THE DIVINE SERVICE

— *A Guide* —

A RESOURCE FROM *THE LUTHERAN WITNESS*

THE DIVINE SERVICE

— A Guide —

THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
MISSOURI SYNOD

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Introduction: What Is Worship?

Welcome to worship, where things look and sound different from much of what you experience in your everyday life. You will use some difficult-to-pronounce words, and parts of the service will have unique names. Sometimes you'll need the hymnal; sometimes you'll need the bulletin.

First, don't worry. You're new to this, and it's going to take some time to get used to it. Some of the people you're sitting (or standing) next to have done this for 80 or more years. Others had to learn the service just like you. Be patient. Come back next Sunday. You won't figure it all out the first time.

Second, ask questions. This resource from *The Lutheran Witness* is all about hospitality, all about welcoming you into the life of the church's worship, where you receive from God's hand. The people of the congregation will help you learn, and the pastor will delight to take you through the congregation's service and open for you the treasures Christ gives in the Divine Service.

Before we dig into the details, let's start with the big picture: Why?

The primary movement of worship is from God to us. We do not gather to do something for God. We don't worship to stroke God's ego or as slaves obligated to show up for an oppressive overlord.

It's quite the opposite. Our God knows the depth of our sin, the deadening reality of our transgressions. He endured this sin on the cross. When we gather in worship around His Word, He serves us with His forgiveness. Worship is the place heaven touches earth and God delivers to us forgiveness that renews and strengthens our faith.

In the Divine Service, God serves us by speaking to us His Word. Wherever Christians gather, God's Word is at the center and gathering point. By that Word, God speaks to us; in the service, He enfleshes His Word in His own body and blood. The heart of the Divine Service is the Word of God.

To reflect this, the service is split in two parts (along with a short preparation). The first part is the Service of the Word; the second is the Service of the Sacrament. Both services grow out of God's speaking to us. In the first, God speaks to us from the Bible. In the second,

God puts His Word into physical elements (bread and wine) and places that Word into the mouths of His people.

In the **Confession and Absolution**, we confess our unworthiness to stand in God's presence. He forgives our sins and welcomes us into His presence.

In the **Service of the Word**, we first hear from the prophets who foretold of Christ's coming, looking for the fulfillment of God's promise to save the world (Gen. 3:15). Then we tune our ears to the apostles and their epistles (letters) teaching the Gospel to the Early Church. Finally, we see the full picture of God's work in the world through the Gospel reading: the teachings and life of Jesus.

After the readings, we speak together with all Christians the words of the Nicene Creed. Then the pastor preaches on the texts, applying them to this particular congregation. He proclaims to God's people that, though they are sinful, God has made them His own in the blood of Christ.

After we respond in thanksgiving (offering) and prayer, we turn to receive God's Word in the **Service of the Sacrament**. In the Lord's Supper, God comes to us in a way He is not present anywhere else. Heaven touches earth in this gift. Jesus — true God and true man — gives His body for us to eat and His blood for us to drink. What a profound mystery.

We testify to this in song and acclamation, fixing our attention on His gifts (Prefaces), joining in eternity's song (Sanctus) and proclaiming His sacrificial death (Agnus Dei) until He comes. The Lord's Supper is the most intimate expression of Christian unity, one in which only those who have been instructed, examined and absolved in a shared confession participate. In time, we pray you also will join us in this faith at His altar.

The service ends in the way it began: in His name, which sends us out in love for our neighbor. The entire service revolves around God giving to us His Word. This Word builds, strengthens and renews faith. Having received it, we go forth with it into the world, living and serving with sacrificial love.

— PARTS OF THE SERVICE —

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

- Invocation
- Confession
- Absolution

SERVICE OF THE WORD

- Introit
- Kyrie
- Gloria in Excelsis
- Readings
  - Old Testament
  - Epistle (or New Testament)
  - Holy Gospel
- Creed
- Sermon
- Offertory
- Offering
- Prayer of the Church

SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

- Preface
- Sanctus
- Lord's Prayer
- Words of Institution
- Pax Domini
- Agnus Dei
- Distribution

POST-COMMUNION

- Nunc Dimittis
- Thanksgiving
- Salutation & Benedicamus
- Benediction

UNDERSTANDING WORSHIP BEGINS WITH defining the terms used in worship. Throughout this booklet, you will find the definitions of each of the terms you see above.

Even more importantly, you will read about how each of these parts of the service flow from God's Word and deliver God's Word to us.

Lastly, you'll learn some snippets of history about various pieces of the Lutheran liturgy.

As you read through this booklet, keep a copy of *Lutheran Service Book* (*LSB*) and a Bible close at hand. *LSB* includes Scripture references in the right-hand margin. We will add additional references throughout this booklet.

Confession and Absolution

WE ARE WELCOMED INTO GOD'S PRESENCE.

Definition

The **Invocation** calls on God's name. He delights to be present among us to bestow His gifts. Because the Invocation uses God's name, it also reminds us that He sealed us with His name in Holy Baptism, using these words: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The **Confession** and **Absolution** answers the accusation frequently made of Christians: "Aren't you all hypocrites?" From the outset, we are honest before God and one another, confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness from Him.

Martin Luther writes: "Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs [Sacraments], to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here" (LC II 55).

From God's Word

Invocation (*LSB* p. 184): God gives us His Triune name in His command to baptize (**MATT. 28:19**). Jesus sent His apostles to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The church invokes God's name because Jesus promised that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (**MATT. 18:20**). Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple trusts God's promise that where His name is, there He is present among His people in a unique and saving way (**1 KINGS 8:29**).

Confessional Address (*LSB* p. 184): This address leads into the rite of Confession and Absolution. The pastor addresses the congregation in preparation for confessing their sins so that they may "draw near with a true heart" (**HEB. 10:22**). We draw near not because of the blood of bulls and goats, but because of the blood of Christ, shed for us (**HEB. 9:11–14**).

Versicles (*LSB* p. 184): These short responses grow from the Psalms. The first is a song of ascent, sung by the Hebrews as they ascended the Temple Mount for worship. With these words, we join with 3,000 years of worshipers. The second versicle comes from Psalm 32:5 and prepares us in heart and mind for the Confession.

Confession (*LSB* p. 184): We confess that we are poor, miserable sinners. God knows the perpetually evil intentions of our hearts (**GEN. 6:5**), that out of our hearts come "evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (**MATT. 15:19**). We know this also and confess it before God.

Absolution (*LSB* p. 185): Having heard our confession, the pastor, Christ's under-shepherd, pronounces Absolution upon us. When the Pharisees complained about Jesus forgiving sins, He demonstrated His authority to forgive sins (**MATT. 9:1–8**). After His death and resurrection, Jesus bestowed this authority upon the apostles and the pastors who follow in their train (**JOHN 20:22**). Pastors therefore forgive not by their own authority but His.

Service of the Word

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD AND CONFESS TOGETHER.

Definition

Here we "enter" (**Introit**) the service proper, with the Word of God in our ears. As the pastor moves toward the altar, he brings our attention together as we sing a portion of the Psalms.

We sing "Lord, have mercy" (**Kyrie eleison**). It is the most basic and comprehensive Christian prayer.

We follow with a confident confession of the Gospel, "Glory to God in the Highest" (**Gloria in Excelsis**). The angels sang this song to the shepherds to announce Christ's birth. We also sing this in preparation to hear God's Word proclaimed today.

In the readings, God speaks. He speaks through the prophets, men of the Old Testament who wrote of the Christ who was yet to come. Then we hear from the apostles, usually the letters (**epistles**) of St. Paul. The crown jewel of the Service of the Word is the reading of the Gospel, the very words and earthly actions of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Even during the transitional parts of the service, we focus on God's Word. As the pastor moves from one location to another during the readings, the congregation or choir sings the Gradual and Alleluia, depending on the season of the Church Year.

The **Nicene Creed** repeats the Bible in summary. We speak this confession of faith together as a reminder of what we believe and confess before the world. In this confession, we encourage one another and renew our understanding of what we believe. Want to know what Christians believe? The creed is a great place to start.

Based upon the readings for the day, the pastor preaches the **Sermon**, speaking again what was already said. What the prophets longed to see and hear, what the apostles saw with their own eyes and witnessed to in the Gospels, the pastor now preaches and teaches to us. And we joyfully receive God's Word from His servant.

Therefore, we respond with thanksgiving in **Offering** and praise (**Offertory**). We return a portion of what God has given to us. This small portion supports the continuing proclamation of the Gospel — among our church family, to others in the community and to people around the world.

Strengthened by the speaking of God's Word, we together, as the Body of Christ, pray the **Prayer of the Church**. We give thanks to God for His gifts, especially the preaching of God's Word. The prayer also ties the worship service to the life of God's people, bringing our petitions before Him for the church, for those in our homes and for the world.

From God's Word

Gloria Patri (*LSB* p. 186): A common refrain used in various parts of the service, it is usually associated with a Psalm. It echoes the words of Baptism in its use of the full Triune name (**MATT. 28:19**). It glorifies God in echoes of the song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest" (**LUKE 2:14**).

Kyrie (*LSB* p. 186): "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David," the Canaanite woman begs (**MATT. 15:22**). "Lord, have mercy on my son," pleaded a nameless man for his son (**MATT. 17:15**). "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David," cried out two blind beggars (**MATT. 20:30**). We also cry out in faith for our Lord to grant us mercy and healing.

Gloria In Excelsis (*LSB* pp. 187–89): The Gloria draws on a number of biblical passages, including Psalm 34:1–3; 105:1–3; Romans 15:6; John 1:29; Revelation 15:4; and other passages indirectly. The song of the angels from Luke 2 leads us into the canticle: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (**LUKE 2:14**). Then we confess, in the words of John, that Christ is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (**JOHN 1:29**). In the Old Testament, a sacrificial lamb bore the sins of the people. Christ is the final sacrifice who bore the sins of the entire world.

Salutation (*LSB* p. 189): We combine this "greeting" from other passages. It echoes St. Paul's closing words to Timothy: "The Lord be with your spirit" (**2 TIM. 4:22**). It acknowledges, much as Israel asked of Moses (**EX. 20:19**), that the pastor has a special duty to speak and act as God's representative for the congregation.

Nicene Creed (*LSB* p. 191): The creeds of the church grow directly from the teachings of Scripture. Many resources are available to explain this in more detail.

Offertory (*LSB* pp. 192–93): Either before or during the offering, the congregation sings this setting of a portion of Psalm 51. It implores God to work through the Word just preached to cleanse and purify

the heart as God's people gather their sacrificial offerings and partake of His Supper.

Offering: An Early Church father, Tertullian, reported that pagans were amazed at how Christians cared for one another. "See how they love one another," the pagans said. The Bible bears this out. The Old Testament Hebrews provided for their priests. In the New Testament, St. Paul exhorts his congregations to take up offerings for the church, to provide both for church workers and all the brothers in need (**1 COR. 16:2; 2 COR. 9:5–7; GAL. 6:6–7**).

Prayer of the Church: The specific wording may change from Sunday to Sunday, but Christians have always prayed according to St. Paul's direction to Timothy: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions" (**1 TIM. 2:1–2**). Listen for these particular petitions and thanksgivings, especially as they relate to the readings of the day.

Liturgical Tidbits

On the Kyrie: *Kyrie eleison* is a Greek phrase that originated in the pagan world. *Kyrie*, which means "sir" or "lord," could mean your landlord, your king, your emperor. In asking him for mercy, you could be asking for alms, begging to be spared some punishment, acclaiming some recent triumph or victory, or asking him to share his good fortune with his subjects. This reminds us that God's mercy toward us is not simply forgiveness; He abundantly and freely shares His good gifts.

On the Gloria in Excelsis: This is one of the very oldest hymns sung by Christians. The earliest reference to it occurs in a letter written in A.D. 112, when Christians were still being ruthlessly persecuted by the Roman Empire. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor, was writing to the Roman emperor Trajan to seek advice concerning how to conduct the trials of Christians. In this letter, he describes how Christians worship: "On an appointed day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god." While bizarre to a pagan like Pliny, Christians easily recognize this reference to the Gloria: "O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father."

On the Readings: During the Babylonian Captivity, the Israelites were stripped of all their customary means of worshiping God — the tabernacle, the ark, everything was taken from them. All they carried with them into Babylon were their scrolls containing God's Word. The synagogue originated in the practice of gathering on the Sabbath to hear that Word read aloud.

On the Alleluia Before the Gospel: From the earliest days of the church, Christians have sung the Alleluia before the Gospel reading. Another ancient tradition is for the Alleluia to fall silent during Lent, to mark the penitential nature of the season and to acknowledge that, this side of heaven, "by Babylon's sad waters mourning exiles now are we" ("Alleluia, Song of Gladness," *LSB* 417). Interestingly, Martin Luther opposed the practice of omitting the Alleluia during Lent: "For the Alleluia is the perpetual voice of the church, just as the memorial of His passion and victory is perpetual" (LW 53:24).

Service of the Sacrament

GOD COMES TO US IN THE LORD'S SUPPER, AND WE TESTIFY TOGETHER TO THIS GIFT.

Definition

The Service of the Word revolves around hearing God's Word read and preached. The Service of the Sacrament revolves around receiving God's Word "in, with and under" bread and wine, that is, the Lord's Supper. A **Sacrament** is a gift from God that combines His Word with a physical element, in this case bread and wine, and the forgiveness of sins.

The Preface — "The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit" (see **2 TIM. 4:22**) — prepares us to eat this feast. The Preface acknowledges the pastor's authority from God to distribute this meal to God's people (**1 COR. 4:1**). While the pastor's task is acknowledged, our attention is directed "to things above."

The pastor admonishes the people to "lift up your hearts," echoing the words of Lamentations 3:41 and Colossians 3:1–2. We respond: "We lift them up unto the Lord" (*LSB* p. 194).

We then move into the Proper Preface, adding to the daily thanksgiving a seasonal focus. This preface will change according to the Sunday of the Church Year.

The Proper Preface concludes with the words, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven." We give thanks and praise, therefore, with all the hosts of heaven. And what do these angels and saints who died before us sing? They sing the song of heaven, the "Holy, Holy, Holy" (**Sanctus**; see **ISAIAH 6:1–7** and **REV. 4:1–11**). By singing the song of heaven here, we acknowledge God's unique presence in the Sacrament as we approach it with all reverence and fear.

What we received from Christ, we pass on with His own Words of Institution: "On the night when He was betrayed, [He] took bread" (**1 COR. 11:23**). "No one annuls" a man-made testament, St. Paul notes in Galatians 3:15. How much more so with this final testament and promise of our Lord, by which He delivers to us eternal blessings.

The "Peace of the Lord" (**Pax Domini**) declares what the Lord's Supper brings. Our sinful flesh never tires of reminding us of our sinfulness; likewise, the new man in Christ never tires of hearing

about the peace we have in Christ. His wounds mean we have peace with God; His suffering and death mean that we have life.

The congregation turns to praise with the words of John's Gospel. His little sermon, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (**JOHN 1:29**), becomes our own. We not only behold Him, we receive Him in, with and under bread and wine.

The **Distribution** follows. The pastor speaks the Word of Christ as he places Jesus' body and blood into the mouths of God's people. Thus, we receive the Word not only in our ears, but also upon our tongues. God gives; we receive — the Word spoken and the Word in flesh and blood.

From God's Word

Preface (*LSB* p. 194): The Preface begins again with the Salutation. We fix our minds on things above (**COL. 3:1–3**), on God and His gifts. The Salutation prepares us for being raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly places (**EPH. 2:6**), knowing that our true citizenship is in heaven (**PHIL. 3:18–21**). The pastor directs us to give thanks as the people of God have always done (**PSALM 136**) and as Jesus did in feeding the 5,000 (**JOHN 6:11**).

Sanctus (*LSB* p. 195): The prophet Isaiah saw the throne of God and the seraphim, high-ranking angels that stand in the presence of God, singing the Sanctus: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts ["Sabaoth," in Hebrew]; the whole earth is full of his glory" (**ISAIAH 6:3**). The evangelist John's vision of heaven confirms what Isaiah saw. The "living creatures" — the seraphim — sing "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (**REV. 4:8**).

The Sanctus also includes our call for God's help. "Hosanna" means "help us" or "save us." The crowds sang these words as Jesus entered into Jerusalem in preparation for His death (**MATT. 21:9**). The Sanctus leads us as we prepare to receive Jesus who comes to us in His body and blood. "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (*LSB* p. 195; see also **PSALM 118:25–26**).

Lord's Prayer (*LSB* p. 196): The main body of the Lord's Prayer comes directly from the Gospels (**MATT. 6:9–13; LUKE 11:2–4**). Lutherans typically add a doxological (praise) ending to the Lord's Prayer, a practice with early evidence in Christian tradition.

Words of Institution (*LSB* p. 197): These words come directly from the mouth of Christ. Three of the four Gospels record them

(**MATT. 26:26–28; MARK 14:22–24; LUKE 22:19–20**). St. Paul also received and passed them along: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you" (see **1 COR. 11:23–25**).

Pax Domini (*LSB* p. 197): When Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He immediately said, "Peace be with you" (**JOHN 20:19**). They now had no reason to fear because Christ won for them an eternal peace with God (**JOHN 14:27**). In the Lord's Supper, they have fellowship with God. The world desires peace, but peace can only be found in the Supper and gifts of Jesus.

Agnus Dei (*LSB* p. 198): John the Baptizer pointed his followers to Jesus with these words: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (**JOHN 1:29**). Some of them became disciples of Jesus and followed Him to the cross where they saw Him pour out His life as a sacrificial lamb, becoming our peace and reconciling us to God (**EPH. 2:13–17**).

C.F.W. Walther, first president of the LCMS, also called the Lord's Supper the "pulpit of the laity." In a sense, the congregation "preaches" as they sing the first hymn of the Distribution, the Agnus Dei, which points us to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Distribution (*LSB* p. 199): The pastor and assistants distribute the Lord's Supper; they do so at the direction and guidance of St. Paul (**1 COR. 10:14–22; 11:17–32**).

Liturgical Tidbits

On the Sanctus: St. Clement of Rome first mentioned the Sanctus early in the second century. The opening words of the Sanctus are the angels' words in Isaiah's vision of God (**ISAIAH 6:3**). The second part of the Sanctus comes from Psalm 118 and contains the same words the crowd shouted as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (**MATT. 21:9**).

On the Words of Institution: At the time of the Reformation, the Roman church said the Words of Institution in the context of a larger, longer prayer; furthermore, the priest spoke these words quietly. To make Christ's gift of His body and blood to us a particularly clear proclamation of the Gospel, Luther set these words apart, adorning them with a beautiful chant tone.

On the Pax Domini: At the end of the consecration, the ancient church practiced "the kiss of peace." Following Paul's instructions in numerous places in the epistles (**1 COR. 16:20; 2 COR. 13:12; 1 THESS. 5:26**), these early Christians would "greet one another with a holy kiss." The kiss of peace was a sign of harmony, good will or — to use an especially Lutheran word — "concordia" (**1 COR. 1:10**). If there was a dispute going on in the congregation and someone refused the kiss of peace, the pastor would mediate the dispute and resolve the matter before Communion began.

On the Agnus Dei: Christ's real presence in the bread and wine was hotly debated among the Protestant reformers of the 16th century. Luther staunchly opposed Zwingli's and Calvin's arguments that Christ could not be really, truly present in the bread and wine because He had already bodily ascended into heaven and could not possibly be in more than one place. This argument plays out in the history of the liturgy in some interesting ways. The English reformers, who followed Calvin on this point, revised the *Book of Common Prayer* so that the Agnus Dei would be sung after the distribution rather than right after the Words of Institution. Singing "Behold, the Lamb of God!" seemed uncomfortably close to adoration of the bread and wine. Lutherans, on the other hand, retained this ancient part of the liturgy in its original place. Christ is really present in, with and under the bread and wine. When the pastor holds the consecrated elements up before the congregation, we really behold the Lamb of God, who takes the sins of the world away.

Post-Communion

THE SERVICE ENDS IN GOD'S NAME, AND WE ARE SENT FORTH.

Definition

As Christians eat and drink, the congregation sings and gives thanks to Christ for His gifts in the post-communion canticle. In this song, they proclaim to each other the confidence His Gospel gives in life and death. This final song is often the **Nunc Dimittis**, or the Song of Simeon (**LUKE 2:22–38**). Just as Simeon held the infant Christ in his arms and declared that he was ready to depart in peace, so we, having received Christ's body and blood, declare that we, too, are ready to die in peace.

This canticle reappears at the end of life as well. In the funeral service for a Christian, the congregation speaks Simeon's song. Thus, we leave the service in joyful hope, even as we remember our mortality and rejoice with those who have preceded us in death.

The pastor offers a final prayer of thanks and asks that the Word and Sacrament strengthen us for faith and acts of love. We surround this prayer with songs of thanksgiving.

The **Benediction**, meaning "good word," is the final word from God for the service. In this blessing from the Old Testament, God places His name upon His people once again.

As the service began in God's name, so it ends by the pastor placing it upon us as a "blessing." The **Benediction** recalls Baptism, by which we received His name and an eternal inheritance. In both the proclamation of His Word and the Word in the Lord's Supper, we receive His name again and again.

This Word of Christ's forgiveness strengthens our Christian faith and inspires us to Christian love, both of one another and the neighbor in need.

From God's Word

Nunc Dimittis (*LSB* pp. 199–200): The Gospel of Luke, after telling the story of Jesus' birth, tells the story of Simeon. God promised that Simeon would see the Lord's Christ before he died. When Simeon saw Jesus in the temple, he sang this hymn, declaring his readiness to "depart in peace" (**LUKE 2:29–32**). So also we leave the Lord's house ready to depart in peace.

Benedicamus (*LSB* p. 202): The psalmist directs us to give thanks to God, to "enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise" (**PSALM 100:4**). God's people give Him thanks and praise (**PSALM 145:10**) with the words that echo the Psalms: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (**PSALM 103:1**).

Benediction (*LSB* p. 202): God directed Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel using these words, which are known as the Aaronic Benediction. God does not bless His people with mere politeness or good wishes. Instead, He places His name on the people: "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (**NUM. 6:27**). Receiving the name of God means belonging to Him; it means becoming part of the royal line. We begin the Divine Service in the name of the Lord. We conclude in the same name. We have peace with Him because we have been emblazoned with His almighty name. We are His.

Liturgical Tidbits

On the Nunc Dimittis: Singing the Nunc Dimittis after the distribution is a uniquely Lutheran innovation. Throughout the history of the church, this canticle was usually only sung at Compline. But in the 19th century, German Lutherans in the United States began regularly including it in the Divine Service. Wilhelm Löhe, a German Lutheran pastor who helped found the Missouri Synod, was one major advocate for its place in the liturgy.

On the Benedictus: Ending the Divine Service with the Aaronic Benediction (**NUM. 6:24–26**) is another uniquely Lutheran tradition. Martin Luther began the tradition, replacing the simpler, standard Benediction of his day ("Almighty God bless you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit") with the Aaronic Benediction in his 1523 Latin Mass. Ending the service this way remained popular in all 16th- and 17th-century Lutheran liturgies, and, to this day, the Aaronic Benediction is used in all of the Divine Service settings in *Lutheran Service Book*.

Common Practices During the Divine Service

The Holy Spirit works in the Scriptures to speak God's Word to us and strengthen faith. Even so, that Word does not strike us all the same, it does not elicit the same response. When Jesus says, "Do not be anxious," some are accused, others encouraged, still others relieved. The very same Scriptures embolden us one day and humble us the next.

In the Lutheran service, no one is expected to feel and act a certain way. The Word is free to do its work. Our liturgy and hymns allow Christian piety (the attitudes and practices by which you confess and live out the faith) to remain both personal and individual, even while we are gathered in corporate worship. For the sake of good order, it is helpful to cultivate our individual pieties together with the church's corporate piety.

Christians confess one truth, yet there may be multiple truthful ways to confess it. Some practices are common the world over; others are unique to congregations, shaped by particular pastors who have served them. Most Christian piety is neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Christian ceremonies and actions have never been uniform in all places and times, nor do they need to be.

For those just beginning, it is helpful to have a baseline and guidance for where to start. That is one value of cultivating a common corporate piety. The thoughts, words and deeds of piety outlined here have both a history of common use in the Lutheran church and sound rationale for that use. You already have the words; this article will focus on the thoughts and deeds.

During Confession & Absolution

Thought: Let these moments be devoted to acknowledging your own sin, and to trusting that, for Christ's sake, He wants you here to receive His mercy today. You will not likely have time or clarity to consider your sins in depth according to the commandments. This is only a "general confession." For specific sins you know and feel, ask your pastor to hear your confession and pronounce forgiveness (see *LSB* p. 292).

During the Introit & Other Psalms

Thought: It's no sin to just enjoy the Psalms. Once you are familiar with the readings, consider whether the Psalms in the service give voice to Christ, to another character in the Gospel reading or to us hearing the Word today.

Deed: At the "Glory be to the Father…" (here and wherever the "Gloria Patri" is said), it is customary to bow for the Triune name, standing again for "as it was in the beginning…"

During the Gloria In Excelsis

Deed: The pastor gets to start this song; the whole congregation responds and continues. You may bow your head at "we worship you" (since we adore God alone), at the name of Jesus (see above), and at "receive our prayer." The sign of the cross may be made at the end of the canticle while we confess the Trinity.

During the Holy Gospel

Deeds: Standing for the Gospel is unique to the Holy Communion service, where it comes last in a progression of readings. (No disrespect should be perceived toward other portions of Scripture or to the Gospel when it is read at other times.)

During the Creed

Deeds: The Creed is the whole story of salvation, but our customary actions highlight only a few key phrases: Bow the head at the name of "one Lord Jesus Christ"; bow or, where possible, bend the knee in honor of His incarnation (from "and was incarnate…" to "… and was made man"); bow the head at "together is worshiped and glorified" (see "Gloria in Excelsis," "adore"); at the end, the sign of the cross may be made.

During the Sanctus

Thought: This moment is loud, no matter how many voices are singing in your church: All of heaven joins you. They worship the Lamb on His throne, the same Lamb who now "comes" in the Sacrament.

Deed: The angels showed great reverence for the Holy Trinity; Christians usually bow for this song. At the start of the "Benedictus" ("Blessed is He"), you may stand upright and make the sign of the cross.

During the Lord's Prayer

Thought: While the pastor often prays alone at this place, no Christian heart can keep from praying with him. Pray that he would act in a worthy manner and perform his duty faithfully.

Deed: The sign of the cross may be made at "Deliver us + from evil." Hand gestures won't ward off the devil, but faith that trusts Christ and His cross definitely will.

During the Consecration & Peace

Deed: The Lord's own Testament deserves our full attention here. You may bow your head at the specific words spoken by Jesus. If the body and blood are lifted up to be seen, perhaps during the consecration and usually at "the peace of the Lord," you may make the sign of the cross to acknowledge that this blessing is for you.

During the Agnus Dei

Thought: This is a hymn of adoration addressing Christ. Our attention is directed to Christ in His Sacrament, which we are about to receive in faith.

During Distribution

Thought, Word & Deed: Your pastor surely will have his own recommendation of how to examine, prepare and receive the Sacrament. Likewise, every parish has its own procedures and traditions. Suffice it to say, where anyone bows or kneels, it is to Christ bodily present and not to the pastor or to one another. Where words of distribution or dismissal are spoken, it is the communicants' role to confess together the "Amen!"

During the Nunc Dimittis

Thought: I have seen and even tasted the Lord's salvation. Will it be the last time I eat this supper before I die? Then, like Simeon, I am well-prepared and at peace with God.

After Communion

Thought: In the wake of receiving our Lord's great gifts in the Sacrament, profound thanksgiving marks both our words and our thoughts. Our thoughts now turn to how, by the Holy Spirit's work

in us, this Sacrament may also bring forth the fruit of love and good works. Consider the questions from the catechism: "I wish to go … that I may learn from Christ how to love God and my neighbor."

Deed: It is customary to bow the head (and sometimes to kneel) to receive the blessing. When the pastor makes the sign of the cross over the people, the people may also make the sign of the cross on themselves. We acknowledge that the Lord has put His own name on us. We are His.

COMMON ACTS OF PIETY DURING THE SERVICE

Sign of the cross

Lutherans make the sign of the cross in remembrance not only of Christ's cross but especially of Holy Baptism, which has joined us to that cross and its benefits. Touch the "points" of a cross on your forehead, chest and two shoulders. Mirror your pastor's hand when he blesses you.

Bowing and kneeling

The biblical word for "worship" is associated with kneeling, bowing and even lying down before God (for example, the Magi before the infant Jesus).

At the most profound mysteries, Christians often kneel (for example, to receive the Lord's Supper). Sometimes we bow at the waist (for example, at the "Holy, Holy, Holy"). At other times, a bowing of the head is all that time (not to mention bad knees and backs) can permit. It is an old custom to bow the head in honor of Jesus' name (PHIL. 2) wherever it is said. At the Last Day, we will bow the knee fully with all creation.

Salutation

The salutation is a brief exchange between pastor and people. The one speaking the salutation may part hands slightly in a gesture of "direction" (with you), while the other party (pastor or people) may bow the head to acknowledge this, and vice versa.

Amen

This is the Word of faith. "Yes, I believe it; yes, that is true." It's always assigned to the people, not the pastor. Say (or sing) it boldly.

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