



Welcome to worship at Our Savior Lutheran Church

Understanding what you will experience here

Learning the Liturgy: An introduction to *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*

Worship in word and sacrament is at the center of the Church's life. It is here that God acts through the means of grace to bring forgiveness, life, salvation and all the power of the gospel. For Lutherans, the Word and the sacraments are the means God uses to share God's love with the world. It is no surprise that we share with many other Christians a simple but ancient pattern for the Sunday assembly. You can see these four parts of our one service in our worship folder: **GATHERING**—The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God. This time can include confession and forgiveness (or thanksgiving for baptism) and song, but always includes a greeting and opening prayer. **WORD**—God speaks to us in scripture reading, psalm singing, preaching and song and we respond in creed and prayers. **MEAL**—a collection for the needs of the world and the mission of the church is gathered, the table is set, thanksgiving is offered and God feeds us in Holy Communion with the presence of Jesus Christ. **SENDING**—God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

GATHERING

God initiates our worship, gathering us by the call of the Holy Spirit. **GATHERING** is the name for the first part of our service. It is the threshold that prepares us for the Word and Meal to follow. The Gathering is the most flexible part of the service and might look different depending on the season or the specific circumstances. For example, in penitential seasons it might include confession and forgiveness, song, greeting, Kyrie (*Lord, have mercy*) and prayer. In festive times it might be very full with Thanksgiving for Baptism with sprinkling of the assembly and a procession during gathering song(s), a greeting, a canticle of praise (*Glory to God, This is the Feast*) and prayer. Gathering always includes at least the apostolic greeting and prayer of the day. Each season or circumstance will determine how simple or elaborate the Gathering will be. In any case the goal of the Gathering part of our liturgy is to welcome all into the assembly, expecting to meet Christ in each person present. The Gathering forms this assembly into a worshipping community and prepares the assembly to hear God's word.

Confession and Forgiveness

The **GATHERING** often formally begins with Confession and Forgiveness or Thanksgiving for Baptism. The minister begins with a Trinitarian invocation, and the assembly is invited to make the sign of the cross (indicated by a +), the sign that is marked at baptism. The presiding minister invites the assembly into a time of confession preceded by silence of sufficient length to allow time for people to examine themselves and to

indicate the weight of the actions in which we are engaged. The presiding minister then exercises the power to forgive sins, given by Jesus to the church, by declaring the forgiveness of God. Once again members of the assembly may make the sign of the cross (+) as the minister traces it over them. The cross is our only hope and the sign of our identity in Christ. Martin Luther teaches us to use this sign often, especially at the beginning and end of each day in prayer. On some festivals, we begin directly with a Gathering Song, reminding us that confession and forgiveness is not an essential prerequisite to every reception of Holy Communion.

Gathering Song(s), Greeting and Prayer of the Day

A Gathering Song usually follows Confession and Forgiveness or Thanksgiving for Baptism. During this time the ministers of the service take their places in front of the assembly. On festivals the procession is led by a processional cross as a sign that we follow the cross of Christ through life. The cross also leads us back into the world at the end of the liturgy. The ministers may bow toward the altar as the primary sign of Christ's presence.

After the Gathering Song, the minister greets the assembly with the words of the apostle ("The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..."). This greeting serves as a welcome, much as a host welcomes guests to a home. The assembly returns the greeting. The presiding minister may bow toward the assembly as a sign of respect for the holy people of God. Often we sing a simple cry for mercy, the Kyrie. "Kyrie" is Greek for "Lord." We still use the Greek title for this part of the service, because it is one of the oldest components of the liturgy. At other times a Canticle of Praise may be sung. In simpler times the prayer follows the greeting. The prayer of the day follows and reflects the theme of the day for each Sunday in the three-year lectionary. The assembly then sits to be attentive to the Word.

WORD

Following the Gathering part of the service of Holy Communion, the assembly then sits to be attentive to the Word. One of the ways the word of God is proclaimed is in scripture readings. As Lutherans, it is important to us to hear a rich fare of scripture each week. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, following the ecumenical Revised Common Lectionary, commends an Old Testament reading, a psalm, a New Testament reading and a gospel reading for each Sunday and festival. The assembly stands as the gospel is read to show the prominence of this reading as a testimony of the living Word, Jesus Christ, present in our midst. The prominence of the gospel is sometimes further heightened, especially on festivals, by a gospel procession, where the gospel is read in the midst of the congregation.

Music is a vehicle for the proclamation of the word of God. The psalm that follows the first reading is again being sung in many places. The psalms are Hebrew hymns, intended to be set to music. We welcome the risen Christ by standing and singing the Gospel Acclamation before the gospel reading. This church's statement on the practice of word and sacrament, *The Use of the Means of Grace* (authorized by the 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly), advises, "The use of a Bible or lectionary of appropriate size and dignity by those who read scriptures aloud, the use of this book in liturgical processions, and its placement on the reading desk or pulpit may bring the centrality of the word to visible expression."

The Gospel and a visible prayer

Evangelical Lutheran Worship suggests that the gospel be announced simply, "The holy gospel according to Matthew," for example. Other words are, of course, possible, but this is the announcement of an oral event—

one that is to be proclaimed and heard, more than simply read. Citing chapter and verse in this context is not necessary. The gospel is proclaimed for these people to hear now in this place. Preaching follows.

Proclamation in Preaching and Song

The sermon is an extremely important element in Lutheran worship, because here God's word of law and gospel are brought into our time and place to awaken and nourish faith. As the readings appointed for the day are opened up in the context of the church year, the preacher's call is to proclaim our need of God's grace and to offer that grace, equipping the community for mission and service in daily life.

The evangelical Lutheran expectation of preaching is to mercifully speak out loud the truth of our awful need, and at the same time, to give away God's free grace in Christ and to turn us in response to love of God and neighbor. Following the sermon in the service of Holy Communion, comes a uniquely Lutheran contribution to the western liturgy which we share in large part with other traditions. The Hymn of the Day is a central way in which the assembly takes its part in proclaiming God's word for the particular Sunday or festival. This is the principal hymn of the service and reflects the readings and theme of the day within the church's year. The assembly has heard the word proclaimed and preached and now joins its voice to that proclamation. The hymn of the day is a historic feature of the Lutheran liturgical tradition. The creed may follow.

Creed

A creed frequently follows the hymn of the day. Traditionally, the Nicene Creed is associated with Holy Communion and the Apostles' Creed with baptism. With restoration of frequent communion in Lutheran circles over the past 30 years, the practice of varying the use of creeds has been introduced into our worship. The Nicene Creed is usually used during the seasons of Easter, Advent and Christmas. The Apostles' Creed is suggested for the "green" seasons after Epiphany and Pentecost. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* suggests its use during Lent as well because of the baptismal associations of that season. It is not necessary to confess a creed each week since they were originally teaching documents for baptismal candidates. The Nicene Creed came to be used regularly in the Sunday Eucharistic service only in the eleventh century. Other parts of our service also express our biblical faith as well, especially the Thanksgiving at Table ("Eucharistic Prayer").

Prayers of Intercession

One of the ways we exercise our faith is by praying for the needs of all the world. The Prayers of Intercession remind us each week of our baptismal vocation as a priestly people of God. The assembly voices its assent to these petitions with a brief response after each prayer

The Peace of Christ

In the pattern for worship used in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the prayers are finally concluded with the peace. This greeting and gesture is the conclusion of the Word portion of the Holy Communion liturgy and the transition to the Meal. Like the prayer of the day at the conclusion of the Gathering preparing us for the Word, the peace functions as a seam between these parts of the service. This is a special moment. As the risen Christ stood among the disciples on the first Easter evening saying, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19, 26), so the presiding minister greets us and we speak this same gift to each other. The presiding minister, standing at the chair, speaks first, extending his/her arms in greeting (embrace!) toward the assembly. As the assembly responds, the minister may bow toward them in acknowledgement. Then the assembly greets each other with these words and a gesture, becoming the risen Christ to his or her neighbor. This is not the time for merely saying "hi," but a time to experience the risen Christ in the midst of the assembly. With this exchange of Christ's gift, the assembly then turns to the Meal.

MEAL

With the exchange of Christ's gift of peace, the assembly then turns to the Meal. By the mercy of God, the assembly will eat and drink the very promise they have been hearing in the scriptures. St. Augustine called Holy Communion, "visible words." From the time of the New Testament the regular pattern for Christian worship has been Word and Meal. Christ invites us to the Meal each Lord's Day. Following the Peace, the assembly is seated and two things happen simultaneously: a collection is taken for the mission of the church, and the table is set for the celebration of Holy Communion. Assembly song, choral or instrumental music, or other forms of music may accompany this action. The table is normally set by an assisting minister. After this an assisting minister may lead an offering prayer with the presiding minister standing back from the table until the conclusion. The offering prayer is one of the parts of the Meal that is optional. You will notice that while we frequently use one, there are some simpler times and seasons when an offering prayer not used at this point.

Great Thanksgiving Dialogue

After the Table has been set, and perhaps an assisting minister has led an offering prayer, the presiding minister comes to the center of the Table. Then the presider begins the ancient Great Thanksgiving. This thanksgiving starts with some of the most ancient texts of the liturgy, ones that are ecumenically well known in churches of various traditions—The *Lord be with you...Lift up your hearts...Let us give thanks to the Lord our God*. These words may be sung or spoken, depending on the season or occasion. The music too has been sung by generations of Christians. The important thing is that this is a *dialogue*, together the presider and assembly share in giving thanks at the table. These are words first of greeting, then of invitation to joyful thanksgiving for all of God's acts culminating in the gift of the Son. The presiding minister extends his/her hands in greeting, and as earlier in the service, may bow to the assembly in acknowledgment of their response. In a sweeping upward gesture, the presiding minister invites the assembly to lift up their hearts. The third line invites the assembly to join in giving thanks which begins with the preface for the day or season, singing the *Holy, Holy*, and then praying the Thanksgiving at Table or Eucharistic prayer which will include the account of the Last Supper.

Initial Thanksgiving

We have nothing but thanks to bring to the table, and so the presider moves to the altar to say the "preface," or "initial thanksgiving." We begin to give thanks using one of the fourteen seasonal prefaces in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. There are also prefaces appointed for specific life passages, such as funerals, weddings, healing liturgies and the like. The day, season or occasion determines which preface is prayed since each one gives thanks in relation to the season of the church's year or occasion for this service.

Singing Holy, Holy

The "Holy, Holy" traditionally called by the Latin title, Sanctus, continues the praise and thanks of the Great Thanksgiving. We were reminded in the preface that our thanks and praise are now joined to the praise of all the angels and the church of every time and place. This is their song. The first part of the song is based on the cry of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy Lord...." We too stand before the Thrice Holy One. The second part of the Sanctus, starting with "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," is found in Psalm 18:26 and is echoed in the Palm Sunday accounts of the gospels. The "one who comes" is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. At these words, some presiding ministers and others make the sign of the cross as an acclamation that the one who comes is indeed this crucified and now risen Savior. Because of his presence now with us at this table, in this bread and wine, we join in the acclamation of the end of the hymn, "Hosanna in the highest," that is, "Save now, O God most high, save us, save all things!"

Thanksgiving at Table

The presiding minister then begins one of the forms for the “thanksgiving at table,” traditionally called the Eucharistic Prayer or Prayer of Thanksgiving. Many others are available as well and anciently presiders improvised these prayers before they came to be written down. The shape of the thanksgiving at table or Eucharistic Prayer follows a common pattern: it begins by continuing the thanksgiving by proclaiming what God has done in creation and redemption, especially as this is summed up in Jesus and in his words at the Last Supper (Words of Institution) which are proclaimed at the heart of every Eucharistic Prayer.

Lord’s Prayer

In light of this great mystery that is now before us on the Table, all we can do is to pray in the words Jesus taught us. In the end, by God’s great mercy, we are given the words with which to stand before God. The Lord’s Prayer concludes the Great Thanksgiving.

Breaking of the Bread

The presiding minister may then speak an invitation to the table welcoming the assembly to the meal of Holy Communion. Once the bread has been broken the ancient hymn, “Lamb of God” is often sung. These are the words John the Baptist spoke when he saw Jesus coming (John 1:29). Now we address the risen Christ who gives his body and blood at this table as the true Lamb. The presiding minister normally gives the bread and oversees the distribution. Others, both lay and ordained assist in giving communion. While a pastor presides at Holy Communion, any baptized and trained lay person may serve as ministers of communion.

Communion

Whether the practice of the assembly includes kneeling or standing for communion, some matters involved in communion are common to us all. We all share together in the bread and cup having been made one by our baptism into Christ. On festival days at Our Savior you will receive continuous communion using intinction (dipping of the wafer into the wine). During non-festival days you will receive the bread and wine around the altar either kneeling or standing and be dismissed by the pastors.

Real Presence and Reception of the Elements

Holy Communion is the true body and blood of Christ, given with the bread and wine. As such it is important that this holy food be handled with deep reverence. The minister of communion addresses each communicant with the words, “The body/blood of Christ, given/shed for you.” Each person may respond; “Amen” to each of these sentences and to the gift itself. Since the earliest centuries, communicants have been encouraged to answer “Amen” to these words as a way of saying, “yes! So be it! This food and this community is the body of Christ, and for this I am thankful.” Since Holy Communion is a gift given and not something to be “taken,” communicants should extend their outstretched cupped hands in order that the minister may place the body of Christ in their palm. St. Cyril of Jerusalem spoke of this as making a throne for Christ. Singing during communion distribution is an opportunity for assembly song that provides focus—it is a centering action in the midst of much movement. When the communion is complete, the remaining food is brought back to the table. Some bread and wine may be set aside to commune those who are absent. Wine remaining in the cup may be consumed by the presiding minister or poured into the ground. Bread may be reverently stored for the next communion.

Prayer after Communion

After communion the table is cleared, or the vessels veiled, and the assembly stands. A canticle, such as “Now Lord, you let your servant go in peace” (the *Nunc dimittis*) may be sung. At Our Savior, we frequently will simply use a prayer after communion. This prayer is one of the transitional moments in the liturgy and as such is important. It leads us from the Meal to the Sending. There are a number of prayers after communion available; however the common pattern in these prayers is to give thanks for this communion in the body and blood of Christ and to ask that we be sent in the strength of this gift to continue God’s mission and service in a needy world. We are coming to the Sending.

Sending

The liturgy of Holy Communion concludes with the Sending. Like the Gathering section of the liturgy, the Sending is flexible—adaptable to the day or season and the gathered community. It is, however, normally the briefest of the four sections. The Sending turns us from the meal of Holy Communion back toward our life and ministry in the world. On certain days there might be a rite such as a blessing of items to be sent out, or an affirmation of our vocation as Christians. Most days we simply receive a blessing spoken by the presiding minister. As at the invocation, the assembly is encouraged to make the sign of the cross on themselves in reception of this blessing and as a reminder of the sign marked on them in Baptism. We sing a hymn during which there may be a procession of the altar ministers back to the baptismal font. From the font, an assisting minister sends the assembly into mission and we enthusiastically reply, “Thanks be to God!” When a processional cross is used, it leads the assembly back out into the world to encounter Christ in all the places life leads. We are sent. The liturgy is complete. Word and Sacrament are enough to sustain us for the journey ahead. We are sent only to be gathered again the next Lord’s Day in this continual cycle to encounter anew the Triune God in Gathering, Word, Meal and Sending all over again.

