



LifeLight™
FOUNDATIONS

Worship



LEADERS GUIDE



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director *(optional)*

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. **(Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.)** The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer) using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- with the leadership team recruits the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 55.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 55);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling

together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places, some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song: Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

The Highest Worship: Faith

John 4:20–26; Hebrews 8:1–6; 11:4;
12:18–29; Acts 2:42

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Christian worship is a very important activity of God's people, but it is infrequently studied and is often misunderstood. In the Bible, God reveals His teaching about worship. God's Word helps us to understand *who* we worship and *why, what* worship truly is, and *how* we are to worship as God's people.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, working through God's Word, will

1. grow in the understanding of a biblical theology of Christian worship;
2. be enriched, through increased knowledge, in their weekly worship; and
3. be better equipped to address some of the concerns and questions raised with regard to Christian worship today.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and

liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Strengthen, O Lord, the hands which are stretched out to receive the Holy Things. Grant that they may daily bring forth fruit to Your Divinity, that they may be worthy of all things which they have sung to Your praise within Your sanctuary, and may ever praise You. Grant also, My Lord, that the ears which have heard the voice of Your songs, may never hear the voices of clamor and dispute. Grant that the eyes which have seen Your great love, may also behold Your blessed hope, that the tongues which have sung "Holy, holy, holy" may speak the truth. Grant that the feet which have walked in the church may walk in the region of light, that the bodies which have tasted Your living Body may be restored in newness of life. Amen. (*The Lord Will Answer*, p. 93, Liturgy of Malabar, India, c. seventh century)

Lecture Presentation

Ironically, while Christian worship is a very important activity for God's people, it is not frequently studied. What is worship? Why do we worship? What is the connection between faith and worship? Does God need my worship? Do I need worship and, if so, why?

Today, you can find many different styles and beliefs about Christian worship even within the same denomination. Sometimes it appears that churches are competing for worshipers! Appeals to tradition such as, "This is the way we have always done it" don't satisfy worshipers. In fact, some might argue that if we've always worshiped a certain way, then maybe that is a good reason to change! So, to answer questions about worship like the ones above, we look to God's Word. In His Word, God our heavenly Father will teach us and will enable us to worship Him "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24).

Our prayer is that LifeLight Foundations *Worship* will not only help you to learn more about worship but also to enhance your worship experience. In the next nine weeks, our lectures will discuss the basic structure of corporate, Christian worship used in many denominational hymnals such as *Lutheran Service Book*. The lectures will also highlight specific Bible passages concerning worship as well as worship-related words, themes, and practices. Our student guide will provide an in-depth study of Bible passages relating to worship, and our enrichment magazine will draw from the rich Old Testament foundation of worship, which points us to Jesus Christ, our Savior. May God bless your study of worship, and may God bless you as you worship Him!

1 Some Words about Worship

To begin, let's talk about a few worship-related words. Our English word *worship* comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, *worthscripe*, which means "to ascribe worth to something." While *worship* is the word we most frequently use for religious services, *worship* really only describes one side of worship: *our service to God*. The German language has another word for *worship*: *Gottesdienst* (GOT-ess-deenst), which is usually translated as "Divine Service." "Divine Service" is a broader term that can refer both to *our service to God* and *His service to us* in worship.

God serving us in worship might sound a little strange. It certainly goes against our natural way of thinking! Why should the Lord serve us on Saturday night or Sunday morning (or even on a Wednesday)? Shouldn't we serve Him? Yet, we are reminded that Jesus served His disciples by washing their feet (see John 13:1–20). At first, Peter protested this act of Jesus' service (v. 8). However, when Jesus revealed the greater significance of His service, Peter's rejection ("You shall never wash my feet," v. 8) became Peter's acceptance. Peter, the disciples, and each and every Christian cannot serve Jesus or others in His name until He first serves us. We must follow our Master's example (vv. 15–16). Our service is *in response* to His.

Consider Psalm 51:15, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise." We praise God only because He has given us the ability and the reason to do so. His service precedes ours; His service *for us* enables

our service. Do you remember how God saved His people from Egypt's mighty army? He parted the waters for His people and drowned their enemies in the Red Sea. In response, Moses and the people worshiped God by singing about what God had done for them: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:1). Their song flowed from God's great and merciful deliverance! When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, God reminded him and through him the people of His service for them. God said, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). God's people were enabled to serve Him in holiness of living only because He had already served them! Scripture is full of such examples of the Divine Service: God's service for us, which results in our service for Him and for others in His name. Christian worship really is Divine Service, God serving us and we serving in response to His grace.

2 Other Worship Words

Let's look at two other words or terms related to worship. Both of them come from the Greek language and both are used in the Bible.

The first of these words is *leitourgia* (lie-tour-GEE-uh) from which we derive the English word "liturgy" (LIT-er-jee). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint; sep-TOO-uh-jint), liturgy refers to the high priest's sacrifices in the temple. In the New Testament, the word for liturgy is often translated as "service." Zechariah had a "time of service" in the temple (Luke 1:23). Paul refers to the financial gift offerings made by the Corinthians as their "ministry of this service" (2 Corinthians 9:12). He also writes about the "service" the Philippians offered to him (Philippians 2:30). The writer to the Hebrews also uses this word to refer to the work of the Old Testament priests: "And every priest stands daily at his service" (Hebrews 10:11).

Liturgy simply means a service, a work or action, done in public for someone else. Liturgies are services done *for the people on their behalf*. The Old Testament temple liturgy was the high priest's public service, which he offered for the benefit of the people of Israel. In Christ, however, "liturgy" takes on a new and significant meaning for Christians.

Hebrews 9:11–14 describes Jesus performing His sacrificial service *for us*. Through the Passion of His suffering and death, Jesus served us as both High Priest and Sacrifice. He served us on the cross, whereby He secured eternal redemption for all of God's people. Jesus has for all time become the single sacrifice for us who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:10–18). It is interesting to note that this passage specifically contrasts Jesus' single act of service on Calvary from the repeated sacrifices made by the Jewish high priest each year. All of those sacrifices pointed forward in time to the true and final sacrifice that Jesus would make for us on the cross. Jesus made a single offering (v. 14), which never will be repeated. However, God continuously delivers the benefits of Christ's service through His Word and Sacraments. This brings us again to the focus of Christian worship: Jesus and His service *for us*. While there may be various kinds of liturgies or forms of Christian worship services, they all should have one thing in view: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. The liturgy, the Divine Service, is God's service *for us*.

The second term we want to look at is actually two words, *coming together*, which come from a single Greek word, *sunerchomai* (soon-ER-ko-mai). Coming together has always been an important part of Christian worship; Jesus promised to be with the gathering of two, three, or more believers (Matthew 18:20). In 1 Corinthians 11:33, Paul directs the congregation to wait for each other when they "*come together to eat.*" A little later in 14:23–26, Paul urges the members of the congregation to use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the body as a whole: "When you *come together* . . . Let all things be done for building up" (v. 26). The writer to the Hebrews exhorts Christians that they should not neglect to "*meet together, as is the habit of some,*" (Hebrews 10:25), but to encourage each other as the Last Day of Christ's return approaches.

By His Holy Spirit through the Gospel of Christ, God has called us into a community of baptized believers called the Church. The Church isn't a gathering of individuals merely interested in the same things or having the same goals. Rather, the Church is a people that God Himself has gathered to receive His gifts. And, when we come together for worship, we receive the service, the liturgy, of our Lord. His work, His service, is *for us*. His

sacrifice on the cross is final and complete. Our sins are forgiven, and death, Satan, and hell are defeated. When we assemble, we come at Jesus' invitation to hear the Gospel and to receive the Sacraments. In our coming together, He builds us up through His Word. And for these things we offer Him our hearts, our voices, and lives in dedicated service to Him.

3 The Highest Worship

Over the next nine weeks, we will review some common elements and practices of Christian worship. However, we need to realize something up front. The mere performance of religious actions or the repetition of religious words are not, in and of themselves, worship. Even though a worship service may be emotionally moving, mentally stimulating, or even aesthetically beautiful, the essence of Christian worship is not a show or performance created by human beings. Jesus warns us about such sham worship (see Mark 7:6–23). Rather, at its very core true worship is *faith*, repentant faith that trusts in God's mercy and forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ. Such God-given faith is motivated and enabled by the Gospel to love the neighbor, a service of worship on his or her behalf.

Faith is pure gift (Ephesians 2:8–9). Faith believes, trusts, and receives God's promises for us in Christ. Repentant faith in Christ is the essential difference between Christian worship and the religious rites of unbelievers. In Christian worship, God's promises are delivered in the reading and hearing of Scripture, in the preaching of God's Word, and in the Sacraments. True worship *always* begins with the Lord's service to which faith takes hold of and clings. It only follows, then, that our worship, our service to God and neighbor, *flows from faith*. Worship without repentant faith in Christ is no worship at all. Faith that doesn't worship is no faith at all. Faith believes in and trusts God's promises that He has made in His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Faith simply must respond to God's grace. This response takes the form of praise, song, prayer, the confession of faith, and even the daily work of one's vocation, or calling in life. That whole response is the other side of worship, *our service to God*.

This is illustrated throughout Scripture. Consider Isaiah 6, a chapter we will revisit when we examine the Sanctus

(SAHNK-tus; Latin for “holy”) in session seven. Isaiah describes the time when He was brought into heaven and given his calling as a prophet. Isaiah hears angelic voices singing praises, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (v. 3). Hearing about his holy God, Isaiah didn’t simply join in this holy hymn. Rather, God’s holiness caused Isaiah to recognize his sin. Isaiah confesses, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (v. 5). Immediately, an angel took a burning coal from the altar and placed it to Isaiah’s lips. The altar was a sign of sacrifice, ultimately pointing to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, which takes away sins. Then, the angel speaks, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (v. 7). With his sins forgiven, Isaiah responds to the Lord’s call: “Here am I! Send me” (v. 8). Isaiah’s worship flowed from God’s grace, which was received through faith. Isaiah’s service to God and his neighbor was initiated and enabled by God’s service to him.

4 We Are Not Alone!

We can learn a lot about worship from Christians who have gone before us. Gregory the Great (ca. AD 540–604) served as a Christian bishop of Rome. Listen to his heavenly description of worship: “The hour of the mysteries opens heaven, the choir of angels is present, the lowest things are joined with the highest, earthly things are joined with heavenly, and the visible and invisible are made one” (Dialog 4, chapter 58). While Gregory’s description of worship may sound extravagant today, his view about worship agrees with the Bible, specifically the Book of Hebrews. In the Divine Service we come “to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22–23). Even those Christians whose souls are now with the Lord in heaven participate in heavenly worship along with countless angels, all worshipping our holy and gracious God. The worshipping community of God’s people is not divided even by physical death. Jesus said that God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:32).

We never lose our connection to departed saints, that is,

those who have died trusting in Christ for their salvation. That was a source of great comfort for the earliest Christians. While many of their brothers and sisters had been martyred at the hands of the Roman authorities, nonetheless these very souls were alive in the Lord. This offers us a similar comfort today. When we “come together” in the Divine Service, Jesus is with us. He comes to serve us. All boundaries of time and place melt away as we join with “innumerable angels” and “the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” Truly, there is more than meets the eye in worship. We are not alone!

5 Reverent and Relevant

While there has been variety to Christian worship over the past 2,000 years, there has also been a remarkable continuity and consistency. The Early Church utilized rites and traditions that were familiar to Jews in Jesus’ and the apostles’ day. For example, the tradition of Scripture readings, prayers, and hymns is derived from the Jewish synagogue service with which Jesus and the apostles would have been familiar. Speaking (or more likely chanting) the Psalms occurred in the temple in Jerusalem. Paul specifically mentions psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as part of Christian worship in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. In the latter passage, he also mentions “the Word of Christ,” that is the Gospel, which should “dwell in [us] richly.” The prophets preached, as did Jesus and the apostles. Paul exhorted Timothy to “Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). These aspects of worship—psalms, hymn, spiritual songs, and Gospel preaching, along with reading the Word publicly and public prayer—marked early Christian worship. To that was added the Christian Sacraments of Baptism (Acts 2:38) and the Lord’s Supper (v. 42). Eventually, the Service of the Word, the Christianized synagogue service consisting of readings, prayers, hymns, and a sermon, and the Service of the Sacrament, the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper, would merge together into one service. In fact, most Christian congregations across the world today use a form of this service, or parts of this service, although there is some variety due to local customs or traditions.

One aspect of Christian worship, or the Divine Service, is as important as it is frequently overlooked. Returning to the Book of Hebrews, we are encouraged to think not

only about what *happens* in worship, but *how* we are to worship. "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28–29). We have received a rich tradition of worship from other baptized believers who have gone before us. Yet, we must also strive to be accessible and relevant to our own time and culture (1 Corinthians 9:22). For some, this tension between reverence and relevance is uncomfortable. And it is! But so too is the Christian life. We are not of this world (John 17:16), and yet Jesus has sent us into it (John 17:18). Our confidence and comfort come not from our ourselves but from our God. He comes to serve us in worship. Jesus really is present. We join with angels and saints when we come together to worship. Knowing these things not only informs but also gives shape to how we worship.

Paul imparted some wisdom to the Corinthians that may help us here. He wrote, "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things build up" (1 Corinthians 10:23). While we are certainly free to adapt our worship for various times and places, not all such freedom is useful for building up the body of Christ. What may be "lawful" or permitted must serve what is "helpful" or beneficial for the body of Christ. What is most helpful for God's people are those things that deliver what God wants to deliver to us. Here our faith about worship informs and shapes *how* we worship. If we believe that Christian worship is primarily about *what we do for God*, then our worship will reflect that. If, however, we believe Christian worship is first about *what God does for us*, and second what *we do for Him and for our neighbor*, then our worship will also reflect that. Reverence and relevance are key.

Conclusion

The goal of LifeLight Foundations *Worship* is twofold: that you learn more about Christian worship and that your weekly worship experience might be enriched. With a strong biblical foundation, centered upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ, your worship with other children of God will be blessed. May God bless your study of worship, and may God bless your worship!

Concluding Activities

Conclude with an appropriate prayer, thanking God for His service among us and asking that as faith takes hold of His service, it may also respond in God-pleasing worship. Distribute the enrichment magazine and explain that "it provides additional background, enrichment, and review of the material studied not only in this session but in the entire course." Encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet two.

Entering into God's Presence

**1 Kings 8:16–30; Matthew 28:18–20;
1 John 1:8–10; John 20:19–23; Psalm 100**

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

This session looks at the various elements that make up the preparation for the Divine Service, and the Introit which serves as our entrance or bridge into the Service of the Word.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit, working through God's Word, will

1. grow in their acknowledgment of the Lord's presence among them in worship and their place before Him as baptized children of God, and
2. acquire a basic knowledge of the history and biblical significance of the elements that form the preparation of the Divine Service.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 58.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Almighty and eternal God, according to Your righteous judgment You condemned the unbelieving world through the flood. In Your great mercy You preserved believing Noah and his family. You drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led Your people Israel through the same on dry ground. By these events You prefigured this bath of Your Baptism. And through the baptism of Your dear Child, our Lord Jesus Christ, You consecrated and set apart the Jordan and all water as a salutary flood and rich and full washing away of sins. We pray through Christ for Your boundless mercy that You will graciously behold us and bless us with true faith in the Spirit. Then, by means of this saving flood, all that has been born in us from Adam and which we ourselves have added thereto may be drowned in us and engulfed. May we be separated from the number of the unbelieving, preserved dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom, and serve Your name at all times fervent in spirit and joyful in hope. With all believers may we be made worthy to attain eternal life according to Your promise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*The Lord Will Answer*, p. 364, Luther's Flood Prayer)

Lecture Presentation

In ancient times, if you were granted an audience with a king or queen, you wouldn't simply barge into his or her throne room. Rather, you would observe proper customs and protocol befitting the king or queen's position and status. Queen Esther, for example, risked her life for her people by approaching King Ahasuerus (uh-HAZ-er-us) unannounced. Nevertheless, Esther put on her royal robes and followed court protocol by touching her husband's golden scepter (see Esther 5:1–2). Had she not done so, she would have further risked her own death.

Just imagine if you had been invited to a dinner with the president of the United States. You would follow the invitation's requests (and the Secret Service's mandates!) to the letter. You would also make sure that your clothes were clean and pressed, your shoes were in good order,

your hair was neat, and so on. How much more, then, should we concern ourselves with entering into the presence of the God of the universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords? The “preparation” in the Divine Service recognizes our place and the Lord’s place among us.

1 What’s in a Name?

Do you know the meaning of your name? In Bible times and still in some parts of our world today, names are believed to say a lot about who a person is, or what he or she would become. The angel Gabriel told Mary that her son would be named *Jesus* (meaning “Yahweh saves”). Jesus’ name says a lot about His identity and what He came to earth to do (Luke 1:31). When Jesus gave Simon the name *Peter* (*Petros*, [PEH-tros] meaning “little rock”) it actually pointed to something greater: Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the “solid rock” (*petra*; [PEH-tra]) upon which Christ would build His Church (Matthew 16:18).

However, the significance of a name doesn’t end there. Men and women, both in the Bible and in our own day as well, don’t always live up to the names they are given. Peter was called a “rock,” but he wasn’t always “rock solid.” Shortly after Jesus gave Simon the name Peter following his confession of faith (Matthew 16:16–18), Jesus rebuked Peter by saying, “Get behind Me, Satan!” (v. 23). At that time, Peter thought it better for Jesus to avoid the cross. “Little rock” Peter did not have his mind on the things of God but on the things of human beings. No sooner is Peter called *Petros* than he’s back upon a foundation as shifting as sand. How quickly the “little rock” becomes the “adversary” (the meaning of the name *Satan*).

It is an entirely different story when the Lord’s name is involved. The Lord remains faithful to His name throughout all times and places (Exodus 3:15). And, when the Lord’s name is invoked, or placed upon something, God does things through His name unlike any other name. Where the Lord places His name on someone or some thing He also promises His gracious presence. When the Lord put His name upon the ark of the covenant, He dwelled there (2 Samuel 6:2). God also placed His name on the temple in Jerusalem, signifying His gracious presence (1 Kings 8).

While the Lord’s name is a name of power and might

(Jeremiah 16:21), the mere speaking of God’s name is not some sort of magical incantation. Pagan deities, false gods and goddesses, and even demons are summoned by their names to do the bidding of people. However, the Lord Himself, wherever and whenever He chooses, gives His name to be called upon according to His own prerogative (Isaiah 65:1). Both true and false prophets in Scripture prophesy, “Thus saith the Lord,” though it is usually only the false prophets who actually say that they are speaking in the name of the Lord (an exception is found in Deuteronomy 18:18ff.). But because these false prophets did not receive the Spirit of the Lord according to the Lord’s prerogative, they would be severely punished (Deuteronomy 18:20).

Do you own many books? If you do and you tend to lend them to friends, you’ve probably put your name in them. By doing so, you have claimed ownership of your books. By placing your name on a book, you ensure that all who read it will recognize that it belongs to you. Similarly, the Lord places His name upon those whom He calls His own. The Lord placed His name upon His people Israel, calling them His precious possession. Therefore, all the nations of the world would recognize to whom they belonged (Deuteronomy 28).

2 God’s Name on Us

Typically, the preparatory part of the Divine Service begins with the Invocation (in-vo-KAY shun), which means “to call upon.” With the Invocation, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” we call upon God, who has promised to be with us. We also recall God’s name—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—being placed on us in Baptism. Through this washing we were made His disciples (Matthew 28:18–20; Titus 3:5–8). Now, we are temples of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38–40), a place where His name dwells (1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Kings 8:29).

God’s name and claim of ownership are on us. We were baptized into one body and are partakers of the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). The body we are baptized into is Christ’s body, His Church, which includes all other believers who are connected to Him by faith. And, as strange as it may sound, this includes all those who have gone before us and who rest from their labors in heaven. It includes those who are alive now. As surely as

Christ cannot be divided against Himself, we are called to share the same mind and the same voice (1 Corinthians 1:9–13).

Human marriage helps us here. In the Scriptures, God uses human marriage as a sign of the intimacy believers enjoy with Him. Just as a husband and wife “become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5) the Lord Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom, is now one flesh with His bride, the Church (see Ephesians 5:31–32). In Jesus’ day, a bride would be washed prior to her wedding. So, also, the Lord calls us His Bride, which He has washed by “water with the Word” (Ephesians 5:26). As members of Christ’s body, the Church, we are one flesh with our Lord. As a communion of baptized believers in Jesus Christ, when we are gathered together in His name, we may be certain that the Lord, our heavenly husband, is there among us (Matthew 18:20).

The Invocation begins the Divine Service by evoking our Baptism, recalling that the Lord has placed His name upon us. Through the Invocation, we may be certain that His Spirit dwells within us, that He has called us His “precious possession,” and that we are “one in flesh” with Christ and with one another. Surely, each of us has a personal relationship with the Lord and enjoys times of private worship. But when we come together in God’s triune name to be served by Him, we do so together. Jesus is in our midst!

3 Sinners before a Holy God

Having heard God’s name in the Invocation, like Isaiah the prophet, we then “own up” to our failure in honoring it in our daily living. We acknowledge not only our faults and failures but also our sinful nature. In the Confession of Sins we admit how far short we have fallen from living up to *whose* we are. As one body of baptized believers, we confess our sins together. Jesus’ parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9–14) helps us to learn more about true confession. Two men approach the Lord in His temple. The Pharisee was the “most likely” person you would expect to find at religious services. He was very knowledgeable about God’s Word and very careful to live according to God’s Law. Tax collectors, it seems, were very different. After collecting the tax required by Caesar, anything extra they collected they could keep! So most tax collectors, while

wealthy, had gained their wealth at the expense of the common people and the poor. The tax collector was the “least likely” person you might expect to find offering prayers in God’s temple.

In the parable, the Pharisee and the tax collector offer different confessions to the Lord. The Pharisee prays, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get” (vv. 11–12). How impressive is his utter lack of true confession! On the other hand, the tax collector recognized his sin. While the Pharisee did not hesitate to approach the Lord and boast of his lack of sin, the tax collector stood far off, beat his breast, and cried, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (v. 13). Jesus tells us that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, was justified before God. This was not because of his confession but because of his faith. The tax collector repented in sincere humility. In contrast, the Pharisee’s unbelief caused him to take pride in his religious piety and boast even before the Lord. Sound familiar?

At the heart of this parable is the truth John articulates in his First Epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). No matter how pious we are, how often we say our prayers during the week, how much money we give to the Church or to the poor, we nonetheless approach the Lord as sinners who do not deserve to be in His presence. The Lord may be worthy of all praise and worship, but our praise and worship are not worthy of the Lord.

By calling upon God’s name in the Invocation, we acknowledge that we are in His presence. Just as a child who knows he or she has disobeyed might be prone to weep or even hide when his or her father arrives home, we are disobedient children who deserve only punishment. Thus, our only recourse is to confess our sins and to trust in His mercy: “God, be merciful to us, for we are sinners!”

To allow worshipers to acknowledge their sins privately, some congregations allow a brief period of silence immediately following the Confession of Sins. Other congregations that are equipped to do so allow worshipers to kneel at this point of the service. Regardless of one’s outward posture, in his or her heart the repentant Christian is on bended knee, acknowledging the need

for the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. In the Confession of Sins, we acknowledge the Lord's authority and plead for His rich grace in Christ.

4 I Forgive You

Imagine that, unfortunately, skin cancer runs in your family. You frequently ask your doctor to thoroughly check your skin to make sure that you do not have this dreaded disease. Imagine further that all of a sudden you notice a suspicious spot on your skin. In such a case, would you not rush to make an appointment to see your physician? Of course you would! And what joy you would experience when your physician told you that you had nothing to worry about. A mere age spot or harmless bruise! And even if your physician diagnosed cancer, would not the news that it was treatable and that you would make a one hundred percent recovery be good news, indeed wonderful news? Certainly! Hearing from your physician that you would live a long and healthy life would even give you the strength necessary to undergo the proper treatment, as painful or as costly as it might be.

God has so ordered our world that He has given us people in our lives to speak and to pronounce with authority. And physicians are just one example! Judges do so, but so too do the police, tax accountants, parents, school teachers, engineers, mechanics, nurses, insurance agents, and on the list goes. We order our lives based on God's ordering, and we are grateful for it. Through these vocations, these positions of service that carry with them varying grades of authority, God blesses us, and we need not be filled with worry and dread.

It's no different in the Church. Following the Confession of Sins we hear the Absolution (ab-so-LU-shun), the public pronouncement of God's forgiveness made by His called and ordained servant, the pastor. *Absolution* comes from the Latin language and means, "to set free." It is no wonder that Absolution is sometimes referred to as "a return to Baptism," that is, the forgiveness of sins that God gives us for Christ's sake through the "washing of water with the Word" (Ephesians 5:26) or Holy Baptism (Titus 3:5). Jesus authorized His apostles, and through the call of the Church authorizes all pastors today, to speak His forgiveness in His name and with His authority. Jesus said, "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 any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.' " (John 20:21-23). Of course, called and ordained pastors do not have some sort of power in and of themselves to forgive sins, any more than a physician can merely touch a cancerous spot and instantaneously heal it. Rather, God Himself forgives sins through the "office" of the pastor. The Holy Spirit through the congregation has called this man, sinner that he is, to speak with God's authority in our midst. When he declares to repentant sinners that sins are forgiven for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, sins are forgiven. When he declares to unrepentant sinners that their sins remain unforgiven, they remain unforgiven just as Jesus says.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul calls apostles and pastors "men of sincerity" (2:17), "ministers of a new covenant" (3:6) who participate in a "ministry of the Spirit" (3:8) that brings "righteousness" (3:9). They are "servants [of the Church] for Jesus' sake" (4:5). They are God's spokesmen, even in spite their frailties, insecurities, weaknesses, and yes, their sin. They are officeholders of the "ministry of reconciliation" (5:18). They are "ambassadors for Christ . . . [who implore us] on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (5:20).

The reconciliation of the world to God has already taken place *objectively* through the sufferings and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; 1 John 2:2). That reconciliation is brought to us *subjectively*, that is, *personally*, through the means of grace: God's Word and Sacraments. When pastors who in God's name and under God's authority declare to us that our sins are forgiven, they are forgiven. Jesus suffered in our place for the disease of our sins, both actual and inherited; He Himself is our cure. And the Great Physician's under-physician, if you will, applies Christ's healing, His unmerited but rich forgiveness, to us by saying, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (LSB, p. 185). When we hear the words, "I forgive you," we hear Jesus speaking His healing word to us. What joy that brings!

5 The Entrance

Having heard God's Word of forgiveness in the Absolution, our worship continues with the Introit (in-TRO-it), which means "entrance." Visually, this is the time when the pastor and his assistants approach, or enter, the area surrounding the altar, or chancel. The Introit itself is usually a psalm appointed for the day or a portion of a psalm. The chanting, or in some instances the speaking of psalms, is an ancient practice derived from both the Jewish temple and synagogue services. The Psalms are, in a sense, the hymnbook of the Old Testament. The conclusion of the Introit contains the Gloria Patri (GLOR-ee-ah PAH-tree; Latin: "Glory be to the Father"), which in full usage is "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen." This ending contrasts the use of the Psalms in Christian worship with their use in the Jewish synagogues. The Gloria Patri also serves as a clear confession of a trinitarian faith in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The same Father, Son, and Holy Spirit whose name we call upon in the Invocation is now offered highest praise in the Gloria Patri, as worshipers join with the pastor in "entering" the divine presence of our one, true God.

Conclusion

So far, we have examined what is known as the "preparation." In the Invocation, we recall our Baptism where we were given the name of our true Lord. He is our Lord, and we are His precious possession. Recalling our sinful nature as well as our actual sins, we admit our grievous faults in the Confession of Sins and then receive the Absolution, the word of forgiveness granted to us freely by God for the sake of the suffering and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Having received the forgiveness of sins, we are ready to enter into God's presence, represented by the Introit, which actually begins the Service of the Word. In each of these portions of the liturgy, we see the thrust of God's service *for us* and our service *to Him* in faith-filled response. Could there be anything else to do at this point than to offer Him praise and thanksgiving? Stay tuned for session three!

Concluding Activities

Close with a prayer thanking God for His gracious forgiveness of all sins for Christ's sake, without which we could never enter His presence. Again encourage participants to read the enrichment magazine as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet three.