ways we have failed to obey God's Word completely. God's word is clear: "be perfect" (Matthew 5:48). We sin when we do what has been prohibited and when we fail to do what has been commanded. We can never be perfect. Jesus, the only one who fulfilled God's standard of perfection, offers to us the *gift* of forgiveness. According to Jesus' promise "if you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven (John 20:23)," when the pastor says "I forgive you, in the name of Jesus," those are the words of Jesus to you. Jesus takes all our sins upon Himself, pays the penalty we deserved, and gives us the *gift* of His own holiness.

After we receive forgiveness of our sins, the pastor literally "moves into" the presence of God as he—on our behalf—approaches the altar. Just as through Baptism, God gave us the *gift* of membership in his church, once our sins have been forgiven and we have been declared holy, we move from the **Baptismal Font** (the white piece of furniture in the front of the center aisle) to the **Altar**. Historically, the service began with the Introit (Latin for "entrance"); Confession and Absolution was a separate service, prior to the gathering of the church.

In the **Kyrie** (Greek for "Lord"), we are invited to pray to God in song, asking for His continued good *gifts* in our lives. Then the **Hymn of Praise** (also called the Gloria in Excelsis) is our response to God for the *gifts* He has given us, some of which we mention in this sung portion of the service. During the seasons of Advent (4 weeks before Christmas) and Lent (40 days before Easter), we omit the Gloria in Excelsis, a joyful expression, to highlight the preparatory nature of these seasons and to focus on our repentance. Also in Lent, to distinguish it from Advent and to draw our repentance into greater focus, we omit all "Alleluias" (Praise the Lord, in Hebrew). At the news of Christ's resurrection on Easter, our immediate response is a joyous "Alleluia!"





The reading of **God's Word** from the Lectern and the preaching of the sermon from the Pulpit are equally important parts of Lutheran worship. God promises that His Word never returns to Him empty (Isaiah 55:11). No matter what, this is a *gift* of God, wherein, the Holy Spirit is active in creating faith in the hearts of all who hear His Word. Out of reverence for the words of Jesus, we stand for the third reading, as it comes from one of the Gospels, the books of the story of the life of Jesus. These three readings come from the church's ancient practice of having a Lectionary, a prescribed set of readings that follows the seasons of the church year.

All throughout the service, we join in singing **hymns** and songs that tell the story of what God has done for us (Colossians 3:16). Some hymns date all the way back to the early Christian church, thousands of years ago. The words are just as true today as they were then. Some hymns are much newer, but the message is still timeless and ancient. The treasury of hymns is a hallmark of Lutheran churches, which strongly encouraged congregational singing, which was less prevalent at the time of the Reformation in the 1600s.

You probably wonder why we stand and sit when we do. We stand to honor God, and we sit to learn. That's why we sit during hymns, which primarily teach us what God has done for us, but sometimes stand for the last verse (if it praises the Triune God).


When, after the sermon, we join in speaking one of the **Creeds**, we confess the common faith that unites us with innumerable Christians who have lived and died before us. Believe it or not, much blood was shed to express the truth of these creeds. What a privilege we have to speak them here today!

One thing that most people enjoy in the pattern of Lutheran worship is the opportunity to *participate*. God comes to us and gives us His *gifts* of Word and Sacrament, and we are given the pleasure of responding to Him with words of **prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and offering**. Even while sitting in the pew, you are a participant in this service, both receiving God's *gifts* and responding to Him. When we speak and respond together as a congregation, we are demonstrating the faith we share. Also, almost every word we speak as a congregation comes directly from the **Bible**. In other words, God gives us his *gifts* that recreate us and give us new life, and we speak His holy Word back to Him.

The first half of the service—from the Introit until this point—has been called the Service of the Word, focusing on God's *gifts* given to us in His Word. The second half, called the Service of the Sacrament, focuses on God's *gift* He gives us in the **Lord's Supper**.

We join with all the angels in heaven when we sing the **Sanctus** (Latin for “holy”). “Holy, Holy, holy” were the words of the powerful angels the prophet Isaiah saw when God approached him (Isaiah 6:3). And we join with all the Christians who have preceded us in the faith when we sing “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” These are the words of the onlookers as Jesus rides into Jerusalem to give up His life as the payment for our sinfulness (Mark 11:9). The one who rode into

Jerusalem on a donkey is God Almighty, the one on the throne in Isaiah's vision, is the one who comes to us in His Body and Blood today.

 The **Lord's Prayer** is a *gift* Jesus gave to His disciples and us as a pattern for prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). When we pray it, we know God hears our prayer because He gave us His promise to hear our prayers (1 John 5:14-15).

Listen carefully to the **Words of Institution**, the words Jesus used when He established the Lord's Supper as a *gift* of God for the church to gather and celebrate (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20).



**Agnus Dei** means “Lamb of God.” Jesus is the holy Lamb of God, the sacrifice for sins, made in our place (John 1:29). We sing of the *gift* of forgiveness of sins we are about to receive because Jesus has died in our place. The Agnus Dei focuses our attention ahead on what is about to happen in the Lord's Supper.

At the **Lord's Supper**, enabled by God's *gift* of forgiveness, we approach the altar. Jesus himself gives us the *gifts* of His Body and Blood. This is truly a miracle: Jesus makes this simple bread and wine His very Body and Blood. What we receive with our mouths is the same body and blood that was “born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried...and rose again.” With these *gifts*, God gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation, renewing His *gift* of faith within us. With so much going on at this Holy Supper, it is important to heed the warning of the Apostle Paul not to eat or drink in an “unworthy manner,” sinning against the Body and Blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:28-30). Thus, out of love and concern for all, we only permit those who have examined themselves, repented of their sins, and confessed a common doctrine with us to participate. Because of the tremendous *gift* of God given at this feast, it is our deepest hope that all might confess a true belief regarding the Lord's Supper and join us in fellowship at the altar. If you have not communed at our altar before, please speak with the pastor before communing.



As the worship concludes, the pastor speaks the words of God to us in the **Benediction**, words God promised to use to *make us His people* (Numbers 6:4-6). And then, reminded of His constant goodness and faithfulness to us through His precious *gifts*, after a final hymn, we depart in joy.

This is but a sample of the treasure of theology preserved in the Lutheran Church. If you'd like to know more, we invite you to join our adult membership class for more information about what we believe and practice.