

A Common Man's Guide to the Liturgy

Divine Service is the term Lutherans prefer for the church service. This term emphasizes that worship is primarily an act of God in serving us. Christ said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28).

The Divine Service is Divided into 3 Major sections. The sections are:

1. The Office of Preparation
2. The Office of the Word
3. The Office of the Sacrament

The Offices of Word and Sacrament are made up of 5 primary "hymns." These hymns are:

1. The Kyrie (Kyrie eleison means "Lord have mercy")
2. The Gloria in Excelsis (which means "Glory in the highest")
3. The Creed, which traditionally is chanted by the congregation
4. The Sanctus (which means "Holy")
5. The Agnus dei (which means "Lamb of God)

The Office of Preparation is not properly part of the Divine Service, but has been added due to private confession being allowed to fall into disuse. Where private confession is the norm, the Office of Preparation is unnecessary.

In the office of preparation we come into the presence of God in the same way we were called to faith in Baptism: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This invocation reminds us that it is God Who gathers us together, and that only the holy Triune God hears and answers prayers. The congregation responds with a confident "Amen," affirming that they are gathered in the name of the only true God.

As a return to Baptism, we drown our Old Adam by confessing our sins and receiving the life-giving absolution (forgiveness) that became ours when we were baptized. In the absolution we are reminded that the pastor does not forgive us on his own authority, but by the command and in the stead of Christ. We hear his words as if Jesus Himself stood before us.

The Office of the Word begins with the Introit, which sets the theme for the day. The introits are listed in The Lutheran Hymnal beginning on page 54. Listed with them are the Graduals, Collects, and the Epistle and Gospel lessons for each Sunday.

Introit means: "Entrance." During the introit, specifically at the Psalm verse, the pastor enters inside the Communion rail, symbolizing that we all enter the Holy of Holies only after our sins have been forgiven. When Christ died on the cross, the curtain that separated us from the most holy place tore in two from top to bottom. That curtain is symbolized by the communion rail, which is split in the middle to remind us that nothing separates us from God. The curtain of our guilt has been torn in two.

The Gloria Patri (which means “Glory to the Father”) is traditionally recited after the reading of a psalm. Because the introit contains a Psalm verse, the Gloria Patri is chanted here. The Gloria Patri is not one of the 5 major “Hymns” comprising the offices of Word and Sacrament.

The Kyrie is the first of the 5 hymns that make up the offices of Word and Sacrament. In this hymn we identify ourselves as sinners who have no hope in themselves. This is a “Garden of Eden” moment in the Divine Service, during which we identify with our first parents who sinned against God. They heard the promise of the coming “Seed of the Woman” who would destroy their enemy the devil. Based on that promise of the virgin-born Savior, Adam and Eve said things that showed they believed that promise. Adam named his wife “Eve” because she would be the mother of all the living (Genesis 3:20). Even brought forth a son and said, “I have brought forth a man, the Lord” (please note that this passage is poorly rendered in many translations).

Like Adam and Eve, we believe the promise of a Savior and Cry out, “Lord have mercy upon us!” We are not capable of living lives that are pleasing to God. Instead it is God who works in us both to will and to do according to His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13) The Kyrie is a confession of that truth, which looks to the birth of the Savior, Who would live the life that we could not live, and die the death that would pay for all our sin.

The mood of the Kyrie is mournful and very serious. It is played slowly, reflecting the very precarious position we are in: without Christ we have no hope.

The Gloria in Excelsis is the song of the angels who appeared to the shepherds when Christ Jesus was born. This is the “Christmas moment” in the Divine Service. By chanting this hymn we remind each other that the birth of Jesus brought real peace to earth. This is the “peace that the world cannot give.” No political organization, and no pristine place in nature can bring this peace. It is found only in the church. It comes only from Christ.

In the middle of this hymn is another rendition of the Kyrie. While most of the Gloria in Excelsis is fast paced and joyful, the portion beginning with the words, “O Lord God, Lamb of God,” the tempo slows and the chanting becomes quieter. We look again in desperation to the only One Who can help us. Then, beginning with the words “For Thou only art holy,” we speed up and joyfully proclaim why we turn to Christ: He is the only human being Who is holy in Himself. Only Christ, along with the Holy Ghost, is most high in the glory of God the Father. This praise hymn clearly shows us the difference between good and bad praise hymns. In this hymn we see that we praise God because He has given us salvation in Christ. All praising of God’s glory and might apart from salvation is emptiness in the sense that it is disconnected from the reason God is glorious and His power worth praising. God is glorious because He has given us salvation in His Son Jesus. His power is worth praising because by it He won salvation for us.

Following the Gloria in Excelsis we pray the collect. The collect, which comes from a collection of prayers, is the chief prayer for the day. It relates to the theme of the day, and is quite short. The formula at the end of the prayer reminds us that Jesus rose from the dead: "Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord Who lives..." The formula also reminds us that only the Triune God hears and answers prayer, and then only those prayers offered by faith in Jesus Christ. Most of the collects are addressed to the Father, but a few are addressed to the Son or the Holy Spirit. Again the congregation chants a confident "Amen" affirming belief that our prayers are heard and answered.

At this point various passages of Scripture are read. The passages may include readings from the Old Testament and Psalms. The readings must include the Epistle (a few of which are taken from the Old Testament) and Gospel lesson appointed for the day. The readings are from a "pericope" (pronounced "pear ICK oh pea") which literally means "a cutting around." A pericope is a list of readings. At Reformation we follow the Historic Pericope as found on pages 159 and 160 in The Lutheran Hymnal. There are a number of other pericopes, but the Historic and the ILCW (Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship) are the most commonly used pericopes by Lutherans. The ILCW is quite recent, and was developed after the Roman Catholic Church put out a new pericope after Vatican II. Unless modified (as it has been by the Wisconsin Synod) it has some serious omissions in it. The benefit of the ILCW is that it is a 3-year cycle instead of one, and it covers more of the Scriptures.

The Gospel lesson is the chief lesson of the day, and the sermon will in some way address it, even if the sermon text is one of the other readings. The Gospel lesson is the chief lesson not because it Gospel (The Gospels are made up of both Law and Gospel), but because it tells us the history of Jesus' life on earth.

We stand when the Gospel lesson is read to symbolize rising up to meet the Lord. If a Gospel procession takes place, the Gospel book is taken from the altar and carried down into the first few pews. After the reading it is returned to the altar. This action serves to remind us that Jesus came down from heaven, was with us a short while, and ascended back to heaven.

The Creed follows the reading of the Gospel, because we speak back to God what we have heard from Him. The Gospel creates faith in our hearts, and we confess that faith. Jesus said, "Whoever will confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father in heaven" (Romans 10:32) In Romans 10:9 we read, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." The creed is our confession of faith. It says what we believe in our hearts. Ephesians 2:8 says, "By grace you are saved, through faith..." Interestingly, while some churches quip: "Deed's not creeds," exactly the opposite is true: "Creeds, not deeds" are what save us as stated in Romans 10:9.

After the Creed comes the sermon, which comments on the Scripture readings. The sermon should lead us from the Word to the Sacrament. For many years preaching fell into disuse in the church. Because of this, Lutherans strongly emphasize the importance

of preaching. Preaching helps us understand the Scriptures. It applies the Scriptures to our lives today by showing us our sins, and then showing us our forgiveness in Jesus. In a sense, it is nothing more than a detailed confession and absolution.

Lutheran sermons are rather unique, because of their role of exposing our sin and then absolving us. Lutheran sermons are not Bible studies; they are preparation for the Lord's Supper. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you show the Lord's death until He comes." This passage, which is legitimately understood in the sense that the eat and drinking itself is proclamation as well as being a command to preach Christ crucified whenever we celebrate the sacrament, was used to elevate preaching back to its proper role of preparing the faithful to receive Christ's body and blood.

The Offering follows the sermon, and is our response to the forgiveness we receive in Christ. Biblically speaking, what we give back to God should be the first and best that we have. Giving to God things that we would otherwise throw away certainly says how little we actually value the gift of salvation God gives us in Christ. Giving an offering at all when we are behind in our credit card payments is nothing but stealing. Not having anything to give back to God tells us (at least for the typical person in our society) that we have a problem with materialism.

The General Prayer follow the offering and is the churches way of insuring that we lift up holy hands for all people. We should not be put off by the fact that for the most part the prayers in the divine service are "from the book" instead of "from the heart." While Lutherans are criticized for using printed prayers, one should not get the idea that the prayers composed and collected by the church through the years are anything less than "from the heart." In fact, such prayers ask for the things we should ask for. They start with the spiritual and general and work toward the material and specific. What "Jusswanna parayers" remember to pray for enemies, the salvation of the Jews, seasonable weather, the guidance of our leaders and unity in the church?

With the beginning of the Office of the Sacrament the whole tone of the service changes. Now the singing is much more melodic. The officiant chants, "The Lord be with you," and the congregation responds, "And with thy spirit." It is intriguing that Greek and Hebrew (even English comprehends this connection) use the same word to say "breath," and "spirit." The Scriptures tell us that God's word is spirit and truth. Here the ordained minister is blessed that Lord would be with his "spirit" just before He speaks the consecration (the same holds with the collect and the benediction). Truly the Lord will be with the congregation as they hear the Word, and with the minister as he speaks it.

The minister invites us to lift up our hearts, and we lift up sinful hearts of stone so that in the Holy Supper God might take from us our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh. We then give thanks to the Lord for this exchange, and move into the Sanctus.

The Sanctus brings us to holy week. We begin in the Old Testament with Isaiah. As we peer into heaven we confess that we are people of unclean lips. As the living creature

took a coal from the altar and touched it to Isaiah's lips thus cleansing him, so the minister touches our lips with Christ's body and blood thus cleansing us. Old and New Testaments are brought together in the Sanctus as we move into the song of Palmarum (Palm Sunday) urging Christ to "Save now, save now in the highest (to the utmost, in the highest heaven...)" We sing these two songs from the Old and New Testaments because we are here peering into the holy of holies itself, and expecting Christ to come now in a manner different: humbling riding on bread and wine.

The Minister prays the Lord's Prayer and recites the consecration. Here the Holy Spirit working through the words of Christ make Christ present in the Holy Supper. While we do not attempt to set a moment, we take Christ at His word so that after the consecration we can say with Luther: "Here the true Pascal Lamb we see, Whom God so freely gave us" (TLH 195:3). As it has been said: "If you ask the preacher what he is holding in his hand and he cannot confidently say that it is Christ's body, then you'd better find another preacher!" It is contrary to Christ's words "Take eat, this is my body," to suggest that Christ body and blood are not present before we receive them. Our Luther Confessions correctly assert: The minister shows forth the body and blood of Christ.

It is also important to realize that the Lord's Supper is the first place where "Another Gospel" is recognized. Many are the churches that claim to be Christian, but insist that Jesus didn't mean what he said. I've personally heard a liar so bold that in the consecration he said, "Jesus said, 'This represents My body.'" If one can tell such a bald faced lie in something so easily verified, how could he be trusted to be truthful in anything at all?

It is rather common for churches to teach that it is not Christ who comes to us in the sacrament, but we to him. Calvinists teach that the Holy Spirit lifts us up to heaven where we spiritually receive Christ Who is stuck there until the second coming. Roman Catholics now say we are mystically transported to the foot of the cross where are prayers combine with the prayers of Mary and the saints in the once for all sacrifice for sins.

You can be assured that if you receive the Lord's Supper and Reformation Lutheran Church you will be at 4435 SE Tualatin Valley Highway, Hillsboro, Oregon. You won't go to Christ; He will come to you. He will feed you on Himself and you will have life in you. You will dine here and now on that which you will eat and drink in heaven. Christ clothes Himself to serve. A lifetime of meditation is contained in the Lord's Supper section of TLH (hymns 304-316). This is the by far the strongest section of hymns in the The Lutheran Hymnal, following perhaps the weakest section, the hymns on Baptism!

We begin the sacrament peering into the holy of holies with Isaiah. We end having seen Christ with Saint Simeon and ready for death: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared before the face of all people.

Here then, after we have received the gift of salvation in a way that we can hear, see, touch, smell, and taste, we give thanks to God. The service ends with the minister raising

up his hands reminding us of Christ hanging on the cross. With that image before us he says, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee, the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." God told man that if he sinned he would die; that is the promise we have. The blessing has God preserving us because He destroyed Christ. God frowned on us because of sin, but the blessing has God smiling on us in Christ. God turned His face down away from us in disgust over our lack of holiness, and the blessing has Him gazing at us with open arms. We were His enemy, and in Christ He gives us peace. Amen. Amen. Amen!