

WORSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

(approx. 100-400 A.D.)

What *REALLY* happened??

1. Much Scripture was not only heard but also *seen and experienced*.
2. Early worship included a rich mixture of *biblical images and symbols*.
3. In essentials, unity; in details, diversity. During the fourth century, diversity diminishes.

The Worship Service

The earliest significant outline of Christian worship is found in Justin Martyr, *1st Apology* (c. 155 A.D.):

“And on the day called Sunday an assembly is held in one place of all who live in town or country, and the records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows. Then, when the reader has finished, the president in a discourse admonishes and exhorts [us] to imitate these good things. Then we all stand up together and send up prayers; and as we said before, when we have finished praying, bread and wine and water are brought up, and the president likewise sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and the [elements over which] thanks have been given are distributed, and everyone partakes; and they are sent through the deacons to those who are not present. And the wealthy who so desire give what they wish, as each chooses; and what is collected is deposited with the president. He helps orphans and widows, and those who through sickness or any other cause are in need, and those in prison, and strangers sojourning among us; in a word, he takes care of all those who are in need. We hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead on the same day.”

Christian Initiation

MEANING of Baptism in the New Testament:

- *union with Christ in his death and resurrection* (Rom 6:3; Col 2:12; Mk 10:38)
- *new birth* (Jn 3:5; Titus 3:5)
- *incorporation into Christ's body, the Church* (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28)
- *gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38; Heb. 6:4; 1 Cor. 6:11)
- *forgiveness of sins* (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21; Heb. 10:22)

Preferred TIME:

1. EASTER

2. Pentecost

WHY?

PROCESS of Christian Initiation:

1. Instruction/Catechumenate
2. Pre-baptismal ceremonies
 - a. Renunciation & Adherence
 - b. Led into the baptistery
 - c. Removal of clothes
 - d. Anointing of body
 - e. Blessing of water
 - running water preferable
 - cold water preferable
3. Immersion 3 times
 - with profession of faith
 - using trinitarian formula

Architecture and Art:

Shape of baptistery: rectangular or hexagon or octagon

Shape of font: rectangular or round or cruciform

Symbols on font/baptistery: e.g. Good Shepherd

Steps descending and ascending

Placement of font/baptistery: e.g. entrance of worship space

4. Post-baptismal ceremonies
 - a. Anointing
 - b. [Washing of feet]
 - c. Clothed in a white garment
 - d. Spiritual sealing
 - sign of the cross on the forehead
 - imposition of hands with prayer of blessing, inviting Holy Spirit
5. Eucharist
 - a. Entrance into congregation, welcome, kiss of peace
 - b. [Milk and honey compound offered to newly baptized]
 - c. Eucharist
6. Instruction/Mystagogy

1. Instruction/Catechumenate:

The catechumenate was a period of instruction in the Scriptures and the Creed. Each year, those catechumens who wished to be baptized at Easter had their names recorded at the beginning of the season of Lent. Instruction, fasting, and exorcism(s) occurred during Lent. Exorcism reflected the early Christian belief that all pagans needed to be liberated from the devil in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

NOTE re. infants: As infant baptism increasingly became the norm in the 4th century and beyond, infants were treated in the same way as adult baptismal candidates who were ill or in danger of death. Most churches did not require the catechumenal process for infants; Rome was the exception. All churches, however, practiced every other part of the baptismal process which is described below. In other words, infants participated in all the pre- and post-baptismal ceremonies such as anointing, immersion, and the receiving of Holy Communion. The only modification that might be made was for infants who were too ill or weak for immersion; they could be sprinkled instead.

2. Pre-baptismal ceremonies

- a. Renunciation & Adherence: **WHY?**
 E.g. “Do you renounce Satan? . . . his works? . . . his pomps?”
 “I pledge myself to you, O Christ.”
- b. Led into the baptistery: **WHY?**
 Mark 15:22
 Mark 15:46
- c. Removal of clothes: **WHY?**
 Gen. 2:25
 Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:22-24
 John 19:23-25
- d. Anointing of body: **WHY?**
 Luke 10:34; James 5:14; Mark 6:13
 Heb. 1:9; Ps. 45:7
 Rom. 11:24
 Other symbolism associated with anointing:
- symbol of *protection* against evil:
 “armor all your limbs and make them invulnerable to any weapons the Enemy may hurl” (Theodore)
 - symbol of *preparation for combat* with the devil:
 candidates are “rubbed with oil like an athlete,
 Christ’s athlete” (Ambrose)
 - symbolize *ownership*, like the branding of a sheep (Chrysostom)
 - “a sign of the *garment of immortality* you will receive through baptism” (Theodore)

e. Blessing of water:

WHY was the Holy Spirit invoked over the water beginning in the 3rd century? As baptisms moved indoors, the water no longer flowed naturally as it did in rivers and lakes. The indoor water lacked movement or a “living” character which could enable it to be seen as already imbued with the Spirit.

Type of water:

E.g. *Didache* (c. 100 A.D.):

“Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then baptize in running water, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Before the baptism, the one who baptizes and the one being baptized must fast, and any others who can. And you must tell the one being baptized to fast one or two days beforehand.”

WHY running water?

Gen. 1:2

Exod. 14:21

Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22

John 5:3

John 7:37-39

Rev. 22:1

WHY cold water?

3. Immersion with profession of faith using trinitarian formula

Trinitarian Formula:

- Interrogatory form of profession with 3-fold immersion:
 - “Do you believe in God the Father?” . . .
 - “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” . . .
 - “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?”
- During the 4th century, this interrogatory form was gradually replaced by a baptismal formula (“I baptize you in the name”) at the point of immersion. The profession of faith was pushed into a preliminary position just before the formula and immersion.
- In the East, the formula passive: “_____ is baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” **WHY** a passive formula?

Immersion 3 times:

WHY immersion?

WHY 3 times?

Architecture and Art:

Shape of the baptistry: rectangular:	WHY?
hexagon:	WHY?
octagon:	WHY?
Shape of font: rectangular:	WHY?
round:	WHY?
cruciform:	WHY?
Symbols on font/baptistry: Good Shepherd	WHY?
Steps descending into font and steps ascending out of font:	WHY?
Placement of font/baptistry: e.g. at the entrance to the worship space	WHY?

4. Post-baptismal ceremonies

a. Anointing:	WHY?
1 Sam. 10:1; 16:1-13; 2 Kings 9:6; etc.	
Luke 4:16; Acts 4:27; Acts 10:38	
Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22	
Exod. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10	

Tertullian, *On Baptism* (c. 200 A.D.):

“After we come up from *the washing*, we are anointed with the blessed unction, following that ancient practice by which, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses, there was a custom of *anointing them for priesthood* with oil out of a horn. That is why [the high priest] is called a christ, from ‘chrism’ which is [the Greek for] ‘anointing’; and from this also our Lord obtained his title, though it had become a spiritual anointing, in that he was anointed with the Spirit of God the Father. . . .”

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350) used more specific symbolism. He anointed:

Forehead - so that the baptized may lose the shame of Adam
 Ears - so that they may hear divine mysteries
 Nose - so that they may become the aroma of Christ to God
 Chest - so that they may be armed against the devil

b. [Washing of feet]	
c. Clothed in a white garment:	WHY?
Gal. 3:27 “baptized into Christ . . . clothed with Christ.”	
Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-7; Luke 9:28-35 garments of transfigured Christ	
2 Cor. 5:1-5 “longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. . . .”	
Mark 14:51-52 and 16:5 “young man...naked . . .	
young man...dressed in a white robe”	
Rev. 7:9-14 robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb	

d. Spiritual sealing:

- *sign of the cross* on the forehead:

Rev. 7:3

Rom. 6:16-23

WHY?

- imposition of hands with prayer of blessing, inviting and welcoming the *Holy Spirit*:

Acts 8:14-17

Acts 19:1-7

Heb. 6:2

2 Cor. 1:21-22

Eph. 1:13; 4:30

1 John 2:20, 27

WHY?

5. Eucharist

- a. *Entrance* into the assembly, being made *welcome*, and exchanging the *kiss of peace*.

WHY?

- b. [*Milk and honey* compound are offered to the newly baptized together with the bread and wine of the eucharist.]

WHY?

- c. *Eucharist* is the only part of initiation which is repeated throughout a baptized person's life.

6. Instruction/Mystagogy (4th century):

During the week after baptism, the baptized received further instruction about initiation.

WHY?

Lord's Supper

Central to early Christian worship!

Frequency: weekly.

Agape/love feast:

Already in the 1st century, it seems, the Lord's Supper was celebrated both in the context of a meal and independently. In the 2nd century, it seems that the love feast was a Sunday evening meal. If persecution was too great, Christians seemed willing to do without this meal but not without Sunday morning assembly for worship (which likely included the Lord's Supper).

Thanksgiving and praise are central, not penitence.

Apostolic Tradition (c. 215 A.D.), one of the earliest surviving eucharistic texts

"Then the deacons shall present the offering to the bishop; and he laying his hands on it with all the presbytery, shall say, giving thanks:

The Lord be with you.

And all shall say:

And with your spirit.

[sursum corda]

Up with your hearts.

We have them up with the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

It is fitting and right.

[Preface: thanksgiving for creation, old covenant, etc.]

[Sanctus = "Holy, Holy, Holy]

And then he shall continue thus:

We render thanks to you, O God, through your beloved child Jesus Christ, whom in these last times you sent to us as a savior and redeemer and angel of your will; who is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all things, and in whom you were well pleased. You sent him from heaven into a virgin's womb; and conceived in the womb, he was made flesh and was manifested as your Son, being born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Fulfilling your will and gaining for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands when he should suffer, that he might release from suffering those who have believed in you.

[Thanksgiving for redemption]

And when he was betrayed to voluntary suffering that he might destroy death, and break the bonds of the devil, and tread down hell, and shine on the righteous, and fix a term, and manifest the resurrection, he took bread and gave thanks to you, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body, which shall be broken for you.' Likewise also the cup, saying, 'This is my blood, which is shed for you; when you do this, you make my remembrance.'

[Words of Institution]

Remembering, therefore, his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and cup, giving you thanks because you have held us worthy to stand before you and minister to you.

**[Anamnesis
= remembrance]**

And we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit on the offering of your holy Church; that, gathering her into one, you would grant to all who receive the holy things (to receive for the fullness of the Holy Spirit for the strengthening of faith in truth; that we may praise and glorify you through your child Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and honor to you, to the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and to the ages of ages. Amen."

**[Epiclesis = invocation
of the Holy Spirit]**

[Trinitarian Doxology]

Then, in most liturgies:

Prayer of intercession and the Lord's Prayer

Fraction (breaking of the bread)

Elevation (e.g. "Holy things to the holy") and Delivery

Communion, each replying "Amen" during reception

Psalms sung

Post-communion thanksgiving

Dismissal

Brief Bibliography

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* = good introductory text