

# Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Narrative Holy Communion

## *Introduction & Background*

The introduction at the beginning of Evangelical Lutheran Worship starts with a reminder of the central place that worship has in the life of the church. The confessions describe the church in terms of the worshipping assembly.

In our Lutheran Confessions, the church is defined by its worship. This does not mean that all worshipping assemblies do the same things in the same way. Yet this confessional statement reminds us that worship is fundamental to our Christian and Lutheran identity. In worship, we encounter God's mission to the world, centered in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the living and abiding Word of God proclaimed in the scriptures.

This narrative service is one opportunity to deepen our awareness of what takes place in the service of Holy Communion. Because it is commentary on the elements and actions of a service of Holy Communion, it is best celebrated during the assembly's worship. Rather than describing each part of the worship service individually, this narrative is focused around the familiar four-fold pattern of Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending.

## *Gathering*

In each service of Holy Communion,  
the Holy Spirit gathers people around the means of grace—the Word of God and the sacraments.  
Sunday is the primary day on which the Church gathers.  
Sunday is the first day of creation when God transformed darkness into light.  
Sunday is the day that the crucified and risen Christ appeared to the disciples  
and was made known to them in word and in the breaking of bread.

The heart of worship is not found in what we do,  
the words we speak, or the songs we sing.  
The heart of worship is what God does and what God gives.  
In the presence of all of us together, in baptism,  
in the word sung and preached and prayed,  
in the gift of the body and blood of Christ in holy communion,  
we participate in God's mission to the world.  
On this day of Christ's resurrection, and at other times,  
we make the sign of the cross,  
the sign first marked on us in holy baptism.

We confess our sin and receive God's word of forgiveness,  
giving thanks that, even when we are dead in our trespasses,  
God makes us alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2.5).  
Together we are brought into the presence of God  
with an honest recognition of the reality of human sin and brokenness  
and our own sin and brokenness.  
Together we hear God's promise and declaration of forgiveness.

We give thanks for God's mercy in the gift of baptism.  
Baptism is the place of entry into the Christian community  
and it shapes all our life.  
Martin Luther once noted that the life of the Christian community  
and of each of us  
is nothing else than a daily baptism,  
one begun and ever continued.

In worship, we are God's people, gathered around Word and sacrament.  
During the gathering, music plays an important role in giving us a common identity.  
Gathering songs welcome us to the mercy of the triune God  
and move us from our individual experiences into the purpose of worship.  
The Kyrie is our prayer of peace for God's mercy to fill the church and the world.  
The canticle of praise gives thanks for God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ.  
When we sing "Glory to God,"  
our voices join with the angels in a song from Luke's gospel.  
In "This is the feast," we gather with all creation around God's heavenly throne  
singing words from the book of Revelation.  
Whether the gathering is brief or extended,  
the presiding minister and assembly greet each other in the name of the triune God.

### ***Word***

The Prayer of the Day marks a hinge or turn in the service.  
This prayer gives thanks to God through Jesus Christ  
and is prayed in the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Led by the presiding minister,  
the Prayer of the Day gathers all our praise into one  
and highlights themes from the scripture readings we are about to hear.  
All Christian worship is biblical.  
In scripture reading, preaching, and song,  
the church hears the good news of God acting in this and every time and place.  
The first reading, usually from the Old Testament,  
is followed by a psalm sung in response to the reading.  
The second reading, usually from a New Testament letter,  
bears the witness of the early church.  
After the second reading and before proclaiming the Gospel,  
we join in another sung response.  
This pattern of "read, sing, read, sing" is a practice Christians inherited  
from the ancient synagogue worship of the Jewish people.  
Before the Gospel is read, we stand and acclaim the living Word made flesh,  
Jesus Christ, who is among us.

The Gospel then leads directly to preaching.  
Luther considered preaching to be the first of two peaks  
or high points in the worship service.  
For Lutherans, preaching is biblical.  
Preaching participates in the creating and transforming word of God,

proclaims Jesus Christ crucified and risen,  
and brings God's word of law and gospel into our time and place  
to awaken and nourish faith.

The Holy Spirit works through preaching,  
forming and empowering us to carry out the mission of God in our daily lives.  
This preaching event is a means of grace.

God's word is now further proclaimed as we sing and confess our faith.  
One uniquely Lutheran element in the service of Holy Communion  
is the Hymn of the Day.

The Hymn of the Day is the assembly's response to God's word read and preached  
and echoes themes of the season or the day.

The creed that follows is also both response to the word  
and proclamation of the word.

A creed is a statement of the faith of the whole church.

The Apostles' Creed is anchored in holy baptism.

The Nicene Creed explores the wonder of the incarnation.

Each creed links us to the saints, our ancestors in faith,  
and is a confession of faith that unites us with the church around the world  
and people of every nation, from all tribes, peoples, and languages  
(Revelation 7.9).

God's word read and preached, sung and acclaimed,  
leads the assembly to the Prayers of Intercession.

These prayers are the assembly's prayers  
for the wideness of God's mercy to be known throughout the world.  
Prayers for the church, for the well-being of creation,  
for peace among nations, for the poor and all in need,  
for local needs and special concerns, and for the faithful departed,  
take up St. Paul's invitation that supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings  
be made for everyone (1 Timothy 2.1).

Following the prayers of intercession,  
the presiding minister and assembly greet each other in the peace of the risen Christ.

This greeting is more than a "good morning" or "hello."

This greeting is the very peace by which Jesus greets his disciples  
following the resurrection.

The peace we share, which marks another hinge or turn in the service,  
is a sign of God's mission of reconciliation among us  
and the reconciliation we have with one another in Christ Jesus.

### ***Meal***

The same peace of God, now received and extended,  
also reaches out from this assembly and into the world.

A collection of material goods for the church's mission,  
including the care of those in need,

is a sign of the giving of our whole selves in grateful response for all God's gifts.  
As the gifts are gathered, the table is set with bread and wine.

The proclamation of the Word of God  
and the celebration of the Lord's Supper are connected.  
Luther called these the two "high points" in the service of Holy Communion.  
In the Word read and proclaimed, God speaks to us.  
In the Lord's Supper-  
a "visible word" of which Luther speaks-  
God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

Before the Lord's Supper is shared,  
the presiding minister leads us into thanksgiving  
for the gifts of creation and redemption,  
including themes of the season or festival that are the focus of this gathering.  
As part of this thanksgiving we join our voices with all of creation  
and sing the angels' song, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isaiah 6.3).

In the meal of Holy Communion,  
the grace of God's gift for us  
is always proclaimed by the presiding minister,  
in Jesus' own words of command and promise.  
This clear proclamation in the words of institution  
may be included in a prayer of thanksgiving,  
which includes praise to God for creation,  
for God's faithfulness to the people of ancient Israel,  
for God's revelation in the saving work of Jesus Christ,  
remembering the crucified and risen Christ,  
and praying for the Holy Spirit in this meal.  
The Great Thanksgiving concludes with the Lord's Prayer.

In Christ's body and blood given to us, God's saving mission is made known.  
We sing as the bread is broken and as the meal is shared.  
We receive the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29).  
We are forgiven and given new life.  
Like the disciples, we recognize the presence of the risen Christ  
who is made known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24.30).  
Christ, who died and rose from the dead,  
is given to us and we are united with one another in the body of Christ.  
Also, through this meal, God nourishes us for mission in the world.  
We receive the body of Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion  
to live as the body of Christ in the world.

### ***Sending***

The sending brings our worship full circle.  
We have been gathered, in all our diversity, and shaped into a community,  
one body in Christ.  
From the table of communion  
where Jesus Christ brings forgiveness, life, and salvation,  
God sends us out in mission, into daily baptismal living.

The presiding minister blesses us in the name of God,  
granting us God's favor and peace.

With the blessing of God we go out to live as Christ's body in the world,  
proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matthew 10.7),  
living in service to others,  
caring for all in need,  
and continuing our participation in God's mission-  
only to be gathered here again around the means of grace,  
God's Word and sacraments.

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