

OUR WAY OF WORSHIP

A Walk Through the Lutheran Liturgy

Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church (LCMS)
St. Paul, Minnesota
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Explanation of booklet: This booklet, which explains in detail the forms of liturgy followed commonly within the Lutheran Church and within our congregation, has been prepared with you in mind. If you would like to take it with you as a learning tool to acquaint yourself more fully with the reasons we worship as we do (or just as a memento of your visit to Jehovah), please feel free to take it with you.

“The service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn. The greatest possible comfort comes from this doctrine that the highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness.”

- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, Paragraph 310

THE LUTHERAN WAY OF WORSHIP

We have come to worship. But just what does that mean? What is worship? Worship is holy conversation between God and His people. God has begun the conversation, even when we had no desire to commune with Him. This was first lived out in Eden when God came to Adam and Eve, although they were hiding out from Him due to their sin. The Lord speaks first, and then His people respond. Saints and angels in heaven's courts are actively carrying out their praise of God, as John saw in the Revelation: "Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come'" (Rev.4:8). When we gather together around God's Word and Sacraments, we join in the heavenly conversation of thanksgiving and praise.

The true worship which God desires (and demands) of every person is the full love and trust of the heart. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," Jesus said, quoting this verse from Deuteronomy as the most important commandment (Mark 12:30). Martin Luther explains the First Commandment, the foundation of all the commandments, in this way: "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." This worship pleases God.

Someone has said that worship is wrongly understood when we see the congregation as an audience and the pastor (or leaders) as the actors in the drama. That author suggests that God should be seen as the audience and the congregation as actors. However, a Lutheran perspective sees worship from a little different standpoint. For in Lutheran worship, God is the primary actor, while we are His understudies. We replay to Him what He has said to us. We live by His will and Word. We uphold His honor and glory. We live out, eagerly and energetically, the life that He gives to us freely.

God's action relative to worship is purely giving. He gives His promises, His Son, His love, His forgiveness, Christ's body and blood, His power, His mercy, His strength. Our actions in worship are twofold: first, we receive God's gifts (through trust or faith in His Word, the highest worship that we can render), and second, we respond (by faith) in prayer, praise, thanksgiving and service.

The Lutheran Church is a liturgical church. That means that we normally follow certain set orders of worship (or liturgies) as we gather together for public worship. There are many such liturgies (such as the orders of Matins, Vespers, Morning & Evening Prayer and the like), but this booklet examines the basic outline of the Divine Service or the Order of Holy Communion as we commonly celebrate it on the Lord's Day. We do not mean to suggest that this way is the only valid order of worship. It does represent, however, an ancient, proven, and worthwhile manner of worship which has been followed (in its essence) by Christians as far back as Christian history can take us.

Today some 70 million or more Lutherans throughout the world, along with many millions of other Christians in other liturgical traditions, essentially follow this same basic pattern of worship. What principles have guided the Church Universal in the development of this rich liturgical heritage? Here are a few:

1) Establish a fairly unchanging structure to assure that certain elements of worship are always present (confession, praise, prayer, thanksgiving, the Lord's Supper, and the like). These are usually referred to as the **ORDINARY** of the service.

2) Ensure through variable, changeable elements (the **PROPER**S) sensitivity to the liturgical year of the Church, as we commemorate key events in the life of Christ and encourage the worshiper toward full life in Christ.

3) Guarantee that the worship of today's church relates to and reinforces the worship of believers of all times, the Church Triumphant in heaven as well as the Church Militant on earth.

4) Replay for the instruction of the faithful the major events of the life of our Lord, and instill knowledge of some of the Bible's key concepts and expressions through regular reuse. You will notice how many of the liturgical chants and exchanges are drawn directly from the Word of God.

5) Expose worshipers to the breadth and depth of Scripture (Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles, Gospel lessons). Thus we have the appointed lessons for each Sunday, following a three-year lectionary cycle which uses the same lessons each third year in a planned

reading sequence which many traditions of Christians also follow.

6) Support contemporary church, community and world concerns as the Church continues her prophetic role. This happens primarily in the preaching and the prayers of the Church.

The various elements of the Divine Service may be identified thus:

INVARIABLE ELEMENTS (ORDINARY)

Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy), from at least the 4th century

Gloria in Excelsis (Glory to God in the Highest), fixed during the 9th century)

Credo or Creed, early centuries, A.D. 150-350

Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy), early 4th century

Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), 7th century

SUPPLEMENTAL ELEMENTS (some are alternates to the ordinary)

Bidding Kyrie (response: "Lord, have mercy")

This is the Feast (alternate to Gloria)

Offertory (several are available)

Post-Communion Canticle

Lord's Prayer (as given by Jesus in Matthew 6:9-13, closing from I Chronicles 29:11)

Words of Institution (as given by Jesus in Matthew, Mark & Luke and reported in use in the early church by Paul in I Corinthians 11)

Post-Communion Collect

Benediction

VARIABLE ELEMENTS (PROPERS)

Introit and Gloria Patri

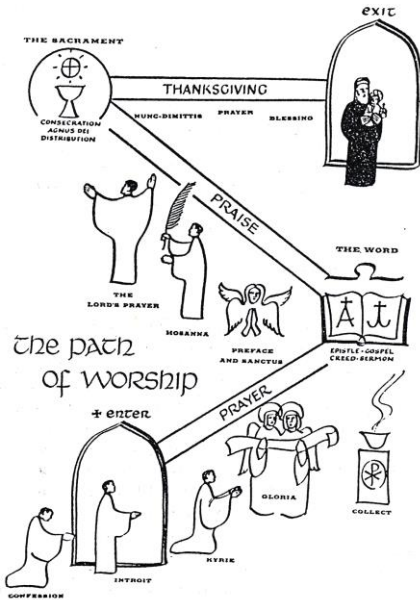
Collect (a prayer including all or most of 5 parts: address, rationale, petition, benefit, termination)

Lection (Old Testament reading, Psalmody, Epistle, Gospel)

Intervient chants (Gradual, Alleluia verse)

Prayer of the Church

Proper Preface



The Divine service has two “high points,” the section of The Word and the celebration of The Sacrament. Introductory and concluding sections are deliberately brief and support the two main sections. By Word and Sacrament, Christ’s Church is strengthened for its responsibilities in the world. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is liturgically a “separate service,” appearing prior to Word and Sacrament of the Divine Service, recognizing the baptized person becoming part of the worshipping community.

During the service you will notice the pastor changing position frequently. When he faces the congregation, it indicates that God is addressing us through him as a spokesman. When the pastor joins the congregation in facing the altar, it is an indication that all are speaking together in prayer and praise.

The action of the liturgy pulsates in three directions. God gives to us, acts upon us, and speaks to us. We commune with and respond to God. And each of us reflects the truth of God’s Word to other worshippers. As careful attention is given to each section of the liturgy, you will notice the ebb and flow of the service, as God acts in absolution and we respond in a hymn of praise; as God’s Word prompts us to giving and thanksgiving; as we are fed on Christ’s body and blood and then answer back with joy and thanksgiving.

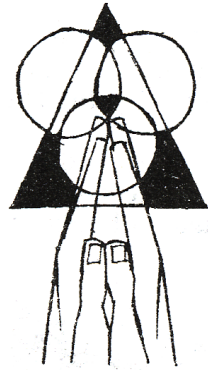
Drama and vitality mark this liturgy, which has stood the test of centuries of constant use by the people of God. It rehearses for us

high points in the life and ministry of our Lord, and it is a constant reminder of the fact that we worship a Lord who is risen and reigning, a Lord who loves us and loves to hear and respond to His people's prayers and praises. By reverent, intelligent use of this Divine Service, we can draw near to the throne of God, receiving from our King His grace to help us in our time of need.

PREPARATORY SERVICE

Now we ready ourselves to worship. The **PRELUDE** played by the organist helps establish the tone and attitude of the day's worship. In many locales, the church **BELL** peals as a community call for God's people to gather in His house for the hearing of His Word and the singing of His praises. Jesus has promised that wherever two or three are gathered in His name, He will be there.

Ministers of the Word are in a peculiar role. They represent Christ to the community, while at the same time they are part of this community, needing what Christ has come to give. Following the opening hymn, the order of worship continues with the Trinitarian **INVOCATION**, spoken or chanted by the pastor. With this invocation we announce to the world that we worship the God of our Baptism, the God of the Scriptures – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and that we dedicate our worship to Him alone. The congregation affirms this by its hearty "Amen," signifying that it believes that here we are in contact with the living God as His worshipping community of faith.



But we do not simply amble carelessly into God's presence, as if we have some right of our own to be there. Our sin has blocked the entrance to God. Only God Himself can open wide the door and break down the barricade to His throne. Thus we come to Him in **CONFESSION** of our sins. At the burning bush where he was called, Moses was told to remove his shoes because he was standing

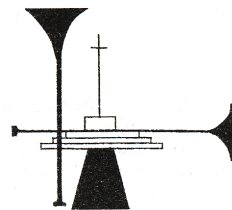
on holy ground. Isaiah, when confronted with the vision of God's throne, said, "Woe is me! I am ruined!" (Is. 6:5). Of Luther's 95 Theses, the very first is this: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt. 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." So we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, pleading the grace of God in Christ as our only hope.

John writes in his first epistle (1 Jn. 1:8-9), "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Having confessed our sins, we hear the pastor, as God's spokesman, speaking to penitent sinners the words of hope and comfort, the pledge of God's forgiveness, the **ABSOLUTION**. The **DECLARATION OF GRACE** may be spoken also by others, while the absolution itself is reserved to the role of the pastor, our "called and ordained servant of the Word."

The organist will play through the **OPENING HYMN** to set the tempo and mood of the singing. Someone has said that, when the Christian sings, the whole Church is singing. So we gladly join our voices with the whole host of Christ's disciples. This opening hymn (which may serve also as an Entrance Hymn) is often a hymn of praise or invocation of the Holy Spirit's presence and blessing.

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

Up to this point our worship has been preparatory in nature. The Service of the Word inserts us as believing hearers into the teaching ministry of Jesus. The pattern of the liturgy follows the pattern of the Gospels. First, through biblical testimony and preaching, Jesus teaches us who He is as the incarnate Son of God. Second, He invites us to participate tangibly in His saving work through sacramental signs: Baptism at the beginning of our Christian walk, Holy Communion for every step in that walk, confession/absolution because we stumble in that walk.

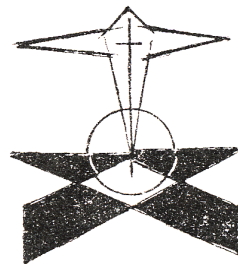


Assured of our forgiveness, we are ready, symbolically speaking, to enter the Holy Place, the place of God’s presence. As the pastor approaches the altar, so our hearts enter with him. The **INTROIT** is the true theological beginning of the service of the Word. The word “*introit*” is Latin for “he enters.” This brief selection from the Psalms, the Old Testament hymnbook, like a trumpet call assembles worshipers and keynotes the service theme. Pastor, choir or congregation may speak or chant the Introit. (The Psalmody may take the place of the Introit and happen a bit later in the service.)

Glowing with gratitude, the assembly praises the changeless Creator, the God of Old Testament and New Testament alike, in the words of the **GLORIA PATRI**, “Glory be to the Father. . .” Thus we indicate that the Old Testament is always understood in light of the New.

The Triune God has brought His kingdom to us on earth in the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus. He carries out His rule among us through Word and Sacrament. The **KYRIE** is not an oft-repeated plea for forgiveness, but a recognition of the Almighty King as the One who can and will help us. Ancient peoples shouted these words as their ruler came riding into their villages and fields: “Lord, have mercy.” Matthew records two incidents where Jesus is acknowledged in this way by men who were physically blind, yet who cried out to Him with faith’s vision, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.” Ten lepers and the Canaanite woman cried to Jesus in the same words. We go to Him with all our needs of body and spirit.

Our response to the Kyrie is the **GLORIA IN EXCELSIS**. God has had mercy and has sent His Son to meet our need. But where do we meet Him, this new-born King? He lies in a donkey’s feedbox and hangs on a Roman cross. God has visited our troubled planet, and we “repeat the sounding joy” of angels over Bethlehem’s fields in our “Glory be to God on high!” This ancient and incomparable hymn of

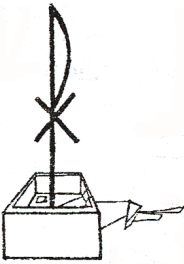


praise spells out the whole plan of our salvation. In it we praise God for sending the perfect Lamb to take away the sin of the world, the Lamb who was once crucified but is now risen and reigning as the “most high in the glory of the Father.” A truly festive alternative to the Gloria is the canticle, **THIS IS THE FEAST**, which has become one of the best-loved sections of the Divine Service.

The pastor then greets the people with Gabriel’s words to Mary at the Annunciation. The **SALUTATION** is the traditional ancient greeting of peace or Shalom, a kind of spoken handshake as pastor and people mutually pray for the Spirit’s blessing upon one another as they offer prayer, praise and preaching to God’s glory. Following the Salutation, a clear-cut prayer is thrust upward. This **COLLECT** is usually a one-sentence prayer which gathers or “collects” the prayers of the ancient and modern Church as they apply to the day’s theme. Among the collects are some of the oldest and finest prayers written by Christians down through the centuries. Like incense of old, this prayer unifies thoughts as they rise to God’s throne. Think of the prayer as Jesus interceding on our behalf before the Father with the Spirit so that this message may be taken to heart by us.

At this point the service reaches the first of two climaxes. Up to now, we have focused primarily on speaking to God, presenting ourselves, our needs, our hopes to His fatherly heart. Now God speaks directly to us. An **OLD TESTAMENT LESSON** is read, followed by the **GRADUAL**, a liturgical “bridge” to the coming readings. In the Old Testament Lesson, the church hears the voice of ancient Israel in its life of rebellion and obedience, learning to walk by faith in Yahweh, their absolutely unique God. The Gradual lifts our eyes to the coming Lord and trains our ears to hear Him. God’s promise of salvation, announced to ancient Israel, is fulfilled through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. The **EPISTLE** for the day follows. This Word from the Lord, like a flaming sword, penetrates to the center of our personality, and by it the Holy Spirit brings our sins to light, brightens our trust in Christ, and fires our love for God and for one another. Without the Word of God, our worship and our faith would wither and die.

Here or at some other point in the service, the choir may sing a fitting **CHORAL SELECTION**. The Lutheran Church has one of the richest musical traditions among all Christian churches (Johann Sebastian Bach being but one prominent example of a dedicated Lutheran musician). We find joy in worship of God through the medium of music. Musical setting and words are chosen carefully to reflect the day's theme and mood. We respond to the Epistle with the **VERSE** or **HALLELUJAH** (Hebrew for "praise to the Lord"), a cry of rejoicing that we are allowed so near to Him.



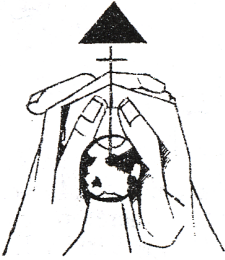
Announcement of the **GOSPEL** for the day brings the congregation to its feet. We declare our reverence and sharpest attention as we sing, "Glory to You, O Lord," indicating our readiness to hear and readily to obey everything which Christ has commanded us. Following the reading from the words or the deeds of Christ, the people respond in joyful outburst, "Praise to You, O Christ!"

The **SERMON** (or **HOMILY**) is not just a number of offhand remarks delivered in a religious setting. It is purposely written and designed to lead people to repentance, to faith in Christ, and to growth in Christian love and good works. As once the cross of God's Son was planted in the earth, so God now injects the Word of the cross into the ground of our hearts, for our strengthening in faith and love. And we respond.



In singing the chief **HYMN OF THE DAY**, our hearts are responding to the sowing of the seed of the Word. Every Gospel proclamation has life-or-death meaning for us, and the obedience of faith is the only proper response. Therefore, after hearing the Word, we respond also by confessing our faith through the **CREED**. Use of the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene

Creed is most common. On Trinity Sunday, the Athanasian Creed is used because of its rich content regarding the Holy Trinity. By use of the Creed we show that the seed has fallen on fertile soil and that we have rightly heard and applied the whole year's readings, as expressed in this summary of our faith.



In the **PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH** are included all the needs of God's people. Besides special intercessions for the sick, the bereaved, new parents, a wedding or an anniversary, there is attention given to the mission of the Church as well as to the world community and "all sorts and conditions of men." One indication that the Spirit's work has borne fruit in our hearts is our faithfulness in intercession.

At the altar we will receive Christ, who is our Peace. In the **PAX** ("The peace of the Lord be with you always!"), the pastor prays that this peace would never depart from our lives. "And also with you" makes this our mutual expression. This greeting also signifies our unity and community with others in the fellowship of the church.

Then we who have been purified and whose hearts are clean and strong are privileged to bring our **TITHES AND OFFERINGS** to God's altar. These gifts are meaningful as tokens of our entire selves being given over to the Lord, tokens of our daily service and worship offered in family, work, church, neighborhood, country and world. Gifts are brought near the altar, reminding us that we and all that we are and have are holy and pleasing to God only through the working of the Holy Spirit. Music is often played during the offering, and the time is well-spent in meditation and quiet worship. **OFFERTORY** sentences, words of confident trust and humble dedication, may be sung after the offering. Several settings are available for use.

THE SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

After the prayers, the pastor greets the congregation once again in

the **SALUTATION**, as the second major climax of the service, the celebration of the Sacrament, approaches. Then comes the invitation to “lift up your hearts” and to “give thanks to the Lord our God.” These **GREAT THANKSGIVING** versicles make up one of the most ancient parts of the entire liturgy. God takes what we give Him (bread and wine) and returns it to us better than ever by His promise. Our worship is a sacrifice, not for sins, but of thanksgiving. Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary is the singular, once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin, which prompts us to dedicate ourselves and our gifts to His service. This is our sacrifice of thanksgiving. In fact the Lord’s Supper itself is also called the *Eucharist*, a Greek word that means “giving of thanks.”

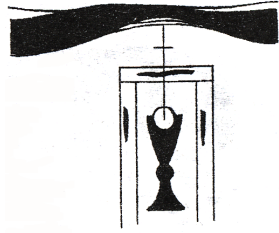
In this name is also comprehended one of the major actions of Christ in His institution of the Supper, as He gave thanks before breaking the bread and again before passing the cup. The **PROPER PREFACE** is a one-sentence portion of the propers which keynotes our special reason for giving thanks according to the particular season of the church year. For instance, during the Easter season we give thanks that Christ “by His death has destroyed death and by His rising to life again has restored to us everlasting life.” Liturgy inserts us into the saving work of Jesus in which we participate explicitly through distribution of Holy Communion.



Joyously, then, with the angels and with the saints above we join in singing God’s praises in the **SANCTUS**. Old Testament and New Testament churches unite in the “Holy, holy, holy,” heard by Isaiah in his vision of heaven, and in the words of the Palm Sunday crowds, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Heaven touches earth, and earth is swept up into heaven as we come closer and closer to the final climax, the actual sharing of the Banquet with Christ.

In the **EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER**, we rehearse the flow of our

salvation story, from our broken world to the new state of affairs issued in with Christ's death and resurrection. With the **WORDS OF INSTITUTION**, bread and wine are set apart for sacred use. The words of Christ, "This do. . ." make this a sacrament, not just a pious custom. His pledge is heard once again, the pledge that those who receive these earthly elements also receive the broken Body and the poured-out Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. As the lamb's blood marked the Passover doors of the Israelites in Egypt, so through the blood of the Lamb of God, God's wrath and the angel of death pass over us as we receive this saving meal in faith.



In the knowledge that Christ is Himself the Victim (whose sacrifice makes it possible for us to pray) and Himself the Priest (who intercedes for us and answers our every prayer), the church family prays the family table prayer of the Lord, the **LORD'S PRAYER**. Here the family of God acknowledges its oneness and earnest desire to live by the power of God's forgiveness.

Our final preparation for receiving the blessed Sacrament is the adoration of the living Lord in the **AGNUS DEI**. The words of this simple, yet sublime, hymn are based on the declaration of John the Baptizer to his disciples, "Behold, the Lamb of God. . ." On this Lamb, God's own Messiah, who takes away our sin, we rely for mercy and peace.

As the grapes have been united to become wine, like the wheat kernels have been combined to make bread, so we express our unity as we come together to receive our Lord's great gifts. He comes to us lowly in His body and blood, "concealed in earthly bread and

wine,” and we approach in humility, reverence and joy to receive Him into our lives.

The **DISTRIBUTION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER** in this congregation takes place in accordance with the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. We are confident that here we are receiving really, truly, if in a mysterious and inexplicable way, the very body and blood of Christ in, with and under the bread and wine. Also present is the pastoral concern that all who commune do so in full awareness of the need for repentance and heartfelt faith in the Savior and in the assurance that His body and blood are personally present in the Sacrament. Any worshiper who is in doubt or who holds a different confession of faith, yet who desires to receive the Holy Supper, should first consult with the pastor.

During the distribution, hymns may be sung and/or played to enable the congregation more fully to meditate on the meaning of the Lord’s Supper and our need for it. As you personally receive the elements, appropriate responses would include making the sign of the cross (indicating the legacy of Christ’s cross and resurrection is also our legacy) and speaking a personal prayer of thanksgiving.



After all have communed and received the **DISMISSAL** from the pastor, the congregation rises to sing the **POST-COMMUNION CANTICLE**. As Simeon, the elder statesman of Israel who first sang the Nunc Dimittis (“Lord, Now You Let Your Servant Go in Peace”), so we have seen with our eyes (and even tasted with

our lips) the salvation of our God. We depart in peace, for Christ is ours. But He is not ours to hoard for ourselves. In thanksgiving we recognize that we “proudly bear his name” and move forth with “shouts of thanksgiving” loud enough that the world can hear. Christ has shared His love and peace with us so that we may reflect His light to all peoples, all races, all nations, and all tongues.

After the glorious climax of the Sacrament of the Altar, the service hastens to its close. We offer joyful thanks to God in the **THANKSGIVING**, in which we turn our attention to the “outside” world and the places where we will find ourselves in the week to come. And we ask God to continue His work of faith in our hearts until the final consummation of this meal in the heavenly banquet halls. We give thanks because the reason for our gathering has now come to fruition and that we have been fortified for our service – and that we will be able to return again next week to be renewed once more.

Finally we bow to receive the **BENEDICTION** of our God. The Aaronitic benediction (“The Lord bless you and keep you. . .”) has been used in the Church of God since the days of Moses and Aaron (originally found in Numbers 6:25-26). The last word we hear from the pastor’s lips is “peace,” a fitting reminder that we have received God’s peace most personally here. And with the sign of the cross we are reminded that all this is ours only by Jesus’ cross and merits.



Though not an official part of the liturgy, the **CLOSING HYMN** is used in many parishes to summarize what we have experienced and to send us off in eagerness to serve our living Lord. After a moment of **SILENT PRAYER**, we depart the place of public worship ready to live out our worship in our God-given vocations. To home and school, to office and factory, to playground and battleground we now go forth, strengthened to take up the tasks which God has assigned to us. The organist’s closing music, the **POSTLUDE**, assists us in carrying heaven’s strains in our hearts as we march off to live as Christ’s disciples in our separate callings, soon to return again to the worshiping community for added strength and direction.

This is our Lutheran way of worship. Through the living liturgy we experience the splendor of God’s gifts, of His greatness, glory and grace. Through it we praise and serve our Lord, and we are taught to honor and glorify Him with our whole lives. May God bless its use

for you and for all who would serve the Lord in gladness!

Relevant Quotes about Lutheran Worship

“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.”

- *Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XXIV, Para. 4*

Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God.

Saying back to him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is his name, which he put upon us with the water of our Baptism. We are his. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where his name is, there is he. Before him we acknowledge that we are sinners, and we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given us, and we, freed and forgiven, acclaim him as our great and gracious God as we apply to ourselves the words he has used to make himself known to us.

The rhythm of our worship is from him to us, and then from us back to him. He gives his gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink. Finally his blessing moves us out into our calling, where his gifts have their fruition.

- *Lutheran Worship, p. 6*

Scriptures quoted from the New International Version Bible.