



Epistle



S T . J O H N L U T H E R A N C H U R C H

The Christian Liturgy

By Pastor Massey

Being baptized and growing up in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, I have only slowly come to understand what it is we do and God does on Sunday mornings. Even going through confirmation under Pastor Karl Weber at Our Redeemer Lutheran in Robinson, IL, he stuck mostly to Luther's Small Catechism and only brought up the liturgical year, colors, or vestments when the catechism did. Being a new pastor himself, I wonder if he too still took much of it for granted. Even though I was more interested in church than my immediate family, I did not understand what it was about our rites, music, or ceremony that seemed to adorn God's Word.

As I moved away to join the army, I missed what I grew up with. Especially while deployed, I had a hard time finding other Lutheran Christians with which to enjoy fellowship. It was while deployed that my family sent me copies of *Gottesdienst: The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*. It was from these journals that I learned that some hold the liturgy to be nearly equal to the Word of God. Although articles in these journals are enjoyable, my only fear is overlooking God's eternal Word and allowing it to be submerged below the love of the trappings and adornments of the liturgy.

What follows is one of the most concise full explanations of the Liturgy that I have found. It comes from my mentor and new pastor installed this year to serve part time at St. Peter Lutheran in Evansville and St. John Lutheran in Ruma, IL: Pastor Thomas Handrick. It is adapted from an article, which appeared in *Concord*, a Confessional Publication for Lutherans in Texas.

Historically speaking, the liturgy is neither "Lutheran" nor "German." Luther reformed it and left his mark on it, but the Church was singing the *Agnus Dei*, the *Sanctus*, and the *Gloria in Excelsis* long before Luther was born.

The liturgy is the BRIDGE that unites us with the whole Christian Church of history. The liturgy is not a creation of any one individual of history, but is begotten by the whole Church. It is the best of worship forms proven and tested through centuries, a quality work created by, accepted by, and given to us by the Church. When we use this form we stand in union with the great cloud of witnesses. The distance between the ages disappears.

A common liturgy also serves to unite us in the present. Centuries ago a common liturgy united Christian congregations across the world. Decades ago, a common worship form united all Lutherans. A Lutheran was in familiar surroundings in any Lutheran congregation he visited. Uniformity in worship and practice has been highly valued in the Christian Church until most recent times.

The liturgy is a DRAMA, which focuses upon the living God who comes to us in the means of grace. The liturgy is a drama in which sinful man encounters his Creator. In the liturgy, we come humbly to God and He comes graciously to us. From the depths of repentance in acknowledging our separation through sin we draw closer and closer together as the drama unfolds. God answers our repentance by His absolution and comes to dwell among us in His Word. Finally, we open the gates of Jerusalem and cry "Hosanna" as He truly comes to us individually, and corporately, in the giving and receiving of His body and blood for the remission of our sins. What could be more emotional, uplifting, and edifying than this beautiful encounter with a gracious God?

The liturgy determines the PERSONALITY of the Church and confines the pastor to a servant role. The liturgy keeps the individual personality and style of the pastor in check. It is virtually impossible for the pastor to reflect his personal "style" or charisma within the strict confines of the liturgy. If there is personality reflected in the liturgy, it is that of the historical church.

The liturgy has the quality and depth that is capable of SATISFYING the deepest yearnings of Christian faith and can never be "outgrown." The liturgy, however, is so full of substance that no one individual could possibly plumb its depths or fill its form with adequate heartfelt worship expression. It is a form of worship that we can grow into but never exhaust. The purpose of the liturgy is not to make us "feel good," certainly not to entertain us, but to provide a form of expressing the heartfelt longing, desires, and worship of the Christian heart, from the cry of repentance to the cry of thanksgiving and inexpressible joy. Because it is grounded in and consists of the Word of God, our liturgy—with its divine variety built-in—has a superior and enduring quality. In our "throw away" society such quality is not even recognized, much less appreciated. The impoverishing of our worship concedes this cultural error. Modern man does not need to be taught the dynamic power of God as much as he needs to "be still and know that I am God." He needs the peace and security that comes from faith in an unchangeable God of grace.

The liturgy provides us with that spiritual sanctuary!

Please reflect upon it at your leisure. I hope that it will pique your interest for future articles in this Epistle. Perhaps I could write an explanation of the elements listed in the first paragraph (the Agnus Dei, Sanctus, & Gloria). Or perhaps your interests focus more on the "drama" or interaction between God and us as His people during the worship service. I invite your responses by e-mail, phone message, or paper mail. May God bless you this Christmas and Epiphany seasons as our Lord Jesus humbly comes to us and reveals Himself to us as our Emmanuel, God with us.

P T L C H R I S T M A S B A Z A A R

Coffee cake sales for the PTL Bazaar were a great success. Many new volunteers have joined the "coffee cake crew", and more are welcome to join. Christian fellowship, camaraderie and humor were enjoyed by all. A total of 34 volunteers, worked approximately 250 hours to bake 552 coffee cakes. All were purchased with the exception of less than six "accidents" or "samples" that the "crew" appreciated tasting, and six unsold, which were given to our "After Care Program". Donations of \$5 each were asked for the fruit, cheese-cake and caramel pecan. All others were \$4 each. Sincere thanks to Gilster-Mary Lee for their generous donations of coffee cake and frosting mix, flour and sugar, and to the Thrivent Action Team program for providing "seed money" toward purchase of baking supplies and ingredients.

L W M L C O O K I E B A K E S A L E

A big Thank you to everyone who helped make the LWML cookie bake sale a success. With all your efforts we were able to raise \$2,265.35 for much needed repairs to the church. Whether you baked, donated, worked, or purchased, it is all appreciated! A special thank to Laura Vasquez and her group of ladies, some of whom don't even belong to our congregation, for thousands of cookies and the candy they made.

L W M L Q U I L T T A C K I N G

LWML will start tacking quilts on **Tuesday, January 8** from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. We invite the ladies of the congregation to join us in this project. Come whatever time fits into your schedule. Lunch will be provided; please bring a side dish. It is a good time of fellowship. Tacking will be as weather permits.

STEWARDSHIP CORNER

It is no secret that God calls us to be generous with the gifts He has given us. Throughout the Bible, we read that just as God has generously given to us, so are we to give generously one to another. As Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35) and “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

But God also calls us to give to Him. And He, who does all things well, presses it into service for the benefit of all the people of God. See for example what God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, after he and the people were safely brought out of Egypt across the Red Sea on dry land:

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, goatskins,[a] acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (Ex. 25: 1-9)

Notice in verse two that the Lord instructs Moses to tell the Israelites to “take for me a contribution” and that from everyone motivated from gratitude for what God has just accomplished and given to them, Moses is to gather up “the contribution for me.”

Pay attention, though, why the Lord wants the people of Israel to gather up these contributions for Him. God tells Moses precisely why: “let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.” The purpose for the contribution of the Israelites was so that He may dwell with them, that He would live among them. Through the tabernacle and the priesthood, through their rites and ceremonies, through their feasts and festivals, as through means, the Lord God, who brought them out of the bondage of Egypt would live and dwell among them and be their God, and lead them into the promised land, which flowed with milk and honey.

God dwells among us still. In the fullness of time, God's son was born of woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law. He brought us out of bondage to sin, death, the devil, and Hell, and He did this by His obedient suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension. But He is not gone. He dwells with us through the means of His Word and His sacraments, through the preaching and the teaching of our pastors, through the rites and ceremonies of our liturgy. He dwells with us in the Church through those means. And He is leading us to the true promised land, to the new heavens and the new earth in the new creation.

In the meantime, as God, even now, continues to call us to give to Him, let us, who have been saved from slavery to sin and death, the devil and hell, be so moved in our hearts as to give generously to Him so that the means of grace, the means of His gracious dwelling among us, would continue now and into the future. For just as He did then so does He do now. He presses the gifts given to Him into service for the benefit of all His people. He puts it to use so that we may have Him with us always, even unto the end of the age.

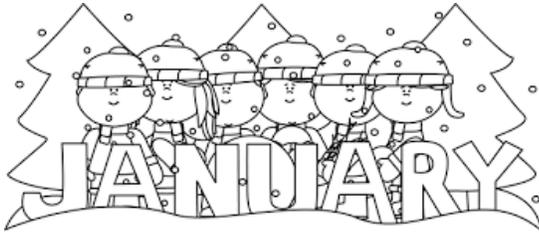
Taken from [lcms.org/stewardship](https://www.lcms.org/stewardship)

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B I B L E T R E A S U R E H U N T :



Bible Incomplete: Fill in the missing letters to complete the passage.

Tw_ th_ ng_ ha_ e I_ eq_ ir_ d o_ th_ e; d_ ny_ e t_ em_ o t_ ef_ re_ di_ : re_ ov_ fa_ fr_ m_ va_ it_ an_ li_ s; g_ ve_ e_ n_ it_ er_ ov_ rt_ no_ ri_ he_ ; fe_ d_ m_ wi_ h_ f_ od_ on_ en_ en_ fo_ me: _ es_ I_ b_ fu_ l_ , a_ d_ d_ ny_ he_ , an_ sa_ , Wh_ is_ he_ or_ ? or_ es_ I_ b_ po_ r_ , a_ d_ s_ ea_ , an_ ta_ e t_ en_ me_ f_ m_ Go_ in_ ai_ .

Answer to last month's Bible Treasure Hunt:

He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, Am I not in sport? Proverbs 26:17-18

C A P P E R S

CAPPERS will not meet during January.

N E W F A C I L I T Y

Were you given some money for Christmas because the giver didn't know what to buy? Want to honor a special someone at the start of the New Year? Consider a donation to the New Facility Fund. The current total is \$51,661.10. Before any new construction takes place, contributions need to come from all ages of our members. Set aside a certain amount each month or with each paycheck. Plan to honor your child when he brings home good grades or makes all his free throws. Show your appreciation of a certain teacher with a gift to the New Facility Fund.

