

Worship Terminology: What does it mean?

What does "worship" mean? Naturally we think of our praise and thanksgiving to God, through which we acknowledge Him as our majestic Creator and Redeemer. But before we can do this, God must come to us with His saving gifts. When Lutherans say "worship," we include both activities. The term "divine service" gets across this twofold action in our Christian gatherings. "The idea is that God serves us with His gifts in Word and Sacrament, and we serve Him by responding in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving" (Lutheranism 101: Worship, p. 48). The old Greek word "liturgy" means much the same: "Properly speaking, it refers to the Divine Service in which God serves His people with the gifts of Word and Sacrament. 'The Liturgy' is also used to refer to the historic rite (order) of the Divine Service" (Lutheranism 101: Worship, p. 174).



"The highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness" (Ap 4:310, Tappert trans.).

"The name of the Lord will be great (Malachi 1:11). This is accomplished by the preaching of the Gospel. Through this preaching, Christ's name is made known and the Father's mercy, promised in Christ, is recognized. The preaching of the Gospel produces faith in those who receive the Gospel (Romans 10:17). They call upon God, give thanks to God, bear troubles for their confession, and produce good works for Christ's glory. (Ap 24:32, McCain trans.)

The following section will walk you through some of the "Lutheran Buzzwords" you may encounter from your first steps through the door and into a typical Divine Service at your local Lutheran Church–Canada (LCC) congregation. If you are coming from a different denominational background, or even if you have never stepped foot in a church before, you may find that you are already familiar with many of these terms. It is helpful to keep in mind that this glossary of worship terminology approaches these words from a confessional Lutheran context.

Preparation Rite: Confession and Absolution

We prepare our hearts and minds for worship...



Pre-Service Music

Pieces of music to help the congregation prepare for worship and introduce some of the themes in the service.

Invocation

From the Latin “to call upon.” The words “In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28:19b) are spoken at the beginning of the service and remind us of our Baptism (LSB p. xxv).

Confession of Sins

A general prayer where the pastor and congregation confess their sins committed against God and neighbour, asking for God's mercy and forgiveness on account of Christ paying the price of our sins by His bitter sufferings and death.

Absolution

Announcement of forgiveness spoken by the pastor, on behalf of God, following the confession of sins (LSB p. xxiv).

Service of the Word: Divine Service

God serves us His gifts of life and salvation through the proclamation of His Word...



Introit

From the Latin for “enter.” Psalm verses sung or spoken at the beginning of the Divine Service (LSB p. xxiv).

Antiphon

A verse of Scripture repeated at the beginning and end of a psalm or Introit (LSB p. xxiv).

Gloria Patri

Latin for “glory to the Father.” A trinitarian doxology used to conclude a psalm or introit (LSB p. xxiv).

Kyrie

From the Greek “Kyrie Eleison,” which means “Lord, have mercy” (Mark 10:47).

Gloria in Excelsis

Latin meaning “glory in the highest” (Luke 2:14). The traditional Hymn of Praise in the Divine Service (LSB p. xxiv).

Salutation

From the Latin word for “greeting.” It refers to an intimate dialogue between the pastor and congregation. The pastor says, “The Lord be with you” (2 Tim. 4:22), followed by the congregation’s response “And also with you” or “And with your spirit” (LSB p. xxv). When the Pastor says his part, “it confesses that Christ is coming to us in the Word and Sacrament. In our response, we recognize that the pastor has received the gift of the Holy Spirit in ordination so that he can pray on behalf of the congregation, preach the Word, and administer the Sacrament.” (p. 92 from Lutheranism 101: Worship by Rev. Dr. Thomas Winger).

Collect

A brief, structured prayer, usually consisting of five parts: address to God, basis for the prayer, petition, desired benefit, or result, and trinitarian conclusion (LSB p. xxiv).

Gradual

A liturgical response, drawn from the Bible, that follows the Old Testament Reading (LSB p. xxiv).

Alleluia

Hebrew word meaning “praise the Lord.” Also spelled "Hallelujah" (LSB p. xxiv).

Creed

From the Latin for “I believe.” Words of faith confessing the teachings of Holy Scripture (LSB p. xxiv). The three Ecumenical Creeds are the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

Hymn of the Day

A hymn that is a “proper” appointed to fit the Gospel or theme of the day. They reinforce the message of the Gospel, and they allow congregations to learn the core hymns of the Lutheran church.

Prayer of the Church

A general prayer, where, on behalf of the congregation, the pastor lays the particular needs of the congregation at the throne of God, asking that He would hear their prayer according to His will. Each petition ranges from individual needs (comfort in sorrow, sickness, mourning, etc.) and the needs of the whole world (peace and good government, good weather, abundance of crops, salvation of all mankind, and the needs of the whole Christian Church on earth). In addition, it also includes petitions for individuals to remember their baptismal covenant, have a right and worthy reception of the Holy Sacrament, and lastly, for a peaceful and gracious end to our earthly life.

Litany

A structured form of prayer for all conditions of humanity, consisting of a series of petitions and responses (LSB p. xxv).

Service of the Sacrament: Divine Service

God serves us His gifts of life and salvation in the Lord's Supper...



Preface

The versicles and responses at the beginning of the service of the Sacrament, followed by the Proper Preface, which changes from season to season (LSB p. xxv).

Sanctus

Latin for “holy.” The Sanctus is the song of praise sung by us on earth with the saints, the angels, the archangels, and all the company of heaven. It is based on the song of the seraphim that Isaiah saw flying around the throne of God in heaven. It also quotes the words of the crowds during Jesus’ triumphal entry, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 21:9). We sing this, acknowledging that Christ is the Blessed one that comes to us in His body and blood to give us salvation. The word “Sabaoth” that appears in the Sanctus is Hebrew for “heavenly hosts,” including “angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven.” The word “Hosanna” is from the Hebrew “save us now.”

The Words of Institution

The words of Jesus, spoken by the pastor over the bread and wine in the Service of the Sacrament, by which the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received.

Pax Domini

Latin for “peace of the Lord” (John 19:20).

Agnus Dei

Latin for “Lamb of God” (John 1:29). A threefold repetition of the words of St. John the Baptist who pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 14:29). Through these words, we confess that Christ is truly present in the consecrated bread and wine, and that through these gifts, He shows us mercy, and grants us peace.

Distribution

The true body and blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine are distributed to the congregation and pastor for the forgiveness of their sins. As the pastor distributes the elements, he speaks the words, “The true body of Christ given for you”, and “The true blood of Christ shed for you.” The word true is emphasized to show that the body and blood of Christ are truly, physically present in the bread and wine, thus dismissing a view that they are just spiritually present or a mere symbol. When all the elements have been distributed, the pastor dismisses the communicants with a blessing: “The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen and preserve You in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart in Peace.” (LSB p. 164, 181, 199, 210, and 218). The congregation responds with “Amen.”



Post-Communion Canticle

The chief canticle sung at the end of Holy Communion is the Nunc Dimittis. It Latin for “now [let your servant] depart,” from the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32). “Early Lutherans saw that Simeon’s song fit perfectly at the close of Communion, because like Simeon, we have received the very flesh of Jesus and received God’s salvation.” (p. 106 from *Lutheranism 101: Worship* by Rev. Dr. Thomas Winger). Because of this we can depart not only the church building, but also our very life, in peace, knowing that God has forgiven us our sins, and that we will spend eternity with Him.

Post-Communion Collect

A prayer to God thanking Him that He has given us a precious gift in the body and blood of Christ for our forgiveness, life, and salvation. We also pray to God that “The Lord’s supper may strengthen our faith in Him, and our love for our neighbour.” (p. 106 from *Lutheranism 101: Worship* by Rev. Dr. Thomas Winger).

Benedicamus

Latin for, “bless we [the Lord].” It is the common words of thanks and praise to God from the psalms. The congregation’s response “Thanks be to God” marks the end of the Divine Service and Daily Offices (LSB p. xxiv).

Benediction

A blessing from the Lord, spoken by the pastor at the conclusion of the Divine Service. The Aaronic Benediction (The Lord bless you and keep you...) is from Numbers 6:24-26. The Pauline/Apostolic Benediction (The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God...) is from 2 Corinthians 13:14. The Aaronic Benediction is reserved for the Divine Service, and the Pauline/Apostolic Benediction is reserved for the Daily Offices.

Learn more at:

www.lutheranchurchcanada.ca/resources/worship-terminology/

About the Project:

The Worship Terminology Webpage developed by Andrew Hayes, LCC Intern 2022, is designed to assist in equipping Lutheran Church–Canada congregations and beyond to better understand why Lutherans worship the way we do through exploring the timeless treasure that is the historic liturgy and Divine Service.

All photos on this page feature actual Lutheran Church–Canada churches. A special thank you to our photographer, Anna Kraemer, who served as LCC’s Communications Intern during the summer of 2021.