

An Explanation of the Divine Service



† Rev. Alan Kornacki, Jr. †

© 2000

This course is intended to be approximately an eight-week review after the Catechism has been studied. By examining the Divine Service in some detail, we also review the doctrine we have learned in the Bible and in Luther's Small Catechism. The students should not necessarily be memorizing the liturgy in this study, although it is hoped that as the students make the Divine Service an integral part of their lives that it will work its way into their conscious memory as well as into their hearts. It is well that we should learn the meaning of what we pray: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Included are an introduction and 8 parts discussing the liturgy. Also included are questions for each part discussing the liturgy. These may be used as either homework assignments or as quizzes. Since this is also supposed to be a review of the Small Catechism, there is a schedule for reviewing the Catechism that loosely parallels what occurs in the Divine Service. It is not a perfect correlation, but I don't think one would not be stretching too far to make a connection.

Catechism Review Schedule

Section of “Explanation”	1943 Catechism to Review for this part
Introduction	Baptism: pp. 16-17
Part 1	Office of Keys: pp. 18-19
Part 2	Morn/Eve Prayer: pp. 22-24
Part 3a	Creed: pp. 9-10
Part 3b	Ten Commandments: pp. 5-8
Part 4	Christian Q & A: pp. 31-35
Part 5	Lord’s Supper: pp. 20-21
Part 6	Lord’s Prayer: pp. 12-15
Part 7	Table of Duties: pp. 25-30

While I would teach the Catechism in its order throughout the regular catechesis, I think it’s important to look at Baptism before discussing the Invocation; the Office of the Keys before we discuss Confession and Absolution; The Apostles’ Creed before the Nicene; etc. Using the Catechism and Hymnal in tandem, the students may be able to make connections that they would not otherwise make.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Introduction

The Definition of Worship

The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus defines “worship” as:
1a: homage or reverence paid to a deity, especially in a formal service; b: the acts, rites, or ceremonies of worship. 2: adoration or devotion comparable to religious homage shown towards a principal or a person . . . 3: (archaic) worthiness; merit; recognition given or due to these; honor and respect. (*American Edition*. Frank Abate, ed. New York: Oxford, 1996.) The word “worship” comes from the Old English word *weorthscipe*: *weorth* meaning “worthy” and *scipe* meaning “-ship.” The entire word assembled means to give great value or respect to someone or something. (Oaths made to feudal lords by their subjects in the Middle Ages often included clauses of owing “life, limb, and earthly worship” to the lord.

“Worship” is a secular word, though. It’s better to look at worship from a Christian point of view, to see what we really do. “The German word *Gottesdienst* (God’s service to us and our response to Him) is appropriately defined as both ‘divine service’ and ‘public worship’. The first and fundamental definition portrays God’s sacramental service toward man in the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacrament. The second and subordinate definition portrays man’s sacrificial service toward God in the offering of hymns, prayers, etc.” (*Gottesdienst*: Volume 6, Number 4 [1998:4])

The high and holy worship of God is faith in Jesus Christ. Such faith is created and sustained by God’s Service to us. In the Divine Service, the Lord comes to us in His Word and Sacraments to bless and enliven us with His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and we respond to the outpouring of those gifts. God speaks to us, and we speak His words back to Him. These two terms are sometimes called “sacramental” and “sacrificial.” God sacramentally serves us through His word, and we, in turn, sacrificially serve God with our prayer, thanksgiving, and praise.

Introduction to the Liturgy of the Divine Service

The word “Liturgy” comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which means public service or duty. The Liturgy of the Church is the entire body of material appointed for use in the conduct of Divine Worship.

Liturgy has five basic characteristics:

1. **Liturgy is of the community.** It always takes place in the context of community: God’s people gathered together around God’s Word and Sacraments, proclaimed and administered.
2. **Liturgy is daily.** The “private” devotional life of the community fits into the liturgical life of the Church, and makes use of the books of the community. (examples: when we pray at the beginning of class, this is a prayer of the whole congregation, and, indeed, of the whole Church. When you pray at home before you wake up, eat, go to bed, etc., that is not just your prayer alone, but a prayer of the whole Church.)
3. **Liturgy is anonymous.** There is no one single author. The community places itself under God, and adopts the language of scripture as its language. While the

arrangement of liturgies is the work of man, most of the Liturgy is taken directly from Scripture.

4. **Liturgy is powerful.** It gives life and salvation, because it is Word and Sacrament. It helps us deal with reality. It is the power of the Gospel, proclaimed from the pulpit, given in the Sacraments, declared in holy Absolution, which imparts forgiveness, life, and salvation.
5. **Liturgy is normative.** The community of faith at worship, the Church, is the way God intended His people to be.

(The Divine Service. Rev. David A. Koeneman.)

The Divine Service has two main events: the preaching of the Word of God and the eating and drinking of the Holy Supper.

The Church Year

Because the Church Year determines those things which vary in the Divine Service, it is important to our understanding of the liturgy that we at least briefly examine the Church Year and how it affects our worship. In the yearly cycle we see two halves: the time of Christ, which consists of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Holy Week, Easter, and Ascension; and the time of the Church, which is Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, and the historic Pentecost/Trinity season.

The Time of Christ

Advent

The Church Year begins with the season of Advent. Advent, which means “coming,” consists of the four Sundays before Christmas. It is a time of repentance as we prepare for Christ who came in humility and is coming again in glory. Because it is a season of repentance, we do not sing “Alleluia.” In addition, because we are preparing for the coming Christ, we replace the Hymn of Praise with the hymn “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” (TLH 62; LW 1 or 31). The traditional liturgical color for Advent is violet, but blue is now considered the standard color for Advent.

Christmas

In the Christmas season we celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus. Christmas is always December 25 (although the celebration always begins at sunset on Christmas Eve), and the Christmas season lasts twelve days. It is a season of joy, and so we resume our “Alleluia” and sing “*Gloria in Excelsis*” with the angels over Bethlehem. White is the color of the Christmas season.

Epiphany

Epiphany means “manifestation.” In the Epiphany season we celebrate the manifestation of Christ’s divine glory. The Epiphany of our Lord is always celebrated on January 6. The first Sunday after the Epiphany is a celebration of the Baptism of Christ, and the last is a celebration of the Transfiguration. The Epiphany season can have as many as five Sundays, including the Sunday of the Transfiguration. For the feast of the

Epiphany, the Baptism of our Lord, and the Transfiguration, the liturgical color is white. For the rest of the season the liturgical color is green.

Lent/Holy Week

The period of “Pre-Lent” is, so to say, the narthex in which we Christians pause for three Sundays before we begin our spiritual pilgrimage to Calvary in the great 40 days of Lent. It comprises the Sundays *Septuagesima* (meaning 70), *Sexagesima* (60), and *Quinquagesima* (50). These number-names do not designate exact periods of time until Easter, but rather are to be considered as general markers like mile-signs on the highway, marking the general number of days we are from the Easter goal toward which we are traveling. From *Septuagesima* Sunday until the Saturday evening after Easter (which is the strict end of the celebration of Easter week) there are 70 days. The liturgical color for Pre-Lent is violet.

Lent is the other penitential season of the Church Year. It is the time when we are called upon like the disciples to watch and pray with Christ, who carried the burden of our sin upon Himself to the cross. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, and lasts 40 days. This does NOT count Sundays. Again, as Lent is a penitential season, we do not sing “Alleluia,” and we replace the Hymn of Praise with the hymn “The Royal Banners Forward Go” (TLH 168; LW 103 or 104). The liturgical color for Ash Wednesday is either violet or black, while the color for Lent is violet.

Holy Week is the last week of Lent. We are here overwhelmed with the mystery of the salvation Christ worked for us in His suffering, death, and resurrection. It begins with Palm Sunday, the day we recall Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem where he was acclaimed as the king “who comes in the name of the Lord.” Maundy Thursday draws its name from the Latin word “*mandatum*” which means mandate. It draws its name from the new mandate from Jesus to love one another (John 13:34), and also the injunction in the Words of Institution for the Lord’s Supper: “Do this in remembrance of me.” Good Friday is the day we specifically recall Christ’s propitiatory sacrificial death on our behalf. It is called “Good” in the sense that good means “holy.” During Holy Week the violet of Lent is certainly appropriate. However, alternatives for these days are offered. Palm Sunday can be red (Scarlet). Maundy Thursday can be white, although the altar will be bared after the Holy Supper. For Good Friday the altar can be left bare, or black may be used.

Easter

Easter is a time of tremendous joy as we recall Christ’s victory over death. Every Sunday is a small celebration of Easter, although during penitential seasons we subdue our joy in solemn reflection of Christ’s work of salvation. Easter is a moving festival, celebrated the first Sunday after the first full moon after the first day of spring (March 21). We resume our “alleluias,” and in the place of the “*Gloria in Excelsis*” we sing “Worthy is Christ,” the hymn of the hosts of heaven in the Revelation to St. John. The Easter season lasts a week of Sundays. 40 days after Easter day we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. White is the liturgical color of the Easter season and of the Ascension.

The Time of the Church

Pentecost

Pentecost recalls the sending of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, which Christ promised to them as He ascended. Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth,” draws its name from the time which Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, fifty days after Easter. The liturgical color for the Feast of Pentecost is red.

Trinity Sunday

The first Sunday after Pentecost is the Feast of the Holy Trinity. We honor the Triune God on this special day. In place of the Nicene Creed it is appropriate to confess the Athanasian Creed, the most thorough Trinitarian confession of the three ecumenical creeds. White is the liturgical color for Trinity Sunday.

The Pentecost/Trinity Season

Following Trinity Sunday is the general season of the Church Year. It is called the Time of the Church, and during this season we teach about and exercise the new life we have as the redeemed people of God. We follow in the readings the work of the apostles as the Holy Spirit moves them to obey Christ’s mandate to baptize and teach all nations. The liturgical color for this season is green.

Minor Festivals

On certain days we recall saints and events which shaped the Church. For a list of these days and the colors appropriate for these days, see p.8 in the front section of Lutheran Worship, or p.255 in the Catechism.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 1 – Invocation, Confession and Absolution

The Divine Service

The Opening Hymn

The opening hymn, also known as the Hymn of Invocation, is not a necessary part of the Divine Service. However, it is appropriate at this time to sing a Hymn of Invocation of the Holy Spirit, or a hymn appropriate to the season of the Church year. Such a hymn at this time will serve to bring the assembly into a proper frame of mind for the Divine Service. A Hymn of Invocation of the Holy Spirit is appropriate because it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can render worship to God through Christ (I Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 2:18).

We are a “singing Church,” so we follow the advice of the apostle Paul to teach and admonish “one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

The Invocation

The Invocation is a brief Scriptural phrase used in liturgical acts. In this place it is an act of corporate devotion addressed to God. God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and it is by His authority that the Pastor proclaims the Gospel, and for His worship that a Christian congregation gathers. Even as in the Lord’s prayer we begin with the address, “Our Father,” so here we begin our worship with an act of faith, calling upon the Name of the Lord, acknowledging our awareness of the presence of God and beseeching His blessing. As Jesus says, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). In the Invocation we hallow the name of the Lord, as we do according to the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer: God’s name is hallowed among us “when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, as we, as the children of God, also lead a holy life according to it.”

In addition, the Invocation is a reminder that God has put His name on us in Baptism. (“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”) As a sign of this, the Invocation is often accompanied by the sign of the cross, the sign placed on us in Baptism.

Confession and Absolution

The *Didache*, one of the earliest known Christian writings, says: “Assemble on the Day of the Lord, break bread and celebrate the Eucharist, but first, confess your sins.” Thus we lay down our burdens at the doorway before entering upon the praises of God.

Confession and Absolution, however, were not always part of the Divine Service. Until recent times, it was the practice of the Church to participate in private Confession and Absolution, the practice of going to the pastor as an individual and confessing your sins before him, and receiving absolution from the pastor who offers Christ’s forgiveness. This is not a practice that we gave up during the Reformation because it was too Catholic. If you look in the Lutheran Confessions, it clearly states that the Lutherans don’t abandon that practice. Rather, it fell into disuse, partly because we don’t understand the necessity for it the way we used to, and partly because it became the opinion of many that it just wasn’t practical to “waste” the pastor’s time by having everyone confess sins individually. (Incidentally, there are few things the pastor does that are more important

than offering Christ's forgiveness.) When this was the case, the service began with the Introit.

The Exhortation and Versicles

In the Exhortation we are invited to lay our sins at the feet of God. As Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). In the Versicles, taken from Psalms 124 and 32, we see (1) from where our help comes, (2) evidence of His power to help us, and (3) the assurance of forgiveness upon confession.

Confession and Absolution

To confess our sins is to speak the truth about our lives. During the confession, we admit that we are sinners by nature (original sin), and that we sin in thought, word, and deed (actual sins). We then express our remorse for the sins we have committed, and plead for mercy. We come before God as sinners in need of forgiveness. Forgiveness is our primary need.

The truth of our sinfulness is answered by the truth of God's forgiveness for the sake of the sufferings and death of Jesus. Forgiveness is located in the mouth of our pastor, who speaks to us out of Christ's Office, "in the stead and by the command" of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus said to His disciples after the resurrection, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained" (John 20:21b-23). The forgiveness Jesus won for the whole world by dying on the cross is here offered, delivered, and applied to each of us with the words, "I forgive you all your sins."

This is done in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, again as a connection to Baptism and the cleansing from sin we receive there. As Luther's Large Catechism states, "Absolution is nothing else than a return to Baptism." Believing this word of forgiveness, we reply, "Amen."

Questions about Confession and Absolution

How do we know people mean what they say when they make Confession of their sins? We don't know. Nobody can judge what is in the heart of another, except for God. God hears our Confession, and He knows what is in our hearts. For our part, pastors accept the words as a person speaks them. We have no other choice.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 2 – The Office of the Word – Introduction and Psalmody

Introduction to the Office of the Word

As we have stated before, Corporate Confession and Absolution was not always part of the Divine Service. Originally the Introit marked the actual beginning of the Service. In a way, it still does. Confession and Absolution are a sort of preparation for true worship. Our sins forgiven, we are glad to enter into the gates of the house of the Lord with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise.

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in Him, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. In the Office of the Word we hear the Word of the Lord in the readings from Scripture and the sermon, and offer our prayers to God, as He bids us do: “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). The Office of the Word has three parts:

1. The Psalmody: The Introit through the Gloria in Excelsis;
2. The Word: The Salutation through the Votum (“The Peace of God which passes all understanding . . .”); and
3. The Offerings: The Offertory through the Prayers.

The Office of the Word

The Introit

The word “Introit” comes from the Latin word *introitus*, which means entrance. Historically, this is the time when the processional cross, the minister, and his assistants would process to the front of the church.

The Introit historically was formed of an antiphon, a whole Psalm (or an alternate passage from Scripture or a liturgical text), and the *Gloria Patri*. The antiphon is a selected verse which gives the message of the Psalm in a brief statement. The Psalm itself introduces the main theme of the day and reflects the season of the church year. We then include the *Gloria Patri* (Glory be to the Father and to the Son . . .), which is a confession of our belief in the Triune God, and fundamentally distinguishes the use of the Psalms in the New Testament Church from their use in the Old Testament Church. We say these words because we understand that, through the Psalms, the life of Christ is revealed to us (Luke 24:44). It is appropriate to bow your head when reciting the *Gloria Patri* in honor of the glory of the Triune God.

It was the original intention that, as the pastor enters, a solo choir voice (or half the choir) should chant the antiphon, and then the choir (or the other half of the choir) should chant the psalm, the antiphon would be repeated, and then the congregation would join in for the *Gloria Patri*. As the procession would move down the center aisle, the congregation would turn to face the cross, and then turn to the front as it passed, perhaps bowing slightly as the cross passed in remembrance of Christ’s great sacrifice for the sake of our sins. Throughout the years, the Introits were shortened, and became sections of Psalms, much like the Introits we have in our hymnal. When the Introit is used now, often the pastor reads or chants it when he enters the chancel area. However, in many churches it is often skipped altogether.

The Kyrie

The Greek words *kyrie eleison* (κυριε ελεησων), meaning “Lord have mercy,” are a general prayer for the Church and the world. Christians know that the gracious mercy of God is the hope of all who are in need. Faith is complete reliance upon the Lord, whatever the petition. It is a very scriptural prayer (Psalm 51:1; Matthew 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30-31; Luke 16:24, 17:13).

This is **NOT**, however, another confession of sins. It is not a meek prayer of resignation, but a bold cry of faith from our cleansed and forgiven hearts to the merciful heart of God. We say this prayer knowing that God has mercy on those who fear him. When you look at the prayer in the Bible, it is said by people who were confident in Christ’s ability to do as they asked of Him. It is an acclamation, a word of praise, much like the word “Hosanna,” which we will look at later.

In its liturgical use, the *Kyrie* has always been a part of prayer. It has been used as a response to petitions of prayer, a form called the “litany” (p.110 or Hymn 661 in TLH; p.279 in LW). Said three times in succession as it is in the Divine Service, it has come to have the character of an invocation of the Trinity, an acclamation by the Church of the Lord coming to meet them as they worship in His temple, as the apostle Paul bids us do in his letter to the Hebrews: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The Hymn of Praise

The hymn of praise gives a powerful expression to why Christians worship, namely, that God Gives His gracious gifts, and thankful believers receive and celebrate God’s gifts. Originally part of the prayer offices (Matins, Vespers, etc.), it was imported into the Divine Service around the 4th Century. We have come to use 2 hymns of praise: the *Gloria in Excelsis* (Glory to God in the highest) and “Worthy Is Christ.” Both are hymns of creation in praise of its God. The hymn of praise is a response to the *kyrie*, in that it proclaims the glory of God and voices the joy of believers in His merciful goodness in sending His Son to be the Savior of the world.

Due to the penitential nature of the seasons of Advent and Lent, it is appropriate to omit these hymns of praise, adding instead the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” during Advent and the hymn “The Royal Banners Forward Go” during Lent. God is not less glorious in these seasons, but this gives us pause to remember Christ’s sacrifices for us (namely, coming to earth as a human being, and dying on the cross).

In the Liturgy we are joined with the hosts of heaven in our worship of God, and this is very apparent in the hymn of praise, as we sing the actual songs that the hosts of heaven sang in praise to our God. The victory feast has already begun, and we are privileged partakers of it in the Divine Service.

The Gloria in Excelsis

This is the song of the angels to the shepherds found in Luke 2:14. Generally the pastor or his assistant will speak or chant the words “Glory be to God on high,” and the congregation will respond with the rest, just as the angel came alone to give the message to the shepherds, and then was joined by the multitude of the heavenly host. The *Gloria in Excelsis* is appropriate on all Sundays and festivals, but is especially appropriate

during the Christmas and Epiphany seasons, as well as any time in which we commemorate Christ's Incarnation (the Presentation of Our Lord, the Annunciation, and the Visitation).

“Worthy is Christ”

This canticle is relatively new to use in the Divine Service, at least those on earth. However, it is a very scriptural song. It is taken from various texts in the book of the Revelation to John (5:9, 12-13; 11:17; 115:3-4; 19:5). This song focuses on the praise of the risen Lord, and the God who sent Him to be our Savior. It has only come into use in the Lutheran Church in the 20th century, but it is a constant hymn of worship to God in heaven, and thus is very appropriate for our use on earth. “Worthy is Christ,” also known by the title “This Is the Feast,” is especially appropriate Easter Day through Pentecost, and as the song of the saints in heaven, on All Saints Day and on the Last Sunday of the Church year.

Questions about the Introduction and the Psalmody

Why do we sing the Festival Canticle (“Worthy is Christ”) once in a while? Again, it is a question of when it is appropriate to use it. The *Gloria in Excelsis* is more appropriate during the Christmas and Epiphany seasons because it talks more about the Incarnation of Christ, while “Worthy is Christ” discusses the victory that Christ won through His death and resurrection, and this is more appropriate for Easter.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 3 – The Office of the Word – The Word

The Salutation

The Salutation (“The Lord be with you;” “And with thy spirit.”) is more than an appropriate statement; it has been and is part of the everyday speech of God’s people. In the early Church, Christians who passed each other on the street would greet each other with these words. In the context of the Divine Service, it sums up the relationship that the congregation and the pastor share in Jesus Christ. The pastor blesses the people entrusted to his spiritual care by declaring that the Lord is with them, and the people in turn remind the pastor that the Lord is also with the one who greets them in His name by virtue of his office as a called and ordained servant of the Word.

The salutation occurs every time the congregation receives an invitation or a special announcement, and seems to focus our attention on the important action that follows. For example, when we say it here, it leads into the Collect of the day, and so leads also into the reading of the Word. More will be said on this during the discussion of the Preface in the Office of the Sacrament.

The phrase “your spirit” can mean one (or both) of two things. First, it refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 3:16). Also, “your spirit” in Semitic (Hebrew) usage means “you.” In some hymnals you might see the reply, “And also with you.” This isn’t wrong, *per se*, but it is more appropriate to say, “And with thy (your) spirit.”

The Collect

Prayer is an important part of the life of the church. The Lord taught his disciples to pray what we call the “Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13). The apostle Paul informed the church at Philippi, “. . . in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

The final moment before the Word of God is read involves a prayer called the “Collect.” It carries a single petition, but with scripturally rich address to God and the reason for the boldness of the request. The earliest written reference to the Collect occurs around the year 380 AD. It was a prayer spoken by the presiding minister after the people had prayed silently, and was meant to gather these prayers and “collect” them into one.

The classical pattern for the Collect has five parts:

1. The Address: the name(s) of the Person(s) of the Trinity to whom this prayer is addressed (usually the Father);
2. The Basis/Rationale: the particular characteristic of God upon which the prayer is based;
3. The Petition: the particular blessing requested;
4. The Benefit: the goal or desired outcome of the petition; and
5. The Termination/Doxology: prayer through Jesus Christ, who intercedes to the Father for us; to the Father, who grants us our petitions; in the Holy Spirit, who gives us the faith to believe that God will answer our prayers; in their unity as one God forever (John 14:13-14). Note here the strong Trinitarian connection.

As an example, look at the collect for Ash Wednesday (TLH p.62; LW p.32):

Almighty and everlasting God, because you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent, create in us new and contrite hearts that

we, worthily repenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever.

Dividing this prayer into its five parts:

The Address: “Almighty and everlasting God”;

The Basis/Rationale: “who hatest nothing that Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent”;

The Petition: “create and make in us new and contrite hearts”;

The Benefit: “that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness”;

The Termination/Doxology: “through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.”

The Readings

Everything in the Office of the Word so far has been the words of all creation speaking to the Lord. Now we pause while God speaks to us. There is nothing we can do or say that compares in importance to the Word of God. The Scriptures are a written record of what the prophets, apostles, and evangelists spoke as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. We believe, teach, and confess that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

The practice of reading selected Scriptures comes from the Church’s Hebrew roots, namely, the Synagogue. We see an instance where Jesus himself reads the Scriptures in the Synagogue (Luke 4:16). Scripture is meant to be read aloud, and special blessings are bestowed on those who bring this Word to the congregation and to those in the congregation who listen (Revelation 1:3).

The lessons appointed for each day follow either a three-year cycle or a one-year cycle. The one-year cycle is the historic precedent, while the three-year cycle has been developed over the last 50 years. In this congregation we have used both, most recently the three-year series.

One additional note: occasionally we observe “special” Sundays, honoring such groups as the Lutheran Hour, Lutheran Laymen’s League, Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, and others. Often these groups send along special worship services, which include prayers, specially selected readings, and even sermons. However, these occasions are best observed by including a special petition in the prayer for the Church, and maybe by mention in the sermon if this can be done in an appropriate manner in connection with the text of the day. These events should not distract from the message of Christ the Incarnate, Crucified, Risen and Ascended Lord. It is best not to break up the lectionary (the appointed cycle of readings) because there is generally a connection between the readings from week to week.

The Old Testament Lesson

First, we hear a reading from the Old Testament, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ in a prophetic manner. This reading almost always relates to the Gospel reading appointed for the day. Occasionally (especially during the Easter season)

a reading from the Acts of the Apostles is substituted to emphasize the importance of the work to establish the early Christian Church.

The Gradual

The Gradual is a liturgical arrangement of portions of Psalms sung from a step (Latin: *gradus*) of the altar. Generally speaking, the Gradual is seasonal in nature, reflecting the theme of the Sunday. It has fallen into disuse in many places through the inclusion of choir anthems.

The Epistle Lesson

Next we hear the apostles of Christ speaking to us as they did to the first-century Church. The emphasis here is on the work of the Lord through His apostles in the early Church, bearing important, practical, serious words for daily living. Although usually taken from the letters of the apostles to local congregations, a few readings have been chosen from the Acts of the Apostles and the Revelation to St. John. Frequently this lesson does not have any direct relation to the Gospel reading appointed for the day, offering instead some variety.

The Alleluia Verse

The Hebrew word *alleluia* (literally, “praise the Lord”) is a song of joy and triumph. Used in the context of the Divine Service, it points forward to the reading of the Gospel. It is usually combined with a brief sentence from Scripture to reflect the mood of the day. For this reason, “alleluia” is omitted from the verse during Lent, and an alternate verse may be used.

The Alleluia Verse was historically sung by the choir, but it is just as appropriately sung by the congregation.

The Gospel Lesson

The Gospel lesson is one of the high points of the Divine Service, ranking only below the sermon and the Sacrament of the Altar in importance. As such, it has long been accompanied by appropriate actions. Historically the Salutation (“The Lord be with you . . .”) was included before the reading. A Gospel procession might precede the reading of the lesson, a procession in which the Crucifer would lead the torchbearers, the pastor, and an assistant carrying the Gospel book into the midst of the congregation. The Gospel would appropriately be read in the midst of the people, even as Christ humbled Himself to walk among us as one of us. It is always given the place of honor as the last reading. Special honor has always been accorded to the Gospel reading, as it reveals the words and works of our Lord as the living Word ever-present in the written Word. One expert on the Liturgy states, “Clergy and people rise respectfully as servants to receive the words of their Lord, and stood bareheaded. Bishops removed their miters, kings took off their crowns, and soldiers laid down their weapons” (Reed 300). In our version of the Divine Service, when the reading is announced, we rise in reverence and say, “Glory to you, O Lord” (II Peter 3:18). We here affirm Christ’s presence among us.

The Gospel selection is the clearest proclamation of the theme for the given day. The reading is a selection from the words of the Evangelists, and focuses our attention on the words and works of our Lord. Historically the Gospel has been the text for the

sermon in the Divine Service, with the Old Testament or (usually) the Epistle reading being the text for the meditation at the evening Vespers service.

After the reading is ended, the congregation responds, "Praise be to Thee, O Christ," again acknowledging Christ's presence with us in His Word.

The Nicene Creed

What the Church believes, she confesses with her lips in creeds. The Nicene Creed (from the Latin *credo*, "I believe") is the Church's reply to God's Word, the public acceptance and confession in summary form of the faith of the whole Church, and a rejection of all the heresies that it condemns. As Jesus says, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). Every use of it is, in a sense, a renewal of our Baptismal vow. It binds all true Christians to one another, and to the faithful of all centuries. The Creed can also be sung (TLH 251; LW 212, 213). It is appropriate to make the sign of the cross at the last phrase in remembrance of your Baptism.

On Trinity Sunday it is customary and appropriate to confess the Athanasian Creed (TLH p.53; LW p.134). As Paul says, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

The Hymn of the Day

One of Martin Luther's reforms was to bring singing back to the congregation. Before this time, the whole Mass was chanted or said in Latin, and only by the presiding minister, his assistants, and the choir, while the common folk stood by and watched. Any singing was done by a trained choir, and only by them.

Certain hymns have long been associated with particular Sundays and festivals of the Church year. The Hymn of the Day is the principal hymn of the Divine Service, relating the theme of the day. (Example: The Hymn of the Day for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord is "Of the Father's Love Begotten.") This hymn is not only to be sung at this point in the Divine Service, but is also intended for use at church meetings, in Bible Class, Confirmation instruction, and home devotions during the week. As was said before, we are a "singing church."

The Sermon

The sermon, usually delivered by the pastor, is an explanation of the Word of God, and an application of that Word to the lives of Christians. It stresses both what God demands of us (the Law) and what God has done and is doing for us (the Gospel).

Before the pastor begins the sermon, he will either stand or kneel before the altar, and pray that his words will be pleasing to God and edifying to the congregation. When he steps into the pulpit, he begins with the Apostolic Greeting: "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:2). He may then read the text, and will then preach the sermon.

The sermon is neither easy to listen to nor necessarily entertaining. It is both discomfiting and comforting, but it is never comfortable. The goal is not to make the listener feel good about himself, but that he should die to himself, and rise to faith.

After the sermon, the preacher will conclude with the words of Philippians 4:7: “The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” This is called the “*votum*.” This verse invokes the promised blessing of peace upon all that stand fast in the Lord and worship Him. It fittingly concludes this section of the Office of the Word and leads into the Offertory.

The sermon should never be omitted. The pastor has two main responsibilities: the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacraments. To omit one is to neglect that responsibility to the care of the souls of those who have been entrusted to him, and he must answer for that before God.

Questions about the Word

Why do we say “Alleluia” three times? Like we do in the *Kyrie*, we say the Alleluia three times to honor and praise the three Persons of the Trinity.

Why do we omit the alleluia during Lent? We omit the Alleluia during Lent because of the penitential nature of the season. Instead of reflecting on the praise of the Lord, we reflect on His suffering and death.

Why do we say the Nicene Creed during the Communion service and the Apostles’ Creed during the other service? Historically the creeds have corresponded to the Sacraments of Baptism (the Apostles’ Creed) and the Eucharist (the Nicene Creed).

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 4— The Office of the Word – The Offerings

The Offerings

The Offerings symbolize the giving of Christian lives in response to God's gift of salvation. There is some discussion as to whether the Offerings are part of the Office of the Word or the Office of the Holy Supper. In either case, it is a transition between the two. It is not, however, a conclusion to the sermon. We do indeed look back upon the message and meaning of the Gospel, but more specifically at this point we direct our thoughts forward to the celebration and reception of the Sacrament.

The Offertory

The Offertory is a song, generally a selection of Psalm verses or other suitable sentences, connected to the act of gift giving. In essence, a heart which is thankful will seek every opportunity for service to the Lord. This sacrifice also extends to the praise of the Lord, as Paul says in Hebrews in the 13th chapter of the letter to the Hebrews: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (v. 15). Thus a song of praise is connected to the act of giving a gift.

The Offertory "Create in Me," from Psalm 51 (vv. 10-12) looks to God's work in the heart of the believer. God renews and makes right our spirit. God gives us joy in His salvation, and strengthens our spirits to obedience to His will. A suitable alternate Offertory is "What shall I render to the Lord," taken from Psalm 116 (vv. 12-14, 17-19).

Historically the communion elements were brought forward to the altar at this time, but this practice has widely fallen into disuse. It is the practice of some to sing the Offertory after the Offering, rather than before the Offering, and either practice is appropriate.

The Offering

Our faith shows itself in the works we do. This includes the giving of gifts to the Lord for the work of His Church, so that the Church may provide the spoken and written Word, Christian education, and pastoral care to the community and to the world. Therefore, after the Offertory we are given the opportunity to return to God the first and finest portion of the blessings He has given us, even as we see Able doing in Genesis 4. Paul says in II Corinthians: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (vv. 6-7). In addition to a sign of faith, the giving of gifts is a show of thankfulness to God for the gifts He has bestowed on us, both physically and spiritually.

Usually the altar and the elements are prepared for the Lord's Supper at this time, although some will delay this preparation until the singing of the *Sanctus*. Either practice is appropriate. In some cases, the Pastor will enter the Sacristy to clothe himself in a garment called a "chasuble," a garment that is meant to further obscure the man in the Office of the Ministry and rather emphasize Christ as the source of the Holy Supper.

Monetary gifts are not the whole of Christian giving, but are a significant part of it. Often giving includes the bread and wine for the Sacrament, flowers for the church, or the offering of time and talent in service to the Church. As Paul says in Romans: "I

beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (12:1). In different times, the gifts brought forward at this time also included clothing, produce, livestock, and other necessities for the Pastor’s family and the needy of the community.

The Prayer of the Church

Prayer is one of the marks of the congregation gathered in worship. As Luke writes in Acts 2, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (v. 42). In the Divine Service, Christians pray for a wide variety of needs: for the Church, for the world, and for those with special or specific needs. In addition, Paul writes: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (I Timothy 2:1-3). We know that God is present in our worship, and we anticipate His real presence in Holy Communion. Therefore we lay before Him our concerns, knowing He will hear and answer them.

The Prayer for the Church reveals the mind of the Church. It is directed to God in humility and trust, and its sincere purpose is to be heard by Him. This is the point in the Liturgy where prayers for occasions and events are offered. The needs of the people of God are ever the same, and the beautiful forms, which the Church has developed throughout the ages, give full expression to the believers’ wants at all times.

There are numerous prayers written for specific Sundays in the Church year, and they are often used in place of the General Prayer. In addition, we also use litanies (see *Kyrie*), prayers that call for response from the congregation. These often capture the specific theme for the Sunday, while maintaining the nature of the Prayer of the Church, namely, prayer for all the needs of the world. At the end of this prayer, the congregation responds, “Amen,” affirming that this prayer is theirs, as well.

After the Prayer of the Church, a hymn may be included to ease the transition into the Office of the Holy Supper.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 5– The Office of the Holy Supper – Introduction and Preface

The Office of the Holy Supper

The Office of the Word is general, and has always been so. Anyone who desires may take part in it. It is meant for worship and instruction. The Office of the Holy Supper, however, is reserved for mature Christians who have been baptized and have received Christian instruction. Also known as “the Mass of the Faithful,” even as the Office of the Word is known as “the Mass of the Catechumens,” the Office of the Holy Supper was closed to those who were not instructed in the Christian faith. Those who were not communicants were removed, and the doors were barred, that no profane eye might behold the sacred mystery.

It is proper for the Holy Supper to follow the Gospel. This is the form that Christ first set forth (Luke 24:13-35), where he first instructed the two disciples about Himself from Moses and the Prophets, and then made Himself known to them in the breaking of the bread. Indeed, the Supper is the most exalted way in which the Word comes to us, the highest commemoration of Christ’s redemptive work. We are given and receive the body crucified for us, the blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. We actually touch and taste the Gospel in the Lord’s Supper. The Office of the Word is the Gospel proclaimed to all; the Office of the Holy Supper is the Gospel applied individually and in community to each soul. The Office of the Holy Supper is divided into three parts:

1. The Preface: The Salutation through the Sanctus;
2. The Administration: The Lord’s Prayer through the Dismissal; and
3. The Post-Communion: The *Nunc Dimittis* through the Benediction.

The Holy Supper is the oldest and least changed part of the liturgy.

The Preface

In the unity of faith, we now proceed into the blessed Sacrament of the Altar. The Prefatory Sentences (“sentences which come before”) and the Preface stress the unity of the Church in its praise of God, not only in this time, but the unity of all Christians of all times and all places. Establishing this unity, we then move on in that unity to worship God in the *Sanctus*.

The Prefatory Sentences

We use three Prefatory Sentences. The first is the Salutation. As we have stated earlier, the Salutation occurs every time the congregation receives an invitation or a special announcement, focusing our attention on the important action that follows. In this case, it highlights the invitations that follow.

The second Prefatory Sentence is the *Sursam corda*; “Lift up your hearts.” Jeremiah makes this exhortation in his Lamentations, the 41st verse of chapter 3. The Psalmist supplies our reply (Psalm 86:4): “We lift them to the Lord.” This Sentence calls for the elevation of the soul above all earthly things, and we in turn do so. This reaches its fulfillment in the *Sanctus*.

The third Prefatory Sentence is the *Gratias agimus*; “Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.” We reply, “It is good and right so to do.” As the Psalmist says in numerous places (Psalm 50:15, 69:30, etc.), praise and thanksgiving is the proper response to God’s blessings to us. This is the character of prayer that follows in the

Preface. In our response, we express our willingness to join in the prayer of thanksgiving.

The Preface

The Preface is the prayer of thanksgiving, which is called for in the last Prefatory Sentence. It is formed of three parts:

1. The Thanksgiving: We offer thanks to God because it is proper to do so. The text of the Thanksgiving is: *It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto you, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord;*
2. The Proper Preface: This gives liturgical voice to deep devotional expressions of faith. It is a seasonal variable. When no particular season is celebrated, it is appropriate to omit the Proper Preface. The text of the Proper Prefaces are found on p.24 in TLH and p.145 in LW; and
3. The Ascription: This expresses in fullness the union of the Church Militant (the Church on earth) and the Church Triumphant (the heavenly Church: the saints and angels) in our thanks and praise in the hymn that follows. The text of the Ascription is: *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising you and saying:*

It segues nicely into the *Sanctus*.

Historically, the Preface was quite lengthy, giving an extended recounting of the benefits of God: the wonders of creation, God's extended revelation throughout history, and his specific revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Shortening the Preface served to focus on the redemption we are given in the body and blood of the Savior.

The Sanctus

The Preface and the *Sanctus* (Latin: "holy") are linked in that we join our worship with those in heaven. Indeed, the *Sanctus* is a hymn of the heavenly choir (Isaiah 6:1-3) combined with the shouts of the people of Jerusalem as Christ entered into Jerusalem (Psalm 118:26; Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; Luke 19:37-38). The Isaiah portion of the *Sanctus* was used in Temple worship, and Jesus Himself would have used it in His worship life.

The *Sanctus* begins with the repetition of the word "Holy." Used three times, it sings in praise of the three Persons of the Trinity. The sentence "Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory" refers to the fullness of the Trinity, while the second part refers specifically to Christ, to whom these words were offered in the triumphal entry.

"*Hosanna*" comes from the Hebrew or Aramaic word meaning "Save now." It is not a plea, but is rather a shout of joy that He has saved. In this way it is similar to the *Kyrie*.

At this point, an exhortation appeared in the historic Lutheran liturgy. It has since been moved to the Order of the Confessional Service in The Lutheran Hymnal (p.46) or Divine Service III in Lutheran Worship (p.197).

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 6 – The Office of the Holy Supper – The Administration

The Lord's Prayer

This is the prayer Jesus taught His disciples (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4). In just a few sentences it offers praise to God and summarizes the needs of the Christian. It is a prayer *of* the faithful, *for* the faithful. Only a faithful child of God could know Him as “Father,” and only through the instruction of Jesus and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are we made bold to do so.

The Lord's Prayer is commonly bound to the Words of Institution in the Divine Service. Traditional Lutheran liturgies place the Lord's Prayer after the Words of Institution, but more recent formulations of the liturgy place it before the Words of Institution. In either case, from as early as the third century, Christians have seen a special connection between the petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and the bread set apart for use in the Eucharist.

Historically in the Divine Service, the pastor spoke or chanted the prayer, while the congregation responded with the doxological phrase. The pastor voices the prayer on behalf of the people, and the congregation ratifies this with their response. This practice was tied to the use of a Prayer of Thanksgiving that included the Words of Institution, but has been carried through recent reforms.

Finally, it was (and still is, in some places) the practice to ring the steeple bell for each petition of the Lord's prayer, so that those in the community who were unable to attend the Divine Service could still participate in the prayers of the faithful.

The Words of Institution

Also known as the *verba* (Latin for “words”) these words appear in all Eucharistic liturgies in one form or another. Our text is a harmony of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20), plus the phrase “Which is given for you” (I Corinthians 11:23-26). Luther incorporated this phrase into the liturgy. The Words of Institution are words that Christ speaks through his Called and Ordained servant to give now what He gave to His disciples that evening. Everything is done on the basis of His Word. He says, “This is my body.” Therefore His body is present in the bread and wine. He says, “This do in remembrance of me.” Therefore we do this in remembrance of Him. He says, “Take, eat.” Therefore we take it and eat. There is no Sacrament without the Words. We call this the “consecration”, or the setting apart of these elements for the sacred task to come.

Historically the Words of Institution were included in a prayer of thanksgiving, which invoked the blessing of the Word and the Holy Spirit upon all who partake of the heavenly gifts. When the *verba* are included in such a prayer, the Lord's Prayer is prayed after the Words of Institution.

Another historic practice is that the bread was broken during the Words of Institution. Luther feared this practice because Rome took this as a sign that the Eucharist is a sacrifice made by the people. This practice has made a resurgence in recent years, and we must be careful to remember that it is Christ who made sacrifice for us.

The Pax Domini

The *Pax Domini*, Latin for “The peace of the Lord,” is the greeting Jesus made to the disciples when He appeared to them after the resurrection. It is similar to the Salutation, but offers a specific aspect of the Lord’s presence. It is an historic practice, dating back at least to the time of Saint Augustine. It was originally the greeting at the beginning of the Mass of the Faithful, but is quite appropriate in this place, as obedience to the mandate of Jesus: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

After this greeting, the congregation may greet each other with these words and a handshake or a chaste kiss. The Lord has granted us His peace. We in turn share that peace with one another.

The Agnus Dei

This hymn, “O Christ, Thou Lamb of God,” (*Agnus Dei* in Latin) has its source in John 1:29. And in repeated references to Christ as a lamb in the Revelation to John. It was introduced into the liturgy around the year 700, where it was repeated as many times as necessary to cover the breaking of the bread into as many pieces as were needed for the distribution. When it became practice to use pre-broken bread, the hymn was shortened to a three-fold song and retained as a hymn of adoration to the Savior who is present in His body and blood.

During the *Agnus Dei* the pastor will commune himself and any assistants he might have in the Chancel with him during the distribution. Then the congregation may come forward at the completion of that table.

The Distribution and Dismissal

Even as there is no Sacrament without the Words of Institution, there is also no Sacrament apart from the administration and eating. Anyone who does not believe this should not come forward to the altar to participate, for they eat and drink to their own damnation (I Cor. 11).

This is the highest peak of the Divine Service, where the Gospel is shared intimately with each of us. God uses ordinary means to impart the extraordinary gifts of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. At the altar Christians realize their common fellowship as members of the body and bride of Christ, the Church.

It is appropriate to pray in silence before approaching the altar rail perhaps praying the words, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my soul will be healed” (Matthew 8:8, replacing the word “soul” for “servant”). As the communicant approaches the communion rail, they bow in reverence to the sacred Presence, and then kneel (or stand with their heads bowed) in that same reverence to receive the body and blood of Christ. The pastor says the words, “The body of Christ, given for you,” and places the body in the communicant’s hand (the historic practice) or directly in the mouth. He then puts the chalice to the lips of the communicant, and says, “The blood of Christ, shed for you.” The communicant may reply, “Amen,” after each phrase.

The pastor then dismisses the people with either the injunction, “Depart in peace,” or “The body and blood of our Lord strengthen and preserve you steadfast in the true

faith unto life everlasting.” This is an assurance that the blessed Lord, who has just imparted Himself to His people, has and will continue to preserve the faith with which they received the Sacrament, and without which faith the Sacrament would not be a blessing but a curse. Upon returning to the pew the communicant may say a silent prayer in thanksgiving to God for His marvelous gift.

Questions about the Administration

Why don't we have Communion every week? Some congregations do have Communion every week. That has always been the preferred practice. However, there is a phenomenon called “pietism” that began in the Lutheran Church in the 16th century. Pietism focused on the personal relationship between God and the individual Christian, to the detriment of the relationship between God and the Church. An easy way of expressing this notion is this: “I have my Bible, and I can pray on my own. I don't need to go to church, because God can hear me anywhere.”

As was said before, one should always approach the altar in a worthy manner. Pietism so magnified self-examination and the fear of unworthy reception to the point that attendance to the Eucharist greatly declined, and some churches decided to offer Communion only four times a year. In reality, the Sacrament is greater than confession or any other preparation for it. The message of the Lord's Supper is Gospel. We come to the altar and the Sacrament in love, and not in fear. Therefore the Lord says the Word that makes us clean (Matthew 8:8).

Some argue that the Sacrament will become too commonplace if offered too often. This shows an improper understanding of the Sacrament. How can the body and blood of Christ *ever* be ordinary? We should be clamoring for it every Sunday, indeed, every *day*, so that we might receive the forgiveness of sins that Christ imparts to us there.

Why do we use wine instead of grape juice? When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He used wine.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

Part 7 – The Office of the Holy Supper – Post-Communion

Post-Communion

Saint Augustine said, “When that great Sacrament has been partaken, a Thanksgiving concludes all.” The liturgical Post-Communion is thus brief in most liturgies. The Lutheran rite consists of the *Nunc Dimittis*, which may be omitted, the Thanksgiving, the Salutation, the *Benedicamus*, and the Benediction.

The Nunc Dimittis

The *Nunc Dimittis* (Latin: “Now Depart”) is the song of Simeon from when he saw the promise fulfilled as he held the Christ child in his arms (Luke 2:29-32). It forms an appropriate and beautiful conclusion to the Divine Service, relating the mystery of the Holy Supper to that of Christ’s Incarnation. It expresses the personal appropriation of the “salvation prepared before the face of all people.” We stand with Simeon in awe of the profound mystery that the Father would give His only Son in the flesh for the salvation of our souls.

This was originally part of the Office of Compline, and was imported into the Divine Service in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, where it became part of the priest’s devotion. Luther did not carry it over into either his Latin or German Masses, but it appears in other German orders as early as 1525. The *Nunc Dimittis* is technically an optional part of the liturgy, but has become somewhat permanent in recent history.

The Thanksgiving

The Thanksgiving consists of a brief responsory and a collect. In keeping with the theme of thanksgiving, the pastor leads one of two responsories. The first is a verse that appears at the beginning of several Psalms (105, 106, 107, 118, 136). The pastor says, “Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,” and the congregation replies, “And His mercy endureth forever.” The alternate comes from I Corinthians 11:26: “As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.” These responsories urge the congregation to unite in the prayer that follows.

Luther either wrote or adapted the first collect for his German Mass in 1526. It expresses thanksgiving for the Sacrament, its function as a Means of Grace, and the goal of stronger faith and more fervent love among Christians. It is found in every Lutheran rite of the Divine Service. The second collect comes from a thirteenth century rite. Originally it was the prayer of the priest as he held the body and blood of Christ in his hands. Both are prayers of thanksgiving for the grace and salvation bestowed on us through this Sacrament. The congregation responds, “Amen,” as the prayer expresses their thoughts as well.

The Salutation

One last time the pastor and the congregation greet each other with these words. These words in this place send the people out into the world with the knowledge of the Lord’s presence, even as the Christians would greet each other with these words as they encountered each other during the week.

The Benedicamus

Historically the Mass concluded with the words, *Ite, missa est*, meaning “Go; it is the dismissal.” The people would respond, *Deo gratias*, meaning “Thanks be to God.” The *Benedicamus*, from the Latin meaning, “Let us bless [the Lord],” is a doxology found at the end of each of the five books of the Psalter (Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106, 150). This was a tenth century substitution. The response is the same: “Thanks be to God.” The response appropriately leaves the word “thanks” as the final expression of the congregation at every Eucharist.

The Benediction

We conclude the Divine Service with the Aaronic Benediction, the blessing God gave to Aaron and his sons to put His name upon the children of Israel (Numbers 6:22-27). This is the only benediction definitely commanded by God. We also recall here how the Lord blessed the disciples as he ascended (Luke 24:50). We believingly accept this blessing in our final “amen.”

The final word that falls on our ears from our gracious Lord is “peace.” This note is repeated several times in the Divine Service. This is the peace the world cannot give (John 14:27). We then offer a silent prayer of thanksgiving.

A final hymn may be sung at this point. It has not historically been included here. However, it is appropriate to praise the Lord at all times, especially when we have just been given the body and blood of Christ and had His presence and peace bestowed upon us. If a hymn is used, it is appropriate that it be a doxological hymn, a hymn of praise to the Trinity.

We then depart in the peace of the Lord.

Conclusion

The Divine Service is God’s gift to His people. He is present among us, forgives our sins, and grants us peace as we gather in His name. The Divine Service is not an option, just as breathing is not an option. The forgiveness of sins is vital, and we receive it nowhere besides the Divine Service. Through it we have the strength to return to the sinful world until God calls us to Himself.

An Explanation of the Divine Service

General Questions

Why do we chant some things and not others? In some places, everything in the Liturgy is chanted, even the Bible readings. We have texts and music for entire worship services to be chanted. It's more appropriate for everything to be all chanted or all spoken, but the way we do it now has become the common practice.

Why do we sit or stand when we do? To be honest, part of it is for comfort. But it's more a question of reverence. When we stand, we stand before God, a privilege we would not have except by the grace of Christ's sacrifice for us. We are seated for instruction, even as the Jews were seated as the rabbi instructed them. In some places, it is the practice to kneel for prayer.

Why do we make the sign of the cross so often? Notice the places in the Service where we make the sign of the cross: the Invocation, Absolution, the Creed, the Sermon, the Lord's Supper, and the Benediction. These are all places where grace is bestowed. In the Invocation, we call upon the Name of God and ask His presence among us. In Absolution we are given forgiveness of sins, again in the Name of God. In the Creed we confess the faith which God has given us, our faith in the Triune God. In the Sermon, we hear the Word of God, the good news of the salvation which Christ won for us on the cross. (You might also see Pastor make the sign of the cross three times as he prays before the sermon. He asks God to purify his thoughts, words, and heart, that he might be a worthy vessel of His Word, that it might be to the benefit of God's people.) At the Eucharist we receive the forgiveness of sins in the Body and Blood of Christ. And at the Benediction, we receive the blessing of God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In all these cases, we receive the Blessing of God, and we here remember our Baptism, where we were washed clean of our sins "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." At your baptism, the pastor signed you on the forehead and on the heart, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Liturgy Bible Study-Introduction

The Definition of Worship

What do the following two terms, which describe what happens in the Divine Service, mean?

- Sacramental
- Sacrificial

Introduction to the Liturgy

Define these five basic characteristics of the liturgy.

1. Liturgy is of the community.
2. Liturgy is daily.
3. Liturgy is anonymous.
4. Liturgy is powerful.
5. Liturgy is normative.

The Church Year

Describe (and give the liturgical color) for each season of the Church Year.

The Time of Christ:

Advent (What does “Advent” mean?)

Christmas

Epiphany (What does “Epiphany” mean?)

Lent/Holy Week

(Maundy Thursday) (What does “Maundy” mean?)

(Good Friday) (How is it good?)

Easter

Pentecost (What does “Pentecost” mean?)

Trinity Sunday

The Pentecost/Trinity Season

Look at the calendar in the front of the hymnal. What other festivals do we celebrate?
Why do we celebrate these festivals?

Liturgy Bible Study-Part 1

The Opening Hymn

What criteria are used in choosing an opening hymn?

Read Colossians 3:16. Why do we call ourselves a singing church?

The Invocation

Read Matthew 18:20. Why do we open our worship in the name of God?

Of what event in our Christian life are we reminded by the words of the Invocation?
Why?

Confession and Absolution

What was the historic practice of the Church regarding confession and absolution? Why have we gotten away from this practice?

What do we confess?

- Original sin:
- Actual sins:

What is the primary need for sinners?

Read John 20:21-23. By what right does the pastor offer God's forgiveness?

How do pastors know that a person is sincere in confessing and repenting of their sins?

Liturgy Bible Study-Part 2

Introduction to the Office of the Word

How did the Divine Service begin historically?

What do worshippers hear and do in the Office of the Word?

What are the three parts of the Office of the Word?

-
-
-

The Introit

What does the Latin word “introitus” mean?

What is the purpose of the Introit?

What are the 4 parts of the Introit?

-
-
-
-

Why do we as Christians include the “Gloria Patri” (Glory be to the Father . . .) in our use of the Psalms?

The Readings

What do the Greek words “Kyrie Eleison” mean?

Is the Kyrie another confession of sins? What is it? (Read Matthew 9:27, 15:22; Luke 16:24, 17:13)

The Hymn of Praise

What do the Latin words “Gloria in Excelsis” mean?

What is the purpose of the Hymn of Praise?

Where is the Gloria in Excelsis found in Scripture? With whom do we sing this hymn of praise?

Liturgy Bible Study-Part 3

The Salutation

How did the early Christians use the salutation?

What does the salutation do between the pastor and the congregation?

When does the salutation occur in the Divine Service? What does it point to?

What does "your Spirit" mean? What does I Corinthians 3:16 say about this?

The Collect

Read Philippians 4:6.

What is the purpose of the Collect?

What do the 5 parts of the classical pattern of the collect mean?

- The Address
- The Basis/Rationale
- The Petition
- The Benefit
- The termination

Divide this prayer into its five parts:

Almighty and everlasting God, because you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent, create in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily repenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God. now and forever .

The Readings

What are the Scriptures?

See Luke 4:16. How long has the reading of Scripture been part of worship?

See Revelation 1 :3. What does this say about the reading of Scripture?

The Alleluia Verse

What does the Hebrew word " Alleluia" mean?

Why do we omit the Alleluia verse during Lent?

The Gospel Lesson

Why do we give special honor to the Gospel lesson? What do we do that sets it apart?

What does the Gospel lesson tell us about that day's worship?

The Nicene Creed

What does the Latin word "Credo" mean?

What does Matthew 10:32-33 say about the confession of faith? What event in our life as Christians does our confession of faith point us to?

Hymn of the Day

How do we choose the Hymn of the Day?

The Sermon

Lutherans say that sermons are formed of Law and Gospel. What do these terms mean?

- Law
- Gospel

Why should the sermon never be omitted?

Liturgy Bible Study-Part 4

The Offerings

What do the offerings symbolize?

The Offertory

Read Hebrews 13: 15. What does it say about what offerings can be?

From where in the Bible does the offertory "Create in Me" come?

The Offering

Read James 2: 14-17. How does our faith show itself?

Read Genesis 4:1-5. What are our offerings? What is the distinction between what Cain offered and what Abet offered?

To what do our offerings go?

Are offerings just money?

The Prayer of the Church

Read Timothy 2:1-3. For what do Christians pray in the Prayer of the Church?

Liturgy Bible Study—Part 5

The Office of the Holy Supper

For whom is the Office of the Holy Supper reserved? Why?

Read Luke 24:13-35. How does Jesus make Himself known to us?

What three parts form the Office of the Holy Supper?

-
-
-

The Prefatory Sentences

What do the three Prefatory Sentences mean?

- The Salutation

- *Sursam Corda*

- *Gratias Agimus*

The Preface

What is the Preface?

What is the purpose of the three parts of the Preface?

- The Thanksgiving

- The Proper Preface

- The Ascription

Divide this Preface into its three parts:

It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God: For in the mystery of the Word made flesh Thou hast given us a new revelation of Thy glory, that, seeing Thee in the person of Thy Son, we may be drawn to the love of those things which are not seen. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying:

The *Sanctus*

What does the Latin word “Sanctus” mean?

What two Biblical hymns of praise does the Sanctus combine? Where do we find these in Scripture?

What does the Hebrew/Aramaic word “Alleluia” mean? What other phrase in the liturgy does it resemble in why it is said?

Liturgy Bible Study—Part 6

The Lord's Prayer

Where in Scripture is the Lord's Prayer?

Who can address God as "Father?" By what right?

Why are steeple bells rung during the Lord's Prayer?

The Words of Institution

Where in Scripture do we find the Words of Institution?

What does "consecration" mean? What is consecrated through the Words of Institution?

Why do we believe that the consecrated bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus?
Why do we take and eat it?

The *Pax Domini*

What do the Latin words "Pax Domini" mean?

Read Matthew 5:23-24. How do these verses relate to the passing of the peace?

The *Agnus Dei*

What do the Latin word "Agnus Dei" mean? Where in Scripture do we first find Jesus called this?

Distribution and Dismissal

What does God give to us through the ordinary means of bread and wine? What do we receive in this Sacrament?

What does the Hebrew/Aramaic word “Alleluia” mean? What other phrase in the liturgy does it resemble in why it is said?

Liturgy Bible Study—Part 7

Post-Communion

What is our attitude or response when we receive the forgiveness of sins in the Holy Supper?

The *Nunc Dimittis* (Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace)

Where in Scripture do we find the *Nunc Dimittis*? Why do we sing it after Communion?

The Thanksgiving

What three things are expressed in the post-Communion prayer?

-
-
-

The Benediction

Where in Scripture do we find this Benediction? What is the purpose of the Aaronic Benediction?

Name _____

Questions – Part 2

1. Why do we say the *Gloria Patri* at the end of each psalm?
2. Why do we say the *Kyrie*?
3. What purpose do the Hymns of Praise (“*Gloria in Excelsis*” and “Worthy is Christ”) serve? Why do we substitute other hymns during Advent and Lent?
4. Why do we sing “Worthy is Christ” on All Saint’s Day? Where in Scripture is this hymn found? By whom is it sung?

Name _____

Questions – Part 3

1. What is the significance of the Salutation?
2. What are the five parts of the classical pattern for the Collect?
3. Why do we include readings from the Old Testament in the Divine Service?
4. Why do we give special honor to the Gospel lesson?
5. Of what event in your Christian life are you reminded when we confess our faith in the Creed? Why?
6. What is the purpose of the sermon? Why does the pastor preach every Sunday?

Name _____

Questions – Part 5

1. What is the proper response to God's blessings to us?
2. What are the three parts of the Preface? Describe them.
3. What does "*Sanctus*" mean?
4. What two cries of praise combine to form the *Sanctus*? Where do we find these in Scripture?
5. What does "*Hosanna*" mean? What other phrase in the liturgy does it resemble?

Name _____

Questions – Part 7

1. What is our attitude or response when we receive the forgiveness of sins in the Holy Supper?
2. What does the *Nunc Dimittis* express?
3. Where do we find the Benediction in Scripture? What purpose does it serve?