



AN EXPLANATION OF
RITE AND CEREMONY IN
THE DIVINE SERVICE OF
THE EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH



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Wieting, Kenneth W. *Lutheranism 101: The Lord's Supper*. Concordia Publishing House, 2012.

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Abbreviations

- AC** Augsburg Confession
- AE** Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition. Volumes 1-30: Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. Concordia Publishing House, 1955-76. Volumes 31-55: Edited by Helmut Lehmann. Fortress Press, 1957-86
- Ap** Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- LC** Large Catechism
- LSB** *Lutheran Service Book*. Concordia Publishing House, 2006.
- LW** *Lutheran Worship*. Concordia Publishing House, 1982.
- TLH** *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Concordia Publishing House, 1941.

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✠ It sends us back to our daily work with the very name of God imprinted on our heart and life in the benediction.

If you rehearse these things regularly, you will know about life as it is grounded in God!

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Our divine liturgy is a celebration of the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here the saving action of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

The divine services are celebrations of Jesus' opening the gates of heaven for us through his life, death, and resurrection. They do not commemorate the "late departed" Jesus of Nazareth, but witness to the resurrection of Christ by proclamation, preaching, praise, thanksgiving, and the Sacrament. Through the Word of God preached and the sacraments celebrated and administered, Jesus Christ is present in our midst according to his promise. He is indeed with us to the end of the age (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 24).

The word "liturgy" comes from a Greek word that originally referred to a public work or duty performed by individual citizens for the benefit of the state. It is literally a "public service." In the church it came to refer to those public acts of recognizing God's grace and mercy on the part of all the people of God when assembled as the church. For this reason, people of the church should understand what they are involved in as they use the liturgy. Unfortunately, we all know this is not the case. I am astounded at the number of congregants, even those who have grown up in the Lutheran Church, who are clueless as to the essence and meaning of the Divine Liturgy. Therefore, I am compelled to compile this commentary.

At the outset, I need to point out that in the Divine Service, the Lord comes to us in Word and Sacrament to bless and enliven us with his gifts. God is not the audience and we the performers. The Divine Service is not something we do for God, but is His Service to us which is received by faith. The "liturgy" is really God's work. He gives. We receive. He speaks. We listen.

In worship a continuing dialog takes place on various levels, and liturgy is an aid in this dialog.

- ✠ God is addressing the worshipers with judgment and grace, with promise and blessing, with Word and Sacrament.
- ✠ The worshiper is addressing God with confession of sins and confession of faith, with prayer and praise.
- ✠ The worshipers address each other, mutually recognizing their sin and confessing their faith, sharing rededication to Christ and renewed commitment to God.

In this way the entire service is talking back and forth among God and His people ... truly a "public service."

Please also remember that the Lutheran Liturgy, as with anything that we consider important is only as full as we ourselves fill it. It can only give as we give ourselves to it. It can only give meaning as we seek to work at drawing

meaning from it. It can only affect us, as we allow it to do its work of grace! A young lad said to his father, “Dad, worship is boring!’ To which the father replied, “Son, as much as you put into it, I’m not surprised you feel that way!”

In the Large Catechism Luther boldly says that the Lord’s day has it’s own particular holy work: “Here a work must be performed by which the doer himself is made holy; this, as we have heard, takes place only through God’s Word. Places, times, persons and the entire appointed order of worship are therefore instituted and appointed in order that God’s Word may exert its power publicly” (LC I.94). Then he sternly says: “You must be concerned not only about hearing the Word but also about learning and retaining it. Do not regard it as an optional or unimportant matter. It is the commandment of God and he will require of you an accounting of how you have heard and learned and honored his Word” (LC I.98). While the Divine Service is God’s work, in the liturgy, we also have “work” to do.

[As an aside: When I look out upon the assembled congregation and see men and women completely uninvolved in the liturgy (as I sometimes do here at Bethlehem) standing or sitting as knots on logs or looking about, I am struck with a number of thoughts. I pity the individual that is so unaffected by God’s mercy and grace as to appear so thankless. I also remember Luther’s comments in his commentary on Psalm 69, of the “lukewarm and nominal Christians let loose on the church” and that “if this kind of homage would be offered to a man it would be despised” (352). And then I think with sadness of the negative witness and example they give to their fellow worshipers – especially children – with their passive-aggressive posture. Luther would often refer to such individuals as “sluggards” and “clods.”]

Rite and Ceremony

In this commentary I will explain both “rite” and “ceremony.” “Rite” (or ritual) is the substance of the service. The Rite this booklet will be explaining is Divine Service Setting Three in *Lutheran Service Book*. “Ceremony” refers to the actions of the Liturgy that accompany the texts of the liturgy. Ceremony includes: folding hands, making the sign of the cross, standing, kneeling, bowing, genuflecting, etc. Ceremony also includes: “the outward observance of the church year ... symbols, and material objects employed in the church’s worship, for example, the church building, the altar, crucifixes, candles, and vestments. Ceremonies are solemn religious things and actions” (Lang, “Ceremony” 6).

We must also note that not every ceremony exists in all places and that ceremonies are always optional. They are not the “main” things in worship, nor are they necessary for true worship. That being said, however, ceremonies do help us confess our faith through bodily action. Ceremony can and does teach and communicate. Our use of ceremony is intended to teach and communicate God’s presence among us in Word and Sacrament. In the Divine Liturgy our worship does not view the Triune God as our golfing buddy, but as the Holy and Almighty Creator of heaven and earth into Whose presence we come as beggars.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

Liturgy is a “rehearsal of daily living.’ If you look back over the liturgy and the commentary provided here you will find three things:

THE LITURGY HELPS US REMEMBER OUR PAST:

- ✠ It helps us remember our failures of the week(s) past as we confess our sins.
- ✠ It helps us remember the blessings we have received as we give thanks and praise.
- ✠ It helps us remember that the forces threatening our life are held back by a gracious hand that seized us already in our baptism.
- ✠ It helps us remember the many needs that have confronted us as we offer up our prayers to the heavenly throne.

THE LITURGY HELPS US UNDERSTAND OUR PRESENT:

- ✠ It reminds us that we are part of a huge army of people who have called themselves Christian through the ages and have lived and died confessing the basic truths the liturgy rehearses for our own living and dying.
- ✠ It reminds us that we are not alone in our sin as we confess our sins together in the presence of God and one another.
- ✠ It reminds us that we are surrounded by people who will support us as we join in confessing our faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the family of God.
- ✠ It reminds us that we share the common needs of all humanity as we join in our prayers to God.
- ✠ It reminds us that we are part of a broad sweep of all human history that knows it can live only by the cry, “Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy upon us)!”

THE LITURGY HELPS US LOOK TO THE FUTURE:

- ✠ It directs our eyes to God, the source of all hope, in all that is done throughout the liturgy.
- ✠ It turns our attention to the great feast prepared for us in the heavens through the bread and wine of the Supper wherein the crucified and risen Christ makes himself available to us for present forgiveness and future hope as we anticipate His coming again.

Epistle¹⁵ candle is lighted first; the Gospel¹⁶ candle last; they are extinguished in reverse order” (Piepkorn 3).

The Altar is 1. a symbol of the sacrifice, 2. The Lord’s Table from which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and 3. A symbol of God’s presence. This is why we direct our worship to the altar and show reverence to it. “Since the altar is a symbol of the constant presence of God and since it serves as the focus of devotion in the church (except during the reading of the Gospel when the focus of attention shifts to the book), it is appropriate to salute the altar with a profound bow when first entering and last leaving the sanctuary and to bow moderately whenever crossing, approaching, or leaving the midst” (Piepkorn 4). The only items on the altar are: Candles, the Crucifix, Eucharistic vessels and elements, and the Missal stand. Flowers and offering plates should be placed on credence shelves.

The Chancel is comprised of two sections; a section within a section. At Bethlehem the whole area behind the altar rail (i.e., the communicants’ rail) is the chancel. The section within the chancel where the altar is located is called the **Sanctuary**. While this term is often used (i.e., by some Protestants) to refer to the whole worship space, it is properly used only of the altar area. The platform step upon which the altar stands is called the *predella*. The area where the congregation is located for worship is called the **Nave**, from the Latin *navis*, since the Christian church is traditionally compared to a ship.

Lent: During the penitential season of Lent, we “sacrifice” the use of “Alleluia” until the Resurrection of our Lord (commonly known as Easter). The Alleluia and Verse is omitted, as is the “Gloria in Excelsis.”

Advent: during the preparatory season of Advent we omit the “Gloria in Excelsis” until the Nativity of our Lord (commonly known as Christmas).

Therefore, all the actions and gestures of ceremony are deliberate, intentional, and planned.

What, then, is the purpose of ceremonies in the liturgy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? **Ceremonies necessarily exist to teach the faith.** As the true worship of the triune God is always anchored in the Christian’s fear, love, and trust in this one God above all things, so proper ceremonies have a didactic function in the Christian congregation. This is the intention of Article XXIV of the Apology: “The purpose of observing ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and that those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may also pray.”

Although the function of ceremonies is never less than pedagogical, ceremonies are more than visual aids to faith. Since worship in the name of Jesus is never without form or structure, **ceremonies serve to maintain good order** in the worshipping congregation.

Although ceremonies are not part of the Divine Service per se, they nevertheless bear witness to what the congregation actually believes regarding the means of grace. The posture and movement of the congregation during the service (i.e., standing for the reading of the Holy Gospel, or kneeling for the reception of the Lord’s body and blood), the manner in which the remaining consecrated elements are treated after the Communion, and the custom of reverencing the altar are examples of ceremonies that point to the congregation’s confessional position (Pless 224-225, emphasis mine).

The Lutheran Position

What is the Lutheran position on these ceremonies. In addition to the quote above (Ap XXIV) which clearly states that *ceremonies have vital purposes*, here are quotations from the Lutheran Confessions which make the Lutheran position abundantly clear:

- *We observe ceremonies not contrary to Holy Scriptures* – AC XV.1: “With regard to church usages that have been established by men, it is taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like” (Tappert 36).
- *We have not abolished old ceremonies* – AC XXI.4 “For it is a false and malicious charge that all the ceremonies and all old ordinances are abolished in our churches” (Tappert 48).
- *We have not abolished the Mass*¹ - AC XXIV.1: “Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. Actually, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence. Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained” (Tappert 56).

¹⁵ The Epistle side of the altar is liturgical south (the left as the congregation faces the altar).

¹⁶ The Gospel side of the altar is liturgical north (the right as the congregation faces the altar).

¹ Mass” is the term used for the Holy Communion Service in the Lutheran Confessions.

A FEW OTHER MATTERS

- *We preserve the ceremonies of the past* – AC XXIV.40: “Since, therefore, the Mass among us is supported by the example of the church as seen from the Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disapproved, especially since the customary public ceremonies are for the most retained” (Tappert 60).
- *We allow only catholic ceremonies* – AC Conclusion ¶5: “Only those things have been recounted which seemed necessary to say, in order that it may be understood that nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or the church catholic” (Tappert 95).
- *We maintain good ceremonies and church customs* – Ap XV.44: “From this description of the state of our churches it is evident that we diligently maintain church discipline, pious ceremonies, and the good customs of the church” (Tappert).
- *We celebrate the Mass every Sunday with usual ceremonies* – Ap XXIV.1: “To begin with, we must repeat the prefatory statement that we do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it. In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved. We keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of the lessons, prayers, vestments, etc.” (Tappert 249).

You will notice that the confessional standard is weekly celebration of the Holy Supper. This standard disappeared in the 17TH and 18TH centuries due to the influences of Pietism and Rationalism (or the “Enlightenment”).

Within the sphere of worship, Rationalism was wholly destructive. The service was mutilated beyond recognition. The church building became a mere place of assembly, the pulpit a lecture platform from which the minister gave moral instruction. The Sacrament of the Altar was reduced to an empty form and was no longer celebrated every Sunday and Holy Day but observed in Reformed fashion four times a year (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 15).

The Church of the Augsburg Confession has obviously not fully recovered from these negative influences. It is my prayer that more and more congregations, which consider themselves confessional, will return to and follow the practice of the original Confessors.

Occasionally, someone will quip, “these ceremonies are catholic.” In a sense they are correct (see above). These ceremonies are a part of the church catholic (universal), passed down since the apostolic period. Justin Martyr’s² account of a Christian celebration of the Eucharist was written about A.D. 150.

But for the most part, these kinds of comments are but emotional reactions and opinions. Declaring accepted Lutheran ceremonies “Catholic” (meaning Roman) actually reveals an uninformed bias and perhaps an unteachable spirit. Again, let me assertively point out that the Reformation was not a revolt against

The Sign of the Cross: “Crossing oneself was practiced by Christians from the earliest centuries and may go back to apostolic times. We know that it was already a common ceremony used daily in A.D. 200” (Lang, “Ceremony” 72) “Since the third century, Christians have made the sign of the cross as a remembrance that in Holy Baptism God makes us his own children” (Stauffer 8). “It is one of the traditional ceremonies that was most definitely retained by Luther¹⁴ and the Lutheran Church in the 16TH century Reformation” (Lang, “Ceremony” 72). Making the sign of the cross is an action which reminds us of our Baptism.

The holy cross is the symbol of our salvation. We were signed with it when we were baptized. It is the sign by which the church blesses people and things (Lang, “Ceremony” 73).

It is a praiseworthy custom to cross ourselves at the beginning and end of all services (the Invocation and Benediction) and at the following places: at the passing of the processional Cross; at the end of the Gloria in Excelsis; at the end of the Creed; during the Sanctus at “Blessed is He;” at the Pax Domini; upon receiving Christ’s holy body and sacred blood; and at the dismissal as the pastor says: “Depart in peace.”

Bowing: “It is a confessional custom to bow the head at the Holy Name of Jesus, toward the Crucifix if at the altar, toward the book if the Holy Gospel is being read ... It is likewise proper to bow the head at the opening words of the Gloria Patri whenever it occurs, and at the Sanctus.” (Piepkorn 5) Bowing at the Gloria Patri “is a humble acknowledgment of the glory of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.” (Lang, “Ceremony” 69) It is also appropriate to bow when a processional cross passes by.

Candles: For the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar, at least two candles traditionally stand upon the altar, one on the extreme right and the other on the extreme left. These are called *Eucharistic lights*. But if the two are the only candles ever placed on the altar, their use need not be restricted to the chief service. They may be lighted at every service.

“Two candles are usually placed on the altar, representing the divine and human natures of Christ” (Stauffer 20).

“Lighted candles are a symbol of Christ as the Light of the world. They also express the glory and joy of our holy religion. In the chief service Christ the Light comes to us in both Word and sacrament. This may be the reason for the traditional minimum of two lights for the celebration of Holy Communion” (Lang, “What an Altar Guild” 54).

“Six candles is a Counter-Reformatory Roman use. Candelabra as substitutes for the two single candles are a Protestant sentimentality. The

² Justin Martyr (100-165) was an early Christian apologist.

¹⁴ See the “Daily Prayers” section of Luther’s Small Catechism.

The celebrant chants the **Thanksgiving** and prays the **Post-Communion Prayer** in the orans position. The ceremony of the **Salutation** here is the same as in the Service of the Word and the beginning of the Service of the Sacrament.

In the **Benediction**, the celebrant bows at each reference to the Divine Name, Yahweh, which here is translated “Lord.” The celebrant also makes the sign of the cross over the congregation. The Benediction (Old Testament) is a mirror image of the Invocation (New Testament).

After the hymn the chimes are rung three times to allow for personal and **Silent Prayer**. Rather than looking around or using it to reshelve our hymnals, this should be a time of personal and prayerful application of the service to our own lives. Here we may thank God for the opportunity to receive His gifts, ask for a renewing of faith and discipleship in which His Holy Word fills our hearts, minds, bodies, actions, and words wherever we may be; at work, play, school, and home.

the Roman Catholic Church, its culture, and all the beneficial things that had come down from the early church to the medieval period. The Reformation was a *purification*, a *purging* of that which was contrary to Holy Scripture and preserving that which was good and in accord with Scripture.

The Lutheran Reformers DID NOT remove all aspects of worship observed in the Roman Catholic Church of the 16TH century. Notice again, our Lutheran Confessions state: “To begin with, we must repeat the prefatory statement that we do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it. ... **We keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of the lessons, prayers, vestments, etc.**” (Ap XXIV.1) [emphasis mine]. Here it is clear that, in addition to liturgies and vestments, even the term MASS was retained. What the reformers DID was correct abuses and errors and remove those elements that were unscriptural and heretical. The first President of the LC-MS, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, also wrote:

“If you insist upon calling every element in the Divine Service ‘romish’ that has been used by the Roman Catholic Church, it must follow that the reading of the Epistle and Gospel is also ‘romish;’ Indeed, it is mischief to sing or preach in church, for the Roman Church has done this also...”
(translated from Der Lutheraner (the original predecessor to The Lutheran Witness), July 19, 1853, Volume 9, Number 24, page 163).

Traditional Lutheran Worship WILL (and should) more resemble a Mass in a Roman Catholic parish than services in a Reformed (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.) church. The present desire among many in the LC-MS to look less “Catholic” and more “Reformed” is NOT orthodox, and in this writer’s opinion “throws the baby out with the bath water.” A former Texas District (LC-MS) president once commented that this is not “your father’s Lutheran Church” (rephrasing an old Oldsmobile commercial). He is right for the most part. Unfortunately, that is not a good thing.

Guiding Principles

The principles guiding the use of ceremony are: reverence, love, order, humility and respect. What follows is a description of the historic practice and ceremonies of the church, and what I put into practice as I lead the Divine Liturgy.

The external ceremonies connected with worship serve a useful purpose. They serve to teach the young. They also identify the outward society of the church. They are vehicles of private and corporate devotion. However, if ceremonies are to have these values, they must be understood and explained. The duty to teach and patiently to explain the ceremonies of worship is the responsibility of the Christian family, the Christian school, and the church (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 17).

Important Distinctions

We differentiate the parts of the Divine Service as the **Ordinary** and the **Propers**. The **Ordinary** is the order of service we use on a given Sunday. At Bethlehem we use Divine Service Setting 1 (*LSB* 151), Divine Service Setting 3 (*LSB* 184), Divine Service Setting 4 (*LSB* 203), and Divine Service Setting 5 (*LSB* 213). This commentary will explain Divine Service Setting 3.

The term **Propers** refers to the portion of the Divine Service which changes each week. The Propers are:

- ✠ Introit
- ✠ Collect of the Day
- ✠ Scripture Readings
- ✠ Gradual
- ✠ Verse

Two terms assist in understanding different foci of the Divine Service: the **sacrificial** and **sacramental** acts in the Divine Service. When the celebrant stands before the altar he faces the altar for all sacrificial acts. He faces the congregation for all sacramental acts. This signifies God's acts toward the congregation (sacramental) and the congregation's acts of worship and praise toward God (sacrificial).

You will notice that Bethlehem's altar is free-standing. The celebrant stands at the front of the altar until the Service of the Sacrament. Then he will move to the back of the altar and face the congregation. Luther himself preferred the free-standing altar. "Until the late Middle Ages the celebrant faced the people from the back of the altar/table. The introduction of relics being stacked behind the altar forced the celebrant to stand before the altar" (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 28).

The Divine Service is in three parts: 1) The Service of Preparation; 2) The Service of the Word³; and 3) The Service of the Sacrament⁴.

Chapter 7

THE SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT: Part 2

The Rite

The **Nunc Dimittis** (Latin for 'now depart'), follows as a concluding thanksgiving for the Sacrament. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart" is Simeon's Song from *St. Luke 2:29-32*. God promised Simeon that he would see the Messiah before his death. Upon seeing the Infant Jesus in the temple, Simeon praised God saying that now he could depart in peace. Now we also praise God for having revealed to our dying eyes so great a salvation as He has offered to us in the Holy Supper wherein Christ was truly present for us! The tune of the Nunc Dimittis is based on Plainsong, Tone V - SOEST, 1532; PFALZ, 1557.

In the **Thanksgiving** and **Post-Communion Collect** we again offer special thanks to God, and pray that God would use the power of the Sacrament to make us more and more like Christ. The prayer "*We give thanks to You, Almighty God*" is the traditional Lutheran post-communion prayer from Luther's German Mass of 1526. Notice the emphasis in each prayer of service to God and love to one another. This is indeed the purpose of the Lord's Supper, to strengthen our lives of faith, made active in love and service.

The **Salutation** and **Benedicamus** (Latin for 'bless we.') is a very ancient part of the Service of the Sacrament and should not be omitted.

The service concludes with the **Benediction**. The Benediction is a biblical text, called the "Aaronic Benediction" from *Numbers 6:23-27*. This is the blessing God first gave to Aaron and the other priests to speak to the people of Israel. This is the final sacramental feature of the service. It is not simply a prayer for blessing. It imparts a blessing in God's name, giving positive assurance of God's grace and peace to each one who receives it by faith. Since the Benediction is a declaration and not a pious wish, it should never begin with the words "May the Lord..."

The **Hymn of Departure** is a concluding hymn of praise.

At Bethlehem, after a time announcing the happenings in the church, we are dismissed with the first century **Dismissal**. The priest would challenge the people to depart in peace as they also go out to serve the Lord, and the people respond, with a joyful response of thanksgiving in God's gracious inclusion in His work of ministry.

The Ceremony

We bow during the first part of the Gloria Patri in the **Nunc Dimittis**. According to ancient tradition, the Gloria Patri was omitted in the Nunc Dimittis from the fifth Sunday in Lent through Holy Saturday. Now it is common for the Gloria Patri to be omitted from its usual locations in the Divine Service during Holy Week.

³ Also known as "The Office of the Catechumens"

⁴ Also known as "The Office of the Faithful"

Chapter 2

THE SERVICE OF PREPARATION

The Rite

The **Hymn of Invocation:** The Lutheran Church is a “singing church.” So we follow the advice of the apostle Paul to teach and admonish “*one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*” (*Colossians 3:16*). This hymn may be one of praise, prayer, or reflection on the season of the church year.

In the **Invocation**, we are not simply reminding ourselves that the God we worship is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are being named and blessed by the same Divine Name into which we are baptized. Our baptism is the foundation and impetus of our being gathered in worship.

The **Invitation to Confession:** Having acknowledged that we are gathered to worship the very God who put His Divine Name upon us in Holy Baptism, we are now invited to confess our sinfulness. The first versicle (*Psalms 124:8*) is from the orders of service in Nuremberg (1525), Mecklenberg (1552), and Wittenberg (1559). The second versicle (*Psalms 32:5*) was used in orders found in Strasbourg (1525), Reformation of Cologne (1543), and Austria (1571).

The **Silence** allows for personal and private application of the words of the introductory versicles. We examine ourselves and then publicly confess our sins.

The **General Corporate Confession** that follows is a prayer which has general statements of confession between the sinner and the Savior. The Confession in the left column is from the Saxony Church Order of 1581. It has been in all Lutheran Service books since the *KirchenAgende* of 1856 (the first official service book of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod).

The Confession in the right column is from Philip Melancthon’s Church Order for Mecklenberg (1545). This was later adopted in Wittenberg (1559) and was used in the Common Service of 1888. “The expression ‘we are by nature sinful and unclean,’ based on Article II, 1 of the Augsburg Confession, is unique to Lutheranism in its structuring of various preparatory rites. This confession is followed by the simple declaration of grace” (Precht 403).

The **Absolution** in the left column is a general corporate announcement of forgiveness. This form “has its roots in private confession” (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 22). Grammatically, this is an indicative-operative declaration. The Lutheran Reformers and the Lutheran Confessions know of no such “group” absolution. In the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, the sacrament of Holy Absolution is only offered individually and personally. It is one-on-one between the penitent and pastor (or father-confessor). Therefore, this form of absolution is not used at Bethlehem (except for individual absolution) as we desire to be faithful to the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord. There is also concern that confession not become a mechanical matter.

“It is desirable to separate the confession of sins from the eucharist proper. **There are genuine problems involved in pronouncing absolution over**

an entire congregation. Unbaptized persons may be present. But confession and holy absolution, because they are a return to baptism, are obviously meant only for those who have been baptized. There is also the possibility that persons may be present who, although they have been baptized, should not be absolved, for example, excommunicated persons. **The ideal solution to such problems is a return to the regular use of private confession and absolution.** (See the AC XI, XXV.13; Ap XI) (McClellan 23-24, emphasis mine).

Lang goes so far as to suggest the following:

... letting Private Confession and Absolution fall into disuse by substituting the General Confession before the Sunday service for it ... may betray a denial, or perversion, or a misunderstanding of the truths of the Christian faith” (“Ceremony” 12).

Why then, is the indicative-operative formula in our hymnal? I wish I had an explanation. It did not appear in any Lutheran worship books until *The Lutheran Hymnal* was published in 1941. It was then erroneously retained in subsequent hymnals, *Lutheran Worship* (1982) and *Lutheran Service Book* (2006).

Dr. Precht gives the following historical account:

Interestingly, the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1912), the first official English hymnal of the Synod, predecessor to *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), prescribed this second form of confession with its declaration of grace for The Order of Morning Service or the Communion. Thus it was used for both noncommunion and communion services. **The first form** (“O almighty God, merciful Father) **found no place in the 1912 hymnal.** In preparing and producing *The Lutheran Hymnal*, the Intersynodical Committee on Hymnology and Liturgics of the then Synodical Conference prescribed the first form with its indicative-operative absolution for the Order of Holy Communion, prescribing the Mecklenburg (1545, 1552) form with its simple declaration of grace for the service without Communion (Precht 403, emphasis mine).

It is noteworthy that the 1931 edition of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* lacked such a formula, as did also the *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958) published by the American Lutheran Church; now a part of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

Unfortunately, and perhaps an “unintended consequence,” the inclusion and use of a “corporate” absolution in the Divine Service has contributed to the overall decline of individual (or private) confession and absolution among Lutherans which is precisely what the Reformers spoke against. *The Augsburg Confession* (1530) XI.1 clearly states: **“It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse”** (Tappert 34, emphasis mine). In addition, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession declares that “Absolution may properly be called a sacrament of penitence” (Ap XII.41). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession also clearly states “The

The communicants are dismissed and the celebrant makes the sign of the cross over the communicants. The communicants may also make the sign of the cross upon themselves at the blessing and dismissal from the Table. The moment of reception is an intensely personal appropriation of what is being celebrated as a congregation. It is a good practice to offer a silent prayer of thanks when we return to our pews.

The Latin term *reliquiae* is used for the remaining Body and Blood of Christ. What remains on the altar is the Body and Blood of Christ and remains so until consumed. At the conclusion of the distribution the celebrant empties all remaining individual cups of the Blood of Christ into the chalice. The celebrant (and assistants, if necessary) consumes the remaining hosts and empties any crumbs into the chalice. He then consumes the chalice. In this way the *reliquiae* is not comingled with unconsecrated elements for the next Supper. Such a practice was so abhorrent to Luther he declared that any clergy who did so should be removed from office for despising God. Nonetheless, carelessness with the *reliquiae* compromises the doctrine of the real presence.

The chalice is then ablated, that is, rinsed with clear water, which the celebrant will also consume. The purificator¹² is then used to wipe out the cup and is then placed inside the cup and the cup is set back on the corporal. The pall is then placed over the cup and all the sacred vessels are covered with a veil. When individual cups are used, they too should be ablated before washing. The water which has rinsed any remaining blood of Christ from the individual cups is then poured to the ground or in a piscina.¹³ To simply wash the cups without abluting is irreverent. We do not pour the blood of Christ “down the drain” as so much wash water.

¹² The linen used to cleanse the rim of the chalice.

¹³ A drain in the sacristy that goes to directly the soil. It is not proper to pour the remains of the sacramental elements into a common drain.

The church of the Augsburg Confession has traditionally used the single chalice for the consecration of the wine and the distribution. The use of glasses, tiny chalices, or small cups is a recent innovation dating to the early part of the 20TH century. It was introduced to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in imitation of those American Protestant denominations that had given up the use of wine in the Sacrament and substituted the use of grape juice. Without the alcoholic content of the wine, the use of a single chalice was considered unsanitary because of the danger of contagion. Since the Church of the Augsburg Confession communes with wine, the use of individual containers is not necessary (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 29).

Unfortunately, culture has become a dominant force sweeping good ceremony and symbol aside. The idea of drinking after another has become repulsive to some, even though this is a “holy” communal meal in which we are sharing the very blood of our Lord. At the Last Supper Jesus took one cup of wine and said to his disciples “Take this and divide it among yourselves” (*St. Luke 22:17*). In addition, the notion that the Lord would allow his Supper to carry germs making one ill is ludicrous. St. Paul says that the cause of sickness and death after partaking is NOT biological, but spiritual, namely, eating and drinking unworthily ... profaning the body and blood of the Lord (*1 Corinthians 11:27-30*). That being said, the following must also be considered:

This historical review must not be seen as a prohibition of the use of individual glasses nor a denial that the Lord’s Supper is present because they are used. Rather, the hope is a deeper awareness of the record of these matters and loving concern for others. That concern would be that though some may not wish to receive from the common chalice, others would not be prohibited from doing so. This would be in keeping with what their brothers and sisters in Christ have done down through the centuries and with what Jesus used when giving this gift of unity (Wieting 141).

If individual cups are used they will be made of glass, and will be ablated before they are washed. “Disposable cups of plastic or paper are the product of a garbage-producing, throw-away culture that respects neither the creation nor the sacramental element” (Pfatteicher 244).

When receiving the Chalice, the communicant should only tip the base of the cup, and should never take hold of the cup thus recognizing that this cup contains nothing less than the sacred blood of our Lord, therefore, we touch it only slightly.

While Lutheran clergymen will be careful to instruct their people that they are not to adore the bread and the wine as such, they will also be careful to instruct their communicants that ‘No one ... can and will deny that Christ himself, true God and man, Who is truly and essentially present in the Holy Communion in the right celebration thereof should be adored in spirit and in truth.’ (FC, SD, VI.126) (Piepkorn 39).

genuine sacraments, therefore, are Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and absolution (which is the sacrament of penitence)” (Ap XIII.4).

The **Declaration of Grace** in the right column (*LSB* 185), announces the Gospel and offers to the congregation a solution to sin. Here the pastor declares that by God’s grace and mercy, for the sake of Christ, our sins are forgiven. This was “originally intended as a general or group confession in preparation for public worship” (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 34).

The Service of Preparation with confession of sins was not originally a part of the Communion celebration. It was developed in the Middle Ages with an increasing emphasis on sin and unworthiness, and then only as a priest’s personal preparation for the mass (the *Confiteor*). The confession was not given to the entire congregation until the time of the Reformation (Pfatteicher 196).

In the preparatory part of the Divine Service we have emphasized:

- ✠ the meaning and significance of our baptism. As baptism is the beginning of the Christian life and the foundation on which that life in Christ is built, so we are here reminded of the Divine Name into which we are baptized.
- ✠ the need for daily confession ... of daily dying to the old Adam and rising in the new life. It is therefore appropriate that we begin the Divine Service in this way.

The Ceremony

At the **Invocation** baptized worshipers may make the sign of the cross upon themselves as a remembrance of Holy Baptism.

The Sign of the Holy Cross is a confessional gesture. It is made with the hand disposed as for a blessing from the head (“My Lord Jesus Christ came down from heaven”) to the breast (“and was incarnate for me”) to the right side (“and was crucified for me”) to the left side (“and entered into my heart”). ... This method of making the sign of the Holy Cross is older than the method in common use in the Roman Catholic Church where the right hand crosses from the left shoulder to the right (Piepkorn 5).

If we were to name the **Invocation** with its Latin name (as we do at other parts, (e.g., the “Kyrie,” the “Sanctus,” etc.) this would be “**In Nomine.**” There are differences of opinion as to whether the celebrant faces the altar or the congregation. The rubrics for *Lutheran Service Book* allow for either. This is dependent on what the celebrant believes is significant in this action. I believe, as do others, that this is more than simply invoking, or calling on God. The pastor here is naming God’s people with a baptismal blessing. *Lutheran Service Book* (184) includes the ceremonial rubric: “*The sign of the cross ✠ may be made by all in remembrance of Baptism.*” For this reason, I face the people, place my left hand upon my breast, and make the sign of the cross over them with my right hand. This action matches the action of the Benediction at the end of the service. I like to think of the Invocation and Benediction as the “bookends” of the service. Now the people of God may call upon God and

approach Him in the confession of sins, because they are baptized, and have his Divine Name.

It is unfortunate that many Lutheran Naves are designed without kneelers in the pews. For those who are able, kneeling is a proper posture for the **Confession** of sins. It signifies contrition and humility.

Occasionally I am asked why the pastor holds his hand in a certain way (with the thumb and first two fingers extended and the last two fingers bent) when making the sign of the cross over the people. In this way we mimic the nailed hands of Christ as they are often depicted on the crucifix. This is a modification of the Roman Ceremony in which the hand is open and flat.

In the **Declaration of Grace** in the right hand column (*LSB* 185), the celebrant faces the congregation until he says, “He that believes and is baptized...” He then turns by his left to the altar and says “Grant this Lord, unto us all.” This change of position accents the “sacrificial” (see above) character of these words.

Whenever the celebrant is facing the congregation and then turns to the altar he turns toward his left (to the Epistle side of the altar). He turns back to the congregation in reverse (toward his right). This is the remnant of ceremony that existed prior to the Reformation. When the celebrant was assisted by a deacon, the deacon stood to the celebrant’s right (as they faced the altar). Turning toward the deacon was recognition of rank and a sign of respect as the celebrant never turned his back on him.

To show that this is preparatory, the celebrant leads this portion of the liturgy from outside the chancel area.

“The presiding minister and the assisting ministers receive the body and blood before the distribution to the congregation. This is in contrast to the practice in some parishes, where the ministers receive last or after the assistant(s). Those who distribute the holy gifts should themselves taste of the holy gifts first. The forgiven offer the forgiveness through the distribution of the Holy Sacrament. In keeping with historic precedent, it is proper that the presiding minister communes himself and then communes the assisting ministers. It is both awkward and unnecessary for the presiding minister to be communed by one of the assisting ministers before (or after) he communes them” (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 29).

The celebrant prays (*sotto voce*): “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for me, preserve my body and soul unto everlasting life. Amen” and receives the host. He then prays (*sotto voce*): “What shall I offer unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will receive the chalice of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord” He removes the pall and raises the chalice as high as his breast and says (*sotto voce*): “The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for me, preserve my body and soul unto everlasting life. Amen.” He then receives the sacred Blood. He covers the cup with the pall.

At the **Distribution** and reception of the Body and Blood of Christ communicants may kneel as they are able. It is customary for communicants to bow before kneeling and to bow again upon dismissal. The celebrant says “The true body of Christ, given for you.” The communicant responds, “Amen.” In doing so the communicant is confessing, “Yes, I believe the bread the pastor has given me is the Body of Christ.”

The more ancient and natural practice is that the bread is placed in the communicant’s hand. The medieval custom of placing the bread on the communicant’s tongue had its origins in preventing the taking away of the host for superstitious use. An ancient practice taught communicants to place the right hand on top of the left to make a “throne” for Christ. Receiving the host on an open palm is much more desirable than taking it with one’s fingers. First, it decreases the possibility of dropping the Sacred Body of Christ on the floor. Second, it is more dignified and shows a humble and respectful *receiving* rather than *grasping* the precious gift.

The assistant and celebrant say “The true blood of Christ, shed for you.” The communicant again responds, “Amen.” In doing so the communicant is confessing, “Yes, I believe the wine I have received is the Blood of Christ.”

The use of one chalice is not only historically more desirable, but also has more theological significance than the individual cups which introduces an individualistic spirit that can hinder the significance of the communal nature of the sacrament. “Various chemical and bacteriological studies have established the hygienic safety of the common cup” (Pffatteicher 244). “It should be borne in mind, however, that neither the Lutheran Confessions nor the Lutheran liturgy envision the use of individual cups in the celebration of the Holy Communion Service” (Lang, “Ceremony” 45). The use of individual cups is not a traditional Lutheran practice.

“This is a survival of the practice of ringing a small, handheld bell at the consecration” (Precht 426). And this practice originated in the ringing of a church tower bells during the consecration “a total of seven strokes, the first at the beginning of the consecration, three at the consecration of the hosts and three at the consecration of the chalice” (McClellan 46).

When reciting the **Words of Our Lord** the celebrant lifts a host from the altar at the words “took bread.” With particular distinctness, attention and reverence, he chants “This is my Body” and makes the sign of the cross over all the hosts. After the words “This do in remembrance of me” he again lifts the host, bows and prays (*sotto voce*): “My Lord and my God.” He then removes the pall¹⁰ from the chalice. He lifts the chalice at the words “He took the Cup” raising it above the corporal¹¹ and then replaces it. Then he touches each vessel containing wine to be consecrated to indicate that he is including it in the consecration. Again, with particular distinctness, attention and reverence, he chants “this is My blood” and makes the sign of the cross. He elevates the chalice and prays (*sotto voce*): “We therefore pray thee, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious Blood.” He then covers the chalice with the pall. If the celebrant used a large host for the consecration, he will break it into smaller pieces to be used to commune himself and assistants.

The Lutheran Confessions do not specify the type of bread or wine for use in the Supper.

“Historically, however, Lutherans desired to play down the symbolic association of bread and wine that would give the impression that Christ’s body and blood are merely being symbolized with bread and wine. For that reason there was a retention of wafer bread and a preference for white or amber rather than red sacramental wine in the Evangelical Lutheran Church” (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 20).

The purpose of the **Pax** is a confessional declaration that the peace that passes all understanding is here present in the body and blood of Christ. For this reason the celebrant now lifts the host with the chalice.

During the singing of the **Agnus Dei** by the congregation the celebrant may say the following prayer (*Domine non sum dignus*) three times: “Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed.” Traditionally, he strikes his breast three times with the extremities of the last three fingers of his right hand.

“Thereupon, in accordance with the best Lutheran precedent, the celebrant administers the Holy Communion to himself. In accordance with the Church’s historic practice, he would do this even though there may be another clergyman present who might administer the Holy Communion to him” (Piepkorn 36).

After the preparatory rite the Divine Service now properly begins with the **Introit** as the start of the Service of the Word. “Introit” is a Latin word meaning “he enters into.” The Introit uses Psalm, Scripture and liturgical verses to announce the theme of the day.

The first verse of the Introit is the antiphon. The antiphon begins and ends the Introit (or Psalm). Normally, the **Gloria Patri** (“Glory to the Father”) is sung before the final antiphon. But in Divine Service Setting Three it appears to stand alone after the Introit’s final antiphon. It would be more correct to chant the Gloria Patri (with the same Psalm tone used for the Introit/Psalm) before the final antiphon, skip the musical version of the Gloria Patri in the hymnal, and continue with the Kyrie. The Gloria Patri is omitted from the Introit and Psalm during Holy Week.

A word about chanting: The music of the Liturgy has been chanted since the early centuries of the Christian Church. In fact, many musical settings in our hymnals are modified Gregorian and Anglican chants. The Lutheran Reformers made every effort to retain the chanting of the Psalms. Our hymnal returns us to this very fine tradition, as each Psalm is marked for chanting (*LSB* xxvi). As Lutheran people have chanted for centuries, our worship includes the option of chanting by pastors and assisting ministers. Chanting was mostly dormant from the introduction of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) until 1982 when it was restored in *Lutheran Worship*. For the leader who is able to chant, not chanting deprives the congregation of a liturgical experience that is rightfully due. I have prepared a booklet “*Chanting In the Evangelical Lutheran Church*.” This is available in the church Narthex, and online at our website www.belctx.org. A simple rubric is “chanting follows chanting and speaking follows speaking.” For example, if the congregation’s “Amen” is chanted, then the celebrant chants the collect. If the Celebrant speaks the collect, the congregation should speak the “Amen.” This is why, occasionally, I will chant the Gospel acclamations (see p. 18 below) in Divine Service Setting 3.

The **Kyrie** is a cry to the Lord for help and strength. In ancient times, the crowds would shout “Lord, have mercy” as the king entered their town. The church has taken over this prayer to greet its King Jesus Christ in the Divine Service. As the people long ago expected help from their king, so we Christians expect blessings from our Savior. This is our prayer that God would never stop offering that mercy we heard about just few moments ago in the declaration of grace. It is our recognition that we live only by His mercy, and we know that our only hope lies in His continuing mercy.

The **Gloria In Excelsis** (Latin for “*Glory To God In The Highest*”) is an elaboration of the song of the angels over the fields of Bethlehem, which appears in *St. Luke 2:14*. In fact, the celebrant and congregation mimic the biblical narrative as the celebrant alone intones the opening refrain (the solo angel) followed by the congregation joining together in praise (the angelic

¹⁰ A stiff board covered in linen and embroidered with a cross used to cover the top of the chalice.

¹¹ The corporal is a square linen at the center of the altar upon which the sacred Communion vessels are placed.

chorus). The opening refrain is followed by three stanzas of praise. The first to God the Father, the second to God the Son in his relationship to the Father. The third, also addressed to Christ, includes a reference to the Holy Spirit and returns at the end to the theme of the glory of the Father, echoing the opening refrain. The music of the “Gloria” in Divine Service Setting 3, is an arrangement of the OLD SCOTTISH CHANT.

The **Salutation** is not a greeting, but a bestowing of the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon the people. It is not a pious wish for the Lord’s presence among us. It is an indicative declaration of blessing. We exchange prayers for God’s presence among us as pastor and people speak to each other of the presence that gives our being together its meaning. In a particular way we recognize here how much the liturgy belongs to all of us!

The **Collect of The Day** is a bridge serving both as the conclusion of the entrance rite and as a preparation for the readings. The Collect gets its name from the ancient practice of gathering or “collecting” prayer requests from the people at worship. Today we use it as the prayer which collects the thoughts and theme of the day, as expressed in the Introit and Scripture Readings, in a unified petition brought by the pastor on behalf of the people. The collect should not be prayed in unison by the whole congregation. The collects for the seasons of the church year have come to us from the rich treasury of the church’s heritage.

The Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, and Salutation/Collect became the traditional entrance rite of the Christian Church. This reflects what used to be the elaborate entrance the Pope used to make into the churches of Rome. The Entrance Psalm, which in the Introit shrank to the fragment of a Psalm, with the response and the Gloria Patri, and the Kyrie, and the Gloria In Excelsis were all sung in procession; the Collect was then said at the conclusion of the entrance when all were in their places.

The Ceremony

The **Introit** gives the preparatory part of the service more significance since now, for the first time, the Pastor “enters” the chancel area and goes to the altar. As he approaches the altar he may pray *sotto voce* (softly, inaudibly): “I will go the altar of God, even unto the God of my joy and gladness.” In some congregations, the celebrant (and assistants) will genuflect and kiss the altar as they arrive at the altar for the Introit. Ceremonially, genuflecting is the same as bowing, it is an act of profound reverence, respect and humility. Kissing the altar is a sign of affection. The celebrant may turn by his right and move to the missal stand at the Epistle corner of the altar and then chant the introit. “Since the introit as actually the beginning of the service proper, the celebrant may make the sign of the cross on himself as he reads the first words of the introit” (McClellan 38).

In an old Norwegian custom the arms are crossed over the chest during the **Kyrie**, otherwise, the hands are held together in the customary posture for prayer.

prayer for mercy. Only in the mercy of God do we have life. As Christ comes to us in the Holy Supper, we recognize Him as the “Lamb of God” sacrificed “to take away the sin of the world;” freeing us from the bondage of sin and death. The text contains a three-fold confession of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice in fulfillment of prophecy and a prayer for the mercy and peace which his death on the cross won for us. The tune of the Agnus Dei is an arrangement of BRAUNSCHWEIG (1528).

The **Distribution** - What happens now is all at God’s initiative! He invites us. He makes Himself present. He forgives. He promises to go with us. We are purely receivers. But in receiving, we are renewed and empowered to obediently do His will, serve and glorify Him, love our neighbor as ourselves, and carry His name wherever we go.

While the meal is being distributed, the congregation sings one or more hymns. The choir or a soloist may also make a musical offering.

The Ceremony

As a part of his preparation for receiving the Holy Eucharist, the celebrant prays the following (*sotto voce*):

- ✠ “O Lord Jesus Christ, Who said to Your Apostles, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you,” regard not my sins, but the faith of Your Church, and grant to her that Peace and Unity which is according to Your will, Who lives and reigns one God, now and forever. Amen.”
- ✠ “O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, Who according to the will of the Father, and by the cooperation of the Holy Ghost, has by Your death given life to the world; deliver me by this Your Most Holy Body and Blood from all mine iniquities and from every evil, and make me ever to cleave unto Your Commandments, and suffer me never to be separated from You, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God, now and forever. Amen.”
- ✠ “Let the partaking of Your Body, O Lord Jesus Christ, which I, though unworthy, do presume to receive, according to Your lovingkindness be profitable to me for the receiving of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God, now and forever. Amen.”

The celebrant takes the orans posture for the **Proper Preface**. He bows at the waist at the beginning of the **Sanctus** and then stands erect at the first “Hosanna.” This ceremony expresses the awe of the worshipers as they join in the hymn of the seraphim around the heavenly throne. At “Blessed is He,” he makes the sign of the Cross.

The celebrant again takes the orans posture for the **Lord’s Prayer** until the congregational response “For thine is the Kingdom...” at which time he joins his hands. The celebrant may make the sign of the cross at “Deliver us from evil.”

In some churches the old tradition of ringing a bell (or chimes) during the Lord’s Prayer (some three times, some after each petition) is still practiced.

In the **Lord's Prayer** we make our final preparations for receiving the blessed body and blood of Christ by humbling ourselves before the Father in the prayer Jesus, himself taught us. This becomes the table prayer of the congregation.

“From at least the third century, Christians have also confessed a special connection between the Fourth Petition (“Give us this day our daily bread”) and the bread now to be set apart for God’s purpose by and according to his own Word and blessing. It is the bread above all other bread, bread that feeds us as the children of God” (Precht 426).

It is proper to chant this prayer to set it apart from the many other ways Christians use this prayer. The chanting of the Lord’s Prayer by the celebrant and the congregation’s singing the doxology reminds us that the doxology was not originally a part of the Our Father, but is a liturgical response to the prayer.

With the **Words of our Lord** (Words of Institution) the celebrant recites the words Jesus spoke when He took the bread and wine of the Passover and gave them the meaning that makes them so central to our worship. These are the very Words of Christ which make the elements of bread and wine a sacrament. The Large Catechism teaches: “When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament” (LC V.10).

Chanting the Words of Institution in the Divine Service is a uniquely Lutheran tradition. You can thank *Luther*, not Rome. The practice of Luther’s day was for the *Verba* (Words of Institution) to be recited inaudibly by the priest. Luther believed these Words of Christ should be heard. Setting the words to music is unsurpassed in serving that purpose. Luther arranged the chant that is used for Christ’s words of Institution in our Divine Service Setting 3. (Luther also composed chants for the Epistle and Gospel readings. He was hardly opposed to chanting.)

The **Pax Domini** (Latin for “*Peace of the Lord*”), the greeting of peace which Jesus spoke on the first Easter, is proclaimed before we approach the altar to receive Him. In the Lord’s Supper, the body and blood of Christ are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine.

In *Lutheran Service Book* (2006) the congregation response in the Pax changed to “Amen” in all of the Divine Services. In *Lutheran Worship* (1982) the response was “And also with you” in Divine Service II (First & Second Settings). The welcomed change highlights the fact that the Pax is not a pious wish of the celebrant and people for one another, but rather, is a confessional declaration that the peace that passes all understanding is here present in the body and blood of Christ. Luther described the Pax as an “a public absolution of the sins of the communicants, the true voice of the gospel announcing remission of sins, and therefore the one and most worthy preparation for the Lord’s Table, if faith holds to these words as coming from the mouth of Christ himself” (AE 53:28-29).

The **Agnus Dei** (pronounced *ahg-noos* or *ahn-yoos day-ee*, Latin for “*Lamb of God*”) uses John’s title for Christ, “*Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world*” (*St. John 1:29*). This is the first distribution hymn and is a final

During the **Gloria in Excelsis**, the celebrant intones the first phrase in the “orans”⁵ position, bringing his hand together when the congregation joins singing. He may bow his head at the words “worship,” “give thanks,” “Jesus,” and “receive our prayer.” The sign of the cross may be made at the conclusion at the words “Thou only, O Christ.”

The celebrant turns by his right, faces the congregation and extends his hands in the blessing of the **Salutation** at which time the people bow their heads. Then the people respond with a blessing to the pastor at which point he bows his head. Then he will pray the **Collect**. Luther calls the salutation a “little ordination.” The people give the pastor their blessing and “permission” to go forward and act on their behalf. It is akin to tying the rope around the High Priest’s ankle when he goes in the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple. In prayer, the celebrant is about to enter into the Most Holy Place for the people. Their blessing upon him signifies their desire for him to go and fulfill his ordination vows. This is the primary reason the collect should not be prayed in unison by the whole congregation. The celebrant holds his hands in the orans posture for prayer.

⁵ orans - From the Latin “praying” or “pleading” – a prayer posture with elbows to the side, hands outstretched, and palms up.

Chapter 6

THE SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT: Part 1

The Rite

We now reach the climax of the Divine Liturgy in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar. The following parts of the liturgy help the worshipers partake of the Holy Sacrament thoughtfully, thankfully, and joyfully.

The Confessions call the Sacrament of the Altar by a variety of names. It is known as the Supper, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Supper, the Sacrament, the most venerable Sacrament, the Holy Sacrament, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Mass. Less frequently it is also called Communion, the Lord's Body, the Eucharist, the Liturgy, the Synaxis, and Agape. Surprisingly the construct "Holy Communion," the current favorite of Lutherans in the United States, never occurs in that form in the Confessions. It seems to have been imported into the Church of the Augsburg Confession from the Church of England. It is with good reason that Lutheran Worship has reverted to the name Divine Service (Gottesdienst) for the chief service of the church. (Guide to Introducing Lutheran Worship 19-20)

Preface means "introduction." This is the beginning of "The Great Thanksgiving" which continues through the Lord's Prayer and Words of Institution. The dialog: "The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord. Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God. It is meet and right so to do" are found in the *Egyptian Church Order* which dates back to before A.D. 215.

Here the pastor and people get ready to celebrate the Holy Meal. First, the pastor and people recognize the need for God's presence as the pastor once again enters into the Most Holy Place by daring to speak the Words of Jesus over bread and wine. They then agree that our focus in this liturgy is not worldly, or the lunch that will follow the service, or our activities at home that afternoon or coming week. We lift up our "hearts unto the Lord" because that is where our attention is to be. This is followed by the proper giving of thanks. Then we remember God's acts in our behalf in the expanded "proper" or seasonal preface. The conclusion of the preface joins our worship "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven."

The earliest Christian practice was to move from the dialog to an extended praise of the Father. By the 4TH century, it had become customary to break this section with a hymn called the **Sanctus** (Latin for "Holy") The text of the Sanctus is a series of acclamations based on the cry of the angels which accompanied Isaiah's vision of God (*Isaiah 6:3*). Then we move from Isaiah's temple to Palm Sunday and the praise with which the people greeted Jesus as He entered Jerusalem on His way to the cross (*St. Matthew 21:9*). We join them in spirit by singing their words as we anticipate Christ's coming in the Sacrament. As he rode humbly and unassuming into Jerusalem on a donkey, so now He will come to us in simple bread and wine.

Chapter 4

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Part 2

The Rite

In the middle ages the **Old Testament Reading** was deleted from the Divine Service. It was also absent in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941). In recent years its use has become more and more prevalent. Our Christian faith is built on and springs out of Old Testament roots. We hear a Word from the Lord as it was given to people long ago, but that is still important for us today. We remember and are instructed by the God of our fathers. This reading usually relates to the Gospel for the day. During the Easter season, the Old Testament Reading is replaced by a reading from *Acts*.

During the **Gradual** or appointed **Psalm**: the pastor and any assistants face the Altar. “Gradual” comes from the Latin *gradus* meaning “step,” Originally this was chanted from a step of the altar. The Gradual is an arrangement of Psalm and Scripture verses for each season of the church year. The Gradual is a response to the first reading and a bridge to the second reading. It is a traditional part of the liturgy and should not be omitted, unless a **Psalm** is spoken or chanted in its place. The practice of singing between the Scripture readings goes back to the Hebrew Synagogue where a Psalm was sung between the readings.

In our hymnal, the Gradual is different from its historic form. The term “Gradual” is now generic and designates the Scripture and Psalm verses between the readings. Originally, however, this consisted of two parts; “the first part was sung between the Old Testament lesson and Epistle, the second between the Epistle and the Gospel. When the number of lessons was conventionally reduced to two⁶, the two separate settings were combined into one” (Piepkorn 21).

The **Sequence Hymn**: “Traditionally a sequence hymn was sung after the Gradual psalmody. Technically a Sequence Hymn is one that has been written specifically for this point in the service” (Piepkorn 21).

The **Epistle** is usually a portion of one of the letters of one of the Apostles, and is read in the Divine Service today just as it was read in the first century to its first recipients. At times this reading is from the Acts of the Apostles or the Revelation of St. John and is called the Second Reading rather than the Epistle.

The appointed **Alleluia** and **Verse**. Here at Bethlehem, the congregation properly chants the Alleluia (which means “praise the Lord) before and after the Verse. The verse is chanted by the pastor (and may be chanted by a cantor or by the choir). There are special verses appointed for each Sunday of the Church Year and they match the theme of the readings and the Gospel of the Day. These provide a bridge connecting the first two readings and the Holy Gospel.

In the **Holy ✠ Gospel** we hear a reading from the accounts of Jesus’ life and message, death and resurrection. The people stand for the Gospel in honor of Christ. This marks the Holy Gospel as distinct from the other readings because now we hear the very words and deeds of Jesus Himself. When the

⁶ as in *The Lutheran Hymnal*

Gospel is announced the people greet Christ, who comes in the Gospel, with the acclamation “Glory be to Thee, O Lord.” When the reading is concluded the people sing out again in joy, “Praise be to Thee, O Christ.” On certain festival days the pastor may read the Holy Gospel while standing among the people. This symbolizes the Gospel coming into the midst of God’s people. He may be flanked by taperers (acolytes carrying processional torches/candles) which proclaim Jesus and His Word as the “Light of the world.” When the Processional Cross is used (carried by crucifer), it leads the Gospel processional into the Nave.

In the **Creed** (from the Latin “credo,” meaning “I believe”) we express our unity in the faith -- the core beliefs confessed by the Holy Christian (i.e., catholic) Church wherever it is found. The Nicene Creed has traditionally been associated with the celebration of Lord’s Supper. The Apostles’ Creed is used at other services. If Holy Baptism is celebrated within the service, the Apostles’ Creed is confessed at the Baptism and the Nicene Creed is confessed at this point in the service. If there is a Baptism but no Lord’s Supper, the Apostles’ Creed is omitted here to avoid needless duplication.

The Ceremony

“Historically, none of the **Readings** at the Divine Service were read from the Lectern, which was reserved for use at ... Matins and Vespers, if there was a lectern at all. ... Actually the lectern is an ornament that a Lutheran church can well dispense with ...” (Piepkorn 19). Anciently (and today in churches with no lectern) these were read from the “horns” (corners) of the altar. In the Old Testament, the altar in the Tabernacle and Temple actually had horns at each corner. The corners curved up to keep the sacrificial animals from rolling off. We no longer have such corners, but have retained the nomenclature. The Old Testament and Epistle were traditionally read from the Epistle side (the right front corner as one faces the altar). Then the Holy Gospel was read from the Gospel “horn” (the left front corner as one faces the altar). Then the sermon on the Holy Gospel was preached from the pulpit. For this reason, I find it interesting and unfortunate that most Lutheran chancels, including Bethlehem’s, have the pulpit on the Epistle side, rather than the Gospel side of the altar.

The pastor should not make eye contact with the congregation as he reads. It is important to note that this is God’s Word, not his. At the conclusion of the reading he may pause before he looks up to the congregation saying: “This is the Word of the Lord.”

It is inappropriate for the pastor to make any interpretation to any of the readings whether before, during or after a reading. In this way we preserve the perspicuity of the Scripture and avoid undue influence of the work of the Holy Spirit. The people of God are allowed to hear the Word of God as it stands. There is a time for the interpretation of God’s Word and this is the Sermon (or Homily).

The reading of Scripture is a time of awe-filled attention and reverence. Movement in and out of the Nave and private conversations are inappropriate; and show disrespect to our Lord, the pastor, and our fellow worshippers. That

the prayer itself, while the people affirmed it with the “Amen” (Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book 406).

The prayers are concluded by saying the final commendation, to which the people respond with a loud “AMEN.”

The Ceremony

It is most appropriate that the **Sermon** is preached from the pulpit. This gives the proclamation of the Word of God an architectural anchor. This distinguishes the preaching of God’s Word from a lecture, presentation in a business meeting, a casual or even motivational speech. The sermon is also not a break from but the continuation of the liturgy during which the presence of God is still recognized.

As the **Offerings** are received, instrumental or choral music is played, and the celebrant prepares the Lord’s Table and himself for the sacramental meal. It is at this point that I go to the sacristy and put on the chasuble⁹ (a traditional Eucharistic vestment). Some wear the chasuble for the whole service. I chose to wear it after the sermon for a number of reasons: 1) it is a visual cue that in the transition from the Office of the Catechumens (Word) to the Office of the Faithful (Sacrament) something extraordinary is about to take place; 2) this was the example set by my catechist, Rev. W. A. Kimberley (+); and 3) this is an option set forth in a rubric of the Worship Supplement (1969): “While the monetary offerings of the people are being gathered, ... the ministers may don vestments appropriate to the celebration of the Eucharist” (Worship Supplement 65).

It is appropriate that the ushers reverence the altar when receiving the **offering** plates from the acolyte or pastor. When receiving the plates from the ushers after the offerings the acolyte or pastor should also reverence the altar before placing the offerings on the credence shelf. The offerings should not be placed on the altar.

⁹ For more information on the chasuble, please consult the booklet I have also prepared: “Vestments in the Evangelical Lutheran Church.” This is available in the narthex, and online www.belctx.org.

As a response to God's goodness, Christians offer their gifts and their very lives to Him. This is placed in the Lutheran service after the proclamation of the Word of God, for it is only after He has spoken to us that we can properly respond to Him. We also correctly call it the "**Offering**" and not "The Collection." We are freely "offering" our gifts to God, they are not being "taken" or "collected." In our understanding and practice the offering replaces the "altar call" of the reformed churches (having an emphasis on "decision theology"). It is in this action, in the presentation of a tangible gift, that we respond to the Word read and proclaimed, giving and re-committing ourselves to God and His mission in the world. This is why "every-Sunday" proportionate giving is the biblical pattern. In this way our offerings are always a part of our worship, they are our weekly action response to the hearing of God's Word. Each Sunday we hear God's Word and each Sunday we respond.

The **Offertory**, a versification of *Psalm 51:10-12*, is sung as the gifts are presented, and asks God to prepare us for renewed living to His glory. We sing the offertory to express gratitude for all of God's blessings, dedicate ourselves to God, and request His continued blessings. At Bethlehem we reverse the order of the offering and offertory as found in *Lutheran Service Book*. The order in *LSB* is unfortunate. The Words "Create in me a clean heart" not only help us to understand the liturgical meaning and action of the offering but also assist us in preparing for the Service of the Sacrament. The tune of the Offertory is from a melody by J. A. Freylinghausen.

In the early church it was here that the people brought food and other gifts for the poor and for the support of the clergy. They came in an offertory procession singing Psalm verses. The custom was to dedicate these gifts to God's service. What we have in the offertory today is our expression of this ancient tradition. Perhaps it can add to our understanding of the real meaning of our gifts presented before God, and that they are dedicated for use to His service.

The **Prayer of The Church** should also be understood as a response to the proclamation of the Word of God. It is part of our ongoing responsibility as the baptized people of God to pray for ourselves and for the world, bringing petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving before His throne of grace. Here we lay before God our prayer for "the whole people of God ... and for all people according to their needs."

As has been customary since ancient times, we invite members to offer petitions and thanksgivings through prayer requests. The whole congregation responds after each portion of the prayers to underscore that the prayers are of the church, and not just of the pastor or worship leader. We typically use two responses: one is called "responsive prayer" e.g., **P** Lord in your mercy; **G** **Hear our prayer**; and the other is the "Ektene"⁸ response, e.g., **P** Let us pray to the Lord **G** **Lord, have mercy**. A third form used occasionally is the Bidding Prayer. This had "its origins in the prayer of the faithful from the Early Church. In offering each bid, the deacon brought the needs of the people before God and whole Church. The priest, symbolizing the intercessory work of Christ, spoke

Almighty GOD would even give us His Word to read and hear, is a gracious gift to be received with humble and reverent gratitude. "*The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him*" (*Habakkuk 2:20*).

The pastor and any assistants face the altar during the **Gradual**, and the **Alleluia and Verse**.

At the announcement of the **Holy ✠ Gospel** the celebrant may make the sign of the cross upon his forehead, lips and heart. This corresponds to the prayer: "The Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart, that I may worthily proclaim the Gospel."

During the Gospel processional the Book is held high. After the reading of the Holy Gospel the celebrant may kiss the book with the prayer spoken *sotto voce*: "By the words of the Gospel may our sins be done away."

Since the Creed is a solemn confession the celebrant leads it from the altar. The congregation may join the celebrant in the ceremony of the **Creed**. "As the celebrant ... says, 'God,' he may bow his head. He may also bow his head at the Holy Name of Jesus and, if he wishes, at the words 'worshiped and glorified.' He may bow from the waist at the words, 'And was incarnate' and remain bowed through the words, 'Was crucified also for us;' he raises himself erect again before the words, 'Under Pontius Pilate.' (The explanation given for this was that the soldiers of the Roman procurator knelt and bowed before Our Lord in mockery during His Passion)" (Piepkorn 26). We make the sign of the cross upon ourselves at the end of the Creed signifying our confession that it is only by the cross of Christ that we will be a part of "*the life ✠ of the world to come.*"

Bowing during the creed at "And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit ... and was made man expresses reverent awe over God's grace in becoming man in order to redeem us. Luther speaks at length about the meaning of these words and how we should show our appreciation and reverence for the Incarnation." He illustrates this with a colorful story of the devil assaulting a "coarse and brutal lout ... so hard it made his head spin" for standing "there like a stick of wood" (Lang, "Ceremony" 69-70)

⁸ Greek for "earnestly"

Chapter 5

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD: Part 3

The Rite

The **Hymn of The Day** is the chief hymn of the service. This hymn follows the theme of the readings and sets the stage for the sermon. The singing of hymns has been traditionally been a strong feature of Lutheran worship. Since the Reformation, Lutherans have been noted for their interest in the singing of hymns of high quality embracing a large number of traditions, particularly that of the chorale. Luther himself stimulated interest in hymn singing by writing the words and music for many hymns. In fact, until the time of Luther, congregational singing was non-existent; all chanting and singing was only by priests, monks, and choir.

The **Sermon** or **Homily**⁷ is the living voice of God's Word today, As God's appointed speaker and the chief teacher of the congregation, the pastor sheds light on the meaning of the Scriptures and shows how their message applies to the contemporary situation. The Sermon is not just a number of off-hand remarks, but a prayerfully prepared proclamation of God's message of salvation, repentance, and growth in faith. We believe that pastors "do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church's call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), 'He who hears you hears me.' When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ's place and stead" (Ap VII and VIII 28).

"Yes, I hear the sermon; but who is speaking? The minister? No indeed. You do not hear the minister. True, the voice is his; but my God is speaking the Word which he preaches or speaks. Therefore I should honor the Word of God that I may become a good pupil of the Word" [What Luther Says 1125].

The **Votum**: "*The peace of God which passes all understanding*" (*Philippians 4:7*) is an optional benediction at the conclusion of the Sermon which brings the Liturgy of the Word of God to a close according to tradition. In *Lutheran Service Book*, however, the Liturgy of the Word continues through the Prayers, and so using or deleting the Votum is an option of the preacher. At Bethlehem, I conclude sermons with both the Votum and the Trinitarian formula.

The **Offering**: "One of the functions of the royal priesthood is to offer sacrifices. These consist of sacrifices of self, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. We express this offering also in the material gifts of money, in which are included the bread and wine used in the Sacrament of the Altar" (Lang, "Ceremony" 101).

⁷ from the Greek *homilia*, "companionship by communication" or "speaking with". Used in 1 Corinthians 15:33, St. Luke 24:14, and in Acts 24:26. The discipline of sermon preparation and delivery is called "homiletics."