

Evangelical
and Catholic:
the
Sunday Liturgy
of the
Lutheran Church

The Rev. Dr. David M. Wendel
Saint Luke's Lutheran Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado

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I. Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of a series of “Worship Letters” written for the worshipping community of Saint Luke’s Lutheran Church from September 2000 through June of 2002. For some time, I had wanted to offer in-depth instruction to the members of our parish with regard to worship within the one holy catholic and apostolic tradition, especially as it shaped the Sunday liturgical life of Saint Luke’s. Initially, my intention was to offer this instruction during the Sunday Adult Class. However, those who participate in our Sunday Adult Class are most often those who worship regularly and have the deepest appreciation for the Sunday liturgy. My desire was to reach the most members with this instruction, that the worship lives of all in our parish might be enriched by a more full understanding of what we do in Sunday worship, and why we do it. It seemed the best way to make this instruction available to all was through a series of Worship Letters in the monthly newsletter.

I never imagined the series would be as lengthy as it has been, but my desire was to truly provide an extensive discussion of our Sunday worship, explaining as fully as possible the biblical, theological and traditional reasoning behind everything we do here at Saint Luke’s. The response to this series on worship has been positive. Many members of the parish have talked with me about what they have learned, and some have told me they’ve been sending these Worship Letters to friends and family who have much appreciated a deeper understanding of worship that is evangelical and catholic. The one suggestion that has come up again and again is that I compile these letters into a booklet that might be reviewed from time to time, shared more readily with new members and those unfamiliar with historic liturgy, and be a resource for anyone interested in Christian worship within the Lutheran tradition.

This booklet is such a compilation. Keep in mind as you are reading that this series deals specifically with worship here at Saint Luke’s, and why we have chosen certain practices and ways of celebrating the liturgy. As pastor of this parish, of course, I have a vested interest in educating members in why we worship the way we do. Other parishes do things differently, and I have tried to reflect honestly about varied practices.

I have also tried to indicate where I have drawn specifically from other writers and scholars. While I never intended this to become a booklet, I did try to cite references when possible. The fact is over twenty years of ordained ministry and pastoral teaching, I have incorporated much from other books and authors and include those thoughts without realizing that I may be quoting, for example, from a book I read back in 1984 while preparing a sermon on the Lord’s Supper. Though this booklet is not being published, formally, I have some uneasiness putting the series in booklet form as I never wrote these letters in scholarly style (with footnotes and bibliography), but as pastoral letters for the edification of our parish. If I have failed to adequately quote a particular author or source, I apologize and would be glad to cite such in the future if made aware of the oversight.

My hope and prayer is that whomsoever receives a copy of this booklet will find in it a wealth of information, instruction, and most of all, faith in Jesus Christ present in Word

and Sacrament. I hope and pray that your worship life will be enriched as you enter more deeply into the great liturgical history that has shaped the service of Word and Sacrament within the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. May God bless you as you seek to enter more fully into the majesty and mystery of the Word made flesh, present within the community of believers whenever they gather for Word and Sacrament!

II. Christian Worship Begins with Jesus

As mentioned above, the aim of this booklet will be to discuss the corporate worship life of the Church of Jesus Christ, how our Sunday worship service was formed through the ages, and what is the meaning and value of worshipping together as a community of faith.

I hope this doesn't sound boringly abstract and uninteresting. I hope to be very specific and concrete, bringing the theology of worship into focus through discussion of the specifics of our liturgy: why do we worship; why do we worship on Sunday; how did our worship come to revolve around Word and Sacrament; why do we kneel; why does our congregation have a so-called "crucifix"; why do some people in our church make the sign of the cross; what is a choir; etc. I certainly want to present the theological foundations of Christian worship in these letters, but to do so as it relates to and shapes the very practical things that we do each Sunday. I hope to answer your questions through this discussion.

I would like for this booklet to inform you about worship, but also to excite and encourage you in your worship life. And that will excite and encourage our worship life as a community of believers. That is my ultimate goal. So...

Where does one begin to talk about Christian worship? I would choose to begin with Jesus.

With all the accounts in Holy Scripture of Jesus teaching and preaching and ministering on the hillside, by the sea, in a boat, and so on, it would almost seem Jesus ministered exclusively outside. Some mis-informed individual might even say, "Jesus didn't spend time in church, He was always outside where the people were!" This would be grossly mis-informed, and mistaken. Because the truth is, Jesus' ministry was "synagogue-based"!

The most powerful motivation for us to be in worship every Sunday comes from the example set by Jesus. St. Luke writes in 4:16, "And Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day."

If you survey the Gospels, what you find is that Jesus' ministry centered on preaching and teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was one day out of seven, so, of course, Jesus preached, taught and ministered wherever he went throughout the week. But on the Sabbath, it was Jesus' custom to go to Sabbath service in the synagogue. Listen to just a few of the references to Jesus' ministry in the synagogue: "Jesus went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues..." (Mt 4:23); "Jesus made a tour through all their towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues..." (Mt 9:35); "Jesus moved on from there and went to their synagogues..." (Mt 12:9); "in Capernaum, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach..." (Mk 1:21); "On leaving

the synagogue, Jesus went to the house of Simon...” (Mk 1:29); “With the coming of the Sabbath, Jesus began teaching in the synagogue...(Mk 6:2); “Jesus came to Nazareth and went into the synagogue...(Lk 4:16); “on another Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach...(Lk 6:6); “One Sabbath day, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues...(Lk 13:10); “Jesus taught this doctrine at Capernaum, in the synagogue...(Jn 6:59); “I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple...” (Jn 18:20).

These are just some of the references to Jesus’ “custom” with regard to the synagogue and Sabbath worship. The simple fact is, on the Sabbath, Jesus participated in the synagogue worship service. What we also see from the witness of scripture, is that in the worship service, Jesus taught and preached. That was his role. Of course, in his formative years, he would have gone to Sabbath service with his father and sat with the men in the synagogue to sing, pray, listen to the rabbis and participate fully as a Jewish male. But as an adult, after his baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus took his proper place in the Sabbath service...as The Rabbi, as the one chosen to read and proclaim the scriptures.

In that sense, Jesus continues in that role. The first half of the historic liturgy of the Church is what we call “The Liturgy of the Word”, and it is basically the synagogue Sabbath service. The first half of our Sunday worship service is very much like the synagogue service that Jesus would have attended in Israel around 30 A.D. It included singing, prayers, readings from the Holy Scriptures, (the Law and the Prophets), and a rabbi expounding the scriptures, teaching and interpreting them for daily life. Christians, from the very beginning, worshiped in the synagogue on the Sabbath, continuing to observe and keep the Sabbath. When Christians were finally expelled from synagogues (and Judaism!) because they worshiped Jesus as the Messiah, Christians simply took the same Jewish Sabbath service form, and moved it to Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. Christians have been using that same form from Jesus on. When Christians gather for Sunday worship today, we consider that Jesus is still present and presiding and preaching/teaching, through the work of the called, ordained pastor chosen to minister in Christ’s name and place. In the Christian congregation gathered for worship, Jesus is both Rabbi and High Priest, presiding over the Liturgy of the Word (lessons/sermon), and the Liturgy of the Meal (the sacrifice of the Lord’s Supper). This is why Sunday worship is so important to Christians...because when we gather on Sunday morning, we gather not just with each other, but with the Lord of the Church who calls us together.

You might ask, “How is it that Christians worship on Sunday, when the Sabbath (of the Ten Commandments) is clearly Saturday?”

When Christians were expelled from synagogue Sabbath worship and Judaism, we don’t know precisely who made the decision to worship on Sunday, and what their reasoning was for moving their worship service to Sunday morning. We do know, however, that by the end of the first century, Sunday morning was the common time of the Christian worship service, and this practice was nearly universal. Sunday, the “eighth day”, as it was sometimes known, was the natural day of Christian worship because it is

“the Lord’s Day”; the day on which Jesus, the Christ was resurrected to give new life to the world. In fact, in many places the custom was to gather for worship before dawn, to connect more directly with Jesus’ resurrection. (Pliny, Roman Governor of Bithynia and Pontus described the Christian Sunday service in a letter to the Emperor Trajan about 111-112 A.D.) The Christians then separated for the remainder of Sunday, coming together again in the evening for the Lord’s Supper, a communal meal that included the passing of bread and cup, in remembrance of Jesus’ Last Supper and in fulfillment of his command to “Do this for the remembrance of me.”

For your information, the practice of this evening meal seems to have ended when the Emperor Trajan issued an edict forbidding the existence of “clubs” and “associations” and evening meetings (when “subversive activities” might be planned or undertaken). It appears most Christians heeded this edict, and with the end of the Sunday evening “sacramental” meals, the Lord’s Supper “ritual” with only bread and wine were joined to the Sunday morning synagogue service. This allowed the Christians the chance to continue to have the Lord’s Supper, to “do this in remembrance of me”, while not violating the emperor’s edict regarding evening meetings.

This change also addressed concerns within some churches that the evening meal was being abused by some more powerful, influential and wealthy members, over against poorer, more common folk. St. Paul talks about this abuse in his epistles, saying that there is little love, respect, or regard for all members of the body, when well-to-do members of the church arrive early and have finished eating before others have arrived. In fact, some of those who came early and began eating, were also drinking and were drunk by the time other working class folk arrived (see I Corinthians 11:17-33). It was this situation of lack of discipline and drunkenness that Paul addresses in his well-known injunction, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord...For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body (the Body of Christ; the community of all believers), eats and drinks judgement upon himself.” (I Corinthians 11:27-29) Separating the sacramental ritual of bread and wine from a complete evening meal, uniting it with the Sunday morning synagogue worship service “solved the problem” St. Paul is citing in the early church. By about the year 150 A.D., the early Christian Father, Justin Martyr reported to the Emperor Antonius Pius and the Senate of Rome in his First Apology, that Christians practice a unified service of Word and Sacrament on Sunday morning.

Back to the original question, “How is it that Christians can worship on Sunday, when the Sabbath (of the Ten Commandments) is clearly Saturday?” Christians have remembered Jesus’ own words, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath.” (Mk 2:27). In one sense, Jesus is here affirming freedom for Christians with regard to which day they observe as a Sabbath. However, in a deeper sense, Sunday took on a new meaning for the earliest Christians. Initially, Christians continued to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest, following largely the Jewish attitude towards the Sabbath. There were scores of rules and regulations governing what was work, and what was not work on the Sabbath, so that faithful Jews could be careful not to break the

commandment for “Sabbath rest”. The earliest Christians kept the Sabbath commandment and respected Saturday as a day of rest and refreshment. Sunday, however, was a day for celebrating the Lord’s resurrection. Not only was Jesus raised on Sunday, but his post-resurrection appearances were on Sunday. There was a tradition which even affirmed that Jesus would come again on a Sunday, because Sunday was uniquely the time of his resurrection appearances. It made sense, then, that Christians would want to be together on Sunday to celebrate His risen presence among his disciples. Dr. Frank C. Senn writes in his book *Christian Liturgy; Catholic and Evangelical*, that “the designation of Sunday as the eighth day served a useful purpose in indicating that the Lord’s Day (Sunday) was not a substitute or an equivalent of the Sabbath. The Sabbath remained a day of rest, commemorating the creation of the world. The Lord’s Day was a day of messianic fulfillment, the day on which Jesus the Christ rose from the dead and inaugurated the new creation.” (Senn, p. 88)

It is for this reason that Christians, by and large, observe Sunday as the day of worship, communion, baptism and celebration. Every Sunday is a celebration of Easter, which took place on Sunday. It is not the day of creation, but of re-creation and new life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each and every Sunday of the church year is intended to be a worthy observance of Easter, in the light of the changing themes of the scriptures of the lectionary (schedule of appointed readings). Christians believe that what happened on Easter Sunday is of such importance, of such magnitude, of such value not only to us, but to the whole world throughout the ages, that the day of resurrection, Sunday, must, **MUST** be marked with worship every week. There are no exceptions. There is no Sunday of the year when we do not have worship. We celebrate the resurrection of our Lord **AT LEAST**, every week! Which brings us back to where we began.

We started by asking, “where does one begin to talk about Christian worship?” The answer is, with Jesus Christ. In Christian worship, we focus on our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, because we are reconciled to God through the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, all of worship takes place in and through Jesus Christ. We can approach the throne of God in worship, only through Jesus, who has redeemed us, and “made us worthy to stand before (God), and to serve Him as His priestly people” (Eucharistic Prayer of Hippolytus of Rome, 100-200 A.D., see I Peter 2:4-10). We worship on Sunday out of respect for and recognition of what Jesus has done for us, through His resurrection. Life, health, hope and salvation would not be possible, were it not for Jesus’ resurrection on Easter Sunday. We owe Him, not only our lives, but our eternal lives. We return to Him at least a part of what we owe, when we come together on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, to celebrate His resurrection!

III. What is Christian Worship?

At its most basic, worship can be understood as “the response of the creature to the Eternal”, as defined in her book, *Worship*, by Evelyn Underhill. Certainly, this is a definition that could be applied to any act of human worship, not specific to Christian worship. And it is appropriate, in that it seems to be a part of our human nature, even before the fullness of Christian revelation, for human beings, as creature to want to respond to the Eternal, to our Creator. Obviously, God must have created humans, from the very beginning, with this propensity, this need to connect with our Creator in a ritual act of formal response. The earliest evidence found shows that even at 180,000 to 120,000 B.C., prehistoric hunters observed some sort of worship ritual as a response to their understanding of God. Of course, their understanding was limited, as was all prehistoric religious experience, as humanity awaited further revelation, and God’s future unveiling of Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But even with limited knowledge and experience of God, humans expressed themselves and responded to their Creator in ritual acts of worship.

But what is ritual? Essentially, anthropologists and religious historians might define “ritual” as “an agreed upon pattern of movement that gives meaning to existence; external actions that convey and express interior realities.” It has been suggested by some in recent years, that ritual has become meaningless in our modern world, no longer having power or value. For this reason, some have claimed to have “done away with” ritual, seeing it as empty, dead action that is irrelevant today. However, the very people who claim to have left “ritual” behind, have then developed new rituals!

An interesting example are the Quakers. The early Quakers rejected the traditional Christian rituals, claiming they were dead, verbose and meaningless. However, wearing hats in church, sitting throughout the “meeting” for worship, using no fixed form of prayer, but having people stand and pray as the Spirit moved them, all became the Quaker ritual! It seems we all need to respond to the Eternal, and to do so, we must...MUST have agreed upon forms and movements that give meaning to what we are doing together. And even when we claim that is not so--even when we claim we need no rituals...we develop rituals to show that we need none. It is at the heart of who we are as human beings, to want to be in relationship with our Creator. It is at the heart of who we are as human beings to want to do so within some form of community, whether family or clan or tribe or local congregation. And when we seek to respond to our God, we do so using rituals... “agreed upon patterns of movement that give meaning to existence-- external actions that convey and express interior realities.” That’s what worship is, from a very general, human perspective.

But what about Christian worship? Now that God has fully revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; now that we worship in Spirit and in Truth, what is worship?

For Christians, worship is still “agreed upon patterns of movement that give meaning to existence”. Worship is ritual, but it is ritual that is not just response, but action and

response. As Christians, we believe that God is active in worship, not passive. We respond to the Eternal in our ritual actions, but the first action is God's, calling us to worship in the first place. We respond by getting up on Sunday morning and coming to church. God speaks to us in the readings from Holy Scripture and through the sermon. We respond with hymns, prayers and offerings. God feeds us with the very body and blood of His Son, Jesus. We give thanks and praise for this wonderful gift. God sends us forth in peace, we "go in peace, to serve the Lord" in our daily lives.

The word "worship" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, "worthship", in the sense that worshipers come together to acknowledge the one who is "worthy", God! And yet, more than that happens in Christian worship. It is not one-sided, with us doing the worshipping and God simply receiving. In Christian worship, the ritual, the agreed upon actions and movements are two-way, as God meets us in our time of worship and is an active participant. He gives to us, and we receive from Him; we give to God, and He receives from us. The ritual is back-and-forth, as we not only respond to God, but He speaks and responds to us as well. So that when you come to worship, you come, not only to give, but also, not just to receive. You come to give and to receive. To receive and to respond. True Christian worship is not passive, but active, as you sing, pray, kneel, stand, come forward, take out your wallet, shake hands, participate fully in the "ritual" that gives meaning to our lives, and to our existence.

It sounds like work, doesn't it?! In fact, we call it "the work of the people"...it is the "business" that God's people are called to do. The Greek word is "leitourgos", from which we get the word, "liturgy"! The liturgy is the activity that we, the people of God, engage in, together with each other, and with God! It's what we do. It's who we are. We are a worshipping people. We engage, faithfully and regularly, in actions and movements that give meaning to existence, because through them, we enter into "Holy Communion" with our God, and with each other! In and through this "Holy Encounter", we come to experience God, Father, Son, and Spirit more fully, and so, we grow more fully into the people God has created us to be. Worship does that for us. That's what worship is, and is for...the transformation of people and their lives, through "Holy Communion" with God. And as people are transformed, communities are transformed, and ultimately, our world is transformed.

Which is why worship is so important. The Holy Communion is critical, not only to our own, individual transformation, but to the changing of our homes, our families, and the world at large. You may pray and read scripture at home, but there are certain "rituals", the liturgy of the people of God, that can't be done at home! Public proclamation of the Gospel, intercessory prayers of the whole community, baptism, the Lord's Supper, these are the work of the whole community, gathered for worship. Other than in emergency situations, they are communal acts of worship. It takes the community gathered as congregation to "do" the liturgy. And in the doing, we are transformed, as individuals, and as a community of believers. That's what worship is, and does.

IV. Style and Form of Worship

In this chapter, I would like to discuss the particular style and form of worship here at Saint Luke's, and in doing so, we will begin to explore the rich history of Christian liturgy.

The greatest danger in any Christian community is that any one person will seek to foster their own agenda with regard to the corporate worship life of the congregation. In other words, there is always the danger that one person will shape, mold and change the worship of the congregation to suit his or her own wants, desires and preferences. It's been said the most dangerous person in a congregation is the pastor (or person) who holds up a worship resource (song, dialog, etc.) and says, "Look what I wrote!" On the one hand, there is room for creativity and expression in the worship of the Church. On the other, the danger is that the worship of the whole congregation will become the "stage" for one person's wants, desires, and creativity. How does the Church of Jesus Christ, and our congregation in particular, guard against this danger?

The guard has historically been, to keep to worship that is solidly within the tradition of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. As a congregation, that has been the aim and goal for some time. We discuss that often in Council gatherings and retreats when we do visioning, planning and goal-setting. Our Council reaffirmed that at our recent retreat, when we highlighted that one of the reasons most of us are here, and the reason many of our new members become part of this congregation is because our worship makes use of the richness of our evangelical and catholic heritage, blending new hymns and songs with old, using, at times, new liturgies like the "Now the Feast" that was used through the summer, yet always within the basic structure of the historic, time-honored liturgy of the Christian Church. Is this the only way to worship God? No, many Christian communities worship using a variety of forms. However, here at Saint Luke's, our conscious choice is to worship in Word and Sacrament, making use of the variety available to us through the historic liturgies of the Church.

For some Christians today, granted, this is too restricting. Some Christians believe that any songs or hymns more than three years old are outdated and irrelevant. (That's the criteria in some contemporary worship circles...don't sing anything more than three years old!) Some Christians, by the same token, sing absolutely NO contemporary hymns or songs, believing that only those that were written 50-500 years ago are worthy of Christian worship.

Here at Saint Luke's, we are somewhere in between these two extremes. We realize the pre-eminence of the traditional Christian liturgy that has been in use in the western Christian Church for 1500 years, at least. We realize that in this historic liturgy, the community is protected from personal agendas, poor theology, and "trendy fads" in worship. At the same time, we believe that the historic liturgy can be set to newer music and that there are many wonderful new songs and hymns that reflect sound theology, are singable, and worthy of being used in worship. Some might wish we would use only traditional "older" hymns; some might prefer we would use more contemporary songs.

Our aim, is to strike a balance, to respect the integrity of the historic liturgy, to focus on the theme of the particular festival day or day of the Church Year, and to balance “new” and “old” in a blending that is worshipful, faithful, and in keeping with the “character” and vision of our congregation, as stated, and affirmed by our Congregation Council.

With regard to worship here at Saint Luke’s, we are not trying to be all things to all people. We are liturgical, confessionally Lutheran, and committed to Word and Sacrament. Many of our new members have been referred to us by other Lutheran pastors in the area, who are aware that at Saint Luke’s, one may worship in a liturgical, historically grounded congregation. At the same time, when visitors are looking for a very contemporary Lutheran worship service with a “worship band” and much variety, we encourage them to try Trinity in Monument. Both congregations are solid, growing, and have vibrant ministry. We have different styles of worship, and we each try to do what we do with integrity, grace, and faith.

Our desire here at Saint Luke’s, is to continue to try to do what we do, as well as we can do it. We want to grow in our appreciation for and use of the historic liturgies of the Christian Church. In worship planning, we often return to the motto, “No innovation without tradition.” We will often use some new resource, liturgy, entrance rite, or prayer, but these are often not new, but only new to us, coming from some worship book of the middle ages, or from one of the early Church Fathers. Luther and Melancthon, in particular, were careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. They realized that there is much in the catholic tradition that should be retained, and indeed, that they did retain in Lutheran liturgies. We are solidly in that camp. If there are resources, practices, liturgical actions that have been in use in the Christian Church, we consider if they might be useful here. We do not throw them out, simply because they are historic, from the Eastern Orthodox, or Roman Catholic traditions. We are in those traditions, as well, and look to them as deep wells from which we can draw the Living Water. Making the sign of the cross, kneeling for prayers and for communion, chanting, using icons during some festival services, the processional cross, the Holy Week services are all examples of liturgical practices that we “plumb” from the depths of our rich Christian tradition. They are not mandatory, but are traditional and customary. They enrich and enliven worship for many congregations who choose to utilize them. And here at Saint Luke’s, we try to be open to the wealth available to us through this tradition that we have inherited.

This has been a brief discussion of the style and form of worship here at Saint Luke’s. It is not exhaustive, to be sure. It does reflect the fact that we purposefully worship here with a particular style and form. It is not by accident, nor is it the result of any one person’s wants or desires (not even the pastor’s or church organist’s!). Within the parameters of the tradition of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, we strive to have worship that is historic, balanced, alive, spiritual, reverent, and most of all, centered on our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That’s what we do here, and we try to do it to the best of our God-given ability!

V. Adiaphora—or, What’s the Big Deal With Candles?

In this section I would like to discuss a term and a concept that is important to keep in mind when discussing Christian worship within the Christian tradition. We will first define the term, “adiaphora”, and then apply that concept as we discuss a very practical issue in Lutheran churches: the use of candles.

The term, “adiaphora” is a term employed by Dr. Martin Luther and Dr. Philip Melancthon to describe “things not required, but allowed”. *The Formula of Concord* (published in 1580 as a confessional statement to unite fractured Lutherans) defines adiaphora as ceremonies and church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God, but which have been introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order and decorum, or else to preserve Christian discipline.” (*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article X*) “Things” considered adiaphora by Luther were not only ceremonies and rituals, but receiving the host either in the hand or in the mouth, vows of chastity, being married or remaining single (for priests or laity), and a number of other issues over which their was contention.

Considering an issue adiaphoron did not indicate it was a trivial matter, however, nor one to be taken lightly. Indeed, there was probably as much disagreement and discussion in the church over adiaphora as over the Gospel itself! Great discussion centered around those issues that were not expressly commanded or forbidden. To add or take away rites and practices within the church, many of which may have been in meaningful use for a thousand years could not be taken lightly. Luther himself was careful not to do away with anything that was not opposed to the Gospel, especially when it increased faith and devotion and fostered Christian discipline. In the *Formula of Concord*, again, in Article X, it states, “We further believe, teach and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense, but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum and the edification of the church.”

To move from a very abstract discussion of adiaphora to how the understanding may be applied practically, let’s talk about one of the most practical aspects of Lutheran worship: the use of candles!

I once heard a professor say, “If you looked at a Lutheran worship service and tried to make out what was the most important aspect, you might think it was the lighting of candles, because we make such a big deal about it.” A practical concern, yet deeply important, the use of candles in worship, specifically, candles “on” or “around” the altar is one of the most prominent features within the chancel and deserves discussion.

The first question that could be asked is, “Why use candles at all in worship?” Lutherans make use of candles because though they are not required, they may be allowed because they help to proclaim the Gospel, and symbolize Jesus Christ, the Light

of the world. They are not essential to worship, as they are not commanded (nor forbidden) by Holy Scripture. They may be allowed because they do not hinder or distort the Gospel, and may serve as a visible reminder that “the Light shines in the darkness.” As adiaphora, the reasons for their use must be all the more weighty. Nothing we do in worship should be done lightly, and without just and reasonable cause. So, let’s examine the reasons that candles and lamps have come to be in such common use in Christian worship.

It may be said that without a doubt, candles, as well as lamps, came into usage in the Judeo-Christian tradition for strictly utilitarian reasons. Without electric lights, the people who gathered, whether in the Jerusalem temple, in community synagogues, in house churches or great cathedrals needed light by which to see and to conduct services of worship! Even without a spiritual significance, lamps and candles would have been necessary for gatherings of the people of God, whether under the Old Covenant, or the New. However, lamps and candles, in the Judeo-Christian tradition have always reflected a deeper, spiritual meaning, as they have symbolized the light of God’s Word and Wisdom from above.

This symbolism took on even greater significance under the New Covenant, as the New Testament so clearly proclaims Jesus Christ as the Light of the World. This proclamation began with the prophets in the Old Testament, as they prophesied regarding the coming of the Messiah, “The people that lived in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.” (Isaiah 9:2) That passage continues with the proclamation read at Christmas, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’

Without pages upon pages of New Testament quotes regarding Jesus and light, let me simply recall His words recorded in the Gospel of St. John, “I am the Light of the World; anyone who follows me...will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) The New Testament is full of references to Jesus as the Light, and to us being “children of light” (Luke 16:8), letting our light “so shine before others that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, quoted in our baptismal liturgy). In fact, one of the great themes in the New Testament is the contrast between the darkness of the world and the Light of Christ bringing life to those living in shadows and fear.

It is no great surprise that the candles in churches and the gatherings of Christians immediately took on significance and symbolism, both as reflections of Christ, the Light, and as the lamps of the “bridesmaids”, awaiting the return of the Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-8). Even after great chandeliers and elaborate lighting schemes overhead (whether using candles or oil lamps) made candles on and around the altar unnecessary, the tradition remained of having candles on the altar as symbols of our Lord, the Light of the World. The tradition continues today, even after many years, of having real candles made of beeswax on or around the altar.

The rubrics (instructions for liturgy) indicate that at least two are required for any altar. These are known as sacramental or Gospel lights. Traditionally, when only two candles are used, these two symbolize Christ's two natures, divine and human. They are never regarded as mere altar ornaments, and are always used/lighted. Further, the rubrics state that these should always be genuine candles, with real flame, never electric substitutes, no matter how attractive or "real-looking". Historically, altar lights were to be of pure beeswax, because of their natural materials. In years past, the rubric was changed to allow for candles of at least 50% beeswax/50% stearine, to keep the candles from warping and having excessive drippage. Also allowed are "candle-lamps" which use oil and wax, with a wick, as with our processional altar candles. This provides for cleaner burning, no drippage, no waste, hence, better stewardship.

Use of more than two candles "on" the altar is purely a matter of local choice. However, "use of too many candles is considered worse than none at all", according to the Rev. Dr. Paul Zeller Strodach, in his *A Manual on Worship*. The danger would be that the altar or crucifix would be obscured or overshadowed by great candelabra, and liturgy restricted by overcrowding. Seven-branched candelabra (seven being the number of divine completeness in the Scriptures), or three-branched (three for the Trinity, of course), are common, especially in older worship spaces and those with altars still attached to the wall of the chancel. More common after Vatican II in the mid-1960's (with free-standing altars) are either smaller candles on the altar that provide no sight-barrier to the pastor/priest presiding facing the people, or free-standing candles that surround the altar and may be used in processions behind the processional cross.

Although the altar candles are of primary significance in worship, it should be remembered that the central candle in catholic and evangelical liturgy is the Paschal Candle. The word, paschal comes from Hebrew word "pasach", which means "to pass over", from which comes the word "passover". It's derivative in Greek is "pascha", which is used as a name for Easter, the Christian Passover, or the Christian deliverance from bondage to sin and death (as the Hebrews were delivered in the Passover from bondage in Egypt). The Paschal Candle is the pre-eminent symbol of Easter, of Christ, the Light rising from the darkness of death. The candle is lighted, usually, at the Easter Vigil late on Holy Saturday night, from what is called a "new fire"...a bonfire or other fire burning outside the church. The candle leads the procession into the church for the Easter Vigil service, during which we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. The Paschal Candle stands, burning, to the right of the altar throughout all services during the season of Easter (fifty days), symbolizing Christ's risen presence. On the Festival of the Ascension (if there is a service) or on Pentecost, the Paschal Candle is moved to the baptismal font, where it remains throughout the rest of the Church Year. It is lighted for "resurrection" celebrations; i.e., baptisms and funerals. An interesting note: during funerals of laypersons, the casket is placed in front of the altar with the feet of the body nearer the altar, and the Paschal Candle by the "foot" of the casket. This represents the orientation of the laity in worship, in the congregation facing the altar. During funerals of clergy, the casket is placed in front of the altar with the head nearest the altar, and the Paschal Candle by the "head" of the casket, representing the orientation of the clergy in worship, at the altar, facing the congregation. In both instances, the Paschal Candle, lighted at

baptism as the deceased was reborn by Water and the Spirit, is lighted also at the funeral, as the deceased is reborn in and through Jesus Christ, the first-born of the dead.

Other times when candles are used in worship are: during Advent, when the candles on our wreath mark the weeks till Christmas; on Christmas Eve and at the Easter Vigil, when all worshipers light candles symbolizing the spreading of the Light of Christ; during the sacrament of Baptism, when the light of the Paschal Candle is used to light a candle for the newly baptized; and of course, during Vespers (Evening Prayer), when a large candle is often carried into the church symbolizing the coming of light at the end of the day.

You may be wondering, before we conclude, what Dr. Luther's opinion was regarding the use of candles in worship. As with all things in worship, Luther allowed them and did not discourage them, so long as they did not hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. In the Apology, or Explanation of the Augsburg Confession (written, remember, not by Luther, but by Philip Melanchthon), Article XXIV, on The Mass, states, "The real adornment of the churches is godly, practical, and clear teaching, the godly use of the sacraments, ardent prayer and the like. Candles, golden vessels, and ornaments like that are fitting, but they are not the peculiar adornment of the church. If our opponents center their worship in such things, rather than in the proclamation of the Gospel, in faith and in its struggles, they should be classified with those whom Daniel (11:38) describes as worshiping idols."

Martin Luther did speak of candles specifically in his Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg of 1523. In describing the reading of the Gospel lesson in the Mass, Luther wrote, "Sixth, the Gospel lesson follows, for which we neither prohibit nor prescribe the use of candles or incense. Let these things be free." (Luther's Works, Vol. 53, p. 25) Again, Luther returns to the understanding of adiaphora: because candles are not commanded nor forbidden, they may be freely used, or not, depending upon their meaning and symbolism.

That, as always, should be our guide. Candles may be used so long as they are not ends in themselves, but are understood to shine the Light of Christ, proclaiming, through their light, the good news of salvation and resurrection in Jesus Christ!

Did you ever think so much about candles? And who would've thought I could write at length about candles in worship! It reminds us that everything we do in worship has meaning, nothing is taken lightly, and everything is intended to say something about Jesus Christ—yes, even the candles around the altar!

VI. Adiaphora Continued: The Sign of the Cross and Kneeling in Worship

As mentioned above, the goal of this series is to deal practically with questions that arise with regard to worship at Saint Luke's. Strange as it might seem, the two most frequent questions are: "Why do some of the worshipers here at Saint Luke's make the 'sign of the cross'?" and, "Why doesn't *everyone* kneel at the appropriate places in the service?" Of course, the reverse of that question is also heard, "Why do people kneel at all, during worship here at Saint Luke's?"

These two acts of corporate/private devotion fall into the realm of "adiaphora". Being neither commanded nor forbidden by Christ or Scripture, they may be freely used, or not, depending upon their meaning and message.

With regard to making the sign of the cross, the best commendation for making use of this liturgical action, are the words and instructions of Luther himself. This is not a practice that Luther ever dealt with, as he never deemed it problematic, but saw it as a natural, meaningful practice that ought to be continued. In fact, in his "Daily Prayers; How the Head of the Household Should Teach His Family to Pray Morning and Evening" (included in some editions of the Small Catechism), Luther instructs, "In the morning, when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say..." His evening instructions are similar, "In the evening when you go to bed, make the sign of the holy cross and say..." Other than these times, I'm not aware of Luther ever mentioning the practice of making the sign of the cross; it was simply a common, universal act of worship. In this regard, it has been retained in the Lutheran liturgy with specific indications for making the sign of the cross (if you choose), at the beginning of the service during the Confession and Absolution, and then again during the Benediction at the end of the service. Other appropriate times are during the creed, at the words, "...the resurrection of the body, the life everlasting" as a recognition that it is through the cross that we will receive "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting". It is also common before and after receiving the Lord's Supper, as a blessing upon oneself to receive worthily, in the name of Jesus. Since at least 700 A.D., the sign of the cross has been used by Christians as a sign of blessing, and a reminder of our Baptism into Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those here at Saint Luke's who make use of this sign, have simply reclaimed it as a useful, meaningful devotional practice.

Should all make the sign of the cross? Not all will feel comfortable making the sign of the cross. Like any good habit, it takes time and willingness to make the effort. It does **not** earn salvation, nor does it make you a better person in God's sight. It may help you to focus, to remember and celebrate your Baptism, and to publicly attest to the fact that you have been claimed, body and soul, by Jesus Christ. I would think it is a practice that all might like to try for a while, just to see if it is meaningful to you. Again, it is neither commanded, nor forbidden by Holy Scripture. It is a spiritual tool. Nothing more or less.

What about kneeling? Although we have talked at length about kneeling in other newsletters, a few words would be in order. Kneeling may seem somewhat "new" to

some because here at Saint Luke's, we had no kneelers until the building expansion/renovation. For years, our goal and aim was to add kneelers when we added new sanctuary seating. Now that we have kneelers available that can be used for prayer, confession, etc., in addition to kneeling at the altar for communion, we have wanted to foster and encourage that practice.

As with kneeling for communion, the question has been how to remind worshipers to kneel so that it becomes a regular practice, while at the same time allowing those who are unable to remain standing or sitting without feeling "awkward". We have been kneeling for communion for so long, that new members and visitors kneel without specific instructions. They see others kneeling, and they kneel as that is the regular practice. Those who are unable freely stand. However, with kneeling at certain times during the service at one's seat, we are not yet into that regular practice. If no instruction is given, probably we would not become accustomed to it, and in time, no one would kneel. The congregational culture would be not to kneel, and visitors/guests would never feel free to kneel, if no one else was. We had tried several ways of introducing/instructing people regarding when to kneel, with no good feeling about the first attempts. When we encouraged people to stand OR kneel, we had questions about why we didn't just say, "all kneel". When we did say, simply, "Please kneel," we had comments about those who were unable feeling self-conscious. The desire is to encourage worshipers to kneel, if they are physically able. That is our goal, and the reason we have kneelers. Like the custom of kneeling for communion, it is a meaningful custom to develop within our congregation. It is a useful spiritual discipline that fosters humility, respect and awe. For those who truly are physically unable, we want them to feel comfortable standing or sitting, as their situation dictates. Hence, we have arrived at a simple instruction that best says what we want to say. "If you are able, please kneel. If not, you may sit or stand."

Is this a requirement? Not any more than kneeling for communion is a requirement. It is a meaningful spiritual practice within our congregation that we want to encourage. We want the majority of able-bodied folks to kneel, so that new members/visitors will also feel comfortable, and will become accustomed. However, the ushers will not be "kneeling police". The question of kneeling is an adiaphoron. Although "O come let us bow down and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our maker" (Psalm 95) is an invitation in the Scriptures, it has never been understood as a "command". Kneeling is simply an appropriate posture showing humility and penitence, but also supplication, respect, awe and praise. Posture, action and "body language" are powerful communicators, both to our own hearts, and as a "public witness", testifying outwardly and visibly, to where we stand (or kneel) before our Awesome God.

Where are appropriate places in the Sunday liturgy to kneel at our seats? Of course, it is appropriate to kneel whenever one feels like showing special reverence before God. As a devotional practice, you may kneel as you pray and prepare yourself after entering the sanctuary before worship (see the prayers for personal devotion on the back of the Sunday worship folder); during the prayer of confession; during the intercessory prayers; throughout the Eucharistic Prayer (after the singing of "Holy, holy, holy...)

through the “Lamb of God” (again, see notes in the worship folder); and after returning from receiving communion. Paul Strodach, in his *A Manual on Worship*, reminds us, “The kneeling posture has always been associated with the deepest sense of religious awe and the strongest fervors of devotion...” That sentence speaks volumes.

I hope these are useful, informative answers to a couple of questions that come to mind for many folks when they first worship in any Lutheran congregation, and especially when they come to Saint Luke’s. By discussing them early on in this booklet, I hope that the way is paved for deeper discussions of Christian liturgy.

VII. Preparation for Worship

The first few chapters have painted, with broad strokes, a picture of worship in the Judeo-Christian tradition. We have looked at our human need to worship, the role of rite and ritual in our God-given human nature, and how even Christian worship fulfills this most basic of human needs. We turned then to the purpose and meaning of Christian worship in particular, how the Sabbath day and the Lord's Day became one in practice, and how the Spirit of God shaped our liturgy into a whole that is balanced on two pillars, Word and Sacrament. Now, we turn to the specifics of the historic liturgy of the Church.

When one "comes to church", the first order of concern is "preparation". Dr. Martin Luther was concerned that Christians come to worship and receive the Sacrament of the Altar with knowledge, forethought and pure hearts. This was not considered, by Luther, a good work, or something that we could DO to make ourselves worthy, rather, it was the response of the faithful believer who desired to open his or her heart and mind to the gifts and promises of God. Remember, Luther said that one is well prepared for the Lord's Supper when one believes these words, "For you, for the forgiveness of sins". Trust in the word of Christ is what makes one ready to participate in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion!

At the same time, Luther did indeed feel that preparation was necessary. He prepared prayers to aid Christians as they sought to center their thoughts and hearts for worship. Several of these are included in our worship folder each week, so that you may take time to truly prepare inwardly for worship. If there is one thing that has been lost in recent years in Lutheran churches (I can't speak for other traditions), it is quietness before worship that allows and fosters intentional time for prayer, meditation and preparation. In the 60's and 70's, the push was for churches to become "friendly", "warm", "inviting", and "cordial". Hence, we built larger and larger gathering spaces for fellowship before worship (as with our Atrium!). This is right and good, I think we would all agree. But in some ways, this has spilled over into worship and liturgy, very naturally making the sanctuary, itself, a place for cordiality, chatting before worship, greeting one another in voices and volume more appropriate to being outside. Of course, how else to be heard over the organ! In much of Lutheranism today, our church included, if someone unfamiliar with the Christian church were to come to a worship service, what they might conclude is that the primary thing about "church" is fellowship! It has become the be-all and end-all of many congregations, to be warm and friendly. I am not against these, but our primary reason for existence as Christians, must always be to worship and glorify God! That is why we are here. Friendship and fellowship grows out of the fact that we are a worshipping community of faith. We are not a friendly fellowship which takes a few minutes out of our fellowship each week to squeeze in a little devotional time, although that's how it seems, at times. One way to return to the proper perspective is through lifting up worship, and being intentional about silence and quiet before worship to allow ourselves (and others!) to prepare for a unique, intimate, powerful encounter with our Triune God. Taking time before worship for silent prayer and preparation reminds us of the value and importance of this time spent in the very incarnate presence of God. That's why in some traditions, kneeling in prayer before worship helps to bring

to mind that in Christian worship, we are not just in the presence of other worshipers, but we are uniquely in the presence of the Lord of Heaven and earth, and we ought to humble ourselves in body, mind and spirit. This helps us to be ready to worship in Spirit and truth, as we hear in the Gospel of St. John.

Another way for us to be prepared is through true confession and repentance. Ask many Lutherans about confession, and the answer you might get is, “Oh yes, Martin Luther did away with confession because that’s what Roman Catholics did!” Which couldn’t be farther from the truth. Luther’s concern was with confession as an outward ritual, that was not accompanied by inward repentance and change of heart and life. In fact, the renowned and familiar 95 Theses which Luther wrote and posted on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church in 1517 was first and foremost about confession and true repentance! The first thesis begins, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’, he intended that the entire life of believers be one of repentance!”

Luther was not against confession and repentance, nor was he against private confession. The truth is, he had no concept of “group or corporate” confessions like the rite we use at the beginning of each worship service. He included no such “corporate confession” in any of the masses, or orders of worship he prepared. His assumption was that individual Christians would continue to go to private confession, in reformed practice, as needed before participation in Holy Communion. Luther wrote in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, “There is no doubt that confession is necessary and commanded by God. Thus we read in Matthew 3, ‘They were baptized of John in the Jordan, confessing their sins.’ And in I John 1, ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. If we say we have no sin, we are liars, and his word is not in us.’” Of private confession, which is now observed, I am heartily in favor of it...it is useful and necessary, nor would I have it abolished--nay, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is cure without equal for distressed consciences.”

Luther’s desire was that a reformed form of private repentance and absolution be practiced, following something similar to the order he provides in the Small Catechism, under the title, “The Office of the Keys and Confession”. (Perhaps you want to dust off your Small Catechism and take a look at it!) Luther’s concern was that believers not try to remember every sin, but only those that were burdensome; that believers trust God for forgiveness, not the priest; that there be true repentance and desire for change of heart and life (not an outward show or fulfillment of an empty religious ritual). Luther was so concerned that this confession and forgiveness be “heart-felt” and genuine, that he desired to combine it with an examination, not unlike those most of us remember exacted upon confirmands. The Augsburg Confession, Article XXV states, “Confession has not been abolished in our churches, for it is not customary to administer the body of Christ except to those who have previously been examined and absolved.” Luther desired that the private confession before communion also include an examination of the believer’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper and acknowledgment of the real presence. As often is the case, however, practical issues worked against this custom. First, in many churches, since the pastor could use discretion to decide who needed examination and how often, it became the practice to excuse from both confession and examination the

educated and noble classes, and those who held power and influence. Second, the larger numbers of believers actually taking communion (as Lutheran pastors encouraged people to receive the sacrament more frequently) made it more difficult to conduct an intentional examination and confession, and finally, the revolt against the payment of the *Beichtpfennig* (confession penny, or payment) to the priest (yes, even among Lutheran priests), all led away from private confession and examination, and toward the practice of a general, corporate congregational confessional rite.

Fortunately, Philip Melanchthon, professor of theology and layman reformer who was one of Luther's closest friends, prepared a general, corporate order of confession and absolution. Using the Roman Catholic Latin prayer of confession called, *Confiteor*, dated 1314, originally said by the priest as he vested in the sacristy, Melanchthon prepared a confession for use by all the faithful preparatory to Holy Communion. The texts in the Lutheran Book of Worship, follow the concept set down by Melanchthon in his Order for Mecklenburg, 1552 and the later Order for Wittenberg, 1559. The LBW Order for Confession and Forgiveness makes clear that the rite is preparatory, as the service itself begins with the Opening Hymn. This preparatory rite is variable, meaning it is not required at every service. However, when not used, some form of confession and statement of absolution should be included within the service. A special form of Kyrie may be used which utilizes the prayer "Lord, have mercy" as a response to prayers of confession. Prayers of confession may also be included in the intercessory prayers. Bowing to Luther's belief that intentional, heartfelt confession and absolution are necessary to reception of the Lord's Supper, here at Saint Luke's we regularly precede worship with the Rite of Confession and Forgiveness.

The order begins with the invocation of the name of the Holy Trinity, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." During the invocation, all may make the sign of the cross, in remembrance of our Baptism. Since, as Luther said, repentance is a return to Baptism, it is particularly appropriate that we begin with a gesture that reminds us of how we entered the community of faith. The sign of the cross is a reminder that we were washed by God and marked with the cross of His Son. The prayer for purity follows, ("Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open...cleanse the thoughts of our hearts...") a prayer which has been used since at least the eighth century. The presiding minister then quotes I John 1:8-9, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." After a silence for reflection and self-examination, kneeling, the congregation prays the prayer of confession directly to our Most Merciful God. Although the ordained minister has the authority to forgive sins, (If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.), in this instance, the ordained minister declares God's forgiveness, speaking God's word of forgiveness purchased for us by Jesus' death for our sins, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Having repented, confessed and received absolution, we stand to begin worship as cleansed, renewed believers!

For your information, two other orders for confession and forgiveness are included in the Lutheran Book of Worship. Corporate Confession and Forgiveness begins on page

193 and is intended to be used as a penitential service in and of itself. There is also an order for Individual Confession and Forgiveness for use with pastor and parishioner in a private, pastoral counseling situation. This order follows the form set forth by Luther in the Small Catechism.

As you come to worship each and every Sunday, I hope you will be mindful of the importance and value placed upon preparation for worship by Luther, both in personal prayer and in confession and forgiveness. May the deeper preparation lead you to deeper devotion in worship, and richer blessings!

VIII. The Entrance Rite

We will continue our discussion of the Sunday liturgy with what is called the Entrance Rite. Remember, the Rite of Confession and Forgiveness is preparation. Our Holy Communion liturgy begins properly with the Opening Hymn, which may be a hymn, but may also be a psalm or litany (responsive or chanted prayer). The earliest description of the Christian liturgy for Holy Communion is found in the writings of Justin in his *Apology*, written about 150 A.D. He describes a definite order of worship. The order was:

- Readings from the prophets and apostles
- Sermon by the president/presiding minister on the readings
- Intercessory prayers for the needs of the church and world
- Kiss of peace
- Bread and wine brought forward
- Prayer of thanksgiving for creation and redemption
- People respond with “Amen”
- Communion elements (bread and wine) are distributed
- Offering for the needy is collected

Other sources from the same time suggest that psalms were sung between the lessons. Together, this structure already formalized and in regular usage in 150 A.D. points to the fact that this order of service for Holy Communion is from the earliest days of Christianity, having been developed long before Justin made a written record of the practice.

The first difference you might notice between that order and ours today is the absence of the Entrance Rite. The fact is this rite developed over time for a very practical purpose; the entrance of the ministers. As Christianity flourished after Constantine, churches and basilicas were designed and built. It was common for a psalm or litany to be sung as the ministers entered the sanctuary and went to their places in the front of the worship space. At first, these spaces were smaller to accommodate smaller congregations. As Christendom spread and more became Christians, larger and larger facilities were needed. By the 500's-600's A.D., churches were great buildings with long aisles from entrance to altar. The entrance processions took longer and longer. The simple singing of a psalm or chanted prayer was expanded to include one or more psalms or hymns, AND a litany or responsive chant based on the *Kyrie eleison*, the scriptural prayer, “Lord, have mercy.”

Our Kyrie is from a litany used by the earliest Christians, in which we recognize God's presence, our need for Him, and our prayer for peace, unity and well-being for the Church and the world. Historically, after the singing of the entrance psalm and Kyrie, the opening hymn was the Hymn of Praise. The common hymn sung at this point was the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, or “Glory to God in the Highest”, the song of the angels as they proclaimed the birth of Jesus to the shepherds in St. Luke 2. In time, the entire entrance rite became an accepted part of the Holy Communion liturgy as it serves to help the

congregation to enter into God's presence, to focus our attention, and to have extended time for praise of Almighty God. This is reflected by the fact that the Apostolic Greeting comes immediately after the Opening Hymn, before the Kyrie and Hymn of Praise. The presiding minister greets and blesses the congregation in the words of St. Paul, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14) These words are called the *Apostolic Greeting* because they come from the apostle, Paul. The congregation responds by wishing the same for the pastor.

Although all Holy Communion liturgies have some entrance rite, the order is variable. Often, the rite will include Opening Hymn, Kyrie and Hymn of Praise. At other times the order may change. During Advent and Lent we vary the order to emphasize seasonal themes: in Advent the rite leads to and includes the lighting of the Advent wreath, in Lent the Entrance Rite involves a more developed time of Confession, reflecting the penitential nature of the season.

In the Lutheran Book of Worship, two Hymns of Praise are included as options for the Entrance Rite. The older and more common, as mentioned, is the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*. The second and newer (although it also comes from scripture) is the hymn of praise, *Worthy is Christ*, more commonly known as *This is the Feast*. This hymn is from the celestial liturgy around the throne of God in heaven, recorded in the Book of Revelation. During the weeks of Easter and on the festivals of All Saints and Christ the King, this hymn is especially meaningful as it is the song of the saints in heaven. Its words reflect both Passover and the heavenly banquet, and are taken from Revelation 5:9-13 and 19:4-9. The theme comes from the refrain of these passages, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Rev. 5:12. Just as this theme is most appropriate during Easter and "saints" days, the Gloria is especially appropriate during the season of Christmas and Epiphany, as the song of the angels echoes throughout. However, either hymn of praise may be sung on any Sunday that the Holy Communion is being celebrated.

The final act of the Entrance Rite is the Prayer of the Day, which is a brief and ancient prayer which expresses the central theme of the day. This prayer is the one part of the rite that is not optional, as it is a bridge between the Entrance Rite and the Liturgy or Service of the Word (the scripture lessons and sermon). The Prayer of the Day is preceded by a greeting, or salutation and response which comes from the Old Testament when Boaz used it as he went out into the field to greet the reapers (Ruth 2:4). It also has New Testament connections when the angel Gabriel came to Mary (Luke 1:28). The Prayers of the Day are an important part of the liturgical treasury of the Christian Church, inherited through the ages. The same basic collection of prayers is used in Lutheran, Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches throughout the world.

As we are discussing the Entrance Rite, let me say a word about the "entrance". Just as this rite developed over time to accompany processions into the sanctuary, the rite often still begins with a procession. The Opening Hymn is often referred to as the "Entrance Hymn" or "Processional Hymn". Processions have a long history in the

Christian liturgy, taking their form from the Palm Sunday procession of Jesus into Jerusalem, and Jesus' "way of the cross", as he processed to Golgotha carrying His cross. The processional cross leads the procession or entrance of the ministers into the sanctuary. The processional cross symbolizes Jesus' presence among us. For that reason, it is always appropriate for the congregation to turn to the processional cross, wherever it is in the sanctuary. At the beginning of the service when there will be a procession, the congregation should turn to face the cross, following it as it is carried to its place in the chancel. The idea is that we should not have our backs to our Lord and His cross! Similarly, when the cross is used for other processions (on Christmas Eve during the Gospel procession, for example), the congregation faces the cross, no matter where it leads. In the same way, on festival Sundays when the cross leads the recessional, it is appropriate to bow to the cross, or to bow and face the cross as it moves out of the sanctuary. After the cross leaves the worship space, one may turn to the front again, or remain facing the assistant in the rear as he or she dismisses the congregation (Go in peace...).

This has been but a brief discussion of the Entrance Rite. We turn next month to the Service, or Liturgy of the Word.

IX. The Service of the Word

We turn now to the first major part of our Sunday Holy Communion, the Liturgy (or Service) of the Word.

As discussed before, the first half of our Sunday service is basically the Jewish synagogue service. The earliest Christians were, of course, Jewish, and when they were forced out of the synagogue, they continued to worship as a Christian community with the same style of worship. This order included the singing of Psalms, readings from the Law and the Prophets, a sermon or proclamation from the scriptures for the day, and prayers. The Liturgy of the Word in Christian worship follows this same basic structure. It forms the first part of the Holy Communion service, which is the primary and chief worship experience for Christendom.

The second half of the service is the Liturgy of the Meal, in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper or Eucharist (which means "thanksgiving"). The two were joined together from the earliest Christian times. The two parts together make a complete, "whole" worship service. The Word without the Meal was an aberration that occurred after the Reformation. Contrary to much popular belief, Luther and early Lutherans did not move away from this two-fold structure of Word and Sacrament for the chief Sunday service. Luther taught that communion should not be celebrated without the Word, and the Sunday worship service should include both Word and Sacrament. It has never been a Lutheran understanding that "You shouldn't have communion every Sunday, because that's what Roman Catholics do!" Indeed, the Apology (or Explanation or Defense of) the Augsburg Confession, our chief confessional document states, "To begin with, we must repeat the prefatory statement that we do not abolish the Mass but religiously keep and defend it. In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals..." (Article XXIV, Book of Concord, p. 249).

The practice in American Lutheranism of having only the Service of the Word on Sunday morning (and no Lord's Supper) developed for two reasons. Rationalism took hold of Americans. This movement fostered the belief that only the rational, reasonable, cognitively understandable sermon was helpful for Christians. Mystical practices, like celebrating the real presence in the Lord's Supper were considered questionable and not useful on a regular basis. At the same time, because an ordained priest or pastor was required for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Lutheran congregations in America could only have the Lord's Supper when a pastor was present. Because of a shortage of clergy in this country, congregations got used to having the Lord's Supper only once a quarter, or perhaps twice a year, when the circuit-riding pastor could be present. As always, this practical arrangement was soon thought to be the prescribed practice, though it is contrary to catholic, apostolic and Lutheran theology and doctrine. It has been a slow process, but thankfully, more and more Lutheran parishes are returning to the full Sunday service of Word and Sacrament.

Back to the Service of the Word, this part of the liturgy begins with a reading from the Old Testament. For Christians, Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and

prophecies. The Old Testament foretells the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus is that Messiah. Except during the Easter season, the first reading is from the books of the Law and the Prophets, as God spoke to His people about the coming of the Christ.

The Psalm appointed for the day is now read, sung, or chanted. Although the Psalms were originally written to be sung to a simple chant, they may be read responsively, in unison, or sung by the choir, as in an anthem arrangement of the appointed Psalm. (If the choir's anthem is not the appointed Psalm for the day, the anthem should be sung at the time of the offering, as a more general musical offering.)

The Second Lesson, formerly called the "Epistle" is the first of two New Testament readings. In this reading God speaks to us through the words of the apostles. At times, this lesson relates to themes presented in the First or Gospel lessons, however as often as not, this lesson provides alternative themes.

Following the second reading, the Verse is sung as preparation for the Holy Gospel. These verses come from the Bible and may either be of a general nature, or specific to the day or season of the Church Year. Except during Lent and Holy Week (when Alleluias are not sung in worship), the "Alleluia" is an important part of the Verse. Alleluia comes from the Hebrew and means "Praise the Lord", and is used in the Church as an expression of triumph in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The general Alleluia Verse in the Lutheran Book of Worship comes from St. John 6:68. Jesus had just been speaking of Himself as the Bread of Life, and some followers left Him because this saying was too difficult to understand. Jesus asks His disciples if they too will go away. Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" We sing this most Sundays as our affirmation that we will not go away, but want to hear Jesus' words of eternal life.

As preparation for the presence of the Risen Christ in the Holy Gospel, an appropriate "sequence hymn" may also be sung. This is most often used when there will be a Gospel procession, to provide extra music for the procession. Whatever words are used, they bid worshipers prepare their hearts and minds for the proclamation of the Gospel through the reading from the Gospels, and the preaching of the sermon.

X. The Proclamation of the Gospel and the Sermon

We have highlighted that there are two major parts to the historic worship of the Church, the Service of the Word, and the Service of the Meal. These are preceded by the entrance rite (which we discussed last issue), and followed by the sending. However the entrance rite and sending are not essential. Word and Sacrament are, and constitute a complete worship service within the holy, catholic and apostolic tradition. Within the Service of the Word, the primary elements are the reading from the Gospels (because there Jesus is specifically proclaimed), and the sermon, in which the lessons are brought to life for the modern day congregation.

Following the announcement of the Gospel for the day, the congregation sings, “Glory to you, O Lord”. This is our declaration of allegiance to the Lord, who comes to us in the Gospel for the day. Biblical references for these words are found in Romans, 11:36 and 16:27, Jude 25, and Rev. 7:12. In the reading of the Gospel, God speaks to us through the words and life of His Son, Jesus Christ. The Gospel is normally read by the pastor from the place of preaching. The pastor should make it clear that he or she is reading the words of the evangelist, not speaking his or her own words. In many places, the book of the Scriptures is held high after the reading, and the pastor proclaims, “The Gospel of the Lord”, showing both acknowledgement of this as the Good News, and respect for God’s Word. The congregation affirms this by singing, “Praise be to you, O Christ”. Since the sermon is normally based upon the Gospel text, the sermon follows immediately after. The reading of the Gospel, together with the sermon, is the climax of the Service of the Word. In these, we celebrate not only the acts of God in past events, but the work of the Word, Incarnate, in our midst now, in the proclamation of the Word through the reading of Holy Scripture and the preaching of the sermon.

What is a sermon? I remember well a man once said to me, “Pastor, why do we still have sermons? People today are well-educated and can read and understand the Bible on their own. Shouldn’t we do away with the sermon, since we no longer need a pastor to tell us what the Bible means?” I had two responses I shared with this fellow. First, the sermon IS NOT first and foremost, teaching uneducated people what the Bible means. Although that does happen, and needs to happen because most people are not as well-educated about the Bible as this fellow concluded, still, the sermon is not primarily teaching. Second, the sermon IS, the presentation of the Biblical text in such a way that Jesus Christ is truly present in the text, in the sermon, and in the preacher, so that there is an encounter that takes place through the sermon; an encounter between the Word, Jesus Christ, and the hearer. That is the goal of preaching...that hearers experience the presence of Christ in the sermon, so that through this experience, they (we!) will be transformed, changed, renewed! I would be the first to admit that this encounter/experience happens to greater or lesser extents on any given sermon, on any given Sunday. I have no delusion that an experience that transforms, changes and renews takes place for every worshiper, every Sunday. Barriers such as an unclear sermon, the preacher’s own lack of clarity, and your state of mind may hinder the experience of the Word made flesh. I have always believed if one person is touched by any given sermon on any given Sunday, the sermon has served its purpose. As a result of my doctoral

preaching projects, I have found that most sermons touch many more than just one person, and that, to be sure, is the work of the Holy Spirit, at work through the sermon.

The success of all preaching, is due to the Holy Spirit who is at work in the preacher preparing the sermon, and delivering the sermon, and in the hearers, to open you and make you fertile soil for the Word of truth that day. And when that happens, we give God the glory, through the work of the Holy Spirit, connected to the Word. About this work of the Holy Spirit, Dr. Martin Luther wrote in a sermon on Pentecost Sunday: “It is a faithful saying that Christ has accomplished everything, has removed sin and overcome every enemy...But the treasure lies yet in one pile; it is not yet distributed nor invested. Consequently, if we are to possess it, the Holy Spirit must come and teach our hearts to believe and say: I, too, am one of those who are to have this treasure of the Gospel.”

I pray that in every proclamation of the Gospel treasure, the Holy Spirit will come and teach our hearts to believe and say that we, too, desire to have this wonderful treasure in our hearts and lives!

XI. The Three Great Creeds

The confession of one of the three great creeds within the public worship of the Church has been in use since early on in Christian history. There are three creeds included in the Lutheran Book of Worship. The two most often used in worship are the Nicene Creed, the more solemn or festive of the creeds, issued by the Council of Nicea about 325 A.D. (using the form of “**We** believe...”), and the Apostle’s Creed, based on the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 which traditionally is considered to have been written by the apostles as a personal statement of faith (using the form “**I** believe”. The Nicene is most appropriate on festival days or seasons of the Church year, while the Apostle’s Creed is used normally during non-festival times of the year. The third, and much longer creed, named for Athanasius is a statement of faith written to combat heresy, and affirms both the divinity and humanity of Christ, and the equality between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This creed is often used on Holy Trinity Sunday, and may be found on page 54 of the LBW.

The title, “Creed” comes from the first word of the creeds in Latin, “Credo”, or I believe. In his book, *Christian Liturgy; Catholic and Evangelical*, Lutheran theologian Frank Senn states, “The Creed is a condensed form of the biblical story.” He cautions against using any statements of faith other than the historical creeds, because they too easily follow personal interests and agendas, rather than stating what is and has always been the consensus of the whole Church. The Creeds set forth above everything else, what is the “catholic” faith of the Church. In some reformed circles after the Reformation, the word “catholic” in the creeds was changed to “Christian”, as a reaction against Roman Catholicism. This was unfortunate because, as I have explained before, the word “catholic” means so much more than simply “Roman Catholic”. Although the word “catholic” is often defined as universal, it came to mean universal only as a result of its original meaning, “right, true, orthodox”. When the early Church described itself as catholic, it had nothing to do with Rome, but defined “right, true, orthodox” teaching as over against false teaching, or heresy. In time, the Church that was catholic became understood as the universal Church, and vice versa. To say that the Church is catholic is more than to say it is Christian—of course, the Church of Jesus Christ is Christian—but the Church is also the guardian of the faith which is right, true and orthodox! This is what we proclaim in the historical, ecumenical creeds.

The Lutheran reformers Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon were careful to present the Lutheran reforming movement as catholic; as not apart from what the right, true, orthodox Christian Church had always believed and taught. Our chief confessional document, the Augsburg Confession aims at placing the Lutheran reforms solidly with the catholic tradition. In fact, the Augsburg Confession, in its very first sentence of Article I states, “We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the Council of Nicaea (i.e., the Nicene Creed)...” *The Book of Concord*, the collection of all Lutheran “symbolical” (or confessional) writings begins with “The Three Chief Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith”. Lutheranism has not only claimed to be Christian and evangelical, it also claims to be solidly catholic, in the sense that we confess the right, true, orthodox faith. That is why we say “catholic” in the creeds. And I might add, that

is why we continue to confess the creeds in worship. By confessing the creed each Sunday, we state what we believe, we re-affirm what is the true Christian faith, and we teach the faith. Through the statement of the creeds, we are united in our common faith as a community, and we are united with catholic Christians of every time and place.

One shortcoming of the Lutheran Book of Worship, from my perspective, is that the creed is optional. While the *Manual on the Liturgy* encourages the use of the creeds on Sunday mornings, the *rubric*, or instruction says “The creed *may* be said.” This is a departure from Lutheran practice, as well as catholic and apostolic custom. In every other prior Lutheran worship book, the rubric states, “The creed *shall* be said.” You have noticed that we do not exercise that supposed option in our worship here at Saint Luke’s. We follow catholic and Lutheran tradition by confessing one of the creeds at every Sunday worship service. Why?

Beyond tradition, there is also great need. We need to affirm and be reminded of what we believe. We need to continue to publicly state, before the world, what is the true Christian faith. We live in a time termed “postmodern”, which, among other things, claims there is no objective truth—truth is whatever it means for the individual person. Although some Christians have fallen into this error in thinking, Christianity as a whole has always believed that there is objective truth—truth that is revealed by God, true independent of what we think about it. If the world is indeed, “postmodern”, what we Christians need to be proclaiming is the objective truth of the Christian faith at every turn—especially as we gather for worship!

XII. Devoted to Prayer

Have you noticed on the front cover of the Saint Luke's Letter the words, "And they devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers..."? These words are from St. Luke's description of the communal life of the early Church. St. Luke is the author of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which takes up where the Gospel of Luke leaves off--with the history of the Church after Jesus has risen and ascended. It begins with the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, and, with St. Peter's sermon proclaiming what has just happened in the tongues of flame, the sound of rushing wind, and the speaking in other languages. And immediately after this Pentecost experience, St. Luke tells us of the believers, "And they devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread, and the prayers."

This, truly, has been the life-work of the Church of Jesus Christ from Pentecost on. Although these take many forms, they are the essential to what the Church is. We know no other teaching than that of the Apostolic tradition; we exist in and continue their teaching and their fellowship; our lives center around the breaking of the bread in the Lord's Supper; we seek to live lives of prayer. Any Christian or Christian community fulfills all righteousness if they will keep their focus on these things. Churches flounder and fuss and fight when they are distracted by other things and find themselves following other agendas.

Here at Saint Luke's, we have tried to keep prayer integral to our life as a congregation and as individual believers. In a sense, our personal prayer life ought to grow out of our congregational prayers each Sunday in worship. The prayers come at this point in the liturgy because having heard the Word read and proclaimed, we are moved to respond in prayer. These prayers may take many different forms. In the past, this prayer was referred to as The Prayer of the Church, and took the form of one extended pastoral prayer. The prayers at this point in the service are indeed, the Prayer of the Church. In recent years, this prayer time has become more responsive, with assisting ministers offering petitions, and the congregation making them their own through the responses (A: Lord, in your mercy... C: HEAR OUR PRAYER). At other times, the prayers may use the form of the Great Litany, found on page 168 of the Lutheran Book of Worship, or the form for the Prayer of the Church on page 52. The form does not matter so much as the content—that at this point in our worship, we pray “for the Church, the world, and for all people according to their needs”.

On the one hand, I'm sure that there are worshipers some Sundays who are impatient and begrudge the number of petitions and requests that are included in our prayers, and the added time it takes to pray for “all people according to their needs”. On the other hand, never is it more meaningful than when it is YOUR loved one or family member who is in need of prayer. I, personally and pastorally, am blessed to see how important our members view the prayer of the community, and how many requests we receive each week. If we had so many prayer requests on a given Sunday that it extended the service 5 or 10 minutes, so be it! If there are needs for prayer, it is our bounden duty to pray. The prayer of the congregation is one of the gifts and blessings of being the Body of Christ in

the world today. In the Sunday prayers, we pray for anyone and everyone who requests our prayer. To do any less would not be faithful to our calling. And then, we also pray for each other!

Our practice of praying for our members week by week had its beginning at a Congregation Council retreat some years ago. I thought it would be meaningful, during our retreat, for our church leaders to pray for all our members, by name. At each of our devotional times, I included the names of some of our members, moving through our member directory alphabetically, so that we wouldn't miss anyone. As the retreat progressed, we realized as a council, how powerful it was for us to pray for each other, and for all our members. It was decided at that retreat that we would make that a regular practice in the prayers at Sunday worship. At times, yes, folks have become confused and wondered why we are praying for them periodically. It's simply a way of lifting up each other in prayer. And although the rotation of names is random, (alphabetical), the truth of the matter is that I am often surprised that we end up praying for a member or a household, at just the time when they are in need of prayer! The Holy Spirit works that way! Praise the Holy Spirit for bringing the right names forward when there is a need for prayer, even when we may not be aware of those needs. At the same time, I encourage you to make a mental note of those we pray for in worship, both special needs for healing and wholeness, as well as the prayers for members, and include those folks in your personal prayers during the week, that we may indeed, be devoted to prayer!

XIII. The Peace

Most Lutherans think of the Peace as something “added” to the liturgy as part of the development of the new hymnal, the (green) Lutheran Book of Worship that was published in 1978. This would not be entirely correct. The fact is this blessing has been in use in Christian worship since the beginning of the Church. Indeed, it has its roots in Jesus’ repeated words to His disciples after His resurrection, “Peace be with you!” (See John 20) All early liturgies include this blessing, often referred to as the “Kiss of Peace”, a mark of fellowship and unity which, in ancient liturgies, was usually placed immediately after the Fraction, or the “breaking of the bread” in the communion liturgy. The reason for its placement here was significant. The bread is both the true presence of Jesus’ body, incarnate in the loaf, and symbol of the Church as the body of Christ in the world today. When the bread is broken it represents Jesus’ body being broken for the world, and US, the body of Christ, being broken as well. The Church is broken, in the sense that we continue to be sinful people (i.e. broken), and the Church is broken symbolizing our willingness to be instruments for the care and feeding of the world! In the liturgical action called the “fraction”, we acknowledge our brokenness, and our willingness to be broken, to be a living sacrifice to our Lord. Having just been “broken”, the words “The peace of the Lord be with you always...” are especially appropriate and meaningful as they heal our brokenness and affirm that we have peace, through our Lord Jesus Christ! In many older Lutheran worship books, the Peace is included at this place in the communion liturgy, spoken or chanted by the pastor, to whom the congregation responds as a whole, “And also with you.” This has been a part of most Lutheran liturgies from Luther on. Luther himself highly regarded the “sharing of the peace” between pastor and congregation at this point in the communion service because it was “the voice of the gospel announcing the forgiveness of sins...the only and most worthy preparation for the Lord’s Table.”

The change that took place in the Lutheran Book of Worship was simply that after the pastor and the congregation exchanged the peace, that congregants also exchange the peace, following the practice of early Christians when all present for the Lord’s Supper exchanged a “kiss” or greeting of peace. Because many responses to this proposed change were negative because the congregational involvement was seen as a disruption (“all those people moving around, shaking hands, and talking right during the most solemn part of communion!” was the gist of the response), it was decided to move the sharing of the peace to another place in the liturgy. In some ancient liturgies, it was the practice to exchange the peace after the prayers, before the communion liturgy began. The Peace was included here in the liturgies of the Lutheran Book of Worship because it has some historic precedent, it was seen by some as less “intrusive”, and was something of a transition after the Service of the Word, before the Sacrament of the Altar. However, the rubrics (instructions) listed in the Lutheran Book of Worship indicate “The Peace is shared at this time (after the prayers) or after the Lord’s Prayer, prior to the distribution.”

The fact is, something has been lost by moving the Peace from its historic location, to a place after the prayers, before the offering. It was, as Luther stated, a truly powerful expression of the Gospel, of the forgiveness to come in the communion. After the

fraction, symbolizing our brokenness, sharing the peace immediately after embodies the unity and community we experience, through the Lord's Supper. Because there is much to commend the practice of sharing the Peace after the breaking of the bread, we do, indeed, at times and seasons during the church year, sharing the Peace at that more historic location in the liturgy.

In either place in the liturgy, it is the blessing of Jesus, spoken to the congregation, "Peace be with you", that is then shared between worshipers as we express our hope for the Lord's peace for each other. This is not a time for usual greetings or introductions. The Peace should never be replaced (as is the custom of some congregations) with a general time of greeting your neighbor or introducing yourself to each other. That should take place before or after the service. The Peace should be an expression of just that... "The Peace of the Lord be with you!" At this most solemn moment, we wish each other, the very peace of Jesus Christ! "Hello!", or "How are you?", or "Good morning!" is not the same. In our troubled, tense, fractured world, we need to speak peace to each other on Sunday morning! That is the purpose of the sharing of the Peace of Christ!

XIV. The Offering—UGH!

As we begin our discussion of the offering, I would imagine there are some who might respond, “UGH!” Haven’t we had enough of that in annual stewardship programs? In a sense, I can understand that feeling. Although Christian stewardship is exciting to me, I get to the point where I’m happy to have the fall stewardship program completed, have pledges all turned in, a budget prepared, and so that we can begin looking forward to Advent and Christmas.

But the liturgical action that we call “the offering” is more than putting our offering in the plate. Like all of liturgy, ritual action is more than what appears on the surface, and this is certainly true of the offering. How could the offering be more than what appears on the surface?

What is obvious about the offering, is the act of returning to God a portion of our income. It happens, quite simply, by our placing check or cash into the offering plate as it comes down the row. This is the obvious liturgical action. But have you ever considered that when we place an offering in the plate, that offering is actually symbolizing all that we have and are? The money is but a token, symbolizing that we are offering up to God, not just our monetary pittance, but ourselves! One of our bishop’s assistants used to say he wished we could jump up, bodily, into the offering plate when it comes around, to show that all that we are belongs to God, and we offer ourselves up to Him! Picture that—offering plates filled with members, sitting tightly compacted, being passed row to row, finally being carried up to the altar as an offering, a sacrifice to God! We are the offering in worship, and the offering is each of us, giving ourselves to God in response to what He has done for us! The offertory prayers make it clear that the offering on Sunday is more than just money, but all that we have—our time, talents and possessions.

But that’s not all there is to the offering—the offering also includes the bread and wine that are a gift to God to be used for the spiritual nourishment of all. As in the account of the feeding of the five thousand, we are like the boy who had but five loaves and two fish. All we have, in a sense, is a small loaf of bread and an amount of wine. What are these simple, earthly elements and how can they become the body and blood of our Lord? When they are offered up, in Jesus’ hands, they become for us his very presence. Just as Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, and blessed them and broke them, so also Jesus takes our bread and wine, blesses them, and breaks them for distribution. And they become heavenly food! They become His real presence to bring us forgiveness, life and salvation! In Jesus’ hands, all our humble gifts are multiplied to do so much more than we could ever imagine. This is true of the bread and wine, and it is also true of our gifts of time, talent and treasure. When we offer ourselves to Jesus, we become more than we are, as He works miracles through us!

And this is why we make an offering each week—to offer ourselves to be instruments in Jesus’ hands. In the offering, we offer ourselves to Jesus, trusting Him to use us and bless us, for the sake of our church, our community and our world. Consider the richness

and deep meaning of the ritual action we call “the offering” this Sunday as you make your offering. And as the usher offers the gifts at the altar, imagine yourself, being offered up at the altar as well!

XV. The Service of the Eucharistic Meal

This begins our focus on the second half of our Sunday worship service, the Liturgy of the Eucharistic Meal. As we have discussed earlier, “eucharist” means thanksgiving. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the liturgy of thanksgiving. In it we recall how Jesus took bread and wine and gave thanks to God the Father. In it we also offer our thanks for Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, and for making his own body and blood available to us in the Lord’s Supper. The liturgy begins with the historic and traditional salutation and response: “The Lord be with you; and also with you.” The presiding minister then bids us lift our hearts up to God, in worship, and we assert that we lift them up to the Lord. And then immediately the tone is set for the Eucharist: “Let us give THANKS to the Lord our God. It is right to give him THANKS and praise.”

In the words of Dr. Luther D. Reed, in his landmark book on Lutheran/Catholic Worship, “In these simple, majestic phrases of great dignity, reverence and beauty, we are here led into the heart of the Holy Communion Office.” These words of the opening communion dialog and the proper preface which follows are the most ancient and least changed liturgical texts of the Christian Church. They have begun the liturgy of the meal and called worshipers to thanksgiving from the earliest centuries of Christianity. There is a balance between the presiding minister who leads the liturgy in the place of Christ, and the gathered community to whom belongs the Sacrament of the Altar. Together, presiding minister and faithful gathered for worship constitute the body of Christ, fully present at this moment, at the table of the Lord. These simple, yet profound words shape the liturgy and establish the tone for the eucharistic meal—it is above all else, thanks and praise. In it, our hearts are lifted up to the Lord God, in heaven. In this meal, heaven touches earth, and we are uplifted so that the “fabric” or distance between our meal and the heavenly banquet is transcended in a way that does not happen in any other place or time on earth. The Orthodox symbolize this perhaps the most powerfully in their liturgies where the eucharistic ritual can best be described as “otherworldly”. This is intentional, and heightens the sense that in the Holy Communion, the earthly celebration is united with the celebration among the heavenly host, where Jesus Christ presides at the wedding feast that has no end.

As the proper (or assigned) preface for the day continues, this is made even more clear. Major festivals or seasons of the church year have their own “proper” preface, as the presiding minister begins, “It is indeed right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places offer thanks and praise to you, O Lord, Holy Father, through Christ our Lord”. The preface then continues with words, thoughts and images that reflect the unique character of the festival or season. (These prefaces are not included in the “pew” edition of the book of worship, but are included in the minister’s altar book (the Missal). The preface for Epiphany (Jan. 6th), for example, continues, “Sharing our life, he lived among us to reveal your glory and love, that our darkness should give way to his own brilliant light.” As the Epiphany celebrates the revelation of who Jesus is, and that His light spreads throughout the world, this is reflected in the proper preface for the festival day. On any given Sunday, as you listen to the presiding minister chant the preface, pay

attention to the words and you will grasp the meaning and importance of this particular Sunday in the life of the church, and the individual believer.

Finally, the proper preface concludes, “And so, with the Church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn...” The congregation then sings (or says), “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of power and might: heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” As you hear, the end of the preface and the congregational “Sanctus” (Latin for “holy”) make real the unity of our celebration with that in heaven. We join them, as we sing around God’s throne, “Holy, Holy, Holy”. This is the song of the heavenly host in Isaiah’s vision, the song of the host in Revelation, united with the shout of those who welcomed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, which is, in fact, from Psalm 118. The Old and New Testaments, therefore, are united, just as heaven and earth are joined in this song of praise. At this point in the liturgy, there should be no doubt that what is happening in THIS sanctuary, in THIS congregation, transcends time and space, as we join the heavenly host at the eternal banquet. If there is one thing that seems to have been lost in much “contemporary” worship, it is this transcendent quality or character. The historic liturgy aims to help us transcend our earthly existence, with all its fear, struggle and worldliness, to give us, if for a moment, an awareness of God’s omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience—that God is all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing—that God is greater than we can ever hope to imagine or understand!

As we are now joined with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, our liturgy moves to the Eucharistic Prayer—a form of prayer in use from the time of the early church, wherein the priest/pastor offers thanks for the whole history of salvation, culminating in the Words of Institution—the very words recorded in scripture as describing Jesus’ institution of the Sacrament. We will discuss the Eucharistic Prayer in the next section.

XVI. The Eucharistic Prayer

Considering how much we have discussed thus far, it's hard to put into perspective the next section to be explored, the Eucharistic Prayer. It's hard to put this into perspective because for all our discussion and reflection, the Eucharistic Prayer is the center of the entire second half of the Sunday liturgy. As the lessons and sermon are the focus of the first half of the service (the Liturgy of the Word), the Eucharistic Prayer may be said to be the focus of the Liturgy of the Meal.

From the accounts of the Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-28, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-20, and I Corinthians 11:23-26, we see that there are four primary actions of Christ in the eucharistic meal. We remember and refer to these simply as "taking, blessing, breaking, sharing". Jesus *took* the bread and wine, He *blessed* these elements, He *broke* the bread, and He *shared* them with His disciples. These are, properly, the four ritual actions of the Lord's Supper. The Eucharistic Prayer is associated with the action of *blessing*.

In the great Passover Seder, the meal which Jesus was celebrating with His disciples the night of His betrayal, there is included in the ritual a special prayer of blessing known as the Berakah, related to the prayers of blessing spoken in each Jewish home at the Sabbath meal. This is a prayer of thanksgiving for God's goodness, God's providence, and God's action in the history of Israel. When Jesus prayed the prayers of blessing at the Seder, which would become the Lord's Supper, He was following faithful Jewish practice. Although we don't know the exact wording of Jesus' prayer of blessing, we know that it was a prayer of thanksgiving (eucharistia), as He gave thanks to the Father for the bread and wine, and the history of God's activity in the lives of His people. This would have all been part of the Seder prayer of thanksgiving. It was right and appropriate that Jesus should, as the head of the household, offer this prayer of blessing over the meal, and over the passover bread and the cup of wine. From that first Lord's Supper on, the presiding minister at the table of the Lord has prayed a prayer of thanksgiving, or Eucharistic Prayer over the bread and wine. At this moment, the presiding minister stands in the place of Jesus at the altar/table, as the head of the household of faith. Although there are a number of traditional Eucharistic Prayers that have come down to us through the ages, the usual form includes words of adoration and praise, *anamnesis*: translated as "remembrance", a solemn reference to our Lord's sufferings and death, Resurrection and Ascension; a recitation of the Words of Institution (the words of scripture describing Jesus' institution of the sacrament); *epiclesis*: prayer for the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine, and upon the community of believers; and finally, prayer for those who would receive the Lord's body and blood. Because of the centrality of the Eucharistic Prayer, the solemn character of this prayer, and the nature of the anamnesis and epiclesis, Christians have traditionally knelt for this prayer, from the singing of the Sanctus through the Lord's Prayer. It was considered an insult to stand, while prayer was made to the Father, recalling Jesus' incarnation, passion and resurrection. Although some parishes today have no accommodations for kneeling, all our members who are able are encouraged to kneel for this most holy prayer of thanksgiving, institution, anamnesis and epiclesis.

Some may recall hearing (in Catechism or adult classes) that Martin Luther did away with the Eucharistic Prayer. This is only partially true. Luther objected to language in the Roman Catholic mass that suggested Jesus was being sacrificed again, in the mass, by the priest. What is called the Roman Canon of Luther's day was full of specific, intentional wording that suggested just that, as the medieval Roman Church did indeed believe that the mass was a "work", performed by the priest and the congregation that brought forgiveness of sins. Although Jesus died in the past for sins, it was taught that forgiveness of sins was available to worshipers in the present, only through the work of the priest, who sacrificed Jesus anew in the mass. The Eucharistic Prayer in Luther's time was so full of this idea, that it seemed easier to Luther to remove the Eucharistic Prayer entirely, and use only the Words of Institution, to help to cleanse the mass of this sacrificial imagery. Luther was not opposed to the historic Eucharistic Prayer, but to the Roman Canon which so clearly taught that Jesus was being sacrificed again, in the mass.

More than five hundred years later, Lutherans have restored the Eucharistic Prayer to its rightful place. Already in Lutheran church orders of 1522, 1525, 1543, and 1571, "purified" prayer forms were written to replace the objectionable Roman Eucharistic Prayers. American liturgies of 1853 and 1863 included "pure" Eucharistic Prayers. It is significant to note that even the Roman Canon today has been cleansed of the notion that Jesus is sacrificed new at every mass, emphasizing instead that Jesus' sacrifice was once for all on the cross. Lutherans and Roman Catholics now share very similar Eucharistic Prayers, make use of common eucharistic liturgies, and are largely united in our understanding and practice of the Sacrament of the Altar. You may notice, at times, that the Eucharistic Prayers in the Lutheran, Roman, and Episcopal liturgies do mention "sacrifice", but in the sense that the bread and wine are our "sacrifice" or gifts to God, and the bread and wine symbolize the sacrifice of our lives, as we offer ourselves to the Lord. (This is the significance of our "breaking" the bread—we are offering ourselves, broken, to the Lord, to be made whole in the communion, as well as recalling/remembering Jesus' sacrifice on the cross). When we speak, in the eucharistic liturgy, of Jesus' sacrifice, it is always as a once for all sacrifice, which we share in the present.

The Eucharistic Prayer changes with the day or season of the Church Year. On festival days and seasons, the prayer may be longer, befitting a more solemn celebration. During "green Sundays"—Sundays in ordinary time, the prayer may be a bit shorter and less full. It is certainly acceptable to only use the Words of Institution, however this would be eliminating the "blessing before the meal". Jesus Himself offered a blessing at the Last Supper, and we do well to continue that practice.

I hope this brief discussion of the Eucharistic Prayer is meaningful, and unfolds for you much richness as we pray this prayer of thanksgiving each Sunday.

XVII. The Fraction

Let us now discuss what may be one of the most misunderstood, and unfamiliar parts of the eucharistic liturgy; the ritual action known as the Fraction.

In the last section, we touched on the fourfold action of the Last Supper, as recorded in Matthew 26:17-28; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20, and I Corinthians 11:23-26. These four movements are referred to as “taking, blessing, breaking and sharing”. They come directly from scripture where Jesus took the bread and wine, He blessed the elements, He broke the bread, and He shared them with His disciples. These are, properly, the ritual action of the Lord’s Supper. As the Eucharistic Prayer is associated with the action of blessing, after the prayer comes the action known as the Fraction, or the breaking of the bread.

This action was so central to the Lord’s Supper that in the early church the Holy Communion was frequently referred to as “the breaking of the bread.” Today, “breaking bread together” is a colloquial term that means eating together, or having a meal together. Maybe this modern phrase grew out of the “churchly” term. I don’t know. What I do know is that for the early church, the action of breaking the bread had its own mystery—so much so that it became one of the names for the Lord’s Supper.

What is the mystery of the breaking of the bread? As with all liturgical action, it is multi-layered and multi-faceted. Above all, it is the act of Jesus at the table on the night of His betrayal. It was practical, in that the bread had to be broken to be shared with the disciples. This is true in our Sunday liturgy as well. But even more, the bread being broken symbolizes broken-ness. It symbolizes Jesus’ body, broken on the cross. It symbolizes the world broken by sin, disobedience and alienation. It symbolizes the Church, being broken to be shared with the world. It symbolizes the sacrifice of our lives, as the bread and wine, together with the gifts of money, are our offering to God. All of these are symbolized in the ritual action of the breaking of the bread, the Fraction. The ritual action of the breaking of the bread should not be done during the words of institution, as this is part of the ritual action of “blessing” (praying). Also, the words of institution are not a “re-enactment”, but instead a “re-presentation”, as Jesus is present, again, in our midst, speaking the words, Himself, through the presiding minister. It is Jesus who takes the bread, Jesus who prays the prayer of blessing (which includes the words of institution), Jesus who then breaks the bread, and shares it with His disciples. In the Sunday Eucharist, the presiding minister is not re-enacting what happened at the Last Supper—rather, Jesus is present in the presiding minister, again celebrating His supper with His disciples. The Lord’s Supper on Sunday morning is a present meal at which Jesus is both host and food, not a dramatic re-enactment of a past event. This is why the bread is broken after the Eucharistic Prayer.

Similarly, this is why it can be meaningful to pause for a brief moment of silence at the Fraction. It is a distinct liturgical action. There is deep meaning and mystery in this action. Rather than hurrying through it, we want to allow time for the meaning and mystery to “sink in”, so to speak. We want to ponder Jesus’ broken-ness on the cross for

our salvation. We want to consider the sacrifice of our lives, represented in the bread, wine, and offering of our money. We want to grieve over the broken-ness of the world. We want to prepare ourselves to receive the sacrament of unity, that heals our broken-ness and brings new life to our hurting world. If anything, we ought to have a longer silence after the Fraction, rather than a shorter silence, that we may have time to truly reflect on the breaking of the bread and it's meaning and mystery.

Let me say at this point, that the Fraction is NOT, sacrificing Jesus again. Although Luther realized that the mass was, in certain terms, sacrifice (Jesus offers Himself to us; we offer ourselves and all that we have and are to Him, in sacrifice, etc.), he was concerned that the liturgy of the mass make it clear that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was once-for-all. The priest/pastor does not "sacrifice Jesus anew" at the altar. However, the bread and wine are our participation in that once-for-all sacrifice, when Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many. He is, indeed, the Lamb of God who gave His life for the sins of the world. When we receive His body and blood, we are partaking of His sacrificial meal, which He offers whenever the community gathers at the altar where He presides at His holy meal. When we gather around the altar, I hope and trust that it is not the pastor/priest whom you see at the altar, but Jesus, present in His minister—Jesus, taking the bread, blessing it in a prayer of thanksgiving, breaking it, and sharing it with His disciples.

This Sunday, I pray that the Fraction will have new, deeper meaning for you—and that you will find yourself even more deeply enveloped in the mystery of the breaking of the bread!

XVIII. The Agnus Dei and the Distribution

Having discussed the Fraction/Breaking of the Bread, let us now turn to what takes place after that liturgical action—the singing of the Agnus Dei and other hymns, as the bread and wine are distributed to the faithful.

The beautiful communion hymn known in Latin as the Agnus Dei (which is translated “Lamb of God”) became part of the Eucharistic liturgy about 700 A.D. Pope Sergius I introduced it as a devotional hymn, first sung by the choir during the Fraction. Through the years, it has as often as not been sung as a congregational hymn, although in many of the great “musical Masses” of Mozart, Haydn, Gounod, and others, it is included as one of their five choral Mass texts: Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei.

The text of the Agnus Dei comes directly from scripture, John 1:29, when John the Baptizer speaks these words of Jesus saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” It also reflects the many times in the book of Revelation when Christ is referred to as the Lamb. This hymn reminds us of the connection between the Passover and Easter, which explains the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God. According to Exodus 12, when the Israelites were about to be delivered from slavery in Egypt, God commanded each household to select a lamb without blemish, to kill it in sacrifice, and to put its blood on the lintels and doorposts of the house. When the first-born in Egypt were slain, the angel of death would “pass-over” the homes marked with the sacrificial lamb’s-blood. Under the new covenant, Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb whose blood delivers us from the bondage to sin and death. When we sing this hymn to the Lamb of God, we proclaim that in His sacrifice is our salvation, and we prepare to receive His body and blood for our forgiveness. After this ancient hymn is sung, other appropriate hymns or songs may be sung by the congregation, choir, or a soloist, or there may be organ music, or silence. All are fitting ways to undergird and focus the congregation’s attention to Christ during the sacrament.

One of the abuses corrected among the Lutherans during the Reformation was the distribution of both elements (bread and wine) in Holy Communion. In the Augsburg Confession, Article XXII, it is stated, “Both kinds are given to the laity in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper because this usage has the command of the Lord (Matthew 26:27), “Drink from it, all of you.” Christ here clearly instructs concerning the cup that all should drink.” (The Book of Concord, Kolb/Wengert, p. 61) For a number of reasons, the cup had been withheld from the laity, under the reasoning that the full presence of Christ is available in the bread. Although Lutherans have always offered both the bread and the wine in Holy Communion, we also acknowledge that Christ is fully present in either element. For this reason, if you normally receive the wine from the common cup, but are feeling ill on a particular Sunday, you may simply receive the bread in the full assurance that you are receiving the fullness of Christ’s presence. This is also an option for those who, for whatever reason, prefer not to receive wine. If you are someone who prefers not to receive wine, keep this in mind if you worship in a congregation where grape juice is not available. Simply receive the bread. Both elements communicate Christ’s full presence.

In discussing the distribution of the sacred elements, a few other things should be said. Keep in mind that while we do practice “open communion”, this does not imply “indiscriminate” communion. We always publish a statement in our worship folder that states clearly that we believe that Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. We instruct that those who are baptized, believe in the real presence, and have received communion before, are welcome to commune. We state our belief and practice, and then let each individual decide for themselves whether they will commune. If a person is not baptized, they should not receive the Lord’s Supper. It is the family meal of the baptized family of God. If a person does not believe in the real presence, they should not commune—and in fact, there are many times when visitors choose not to commune. Certainly, if a person has never received instruction, been prepared, and received the Lord’s Supper before, they should not receive.

Another item to be aware of is the variety of practices among Lutheran congregations with regard to how the elements are distributed, and at what age young people are received as communicants. I find it helpful to remember that what matters is the Word, together with the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. Whether one received wafers or from a loaf—whether one receives from one common chalice or from individual glasses, is of less consequence than that one receives the Lord’s Supper regularly. You will find many pastors and laymembers who make much of common cup versus individual glasses. Certainly, Jesus used one cup when He instituted His Holy Meal. There is a certain unity and community that is manifested by one cup, just as that is manifested by one loaf, rather than many individual wafers. However, as with baptism and the amount of water used, what matters finally is the Word and Holy Spirit at work in the earthly elements. I am more concerned that congregations offer and communicants receive the Lord’s Supper each and every Sunday, rather than concerning myself with what are truly, external matters.

In the same way, you will find that many Lutheran congregations are offering first communion at a variety of ages these days. Our joint communion practices statement (LCA, ALC, LC-MS) from the 1970’s leave younger communion as an open question. Infant communion is precluded, and the age of 10 years old is suggested as a guideline, but discretion is given to congregations, pastors and parents. For this reason, many congregations commune younger than 10 years of age. Our practice here at Saint Luke’s is not to exclude anyone from communion who has been receiving in another congregation. If a child began receiving in first grade at a former congregation, and then comes to Saint Luke’s where we commune at fourth grade, we do not exclude them. The issue is one of respect for the understandings and practices of other congregations, and the realization that biblically, there is no one age specified for first communion. This remains in Lutheranism an open question, so we decide what will be the practice in our congregation, and we respect the decisions of other congregations.

Finally, with regard to receiving the Lord’s Supper. Although other traditions use different words to accompany the presentation of the bread and wine, here at Saint Luke’s our custom is to use the traditional words that Luther himself preferred. The

bread is given with the words, “The body of Christ, given for you.” The wine is shared with the words, “The blood of Christ, shed for you.” The appropriate response is “Amen”, although one may hear a variety of responses to receiving the elements. It is not necessary to speak a response at all, and some prefer to make the sign of the cross, silently before receiving the bread and after receiving the wine. However this is open to personal preference and what is most meaningful to the individual communicant.

We have covered much with regard to the distribution of the Sacred Elements of the Lord’s Supper, and there is even more that could be discussed. But let this be enough for now. May the Holy Spirit create an undying hunger and thirst in us, and in our congregation, for the Lord’s Supper!

XIX. The Post-Communion

In our discussion of the Sunday liturgy within the one holy catholic and apostolic tradition, we come now to what has been called the Post-Communion. This refers, simply, to all that comes after the sharing of the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, this might seem as nothing more than a fitting closing for the service. On the other, it is an important bridge between our reception of our Lord's presence in Word and Sacrament, and our mission as we are called to take His presence out into the world.

The post-communion may include a canticle or a final communion hymn that concludes the distribution. The two canticles that are included in the Lutheran Book of Worship are "Thank the Lord and Sing His Praise", and the *Nunc Dimittis*, the song of Simeon when the baby Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem for the rite of purification (Luke 2:29-32). Having now experienced the Son of God, in the flesh, Simeon is prepared to depart this life happy. His song says, "*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.*" The LBW canticle then adds the doxology, "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen." Most often here at Saint Luke's, we sing one of the LBW canticles on festival days, when a full liturgy is warranted. On "ordinary" Sundays, we sing a final communion hymn that is especially oriented to thanksgiving for the sacrament and mission to the world, again, helping to make the bridge that moves us from worship to service.

Either after the Post-Communion hymn or before the Post-Communion canticle, the presiding minister may say these or similar words, "The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in his grace." These words, known as the "sacramental blessing", are an adaptation of a form used in pre-Reformation times as part of the distribution. It is what the name implies: a blessing that the sacrament will confer upon recipients the grace contained therein.

Also included in the Post-Communion is a prayer which again, normally offers thanksgiving to God with prayer that He will guide us as we go forth to serve. The LBW has three Post-Communion prayers. The booklet, *Lutherans at Worship*, by Stauffer, Doan and Aune, gives the history and origins of these prayers. The first, which begins, "We give you thanks, almighty God..." is a new translation of a prayer from Luther's German Mass of 1526, and it has been used in almost all Lutheran liturgies. It expresses our gratitude for God's gift and prays that we may be strengthened by it. The second prayer, beginning, "Pour out upon us the spirit of your love..." is a new translation of the Post-Communion prayer for Easter in the Roman Missal. The third prayer, "Almighty God, you gave your Son..." comes from the prayer for the second Sunday after Easter in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. A fourth option (included in the Minister's Desk Edition), is to use the prayer for Maundy Thursday—"Lord God, in a wonderful Sacrament...". This prayer was written by St. Thomas Aquinas in 1264 for the new feast of Corpus Christi. At the same time, there are many prayers in the tradition

of Christianity that are appropriate as post-communion prayers, and we often draw from these rich resources to vary our liturgy during particular festivals and seasons.

After the Post-Communion prayer, the presiding minister blesses the congregation with the Benediction. Although we most often (almost exclusively), use the Aaronic Benediction (the words God gave to Aaron and his sons in Numbers 6:22-27, to “put my name upon the children of Israel”), any Trinitarian Benediction may be used. The alternative in the LBW is, “Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever”, which originated in the eleventh century. This Benediction is used in many denominations, and has wide acceptance. However, the blessing given to Aaron is the only Benediction specifically commanded by God and included in Holy Scripture. Luther in his Latin Mass suggested this blessing as the Benediction to conclude the service of worship, and employed it in his German Mass. (See the book, *Worship*, by Luther D. Reed.) The Lutheran Church Orders generally followed Luther in the use of the Aaronic Benediction so that this blessing developed into common Lutheran usage. The Liturgy of the Church of Sweden added to the Aaronic Benediction the New Testament form, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”, concluding the service with this Trinitarian confession. In America, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg followed the Swedish practice in his Liturgy for the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, 1748, as did the Augustana Church. While I am not opposed to the use of other Benedictions, I hope you know me well enough to know that given the strong history of Lutheran usage of the Aaronic Benediction, together with the specific command of God in Holy Scripture, I see no compelling reason to depart from the Aaronic Benediction as a common practice.

The service ends with the dismissal, or sending, as we are sent forth to serve. An assisting minister says, “Go in peace, serve the Lord”, or some similar words related to the particular Sunday or season. The congregation responds with a confident and heartfelt, “Thanks be to God!” From the time of the early church, the people of God have been dismissed with these or similar words. The dismissal reminds us of the words of Jesus to the sinful woman who poured perfume on his feet. Jesus said to her, “*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*” (Luke 7:50) Interestingly, the dismissal/sending in the old Latin liturgy is, in fact, where the term “mass” comes from. The sending was: “The *mass* (or gathering) is ended; go in peace.” This gathering of Christians for the Sunday service was called *the mass*. Luther also referred to the Holy Communion service as the mass, giving his liturgies the names “German Mass”, “Hymn Mass”, “Formula Mass”, etc. We ought not shy away from that term, or feel uncomfortable with it. It is simply another name for the Sunday gathering or “massing” of Christians for Word and Sacrament!

Believe it or not, we have now discussed, in detail, the complete Sunday liturgy of western Christianity, within the Lutheran tradition. Let us now turn to some final concluding thoughts.

XX. Final Thoughts

What a pleasure it has been to explore, together, the meaning and mystery of the Sunday liturgy within the Lutheran tradition of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ! I hope that I have been able to share some of my deep appreciation and excitement for the celebration of Word and Sacrament as it's been passed down to us through the ages. I hope that I have also been able to inspire in you, a more full understanding, and so a greater hunger and thirst for Sunday worship. Because truly, that has been my goal.

If there is one aspect of worship within the Lutheran tradition that is my greatest disappointment, it is that on any given Sunday, so few Lutherans worship! As with all things related to faith, Dr. Martin Luther believed that if participation in Sunday worship were not an obligation, not a requirement, but an act of freely given worship and praise in response to the gift of salvation in and through Jesus Christ, Christians would flock to their churches on Sunday hungry to hear the Word and receive the Sacrament. Sadly, in America, at least, only three out of ten Lutherans worship on any given Sunday. In a letter from our bishop dated Easter, 2002, he cites that “We in the ELCA are 5.1 million people. On an average Sunday morning, 1.5 million of us are in worship.”

I can't believe Lutherans are happy, or even satisfied with that fact! For Christians who say that we believe love and grace are greater motivators than law and requirements, it is not proven by our response in worship. In spite of all the excuses to the contrary (“I had to work”, “The kids were sick”, “I had to mow the yard”, “I was out of town”, etc.), it comes down to an unwillingness to put God first. It comes down to an unwillingness to “Remember the sabbath to keep it holy.” What God commands is not a sabbath full of yard work and relaxing and family time. God commands a holy sabbath—a sabbath that is consecrated to Him. What better way to consecrate Sunday to God, than by beginning with worship! It keeps us on track. It makes Sunday truly, holy. It feeds us with Word and Sacrament. It unites us, physically and bodily, with the Body of Christ. I can think of no reason to miss Sunday worship, ever! (Barring sickness, work, or unavoidable travel.)

At our recent Congregation Council retreat (April, 2002), we discussed the fact that the central aspect of the Christian life and the Christian community is Sunday worship. Everything draws its strength from Sunday worship; everything flows from Sunday worship; the community grows in faith and commitment by participation in Sunday worship. It is as some wise (and witty?) sage once said, “Irregularity binds the church!” At our council retreat, it was felt that perhaps no one has ever stated, clearly, that the norm for our congregation (and indeed, for all believers!) is to be regular, faithful Sunday worship.

For this reason, we decided to state, publicly, that the norm for our congregation is to worship every Sunday, except when ill, working, or otherwise precluded. Granted, this will sound to some like a strong statement, as well we intended it to be. Some may hear this as legalistic—though it is not a requirement. No “sabbath police” will visit you if

you miss worship. It is simply, but powerfully, a statement that this is what we expect of ourselves and each other, as people saved by the grace of God, wanting to respond to that gift obediently and faithfully! We want to take Sunday worship seriously here at Saint Luke's. This is one way to take worship seriously.

My prayer is that this booklet will help you to take worship seriously, and then to worship devoutly, reverently, and joyfully! My opinion is that there is not enough being preached or taught or written about the meaning and power of the great tradition of Christian worship, from the apostles on. This booklet is one humble attempt to encourage and upbuild our church, and the Church in worship.

If you have grown through this booklet, please feel free to pass it along to others. It is written as a pastoral work, and I would welcome the chance to be a pastoral teacher to all who search for greater depth and understanding in worship.

May God bless you, and all those who do not forsake the gathering together of believers, as is the custom of some! May God so inspire us that we will not forsake the Sunday liturgy, but hunger for it daily.

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