

Our Way of Worship

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Foreword

This explanation of the Liturgy has been prepared as an aid to worship. As such it does not aim at encyclopedic completeness. Its concern is rather to emphasize the Word and the Sacrament as the essential and pivotal points about which our service revolves, and then to suggest the corresponding devotional attitude called for by the various parts.

This purpose accounts also for the limiting of this discussion to the communion services, for here God meets us with *both* means of his grace. The church indeed worships according to other orders of service as well: matins and vespers; preaching services; prayer services; hymn services; and so on. But none of these represent the distinctively New Testament form of worship in the same fullness as does the service which celebrates the Gospel in both Word and Sacrament. These are the means through which, since his ascension, our Lord Jesus comes to be present in his worshipping congregation—and be it added at once, as really present through the one as through the other.

It needs to be emphasized also that all the other elements of the service as we have it (the music and hymns, the versicles and responses, the kneeling and standing and sitting, the adornment of the place of worship itself) can be altered in Christian freedom and love. But the basic structure of our New Testament worship must always rest upon the two gifts through which God offers and imparts his grace: his holy Word and blessed Sacrament.

It is our hope that this manual will, under the careful guidance of teachers and pastors, help to prepare our youth for confirmation and first communion. Their participation in the church's worship should be a faithful, devout, and meaningful use of the means of grace.

Finally, we herewith gratefully acknowledge our indebtedness to Pastor Max Witte, Braunschweig, Germany, from whom we received the basic idea of an illustrated Way of Worship.

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Our Way of Worship

When Christians come together to worship God, they leave the world behind them. During the week they have been busy in their various callings, travelling many different paths here and there in the world in order to carry out their duties.

But on Sunday morning Christians forsake all those different paths and meet in church to travel together a new path, a path on which God himself waits to meet them, to speak to them, and even to enter them. We call this path the divine service, or the Liturgy.

We travel on it by worshipping the Lord God who is coming to give us his blessings. Our worship is made up of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. And these, as shown on the picture, are the three parts of our path in the divine service.

But much more important than what we do in the service is what God does in it. There are two places on our path where we stop to let God act; first when Jesus himself comes and speaks to us in the Word, and again when Jesus himself comes with his body and blood to give himself to each of us in the Sacrament.

For he is our God,

let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

The Church Year

On the first day of every week we Christians gather to celebrate our Lord's triumphant Resurrection. Yet despite the fact that each divine service actually celebrates the whole gospel, it would be impossible for us to give due consideration each Sunday to all the various important aspects of our Lord's life and work. Therefore we unfold the fullness of the Gospel in accordance with the fine pattern of the Church Year. This pattern enables us to celebrate the main events in our Lord's life on the various Sundays and festivals of one Church Year. The dazzling light of the Gospel passes, so to say, through a prism, and is broken up into all the wondrous colors of the rainbow. Each season in the Church Year has its own color; and each Sunday in the Church Year has its own message. In the individual divine service, then, the Gospel for the Day proclaims that original event in our Lord's life which we are celebrating. So we live the year with him. Our life centers in the Year of our Lord.

Advent tells us, Christ is near;
Christmas tells us Christ is here;
In Epiphany we trace
All the glory of His grace.

Those three Sundays before Lent
Will prepare us to repent;
That in Lent we may begin
Earnestly to mourn for sin.

Holy Week and Easter, then,
Tell who died and rose again:
O that happy Easter Day!
"Christ is risen indeed," we say.

Yes, and Christ ascended, too,
To prepare a place for you;
So we give him special praise
After those great forty days.

Then, he sent the Holy Ghost,
On the Day of Pentecost,
With us ever to abide;
Well may we keep Whitsuntide!

Last of all, we humbly sing
Glory to our God and King,
Glory to the One in Three,
On the Feast of Trinity.

“Lord Have Mercy”

The original Greek words of this cry for mercy are “Kyrie eleison”—“Lord, have mercy.” It is therefore still called the Kyrie. As we draw near to receive God’s gracious gifts, his holy Word and his holy Sacrament, we earthborn creatures of trouble cry out to God for deliverance. We cry three times, calling upon the Holy Trinity to have mercy upon us and to help us in our helplessness here on earth.

Kyrie, God Father in heaven above
Great art thou in grace and love,
Of all things the Maker and Preserver,
Eleison, Eleison.

Kyrie, O Christ, our King,
Salvation for sinners thou didst bring.
O Lord Jesus, God’s own Son,
Our Mediator at the heav’nly throne.
Hear our cry and grant our supplication.
Eleison, Eleison.

Kyrie, O God the Holy Ghost,

Guard our faith, the gift we need the most,
Do thou our last hour bless;
Let us leave this sinful world with gladness.
Eleison, Eleison.

Glory be to God on High

After kneeling in the dust, as it were, with the cry, “Lord, Have Mercy Upon Us,” we now lift up our voices in the “Glory Be To God On High” to greet that Lord who is coming in answer to our plea. For now we call to mind the gracious lovingkindness of the Lord who is coming to meet us. It is our Lord Jesus Christ: Therefore we join the Christmas angels in the hymn which they sang when the eternal God was born true man at Bethlehem:

All glory be to God on high,
Who hath our race befriended!
To us no harm shall now come nigh,
The strife at last is ended:
God showeth his good will to men,
And peace shall reign on earth again;
Oh, thank him for his goodness!

Collect

Just before we hear our Savior's Word we have a special petition to bring to him. We ask for the particular gift that our Lord gained for us by the event which we are celebrating. Our pastor first greets us with the salutation, "The Lord be with you," that is, "The Lord Jesus be with you in your praying;" and we answer him, "And with thy spirit"—"May he be with you also in the prayer you offer." Thus in his (Jesus') name (that is, with him praying with us and for us before the Father in heaven) we pray the collect, that beautiful and concise prayer which gathers together in one brief sentence what we all need to gain from this day's celebration.

"Let my prayers be set before thee as incense."

The Word

Now we come to the high point of the first half of the divine service: the reading and preaching of God's Word.

By his Word God expresses his inmost thoughts, his inmost being, yea Scripture tells us, God's Word is a person; God's eternal Son, the one who became flesh, was born of the Virgin Mary as our brother. It is this Lord Jesus then who is the Lord of the Scripture, of both the Old and New Testaments. He alone unseals the Scriptures for us, which are otherwise sealed with unbreakable seals. Only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ do we understand that the Bible is the Word of God. And all this means then that at this point in the divine service, when the Word is read and preached, *GOD himself* speaks to us with his very own Word!

And that Word of God is full of life and power. Therefore we obtain either grace or wrath from it: grace, if we open up our hearts and believe the message; wrath, if we let the good seed fall upon unrepentant hearts. When the Scripture is being read—or explained and applied in the sermon—*God* is speaking to us through his minister. Therefore we are not to marvel at, or to criticize the preacher, but rather hear what *God* would say to us.

Two portions from the Word of God are usually read in the divine service: the Epistle and the Gospel. The Epistle is nearly always a passage from one of the letters of the apostles and it applies the great deed of salvation that we are celebrating to our daily living. We answer this reading with a joyous Hallelujah—(Praise ye the Lord!). Then, with shouts of "Glory be to Thee, O Lord" and "Praise be to Thee, O Christ," we hear the Holy Gospel for the day. Jesus himself speaks to us, and we now respond by confessing our faith in the Triune God. The creed is in a way already a sermon, for it shows the main content of the entire Gospel.

In the sermon a part of the Word already read or a similar passage is thoroughly expounded and applied to our daily life. How could we answer this Word of God more fittingly than by singing "Create in me a Clean Heart, O God" and by praying in the general prayer that all men and all affairs on earth may be brought under God's Word?

Preface and Sanctus

On our "path" of worship we have just experienced the miracle of having our living Lord speak to us in

his Word. Another miracle is soon to take place. This same Lord is about to meet us in his very body and blood.

This is an occasion for reverent joy. So we encourage each other to “lift up our hearts” and “to give thanks unto the Lord our God,” even as Jesus himself did when he instituted the Holy Supper.

This is also an occasion for adoration. For the Savior who comes to us here is the King of kings and Lord of lords who reigns gloriously in heaven, where he receives the continual adoration of the angel host and of all the saints in bliss. In this moment we mortals share in that heavenly worship as we raise the “Holy, holy, holy” to him—the song that Isaiah heard the seraphim singing round the throne of God.

Isaiah, mighty seer, in days of old
The Lord of all in spirit did behold
High on a lofty thrones in splendor bright
With flowing train that filled the Temple quite.
Above the throne were stately seraphim;
Six wings had they, these messengers of him.
With twain they veiled their faces, as was meet,
With twain in rev'rent awe they hid their feet,
And with the other twain aloft they soared,
One to the other called and praised the Lord:
“Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth!
Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth!
Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth!

Behold, His glory filleth all the earth!”
The beams and lintels trembled at the cry,
And clouds of smoke enwrapped the throne on high.

Benedictus and Hosanna

It is not a distant Savior whom we worship. He is not only enthroned far above us in glory, so that we have to lift our spirit into the realm of heaven to adore him. He is with us here on earth. Better still, in the Sacrament he will come to us and be with us even more intimately than he was with the people who knew him in his earthly days.

Joyfully, therefore, we welcome him, our gracious King, with the glad “Hosanna” that first greeted his ears when he entered his city Jerusalem on the Sunday before his death—the death that brought deliverance from death for all.

All glory, laud. and honor
To Thee, Redeemer, King
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel,
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and Blessed One.

The Lord's Prayer

At a moment like this, on the threshold of the New Testament Holy of Holies, we want nothing in our hearts nor on our lips but prayer. And how better could we pray than in the words that our Lord himself taught us—for through him and in him we too dare to say “our Father.”

Our Father, Thou in heav'n above
Who biddest us to dwell in love,
As brethren of one family,
To cry in ev'ry need to thee,
Teach us no thoughtless words to say,
But from our inmost heart to pray.
Thy name be hallowed, Help us Lord,
In purity to keep thy Word.
Thy kingdom come. Thine let it be
In time and in eternity.
Thy gracious will on earth be done
As 'tis in heaven before thy throne.
Give us this day our daily bread

And let us all be clothed and fed.
Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore
Remove from us their burden sore.
Into temptation lead us not,
When evil foes against us plot.
From evil, Lord, deliver us;
The times and days are perilous.
Amen, that is, so shall it be.
Confirm our faith and hope in thee,
That we may doubt not, but believe
What here we ask we shall receive,
Thus in thy name and at thy Word
We say: Amen. Oh, hear us, Lord!

The Sacrament

Our path on the way of worship has brought us to the second high point of the service: the Holy Supper of our Lord. What makes this important is the fact that once more, as in the reading and preaching of the Word, it is God himself who is acting.

When the Word was proclaimed, it was Jesus, God's Son and our Savior, who met us and spoke to us. In him we found the revelation of the Father, full of grace and truth. And now again the same Jesus comes to us with the same grace and truth. Only in the Sacrament the manner of his coming is different. For here he gives himself to us in his very body and blood; and we receive him to ourselves not only spiritually by faith, but in a

bodily way as well, as we eat and drink according to his command.

This, then, is for us the joyous climax of our worship. The entire Gospel of salvation, our whole Christian hope, the very blessing of heaven itself, are here all bound together and given to us in the gift of our Lord's body and blood. In this very body our Lord suffered, died, rose again, and now lives and reigns eternally. This he gives to us and says: "For *you!*" This is the sacrificial blood he shed as the seal on God's New Covenant, the blood which carries his own innocent, holy life. This he gives to us and says: "For *you!*"

The Gospels for the Sundays of the Church Year proclaim the deeds by which our Lord in his bodily life won our salvation. As we receive his body and blood in the Sacrament, every one of those deeds is made our own, here and now. For example, our Easter celebration of Christ's triumphant resurrection becomes for us in the Sacrament the bursting of the bonds of death right now.

Because of Christ's redeeming work we look forward to spending all eternity in blissful fellowship with him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. Here in the Sacrament we have a foretaste of heaven's blessedness even now as we are united body and soul with the Redeemer who gives us his own body and blood.

Consecration

We are accustomed to saying that we "celebrate" the Lord's Supper. That is a very fitting word, for the Sacrament is a miracle which gives believers a foretaste of heaven's own joy, the joy of being united with our risen Savior, heaven's King.

It is the Real Presence of our living Lord in his body and blood which makes this Sacrament the highest and holiest celebration we can have this side of eternity. This Real Presence has been made certain to us by Christ's own promise in the words of institution. These words we now repeat as a prayer, confidently looking for its fulfillment.

Soul, adorn thyself with gladness,
Leave behind all gloom and sadness;
Come into the daylight's splendor,
There with joy thy praises render
Unto him whose grace unbounded
Hath this wondrous Supper founded.
High o'er all the heavens he reigneth,
Yet to dwell with thee he deigneth.

Hasten as a bride to meet him
And with loving rev'rence greet him;
For with words of life immortal
Now he knocketh at thy portal.
Haste to ope the gates before him,
Saying, while thou dost adore him,
Suffer, Lord, that I receive thee,
And I nevermore will leave thee.

Agnus Dei and Distribution

There are many precious blessings which we Christians possess in our Lord Jesus. But all of them

depend on the one great fact that it was as a Sacrifice for sin that he once gave his body and blood.

So we who are about to receive him to ourselves in that very body and blood now sing the central song of all truly Christian worship: "O Christ, thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us thy peace!"

Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior
Turned away God's wrath forever
By his bitter grief and woe
He saved us from the evil Foe.

As his pledge of love undying
He, this precious food supplying,
Gives his body with the bread
And with the wine the blood he shed.

Praise the Father, who from heaven
Unto us such food hath given
And, to mend what we have done,
Gave into death his only Son.

Nunc Dimittis

The greatest single event in the whole history of mankind was the birth into our flesh and blood of God's eternal Son. And the greatest event in any individual person's life occurs when by God's grace he takes to himself that holy Child born of Mary. Thus aged Simeon once declared himself ready to depart in peace, now that he had seen with his own eyes and embraced with his own arms that Christchild.

How fitting it is for us now to sing that song of Simeon, for we have not only seen God's salvation with the eye of faith; but he, the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel, has come to each of us—yes, entered into our very being, that we may bear him with us back into the world.

In peace and joy I now depart
At God's disposing;
For full of comfort is my heart,
Soft reposing.
So the Lord hath promised men
And death is but a slumber.

'Tis Christ that wrought this work for me,
My faithful Savior,
Whom thou hast made mine eyes to see
By thy favor.
Now I know he is my Life,

My Help in need and dying.

Thanksgiving and Benediction

In the song of Simeon we have sung our individual thanks to God. In the prayer of thanksgiving we speak as a grateful congregation, asking God that his blessing rest upon this gift of his to us all.

The final assurance that we do indeed possess God's blessing is now given to us in the benediction. Even as Jesus lifted up his hands when he blessed the disciples on the Mount of Ascension, just before withdrawing his visible presence from them, so the same Jesus through the voice of his minister imparts his blessing to us who have in this hour of worship once more experienced his Real Presence.

May God bestow on us his grace,
With blessings rich provide us,
And may the brightness of his face
To life eternal guide us,
That we his saving health may know,
His gracious will and pleasure,
And also to the heathen show
Christ's riches without measure
And unto God convert them.