

# THE DIVINE SERVICE

***"Everything in the Christian church  
is so ordered  
that we may obtain full forgiveness of sins  
through the Word and the Sacraments  
which are appointed  
to comfort and revive our consciences  
as long as we live."***

***(Large Catechism II.55)***



**(The 1547 three-panel altarpiece painting of Lucas Cranach the Elder at St. Mary's church in Wittenberg, Germany. The three panels depict Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Holy Absolution.)**



**(The 1547 altarpiece painting of Lucas Cranach the Elder at St. Mary's church in Wittenberg, Germany portrays Martin Luther preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified.)**

***"Faith is that worship which receives  
God's offered blessings;  
the righteousness of the law is that worship  
which offers God our own merits.  
It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped,  
namely, that we receive from Him  
what He promises and offers."***

***(Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV.49)***

Every Lord's Day we join together with fellow believers to *"lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven"* (Lamentations 3:41) in the Divine Service. In order to derive more meaning and benefit from our way of worship and so *"worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24), the following is an explanation of Divine Service, Setting Three from the Lutheran Service Book.

The Divine Service – also called the Order of Holy Communion or simply the Mass – has been in use since the first centuries of the early church, reflecting the description of believers in Christ after the Day of Pentecost who *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"* (Acts 2:42). Not only has the Divine Service stood the test of time, connecting us with the faithful who have gone before us, but its various parts are taken directly from the Bible and focus on Jesus Christ crucified and risen. It is called the Divine Service to express the biblical truth that our worship is first and foremost not something we do but God's service to us; as our Lord Jesus Himself says, *"I am among you as the One who serves"* (Luke 22:27).

Instead of abolishing the Mass altogether, the Reformer, Martin Luther, revised the Mass by removing the unbiblical and unchristian features that had crept into the medieval church. The result is that the Divine Service in its various forms that is in use in the Lutheran Church today is not merely a reflection of 16th century worship forms, but, rather, of that which was in vogue in the early church.

While God has not prescribed any particular liturgy or public worship service conducted according to a specific order, He does tell us that *"all things should be done decently and in order"* (1 Corinthians 14:40). Our Lutheran Confessions state in this regard: *"We keep traditional liturgical forms so that people may learn the Scriptures and that those who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may also pray"* (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV.1, 3).



The pastor then blesses us in the words of Numbers 6:24-26 in the **'Benediction'**, and we are assured once again of God's grace and peace. The sign of the cross signifies that all our worship has been centered in the cross of Jesus Christ.



In the Divine Service our Lord has spoken to us in His Word and has come to us in the Sacrament to bestow upon us His blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. We have responded to His gifts by returning to Him the sacrifice of our prayers and praise. We then go our homeward way to live our lives out in the world as redeemed, forgiven people of God and in the various stations in life in which He has placed us; as St. Peter declares: *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:9).



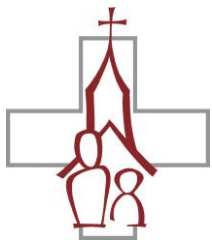
laid in the manger, nailed to the cross, risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

On that first Easter evening when Jesus appeared to his disciples, He stood among them and said, *"Peace be with you"* (John 20:19). Since He is now present among us in this Sacrament, the pastor speaks these same words of peace to us – the **'Pax Domini'**, for it is only by the body and blood of Jesus that was given and shed for us that we have peace with God and with one another.



In singing what is called the **'Agnus Dei,'** Latin for *'Lamb of God,'* we are reminded that only through the sacrifice of the sinless Lamb of God do we receive peace and forgiveness of our sins (John 1:29).

Those who are baptized and have been instructed in the chief teachings of the Christian faith, who are able to examine themselves, and who profess the same faith now kneel together at the Lord's Table to receive this heavenly meal (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-29). Hymns appropriate for Holy Communion and the season are often sung during the **'Distribution'** of the Sacrament.



Before we leave the Lord's house, how can we not but thank Him for the blessings received in this Sacrament? This we now do by singing the **'Nunc Dimittis'** – the song Simeon sang when he saw the Christ Child in the temple and held Him in his arms (Luke 2:29-32). We, too, have seen our salvation in this Sacrament and can now depart in peace. We then join in a prayer of thanksgiving that is based on Psalm 107: *"O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good."*

The Divine Service itself has two distinct parts – the sacramental part and the sacrificial part. These parts are often reflected by the pastor. In the sacramental parts God gives to us and the pastor faces the congregation. In the sacrificial parts we respond to God's gifts and the pastor thus leads the congregation in facing the altar which is a symbol of the throne and presence of God.

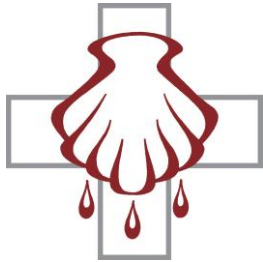
The Divine Service can further be divided into two other parts. Those parts that remain the same from week to week are called the 'Ordinaries' and contain the changeless truths of God's Word that we in our changeless needs always need to hear and receive. Those parts that do change from week to week are called the 'Propers' and are appropriate to the theme or emphasis of the particular day or season of the church year.



(Painting of a Lutheran Divine Service from the 1600's at a church in Muhlberg-Elbe, Germany)

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

The Divine Service usually begins with a hymn of invocation for the Holy Spirit, because it is only through His work in our hearts and minds that we can render acceptable worship to God; as St. Paul writes: *"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except in the Holy Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:3).



In Holy Baptism God has made us members of His family. We thus begin our worship with the same words spoken over us at our baptism. Based on Jesus' words of institution of Holy Baptism in Matthew 28:19, the **'Invocation'** declares that we worship the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and that we are now standing in His presence; for as our Lord has said, *"Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them"* (Matthew 18:20). The congregation responds with the 'Amen,' which means, as the catechism puts it, *"yes, yes, it shall be so."*



As children of God by virtue of our baptism, we want to do the will of our Father in heaven. Yet, every day we break His commandments. Standing in His presence, we recognize that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. We give expression to this need in the 'Versicle' taken from Psalm 124:8 and Psalm 32:5. After a brief time of silence for reflection on our individual sins, we join together in making **'Confession'** of our sins before the one holy God.



Those men who are called and ordained into the office of the holy ministry have been commissioned by our Lord to *"forgive sins"* (John 20:23). The pastor thus assures us of God's forgiving love in Jesus Christ in the **'Absolution'** and in the name of Christ and by

## SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

In obedience to Jesus' command and invitation, *"Do this in remembrance of Me"* (Luke 22:19), we now prepare to partake of the Holy Supper of our Lord. The communion liturgy begins with the **'Preface,'** which means *'introduction,'* as we are exhorted to lift up our hearts in thanksgiving to God for His many gifts, especially for the gift of His own Son. In the **'Proper Preface'** we remember specifically the blessings which the particular season brings to mind.



Our thanksgiving swells into the **'Sanctus,'** the Latin word for *'holy.'* This ancient hymn is based on the vision of God given to Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3) and on the song sung by the people when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:9). We thus unite our voices with the whole Church in heaven and on earth in adoration of the Son of God who came to this world for our redemption, who comes to us today in the Sacrament, and who will come again on the Last Day.

In 1 Timothy 4:5 the apostle Paul says that everything is *"made holy by the Word of God and prayer."* So we join together in the prayer that Jesus Himself taught us to pray (Matthew 6:9-13) – the **'Lord's Prayer'**.



The **'Words of our Lord'** – His institution of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25) are then said by the pastor. The bread and the wine are thereby consecrated or set apart for holy use, and in and with and under the bread and the wine we now also receive the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ – the same body and blood that was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary,

been selected, as such, because they are Bible-based and Christ-centered. They have been written and composed by authors and musicians from nearly *"every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages"* (Revelation 7:9) over the past 2,000 years.



Jesus appointed the apostles so that *"repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations"* (Luke 24:47). Likewise, St. Paul reminds his co-worker Timothy to *"preach the Word in season and out of season"* (2 Timothy 4:2). The pastor now applies the Word of God, usually one of the appointed Scripture Readings, to our everyday life and unfolds before us the great truths of God's Word concerning *"Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Corinthians 2:2). Our Lord tells us to pay close attention to the **'Sermon'** for it is really He Himself who is speaking to us through the pastor; as He says: *"the one who hears you hears Me"* (Luke 10:16).

We then rise to sing the **'Offertory'** – a portion of Psalm 51, in which we ask God to cleanse and renew us by the Word that we have just heard. In gratitude to God for His Word of truth and life, we *"honor the Lord with your wealth"* (Proverbs 3:9) by giving our offerings in accordance with St. Paul's instructions, *"on the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper"* (1 Corinthians 16:2).



In St. Paul's instructions on worship, he says, *"I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people"* (1 Timothy 2:1). This we now do in the **'Prayer of the Church'** in which we pray for the church, for our congregation and its members, for our nation, and for all people in their various needs of body and soul; and in which we also ask God to prepare us to receive another of His gifts – the holy Sacrament.

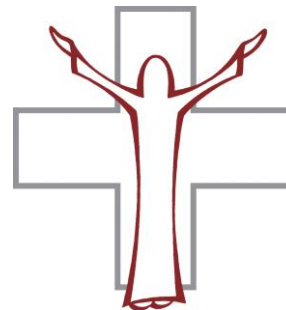
Christ's own authority and command he actually forgives us our sins. Having received forgiveness of our sins we are now able to truly worship God aright; as the psalmist declares: *"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart"* (Psalm 24:3-4).

## SERVICE OF THE WORD



The theme of the day is announced in the **'Introit,'** a Latin word that means *'entrance.'* It marks the actual beginning of the service and the entrance of the pastor to the sanctuary or altar area. The Introit usually consists of a psalm, the hymnal of God's Old Testament people, that is either said, chanted, or sung.

The **'Kyrie'** is a Greek word that means *'O Lord.'* At the time of Jesus, Roman citizens would greet the Caesar in a similar way when he visited their city. The Lord of lords and King of kings, Jesus Christ, is now visiting us in His Word. We thus greet Him with the words of blind Bartimaeus: *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me"* (Mark 10:47). As citizens of heaven, we, like Bartimaeus, know that Jesus alone can help us, the church, and the world.



God's answer to the 'Kyrie' is the redemptive work of Christ. For this we thus adore Him by singing the **'Gloria In Excelsis.'** This is an ancient and beautiful hymn or canticle that begins with the angels' Christmas carol (Luke 2:14), swells into a profound adoration of the Holy Trinity, and centers in *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29).



We then pray the **‘Collect of the Day’** – a short prayer that collects or gathers our thoughts and needs as they apply to the theme of the day. The congregation responds with the 'Amen', believing that God hears our prayer and will answer it according to His will. Before we pray, the pastor and people greet one another in the **‘Salutation’** – a Christian greeting based on 2 Timothy 4:22. Its meaning might be expressed in this way: “Dear people, may Christ enter your hearts through the Word of God about to be read and proclaimed.” “Pastor, may He also be with you as you read and proclaim His Word.”



At the time of Jesus various parts of the Old Testament – the Law and the Prophets – were read in the synagogue services. This custom was not only carried over into the early church, but it also has God's own command; as St. Paul says, *“Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture”* (1 Timothy 4:13). Since our faith and life is only *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone”* (Ephesians 2:20), we now listen to what God said through the prophets concerning the coming of the Saviour and what He did for His people Israel in the **‘Old Testament Reading’**.

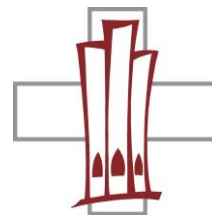
The custom of singing a portion of a psalm or an anthem between the readings, called the **‘Gradual,’** comes from the Jewish synagogue service.

A portion of one of the letters of the apostles in the **‘Epistle Reading’** concerning the faith and life we have in Christ is then read. These selections of readings have been chosen for the different days of the church year over a period of centuries and present the fundamental teachings of our faith and reflect the theme of the day.

The third and final reading is from one of the four evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and centers in the person and work of Jesus, recording the very words He spoke and recounting the very deeds He did. Before the **‘Holy Gospel’** is read, we stand and sing the **‘Alleluia and Verse’** in recognition of the truth that Jesus Himself is in our midst through His Word. After the reading we thus praise Him for His gift of salvation.



In response to the Word of God that has just been read, we confess our faith in the Triune God by saying the **‘Creed,’** a Latin word that means *‘I believe.’* The Apostles' Creed began as a baptismal confession and is confessed today in the order of Holy Baptism. The Nicene Creed, usually confessed when Holy Communion is celebrated, was formulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and defines clearly the two natures of Christ; namely, that He is true God and true man. By confessing one of the creeds, we are united with fellow believers of all times and in all places and are thus *“building ourselves up in our most holy faith”* (Jude 20). Moreover, as St. Paul reminds us, *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved”* (Romans 10:9-10).



The chief hymn of the service, the **‘Hymn of the Day,’** which follows, reflects the theme of the day or season of the church year. In accordance with the words of St. Paul, *“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God”* (Colossians 3:16), the hymns that we sing in our worship services focus primarily on what God has done for us and what He has made known to us in His Word. The hymns in the Lutheran Service Book have