

Biblical Sources of Lutheran Worship

by

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Invocation

“In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (p. 151)

Read Matthew 18:20 and 28:18-20. Jesus promised his disciples that God is present where two or three are gathered in the name of God. He later revealed what the name of God is: it is in fact three names, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We “invoke” (that is, call upon) this name.

It is necessary to name the God we worship so as to remove confusion about who he is. Christians do not worship Allah or the nondescript gods of other religions. We do not worship the Mother. Orthodox Jews do not worship the same God because they do not believe in the Son, Jesus Christ. God did not give us the names of “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.” Only one name will do.

Read Exodus 3:13-14. God revealed the name “YHWH” initially to Moses. That name means, in Hebrew, “the one who makes things happen.” God cannot be separated from his name. Wherever his name is mentioned, he becomes active. He can either bless us or curse us with his presence.

Read Ephesians 1:1-14. St. Paul, in his mature years, learned to unfold in writing the “mystery” (or plan) of our salvation. Before the world was created, God the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer in our place to redeem us from sin. So that we may believe and be certain that we are saved, the Holy Spirit has been sent to dwell among us. We have been “sealed” (that is, baptized).

Confession & Absolution

“We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean.” (p. 151)

Read Genesis 3 and Psalm 51. God created the first humans to be perfect. Adam and Eve lived in uninterrupted communication with God because they did not have a problem with sin. They chose willingly to commit sin, which is disobeying God’s command.

Their sin is the “original” sin because it is the first. Every human being born into the family of Adam and Eve is sinful from the moment of conception. Despite our best efforts, we cannot go any span of time without committing harmful thoughts or words, if not always in deeds (or actions). This inability is due to a condition from which we cannot free ourselves.

King David, who was the most beloved king in Israel’s history, was not immune to the effects of original sin. He wrote the Fifty-First Psalm after committing the greatest sins of his life: adultery, murder, and abuse of his authority. David recognized that it was his fault; but even so, even if he had not done any of this, he was still a sinner from before he was born.

David pleads God to clean him with hyssop, a ceremonial tool for scattering water on people. Christians are made clean by the sprinkling of water in baptism. Confession of sins does not end with a sad reflection on ourselves: we are reminded of a work we could not do for ourselves.

Read Matthew 19:13-15. Jesus invited the little children to come to him. It is popular to think of babies and children as being unselfish and innocent, but experience tells a different story; they cause trouble just like any adult. Infants are the most helpless and cannot make any decisions for their own benefit. Jesus amazingly teaches that all believers should be like them. When it comes to forgiveness of sins granted in baptism, we do not choose God: he chooses us.

We are not able to free ourselves from our sinful condition. God has taken that step.

Christians are not rebaptized every time we make a confession of sin, however. Read John 20:19-23. On the day of Jesus' resurrection, the first (or eighth) day of the week, God began to create the world anew. Jesus breathed on his disciples in order to recreate humans, now free from sin. This is why Christians worship in public on Sundays.

St. John recalls that Jesus gave his apostles the authority to absolve (that is, forgive) or to retain sins. Only an ordained minister pronounces the absolution publicly. However, any Christian ought to exercise forgiveness, and may even pronounce the absolution in a private or emergency setting.

Those gathered for worship may not feel as though they have been set free from sin, but that is just what happens at this juncture. God is present, no longer to punish, but to bless his people who are called by his name.

Introit or Psalm

Read Psalms 100 and 147. The One Hundredth Psalm shows us the attitude with which we should enter into worship: not gloomy or despondent, but with joy, and gladness. In ancient times and still today in many cultures, joy is expressed with spontaneous singing. It is difficult to imagine a worship service without music.

The One Hundred Forty-Seventh Psalm is one of the "Hallel" Psalms: it begins with the word "Hallelujah," which means "Praise the Lord." Worship in the Old Testament actually had a dual setting: the place for worship on earth was the Temple in Jerusalem, while worship simultaneously occurs in heaven among the holy angels.

Read Deuteronomy 12. Under the Old Covenant, God's people were required to meet at Jerusalem at least three times a year. Read Matthew 18:20. When Jesus came, he promised that worship of God can now happen anywhere two or three are gathered in his name. Every gathering of Christians can be a suitable worship setting, no matter how humble or grand our surroundings.

The One Hundredth Psalm also teaches us about our relationship to God. The gap between Creator and creation will never be bridged; we do not come to worship in order to become gods, but to receive gifts from the hand of God. The One Hundredth Psalm uses the well-known metaphor of sheep and a shepherd to describe the Church.

"Introit" means literally in Latin: "He comes in." In Medieval times, the presiding minister would enter to the sound of a cantor or choir performing the Introit. After the Confession & Absolution, which makes us "right" with God again, the worship service properly begins at this juncture.

The Introit announces the theme for that particular worship service. Nearly always the Introit is made up of Scripture verses, and these usually from the Psalms. The Introit changes accordingly. The Introit for several martyr's days begins with a verse from Revelation 7:14:

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Some churches substitute an entire Psalm for the Introit; the Psalm is likewise connected thematically with the occasion. Psalm 100 is the appointed Psalm for Easter Evening; Psalm 147 is the appointed Psalm for the Festival of St. Luke (whose Gospel focuses on the Temple).

Whether the Introit or Psalm is used, the worship assistant (who need not be a minister) leads, and the congregation responds. Once the entire Psalm or Introit has been recited responsively, the entire congregation joins in saying the Gloria Patri, and then the opening verse is repeated.*

Kyrie

The Kyrie is the first part of the service proper that does not change. The Kyrie, Hymn of Praise, and other portions of worship are called the “Ordinaries”: they are ordinary, or default parts. The Introit, the Readings, and other such portions are called “Propers” because they are the properties that distinguish that particular worship service.

“Kyrie Eleison” means in ancient Greek: “Lord, have mercy.” Read Luke 17:11-19. What were the words with which the lepers caught Jesus’ attention? They were asking Jesus to heal them from their disease. Martin Luther wrote that, “The Kyrie is not another confession of sins, but a prayer for grace and help in time of need – ‘the ardent cry of the Church for assistance.’”

At this juncture the worship assistant or the minister recites several general prayers (called “petitions”) for the benefit of all people. The people respond with the words “Lord, have mercy.”

Hymn of Praise

“Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.” (p. 154)

As mentioned above, the appropriate response to God’s presence is joyful singing.

The Gloria in Excelsis, which means in Latin: “Glory to God in the highest” begins with the angelic announcement of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Read Luke 2:8-20.

The King James Bible mistranslated v. 14; it should read, along with the ESV: “and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” (or the NIV: “to those on whom his favor rests”). The Lutheran liturgy singles out the people of God, that is, the Christian Church. Only within her walls do we enjoy peace with God that comes with forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

The following lines of the Gloria focus the activity of the congregation:

“We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.”

The Gloria in Excelsis continues to mention Jesus and the Holy Spirit to complete the Holy Trinity.

The Gloria in Excelsis was likely composed in the 4th or 5th century AD. The hymn “This Is the Feast” (or, “Worthy is Christ”) was composed recently. Prayers and rites, hymns, vestments, etc., may recommend themselves to a congregation’s repertoire inasmuch they are harmonious with Scripture. While other denominations made uniformity in externals their hallmark, the Lutheran Church decidedly did not: “We on our part also retain many ceremonies and traditions... which serve to preserve order in the church. At the same time, however, people are instructed that such outward forms of service do not make us righteous before God and that they are to be observed without burdening consciences” (AC XXVI 40-41). Sixth-century pope St. Gregory the Great quipped that “in the Church, because united in one faith, diversity of usages does no harm.”

Read Revelation 5. “This Is the Feast” opens with v. 15: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain”; the hymn renders in English verse the “new song” that is sung in the heavenly courtroom. The lyrics do not rhyme, and the metre is not regular, but it has a celebratory effect nonetheless. In the

older English used in the hymnal, “feast” means “celebration”; it does not necessarily involve eating (although the Lord’s Supper is typically held as part of a Sunday worship service).

“This Is the Feast” is typically reserved for the Easter and Christmas seasons and the Feast of All Saints. Non-festival services default to the Gloria in Excelsis. Both Hymns of Praise are omitted during the seasons of Advent and Lent due to their penitential focus.

Collect of the Day

The term “Collect” is misleading. A Collect is actually a prayer: it is the Prayer of the Day. These special prayers were “collected” and revised mainly during the Middle Ages with the aid of the reforming pope, St. Gregory I “the Great.” They represent all imaginable prayer requests a Christian may make. “In many ways these collects remind us that our prayers are not ours alone, but they are the prayers of the whole Church – past, present, and future.” (Maschke, p. 147)

The minister signals the Collect of the Day by addressing the congregation with this liturgical greeting: “The Lord be with you”; to which the congregation responds, “And also with you.”

Read Psalm 141. As part of the Service of Evening Prayer (LSB, p. 243), this Psalm leads up to the Collect. this Psalm, David compares prayer to incense smoke, which rises as to heaven. Incense has the added effect of spreading a pleasant aroma, like prayer which sets us in a positive mindset.

The Collect of the Day follows a fivefold pattern:

- 1) Address, which names the Person of the Trinity to whom we make our requests. The collect addresses either the Father or the Son.
- 2) Basis, which establishes the reason why we are making our request.
- 3) Petition, the statement of our request.
- 4) Outcome, which establishes the desired result of our request.
- 5) Doxology, which bookends the prayer with the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “Doxology” means “glorification.” The ultimate end of all things is the glory of God.

Readings

Read Colossians 4:16. Paul’s letters were read publicly, as they still are today as the Word of God. Read Nehemiah 8:1-12. How would you describe the attitude of the congregation when Ezra read the Torah (the first five books of the Bible)? How would you characterize their response? The two great parts of Scripture – the Law and the Gospel – provoke different responses.

Read Luke 4:16-21. Jesus attended the synagogue, the place of worship for the Jewish people, and he read a lesson from the scroll of Isaiah. After reading, it was customary for the reader to sit and give an explanation of the text. Read Acts 17:2-3. St. Paul visited the synagogues during his missionary journeys; we can assume he participated in worship, read the Scripture, and then explained that the meaning was found in Jesus. Read Acts 8:26-32. The Ethiopian eunuch asked St. Philip to explain the Scripture lesson, which he was glad to do. The Holy Spirit awakened faith in the eunuch. The minister fills a similar function as he explains one or more of the Scripture lessons and proclaims them to the present circumstance of the congregation.

The reason why some people leave worship without being convinced is because they have been prevented from hearing the Gospel. The Law can be thought of as the “gate-keeper” to the Gospel. It shows what God expects of us, and that we have not done what is right. People can reject the

Law by supposing that saving themselves is somehow in their ability. Read 2 Corinthians 3:6-18. Reading Scripture (“Moses,” author of the first five books of the Bible) with a veil on means to expect that we can keep the Law. This expectation hardens the heart. Those who, contrariwise, understand the Law will realize their need for a saviour. That is where the Gospel comes in.

The Law shows our sin, the Gospel shows our Saviour.

Not every Scripture reading has clear Law and Gospel, yet the task of a minister is to preach both. He has three Scripture readings in which to find a Law command and a Gospel promise:

- 1) One from the Old Testament (on rare occasions, Acts or Revelation);*
- 2) One from the Epistles;*
- 3) One from the Gospels.*

Gradual & Verse

The Gradual is pieced together from one or two Scripture passages. Each season or festival has an appointed Gradual; the Gradual remains the same throughout a season. The Gradual refocuses our attention to the worship theme, which we may not otherwise notice in the readings.

The Verse of the Day usually (but not always) comes from one of the three appointed readings for a particular Sunday. It states the central theme of the day. The congregation recites “Alleluia” (“Praise the Lord”) before and after the Verse, except for Advent and Lent. Both the Gradual and the Verse are spoken by the congregation or a worship assistant after the First Reading.

Creed

In the Divine Service, Setting One and Two, the Creed is spoken after the sermon. Creed comes from the Latin “credo,” which means “believe” (“credible” means believable; a person who seems able to believe anything is “credulous”). The Creed represents the congregation’s first significant opportunity to participate after hearing the Word of God explained and applied.

The Christian Church has three creeds:

- 1) The Apostles’ Creed is the briefest and oldest. It was handed down orally. The Apostles’ Creed is chiefly made up of Biblical citations.*
- 2) The Nicene Creed is a little longer than the Apostles’. It was drafted by a committee of bishops at the Council of Nicaea (a village in modern Turkey) in the year 325. Its primary purpose is to explain who Jesus Christ is. A later Council of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in the year 381 expanded the article about the Holy Spirit.*
- 3) The Athanasian Creed is the longest. It was written during the Middle Ages to describe the relationship between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. It is named in honour of St. Athanasius, a bishop who faced great adversity standing against the Arian heresy.*

Lutherans commit the Apostles’ Creed to memory when they learn the Small Catechism. We recite this creed during a devotion or a non-Communion service. The Nicene Creed is used during a Communion service, perhaps because it takes longer to describe who Jesus Christ is:

“the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made” (p. 158)

In the Sacrament of the Altar, Jesus proves that he is truly God by coming in his body and blood. No ordinary human being can make that happen. Due to its length, the Lutheran Church recites the Athanasian Creed during worship only once a year: on the Festival of the Holy Trinity.

The Creeds differentiate Christians from those who follow other faiths. Like the Invocation at the beginning of service, the Creed professes our unique faith.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Philippians 2:5-11, and Ephesians 1:20-21; 4:4-10. Which articles (statements) in the Apostles' Creed do these verses support?

The first Creed is found in Deuteronomy 6:4. What does this teach about God? Even certain "Christian" denominations do not worship the same God. Unitarians, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Christ has a unique relationship with God the Father. Even a number of mainline Christians do not understand that Jesus or the Holy Spirit are God. However, the Creeds together state clearly the points which Christians must affirm.

Prayers of the Church

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – it is only two words: "pray ceaselessly." Read Philippians 4:4-7. Although a Christian may pray at any time, it is important to provide an opportunity to pray in sync with other believers. Prayers, like the Creed, form a congregation's response to God's Word.

In the lyrics of a song by the Christian music ministry Maranatha,

"We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord"

Scripture occasionally ties prayers and sacrifices together. When a Christian prays, we can be said to "sacrifice" our time and leave some control over our own affairs to God.

The Prayers of the Church are also known as public prayers or "corporate prayer" because the congregation as one "body" (corps) prays with one voice. They are distinct from private prayer which every individual Christian may make at any time.

Lutheran Church-Canada has access to pre-written prayers based on the Scripture readings for the day. The minister or worship leader also mentions those who have asked to be named in the public prayer: those who are ill, the family of those who recently died, or others in need. Prayers can also be a way of publicly recognizing something good that has happened to a member. Prayers are offered on behalf also of our religious and secular leaders: the officers of our Synod, the monarch and the Prime Minister of Canada, the police and armed forces, etc. A special prayer is given during the commemoration of a Saint. In this prayer, we thank God for the work He did in the life of that Saint, and then ask God to inspire us to display a similar attitude in our own calling.

After each petition, the congregation gives their verbal assent. If the minister closes with the words "Lord, in Your mercy," the response is "Hear our prayer"; if he closes with the words "let us pray to the Lord," the response is "Lord, have mercy." The latter is called the "Ektene" pattern.

Offering

The offering gathered during the Divine Service is the Church's chief means of support. It is a voluntary donation, hence "offering." The amount donated is a private matter up to each believer, but donating is a public act. The offering is presented publicly before God and the congregation in special collection plates; the offering is customarily placed upon the altar.

Read Leviticus 27:30-33 and Deuteronomy 26:1-4. The Old Testament people were commanded to offer a tenth (called a “tithe”) of their produce or property. After they established themselves in the promised land, they were to present the firstfruits of their harvest in the Tabernacle.

In the ancient Church, various food items were offered; they still are in many parts of the developing world. “In addition to monetary gifts to the congregation, quilts prepared for distribution, food for relief pantries, and monetary gifts for mission projects may be offered to the Lord during this portion of the liturgy.” (Maschke, pp. 159-160) The early Christians had a custom of donating food that was served as part of the worship service. This free meal was called a “love feast” (today’s potluck lunches are comparable).

A portion of this food included bread and wine, which were immediately set aside for the Sacrament of the Altar. Because these elements are offered or “sacrificed,” the Church designates the Sacrament as a “sacrifice of thanksgiving” for the gift of salvation God is about to bestow. “Once faith has strengthened a conscience to see its liberation from all terror, then it really gives thanks for the blessing of Christ’s suffering. It uses the ceremony itself as praise to God, as a demonstration of its gratitude, and a witness of its high esteem for God’s gifts.” (Ap XXIV 74)

The main purpose of the Offertory hymn is to signal the transition between the Service of the Word to the Service of the Sacrament. The words of the Offertory hymn acknowledge that no Divine Service is complete without Holy Communion. The popular hymn “Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful, Lord” ends with this anticipatory line:

“Grace our table with Your presence, and give us a foretaste of the feast to come.” (LSB 955)

More recent hymnals give the option of singing either Psalm 116:12-13 or Psalm 51:10-12. The One Hundred Sixteenth Psalm mentions the “cup of salvation,” “sacrifice of thanksgiving,” and “courts of the Lord’s house,” which are fitting images for the Divine Service. The penitential Fifty-First Psalm is a final prayer to God to make those who wish to receive the Sacrament worthy.

Salutation

“Salutation” is an archaic term for “greeting.” It comes from the Latin word “salus,” which has an array of meanings: health, recovery, prosperity, or salvation. It is the origin of the word “salute.” The minister “greet” the congregation, withing them salvation. If there is more than one minister participating in a Divine Service, this is the point at which the “celebrant” (the minister who will serve Holy Communion) takes charge. He opens with these words:

“The Lord be with you.” (p. 160)

The congregation responds in one of two ways: “And with your spirit” is the ancient response; “And also with you” is more contemporary although the meaning is the same. The minister then speaks these words:

“Lift up your hearts.”

This is a note of encouragement. The phrase originated in the first three centuries of the Church, during which time the Roman Empire induced persecutions every few decades until the Edict of Milan (AD 313) recognized Christianity to be a legal religion. This reminder helps the congregation focus on the gifts of God about to be enjoyed. An uplifted heart is a joyful heart.

Proper Preface

Recall that the word “Propers” refers to parts of worship that vary according to the calendar. The Preface to Holy Communion acknowledges the festival or season in which we worship.

Every Preface begins with words recalling that it is good to give thanks and praise to God at “all times and in all places”; this is especially the case during the Service of the Sacrament. The Preface concludes with these words:

“Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying...” (p. 161)

Read Revelation 4:1-11. A scene like this happens, though unseen, at every celebration of Holy Communion. When a Saint is being commemorated, his or her name is specially mentioned “with all the company of heaven.” During the Proper Preface for Easter Sunday, we remember “Mary Magdalene, Peter and John, and all the witnesses of the resurrection...”

Sanctus

“Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth; heav’n and earth are full of Thy glory.” (p. 195)

Read Isaiah 6:1-7. This vision of the glory of God came to the prophet Isaiah while he was serving as a priest in the Temple. Read 1 Kings 6. The Temple of Solomon was lavishly decorated with pictures of angels, majestic beasts, fruits and vegetables, and rich colours. This was by God’s design to alert the people to his presence there. Isaiah was given a special vision in which he saw, not pictures of God and the angels, but the real thing.

In the Sacrament of the Altar, we do not behold a mere image of God; the wafers and wine in Holy Communion do not resemble Jesus in any way. Jesus nonetheless gives his true (physical) body and blood under the obscure “forms” of bread and wine.

“Sanctus” means in Latin “holy.” It is the first word of the hymn that the angels sang in Isaiah’s vision. The species of angel is called a “seraph” – a Hebrew word which means “burning one”; the plural of seraph is seraphim. “Sabaoth” means in Hebrew “hosts” or “armies.” In the Divine Service, Setting One (and Two) it is paraphrased as “Lord God of power and might.”

God can only abide the presence of holy creatures. We are made holy in Holy Baptism.

The second half of the Sanctus begins with Psalm 118:26. Verse 25 reads: “Save us, we pray, O Lord.” In the Hebrew language, that phrase can be expressed with one word: “Hosanna.” One of the benefits of the Sacrament is salvation, which we take hold of in the most intimate way here. Read Matthew 21:1-11. The crowds that greeted Jesus as he entered Jerusalem recited these prayers; they seem to have expanded the prayer to say, “Hosanna in the highest.” When Jesus is about to arrive in our midst during worship, we treat him to this same royal greeting.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Read Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 14-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. These are the four accounts of Jesus instituting the Sacrament of the Altar; they were handed down orally, which accounts for different wording. Why does St. Luke’s account stand out? The Jewish Passover, which Jesus and his disciples were in the act of celebrating, involved four cups of wine. Luke, who gives the most detail, mentions two; it is the final cup that Jesus declares to be his “blood.”

One key detail that St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Paul include is that Jesus “gave thanks.” Thanksgiving is a major part of Christian prayer. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Colossians 1:11-14. The Sacrament of the Altar is a double thanksgiving: we thank God for the gifts of creation (i.e. food and drink) which we are about to enjoy, and for the gift of salvation which we also receive by eating and drinking. The Greek word for “giving thanks” is “eucharistein”. Because the early Church began celebrating the Sacrament with a prayer of thanksgiving, it came to be known as the Eucharist.

Surprisingly, the Prayer of Thanksgiving does not use the words “we give you thanks.” Instead, the Prayer begins with these words:

“Blessed are You, Lord of heaven and earth, for You have,” etc. (p. 161)

In the Jewish custom, beginning a prayer by blessing God was the manner of giving thanks. The Prayer of Thanksgiving is inspired by the type of prayer Jesus likely used during the Passover. The earliest Church orders of service retained some Jewish elements which were gradually forgotten; their value has been rediscovered and incorporated into more recent hymnals.

The Lutheran Book of Worship (1978) included a Eucharistic Prayer which is not found in the Lutheran Service Book (2006). The Eucharistic Prayer includes a retelling or “bringing to memory” of God’s historical activity saving his people, called the “anamnesis.”

“Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father: Endless is your mercy and eternal your reign. You have filled all creation with light and life; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Through Abraham you promised to bless all nations. You rescued Israel, your chosen people. Through the prophets you renewed your promise; and at this end of all the ages, you sent Your Son, who in words and deeds proclaimed your kingdom and was obedient to your will...” (LBW, p. 69)

Words of our Lord

“Take, eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me... Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My T blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” (p. 162)

The words of Jesus are known as the Word of Institution. Only this part of the Passover meal Jesus celebrated with his disciples is repeated by the Christian Church – we follow Jesus’ “institution.”

Every account from the New Testament cited above includes these exact words:

“This is my body”

along with some iteration of “This is my blood.” These words are the only necessary part to bring about the Service of the Sacrament. In Latin they are the “Verba Domini,” “words of our Lord.”

The bread and wine are “consecrated,” that is, set apart for this special use. One of our Lutheran Confessions entitled the Formula of Concord stipulates: “In the administration of Communion the words of institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and are under no circumstances to be omitted.” (FC SD VII 79) The minister makes the sign of the cross over the “elements” of bread and wine.

Several Christians do not find it important to agree on the interpretation of Jesus’ words so long as we all participate together. But bear in mind that these words of Jesus are thought of as his

“testament,” which is the likeliest meaning of the word translated as “covenant” in the ESV. Read Exodus 24:1-11. This meal prefigured the Sacrament of the Altar. Moses did not merely remind the people of the blood that was shed to give them access to God; he sprinkled the actual blood on the people with these familiar words: “the blood of the covenant.”

In addition to the Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic and the various Orthodox Churches confess the Real Presence of Jesus – that is to say, literal a flesh-and-blood presence. Other Christian denominations interpret these words figuratively; here are ways which different churches confess Christ Jesus to be “present” in the Sacrament:

- 1) Christ is present symbolically (Symbolism) through the bread and wine, which symbolize his body and blood.*
- 2) Christ is present because the Church holds a meal in his memory (Memorialism).*
- 3) Christ is present because the Church, his “body,” has assembled for worship.*
- 4) Christ is not present on earth since he ascended into heaven. Christians ascend into heaven in some spiritual way (Spiritualism) to eat the Sacrament there in his presence.*

Each of these views gets around Jesus being actually present. However, the words “body” and “blood” clearly indicate a bodily mode of being present. Consider the expression “in the flesh.” Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-32. St. Paul states in v. 29 that the body (and blood) of Jesus are to be “discerned” or “recognized” by everyone receiving the Sacrament. Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 Remember that, when God is present, he either blesses or curses. We protect those who belong to a different confession of faith from being harmed by the Sacrament.

Proclamation of Christ

Read 1 Corinthians 11:26. The Gospel writers St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke say little about the words of Jesus because they do not require explanation. St. Paul, however, gives a very brief “sermon” on the Sacrament of the Altar. He teaches that the Sacrament shows not only that Christ Jesus has risen from the dead and remains present with the Church, but that he will come again. The congregation responds to the words “we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” with the ancient prayer, “Amen. Come, Lord, Jesus.” “Come, Lord” is a translation of the Aramaic expression “Maranatha,” which was spoken by the earliest Christians (Aramaic is related to the Hebrew language). Read Revelation 22:12-13.

The world outside the Church’s walls must wait for the Second Coming of Christ Jesus to hear his pronouncement of judgment; but believers enjoy a forecasting of the judgment in the Sacrament. We are told on no uncertain terms that we stand forgiven before God and heaven bound.

Pax Domini and Agnus Dei

“The peace of the Lord be with you always.” (p. 163)

Read Philippians 4:4-7. The “peace of God” does not mean living an undisturbed life, but it “passes all understanding.” Conflicts arise among people because of the never-ending quest to justify ourselves or gain power over others, but that is something a Christian does not have to do. We are able to greet one another with a sign of peace. Read Romans 16:16. The early Christians likely shared a kiss, which was a common greeting in the ancient world and is still customary in some countries. In North America, a handshake serves the same purpose.

Read John 1:29-51. In this passage St. John applies several titles to Jesus. St. John the Baptist repeats the exclamation: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" "Agnus Dei" means in Latin, "Lamb of God." Read Exodus 12:1-28. When the Israelites were to leave Egypt, God demonstrated his wrath. In v. 23 he promises that "the destroyer" would not visit any house that had consumed a lamb "without blemish" and smeared its blood on the doorposts. Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. St. Paul, referring to the Sacrament, calls Christ the "Passover lamb."

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This passage of the Old Testament is famous as the "Suffering Servant." Up until the modern era, Jewish and Christian interpreters always understood that this was a prophecy of the Messiah (Christ). Isaiah confesses that, although the Christ to come would be innocent, he was to bear the penalty that the guilty party deserves. The Agnus Dei is a final reminder that Jesus absorbed the full punishment from God the Father. Read 1 John 2:1-2.

"All activities during this hymn should be performed in a dignified and respectful manner, anticipating the distribution of Christ's body and blood." (Maschke, p. 173)

Distribution

Christian worship is not primarily an opportunity to hear a speaker or learn a lesson; it is to receive a gift. Read Job 1:1-5 and 42:7-9. The animal sacrifices on the altars of Abel, Abraham, Job, and in the Tabernacle prefigured Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the "altar" of the cross.

Read Matthew 5:21-26, in which Jesus states his expectation that believers will continue to gather around altars. Jesus' chief point is to say that everyone participating in worship should make certain he or she is prepared and bears no grudges against God or others. The Didache, a catechism written in the 1st century, warns: "But let no one who has a quarrel with a companion join you until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled."

The consecrated bread and wine deserve the utmost respect. Martin Luther spoke in favour of elevating the "host" (consecrated bread) and Communion chalice when his pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen, had stopped doing so. In another instance, while Luther was distributing the Sacrament, a communicant upset the chalice. Luther stooped to the floor and sucked the spilt wine to keep from showing disdain to the blood of Jesus. It is customary for the minister to drain the leftover wine whether by drinking it or pouring it over the ground immediately outside the church.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his 4th century lectures instructed his students to receive the host with the right hand and clasp the left hand underneath. This has the visual effect of creating a "throne" for the King. It also reduces the risk of dropping between the hands.

The way of identifying people who do not plan to receive the Sacrament is folding the arms over his or her chest, creating an X-shape. It also suffices to simply cross the right arm over the chest.

Dismissal

"The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart in peace." (p. 164)

"Mass" originated as an informal expression for the Service of the Sacrament during the later Middle Ages. It was, and remains today, a layman's term. It comes from the Latin "missae," which could be rendered in English as "dismissals" (i.e. dismissals after receiving the Sacrament).

"The peace announced after the eucharistic prayer is reiterated here" (Just, p. 232).

In churches where the custom prevails of serving the Sacrament in rounds at the altar, the minister dismisses each “table” with a blessing of peace. The Sacrament may also be served “pilgrim style” as each communicant approaches the chancel in a single or double file line to receive the host and wine. In this case, the minister pronounces these words of peace sweeping over the entire congregation at the end of the Service of the Sacrament.

Post-Communion Canticle

Read Psalm 34. How is a Christian who has received the Sacrament of the Altar in a unique position to say, “Taste and see that the Lord is good”? Read Psalm 145. Verses 15-16 of this Psalm are recommended as a prayer of blessing over a meal in Luther’s Small Catechism. This Psalm is also a prime example of a prayer of thanksgiving.

The One Hundred Fifth and One Hundred Forty-Fifth Psalms supplied the themes for the post-communion hymn “Thank the Lord and Sing His Praise.” “Thank the Lord” first appeared in the Lutheran Book of Worship (1978).

An alternate post-communion hymn is called by its Latin name, Nunc Dimittis, which means “now you let depart.” Read Luke 2:22-35. Simeon, a mysterious old man, broke out in song when he was privileged to hold the month-old Jesus in his arms. The Song of Simeon is fitting for Christians to sing after holding the body of Jesus in a no less real way in the Sacrament. The Nunc Dimittis is taken word for word from the Gospel of Luke, with the Gloria Patri appended. The Nunc Dimittis is also chanted during Compline, a service used just before retiring for the night.

Benediction

“The Lord bless you and keep you...” (p. 166)

The final blessing in the Divine Service is called the Aaronic Blessing. This blessing is taken from Numbers 6:22-27. Moses’ older brother Aaron – both members of the priestly tribe of Levi – was the first High Priest of Israel after the Exodus; he became the first “ordained” minister in Scripture. At the coming of Christ, the Christian Church is the continuation of the people of God which began as the nation of Israel. This fellowship is not bound together by standing of birth but by faith. Ministers repeat God’s blessing on the people of “Israel” today. Read Romans 11:29.

The Hebrew term “Shalom” does not mean only peace; it conveys wholeness, health, and every blessing. It is important to keep in mind that, when a minister blesses people, he is not merely wishing for God to bless them; God actually blesses them in that moment. God is present when the Triune Name is invoked, and he grants Shalom through the Aaronic Blessing.

Only an ordained minister may bless in the second person. If worship is led by a lay leader, he may invoke a blessing in the first-person plural: “The Lord bless us and keep us...”

“Benediction” means “blessing”; “Benedicamus” means in Latin, “let us bless.” Certain worship services include a Benedicamus, in which the worship leader asks the congregation to bless the Lord. The congregation responds, “Thanks be to God.” (It is somewhat ironic that the Prayer of Thanksgiving begins with the word “Blessed,” while the Benedicamus begins with “Thanks!”)

Services in which the Sacrament of the Altar is not celebrated apply a different formula:

“May the almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, T Son, and Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.”
(p. 267)

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