

# THE DIVINE SERVICE



Original Source: LCMS Commission on Worship  
Published by: LCMS Worship  
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*Liturgical Glossary Included*

## THE DIVINE SERVICE

### *Biblical Root of the Lutheran Liturgy*

#### **Invocation**

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” How many times have we heard those words? And yet, they testify with renewed freshness to our identity as children of God who’ve been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Wouldn’t it be something if God’s faithful would remember that every time they heard the words of the Invocation, perhaps tracing the sign of the cross as a visible reminder?

St. Paul beautifully captures the eternal significance of our baptism into Christ when he writes to the Galatians that “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). We are clothed with his righteousness. Unlike the man in the parable of the wedding feast who had no wedding garment, when we stand before our Judge on the Last Day, we will be clothed and covered, robed in the purity of Christ.

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Already now, in this heaven on earth we call worship, we stand with boldness before the triune God who has claimed us and named us.

#### **Confession and Absolution**

We can indeed approach God with confidence. And yet, because we stand on this side of our Lord’s final return, we still have with us the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. We have not yet faced the final judgment. And so, with sin still working in us, the condemnation of God’s Law must still confront us, lest we have any delusions that we might have something to boast of before our mighty Judge.

Above all else, Confession and Absolution keep us honest—honest with ourselves and honest before God. The act of confession is not some work that we lay before the Father’s throne; rather, it is the simple acknowledgment that God’s Word is true and right and that when we measure ourselves against its demands, we come up short. God’s Word says “you shall not give false testimony,” but in truth we have lied and gossiped and slandered.” And so, the Christian confesses: “Lord, Your Word is true; I have sinned.”

There are three basic ways to handle sin and guilt. One is to ignore or minimize them. We’ve all been tempted in that direction more than a few times. Isn’t that, after all, what our sinful human nature is all about? Another way is to institutionalize them, especially the guilt part. After all, if you can keep people feeling just guilty enough, you will keep them coming back for more.

**Venite** – Latin for “oh, come.” The title for the song of praise taken from Psalm 95 that is sung at the beginning of Matins/Morning Prayer. The first line reads, “Oh, come, let us sing to the Lord.”

**Verba** – Latin for “words.” A technical term used to refer to the Words of Institution. Usually used in conjunction with other words, like *verba testamenti* (“words of the [new] testament) or *verba Domini* (“words of the Lord”).

**Verse** – A biblical text sung prior to and in anticipation of the Holy Gospel. Except during Lent, the Verse is preceded and followed by the singing of alleluias. Individual proper Verses are appointed for each Sunday and festival; a general Verse is provided for use throughout the year.

**Versicle** – From the Latin *versiculus*, meaning “little verse.” One or more verses, usually from a psalm, read responsively. Versicles often appear at the beginning of a service (e.g., Matins and Vespers, special rites of dedication, etc.)

**Vespers** – A Latin word meaning “evening.” Originally one of eight daily offices prayed during the Middle Ages, Vespers was retained at the time of the Reformation as one of two daily services, the other being Matins. Sometimes also referred to as Evening Prayer.

**Vestments** – From the Latin *vestimentum*, meaning “garment.” Vestments are worn by the pastor and other liturgical assistants. Among their many purposes is the fact that they identify the person vested as a servant of the church and cover any individuality of clothing style which may be a distraction in the service of God’s Word.

**Wafer** – See “host.”

heart, then to one shoulder and finally to the other. Appropriate points in the Divine Service to make the sign of the cross include the Invocation, Absolution, conclusion of the Creed, upon reception of Holy Communion, and the Benediction.

**Stanza** – The proper designation given to the major divisions of a hymn. The term “verse” is more properly used to designate divisions within a psalm.

**Stole** – A scarf-like fabric usually crafted in the color of the day or season, often bearing symbols appropriate to the day or season. It is worn over the shoulders of those ordained to the pastoral office.

**Stripping of the Altar** – A ceremony that may conclude the Maundy Thursday service in which the altar is “stripped” of all its appointments (candles, vessels, linens, etc.). Other ornaments may also be removed from the sanctuary. The ceremony symbolizes the stripping of Jesus by his captors (both of his clothing and his honor) as well as the abandonment by his disciples. Usually Psalm 22 is prayed while the altar is stripped.

**Surplice** (SIR-pliss) – A flowing, white vestment worn over a cassock (a fitted vestment usually in black). The cassock/surplice combination is frequently worn at the daily offices (Matins, Vespers, etc.). It is also the vestment frequently worn by other assistants (e.g., acolytes) and by choir members.

**Te Deum Laudamus** – Latin for “You, God, we praise.” The opening words of an ancient hymn of praise most often sung at Matins/Morning Prayer. The author is unknown, though liturgical legend holds that it was composed spontaneously by Ambrose and Augustine as Ambrose baptized Augustine in the late fourth century.

**Tenebrae** (TEN-uh-bray) – A Good Friday service, though originally observed earlier in Holy Week. Candles are extinguished following a series of readings and/or psalms.

**Tract** – An older term for the Verse (see below) during Lent, when Alleluias are omitted.

**Triduum** (TRIDD-oo-um) – Latin for “three days,” namely, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. (Some include the day of Easter as well.) The Triduum celebrates the saving work of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It culminates with the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening.

The third way is to give sin and guilt their proper due, and then to silence them. That is the way of God’s absolution. With his forgiveness, our sin is removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Christians know that, but they also need to hear it often. We need to be reminded that those familiar words, “I forgive you all your sins,” are not just some impersonal announcement. They say what they mean and accomplish what they promise. Jesus himself said to his disciples that the sins they forgive are forgiven (John 20:23).

The last and greatest absolution that will ever be spoken to us will be at the last judgment. In the final pages of the Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis provides a marvelous description of this event. As each individual comes before Aslan—the lion who is Lewis’ figure for Christ—one of two things happens: either the person gazes directly into Aslan’s face and recognizes his forgiving countenance, or, upon seeing the lion’s stern demeanor, passes into his long shadow, forever to be separated from Christ.

In the Confession and Absolution we are being readied for our appearance before Christ on the Last Day. And hidden behind those comforting words that our sins are forgiven is the invitation, “Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34). When our Lord speaks those words to us at the Last Day, Confession and Absolution as we know it will cease, for we will then bask in the eternal absolution of the Lamb.

### **Kyrie**

In this world of sin and death, Christians have plenty of opportunities to join in the brief, yet all-encompassing prayer of the Kyrie: “Lord, have mercy.” All around us we see the results of hatred, envy, lust, and greed. Surely, the world is in need of God’s mercy. It’s no wonder that the church, in her worship, pleads before God on behalf of the whole world. It’s a prayer that no one else is going pray.

Yet, when we cry out, “Lord, have mercy,” there is confidence in our voices because we know that God is indeed merciful. He desires to bring relief to the suffering that is all around us. Our prayer may not always bring an immediate response—at least, not the response that we are seeking—but even then, we commend ourselves and the whole world to a merciful God.

Like the confession of sins, however, our cry for mercy will be silenced in heaven. There we will see the results of God’s mercy, as before the throne and in front of the Lamb will stand all the redeemed—not one of them worthy of the honor.

### **Hymn of Praise**

On the night of Jesus' birth, the angels let loose their earth-shattering song of praise: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." On that specific occasion, their praise gave utterance to the good news that the Son of God had come in the flesh. Heaven had come down to earth! And ever since, the Church has continued to rejoice in this miracle of our salvation.

The opening words of the Gloria in Excelsis are followed by a hymn of praise to the triune God. One can imagine the faithful singing these words in heaven: "We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory." Our focus is on the incarnate Son of God, the only-begotten Son, the Lamb of God, and only Son of the Father. And if that isn't enough to name this One who is the object of our worship and praise, twice we sing, "you take away the sin of the world." There it is, the heart and substance of the Christian faith. In heaven we will be gathered around the throne and the Lamb, confessing that he alone is holy, he alone is the Lord.

In more recent times, the Lutheran Church in North America has made a significant contribution to the church's liturgy through the alternate Hymn of Praise, "This is the Feast." Drawing directly from the description of heaven in the Revelation to St. John, our voices are joined to that heavenly throng as we sing with them, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12)

### **Word of God and Sermon**

Frequently we conclude the reading of Holy Scripture with the phrase, "This is the Word of the Lord!" More than just a "word" from God, this is his revelation in which he makes known to us his will, most specifically, his merciful will that desires our salvation. Ultimately, this word points us to the Word, the incarnate Son of God. He is God's final and full revelation to us, the mirror of the Father's heart. That is the point that the writer to the Hebrews makes in the opening verses of his epistle: "In many and various ways God spoke to his people of old by the prophets, but now in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2a). Only through him--God's only Son--are we able to know the Father's favor and grace.

In the sermon, the Word of God is brought to bear on the lives of the hearers. This is the equivalent of sitting at the feet of Jesus. But it's more than mere instruction. Through the sermon, God speaks to us with his two-edged sword of condemnation and promise, Law and Gospel. The subject of the sermon is both God and us. Through the sermon we come to a better understanding of ourselves, especially our need for God's forgiveness. But we also come face to face with God's mercy and love. Week after week, God's faithful hear the voice

**Preface** – The opening dialogue between pastor and people that begins the liturgy of Holy Communion. These words, dating from the second century, are likely the most ancient part of the Divine Service.

**Propers** – Those parts of the service that change from week to week, including the Introit, Collect, Gradual, readings, hymns, etc. The changing propers give shape and direction to the church year calendar.

**Reproaches** – Part of the Good Friday liturgy, these responses between pastor and congregation are drawn from Micah 6:3–4. Three times the question is asked: "What have I done to you, O My people," and in response, the congregation responds with a plea for God's mercy.

**Rite** – An order of service, often used to refer to occasional services like the rite of marriage or rite of ordination.

**Rubric** (ROO-brik) – Directions or instructions on how to conduct the service. Rubrics are often printed in red to distinguish them from the text of the service. The word comes from the Latin *ruber*, which means "red."

**Sacristy** (SACK-riss-tee) – From the Latin *sacristia*, meaning "holy things." The room where the communion vessels and paraments are kept. The vestments for pastor and liturgical assistants may also be kept here or in a separate room, the vestry.

**Salutation** – From the Latin *salutatio*, meaning "a greeting." A liturgical greeting by which the pastor blesses the people: "The Lord be with you." The traditional response, "and with your spirit," acknowledges that this blessing is spoken by the Lord's servant. The Salutation occurs before the Collect of the Day and at the beginning of the communion liturgy.

**Sanctuary** – From the Latin *sanctuarium*, meaning "a holy place." Refers to the area surrounding the altar, which is often enclosed by a communion rail, setting it off from the nave, the place where the people are seated.

**Sanctus** (SAHNK-tus) – A Latin word meaning "holy." The Sanctus is the liturgical song sung at the beginning of the communion liturgy. It is drawn from the song of the angels in Is. 6:3. The concluding text, "blessed is He who comes..." is from Ps. 118:26 and Mk. 11:9–10.

**Sign of the Cross** – In the Small Catechism Luther encouraged that the sign of the cross be made each morning and evening as a reminder of one's baptism. The cross is signed by touching the fingers first to the forehead, then to the

**Ordinary** – Those parts of the service that remain constant from week to week. For centuries the ordinary of the weekly communion service were the Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Nicene Creed, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. Countless composers have written complete musical settings using these texts. The parts of the service that change from week to week are called the propers.

**Ordo** – Latin for “order.” The term is used to refer to an order of service.

**Paraments** – This is the general term given to all of the liturgical cloths that are placed on the altar, pulpit, and lectern. The paraments are usually fashioned in various colors for use during specific seasons and days of the church year.

**Paschal Candle** (PASS-kel) – A large candle that has special significance during the Easter Vigil. It is also used at baptisms and funerals. Ordinarily it is located near the font. During the Fifty Days of Easter (Easter through Pentecost) it is placed near the altar, and at funerals it stands near the casket. Paschal comes from the Greek work for Passover and refers specifically to the celebration of Christ’s resurrection.

**Passion Sunday** – In the three-year lectionary, the Sunday before Easter. Traditionally referred to as Palm Sunday, the day commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem but then shifts focus toward the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf. In the historic one-year series, the fifth Sunday in Lent is called “Passion Sunday.”

**Paten** (PATT-en) – Latin for “dish.” A paten is a plate, usually made of a precious metal like silver, from which the body of Christ is distributed.

**Pax Domini** (POX DOE-mee-nee) – Latin for “peace of the Lord.” Prior to the distribution of the Lord’s body and blood, the pastor blesses the people with the words, “The peace of the Lord be with you always.”

**Pentecost** – From the Greek for “fiftieth day.” Pentecost is the liturgical celebration of that 50th day of Easter when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, marking the birth of the church. Liturgically, Pentecost is not the beginning of a new season, but the culmination of Easter.

**Pericope** (per-ik-oh-pee) – A pericope is a section of Holy Scripture that is read in a service. Since the eighth century, periscopes have been gathered together in lectionaries in which readings are appointed for each Sunday or festival. From the Greek, meaning to “cut around.”

of their Good Shepherd, preparing them, in a sense, for that final day when Jesus calls them to their eternal reward.

## Creed

In the course of his earthly ministry, Jesus put this hard question to his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” He wasn’t asking for the opinions of the crowds. He wanted a confession of faith. In reality, this confession is no different than the confession of sins. In both, we acknowledge that what God has said is true. When we confess our sins, we acknowledge the truth that God speaks about us--that we are sinners. When we confess the faith of the church in the creed, our confession speaks about God--who he is and what he has done.

In every age, the same question is put to the church: who do you say that I am? As we open our mouths and begin, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty . . .,” we confess a profound truth that has passed over the lips of Christians in every generation. This confession of the triune God is the property of no single individual, but of the whole church, including the whole company of heaven. There are more than a few saints and martyrs who put their lives on the line as they defended the truths that we confess in the creeds. Think of Athanasius, that faithful fourth-century pastor and confessor, who was exiled numerous times for his defense of the truth against the false teachers of his day. Or Luther, who stood firm against the combined might of the Roman Church and the Holy Roman Empire. In our own day, there are faithful Christians who risk their lives--and sometimes die--to confess these truths.

In the Revelation to St. John, we find confession going on in heaven. Just listen to the snippets of the grand confession that swirls around God’s throne:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come! (4:8b)  
Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created (4:11).  
Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth (5:9-10).

In the same way, as we stand on holy ground where Jesus comes in his Word and Sacraments, we join that noble company of saints and martyrs, confessing these holy truths concerning the triune God.

### **Offertory**

“What shall I render to the Lord?” Truth is, we have nothing to render him. We brought nothing into this world, and we will take nothing with us when we depart. As Jesus so poignantly tells us, our treasures are already stored up for us in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21).

There is, however, an offering that we do make, both now in our worship and one day in heaven itself. It is the sacrifice of thanksgiving as we call on the name of the Lord (Ps. 116:17). In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession (Article 24), this eucharistic sacrifice is carefully distinguished from the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice for sins belongs to him alone. Every time we try to grab that honor for ourselves, we come up short—very short. But when we recognize our rightful place—that we are on the receiving end of God’s merciful goodness—then the sacrifice of thanksgiving cannot help but pour forth from our lips as we give our thanks to the One who gave everything for us.

The giving of our firstfruits, whether it is money or possessions, time or talents, is also a part of this sacrifice of thanksgiving. Our mouths cannot remain separated from the rest of our bodies. If the thanksgiving is flowing from our lips, then it will also find expression in the giving of our very selves for the sake of Christ and the neighbor.

### **Sanctus**

If any part of the service has been recognized as providing a glimpse of heaven, it’s the Sanctus: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory.” This is the eternal song of the angels who hover over the throne of God in the vision of heaven that was given to Isaiah (Is. 6:1-4). Such was the splendor of their song that the very foundations of the threshold of the temple trembled at the sound.

At first glance, these words appear to be out of place at this point in the service. Nevertheless, the reality is that there is nothing in this entire world that compares with the miracle of Jesus’ bodily presence to feed his people. In this meal God is breaking into our world to give us life. No wonder our repeated cry is “Hosanna in the highest,” for what is more needed in this dying world than the Lord’s salvation?

**Mass** – One of the names for the service of Word and Sacrament. The term is used this way in the Lutheran Confessions, though in his later years, Martin Luther used it less frequently. More common terms among Lutherans are Divine Service, the Lord’s Supper, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

**Matins** – The first of eight daily prayer services that developed during the Middle Ages for use in the monasteries. At the time of the Reformation, these services were reduced to two: Matins in the morning and Vespers in the evening. Matins is a Middle English word that comes from Latin for “of the morning.”

**Maudy Thursday** – From the Latin word *mandatum*, which means “command.” The reference is to the Holy Gospel appointed for the day from John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another.” Also called “Holy Thursday.”

**Narthex** – Greek for “enclosure.” The narthex is an entryway or gathering room that leads into a church.

**Nave** – From the Latin *navis*, which means ship. The nave is the main section of a church where the worshipers are gathered. The term may have derived from the ship-like appearance of early naves or from the early church understanding of the church as the ark of salvation.

**Nicene Creed** (nye-SEEN) – Composed in A.D. 325 at a council of bishops (pastors) in Nicaea as a defense against the false teaching that Jesus was not true God. The creed was expanded to its present form at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. It has been used in the Divine Service as a corporate confession of the faith for centuries.

**Nunc Dimittis** (noonk di-MIT-iss) – Latin for “now dismiss.” These are the words spoken by Simeon as he held the 40-day-old Jesus in his arms (Luke 2:25—35). One of the New Testament canticles, it was traditionally used in the daily service of Compline and as an alternate to the Magnificat in Vespers. In the Lutheran Church it is also appointed for use following the distribution of the Lord’s Supper.

**O Antiphons** – Refrains that developed during the eighth century for use with the Magnificat at Vespers on the days leading up to Christmas (Dec. 17—23). Each is addressed to Christ, using an Old Testament image (O Wisdom, O Adonai, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dayspring, O King of the Nations, O Emmanuel). The antiphons are also reflected in the seven stanzas of “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” (LSB 357).

**Kyrie eleison** (KEE-ree-ay ay-LAY-ee-zon) – From the Greek, it is a direct address to God, meaning “Lord, have mercy.” The ten lepers, blind man Bartimaeus, and others addressed Jesus with these words. The Kyrie appears early in the Divine Service. It is not part of the confession of sins but a cry to God to have mercy on us and all humanity.

**Lectern** – The lectern is the reading stand from which the Word of God is read. In some churches it is highly ornamented, though usually less so than the pulpit.

**Lectionary** – A schedule of readings from Holy Scripture for use in the weekly liturgy. In current use are both an historic, one-year lectionary with readings that have been in use for centuries, and a more recently developed three-year lectionary. Use of a lectionary provides the congregation with the opportunity to hear carefully chosen sections from the entire Bible.

**Lent** – The penitential period of preparation before the celebration of Jesus’ resurrection. Its 40-day duration (not counting the Sundays in Lent) begins on Ash Wednesday which can occur as early as Feb. 4 and as late as Mar. 10, depending on the date of Easter. In the early church, Lent developed as a time of intense instruction for those who would be baptized at the Easter Vigil. The name comes from the Anglo-Saxon word for “spring” and the Old English word for “lengthen,” as in the lengthening of days with the approach of spring (in the northern hemisphere).

**Litany** – In general, a responsory prayer with repeated congregational responses. In the Divine Service, the Kyrie is sometimes cast in the form of a litany, with the congregation responding to each petition with the words, “Lord, have mercy.” An expanded form of this litany is found in Evening Prayer. The most comprehensive form of the litany is the medieval version that was revised by Luther and still appears in hymnals today.

**Liturgy** – In the Lutheran Confessions, liturgy is defined as “public service” in the sense that the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments is God’s service done on behalf of his people. Sometimes the word is used to denote an order of service, though the more specific terms “order of service” or “ordo” are preferred.

**Magnificat** (mahg-NIF-ih-kaht) – The opening word in the Latin text of the song of Mary from Luke 1:46–55, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” This New Testament canticle has been sung at the daily service of Vespers (Evening Prayer) for some 1,500 years.

The second half of the Sanctus contains a statement as bold as the first. Here we have our own little Palm Sunday. Just as the crowds cried out to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, so do we declare, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Mt. 21:9; Ps. 118:26). Heaven continues to break into our world as Jesus, our humble king, comes riding into our midst in the Lord’s name. This confession in the Sanctus of Jesus’ real presence is so significant that Luther proposed moving the Sanctus after the Words of Institution in order to highlight the reality of the words we sing.

### **Words of Our Lord**

Among many Christians, the words of Jesus that we often refer to as the Words of Institution are nothing more than an historical report: this is what Jesus did and what he said. Period. We have been blessed to know, however, that these words mean much more. They do what they say. According to the command of Christ, we celebrate the Lord’s Supper not as a mere meal of remembrance but as a Sacrament by which Jesus himself comes to us. We don’t transport ourselves back in time; rather, he comes to us and brings heaven down to earth for our benefit.

Of course, in heaven we won’t receive the Lord’s Supper. There we will have Jesus—the Bread of heaven—in all his fullness. But for now, as we wait for his return, he establishes his own beachhead in our sin-infested world, coming as our defender and deliverer, offering his own body and blood as the medicine of immortality. Here we find strength for the journey as Christ dwells in us and we in him. And the more we partake of this sacred food, the greater our desire becomes to be with Christ forever. In the words of Thomas Aquinas’ great eucharistic hymn:

O Christ, whom now beneath a veil we see:

    May what we thirst for soon our portion be:

To gaze on Thee unveiled, and see Thy face,

    The vision of Thy glory, and Thy grace. (*Lutheran Service Book* #640)

### **Agnus Dei**

Turning again to the Revelation to St. John, at one point John sees a scroll in the right hand of the One who was sitting on the throne. A “strong angel” puts forth the challenge, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” Then, between the throne and the elders, the Lamb comes into view. Undoubtedly the most significant feature in John’s description of this Lamb is that it is a lamb who appears to have been slain.

When we sing the Agnus Dei, “Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us,” we are preaching and praying all at once. It was,

after all, with these very words that John the Baptizer pointed his disciples to Jesus (John 1:29, 36). As we prepare to feast on the Lamb of our salvation, we do indeed proclaim him who gave his life for us. Here is the Lamb of God! Yet we also pray to him who is now present in his body and blood. We pray for mercy, mercy from the One who showed the true depths of mercy and compassion as he was silently led to slaughter, dying like a lamb shorn of all its honor.

Returning one more time to the apostle John's vision of heaven, we later hear his description of the saints in white robes. "Who are they?" John is asked. The answer: "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" (Rev. 7:13-14). This is the blood of our redemption, the propitiatory sacrifice that was foreshadowed at the first Passover when the blood of the year-old lambs was sprinkled on the doorpost as a sign that blood had already been shed in that house. In his Easter hymn, Martin Luther applies that incident to us, thus revealing our standing before the Father:

See, his blood now marks our door;

Faith points to it;

Death passes o'er,

And Satan cannot harm us. (*Lutheran Service Book* #458)

So it is at every celebration of the Lord's Supper. The blood of the Lamb is poured out for our drinking and his flesh for our eating. Clearly, God's mercy is shown, and his peace rests on us.

### **Distribution**

Try for a moment to picture the heavenly throng standing before the throne of God on the Last Day. The numbers will be staggering. And yet, united as we all are to Christ, the Bridegroom, we will be one--his elect Bride. As the faithful make their way to the altar to feast on the Bread of Life in the distribution, they are given a glimpse of that holy Bride. Oh yes, we see all of her warts and blemishes: the petty bickering over trivial matters, the deep disagreements on more weighty issues, and the painful ways in which we sometimes treat one another. Yet, by our common confession of the truth, we are one in Christ. As Christ gives himself to us in this holy meal, he strengthens that unity and bids us love one another with a deep and abiding love. How can it be any other way, as we are sent from the table with the blessing to depart in peace?

### **Nunc Dimittis**

Another Lutheran contribution to the church's liturgy is the use of the Nunc Dimittis as the post-communion canticle: "Lord, now let Your servant depart in

highest place of prominence by being read last. At services when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, the congregation stands for the reading. Especially on high festivals like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, etc., the Gospel may be read from the center of the nave, symbolizing what it means that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The movement to and from this location is referred to as the Gospel Procession.

**Holy Innocents** – Observed on December 28, this festival commemorates the baby boys of Bethlehem who were executed by King Herod in his attempt to murder the newborn king of the Jews (Matt. 2).

**Homily** – From the Greek for "discourse." A homily is a sermon on a biblical text. There is no distinction between a homily and sermon.

**Hosanna** – From Hebrew, its basic meaning is "to save." It functions as a plea to God our king to have mercy on us and save us from our lost condition.

**Host** – From Latin, means "sacrifice, victim." This term is used for the individual Communion breads or wafers.

**Icon** – A style of sacred art usually associated with Eastern Orthodox churches. Painted according to strict guidelines, the two-dimensional paintings are intended as windows into heaven and form the basis for a rich devotional piety.

**Incense** – From the Latin word "to set on fire." In Jewish worship in the temple, incense symbolized prayer rising before God (Ps. 141:2). The same image is used of the prayers of the saints in heaven (Rev. 8:3–5). In use in the Christian Church for over 1,500 years, the sweet smelling aroma engages another of the senses. Its association with prayer recommends it for use at any service, but especially the prayer offices (see Daily Office).

**Introit** (in-TRO-it) – From the Latin, meaning "to enter." Traditionally this was the entrance hymn to the Divine Service, consisting of antiphon, psalm, Gloria Patri, and antiphon repeated. During the Middle Ages it was shortened considerably and lost its function as an entrance hymn.

**Invitatory** (in-VYE-tah-toe-ree) – An antiphon preceding the Venite in Matins/Morning Prayer, this variable introduction concludes with the invitation, "O come, let us worship Him."

**Invocation** – From the Latin, "to call upon." Used at the beginning of many, though not all, services. It serves as a reminder of Baptism and may be accompanied by the sign of the cross.



**Epistle** – Greek for “letter.” The New Testament contains 22 epistles written by Saints Paul, Peter, John, and others, that were addressed to Christian churches scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The second reading in the Divine Service is usually taken from one of these epistles.

**Eucharist** (YOU-kahr-ist) – One of the many terms for the Lord’s Supper. It comes from the Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.” Even as Jesus gave thanks when he instituted the Lord’s Supper, so do we give thanks that in this holy meal our Lord gives us his body and blood for forgiveness and life.

**Flagon** – From a Latin word meaning “bottle” or “flask.” A flagon is a large pouring vessel that contains wine for use during distribution of the Lord’s Supper. The blood of Christ is poured from the flagon into a chalice.

**Funeral Pall** – A large, white cloth that covers a closed casket during the funeral service. Based on St. John’s vision of the saints in heaven (Rev. 7:9), the pall symbolizes the white robe of righteousness given to all believers in Christ. The pall is also a reminder of the white garment sometimes given at the time of Baptism and symbolizes the new life in Christ first given at Baptism and now fully realized in death.

**Gloria in excelsis** (GLOR-ee-ah in ex-SHELL-sis) – Also known as the “greater doxology,” this is the hymn of praise sung at the beginning of the Divine Service. It originates from the fourth century and has been in regular use for over a millennium. The canticle begins with the angel’s song in Luke 2:14 and then continues with a hymn of praise to the triune God, focusing chiefly on the saving work of Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” It is omitted during Advent, in anticipation of the celebration of Jesus’ birth at Christmas, and during Lent, a season of penitence.

**Gloria Patri** (GLOR-ee-ah PAH-tree) – Latin for “glory to the Father.” The complete text is: “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.” Also known as the “lesser doxology,” this ascription of praise is appended to psalms and other liturgical texts.

**Gradual** – A selection of psalm verses traditionally sung between the Epistle and Gospel. With the regular use of the Old Testament reading, the Gradual now appears after that reading, before the Epistle. The word Gradual is from the Latin for “step,” which refers to the step of the lectern from which the

**Holy Gospel** – Refers to the reading of one of the evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) in the Divine Service. The reading of the words of Jesus is given the

peace.” At first glance it appears that we’re taking the words of Simeon completely out of context. After all, what does his experience have to do with ours? How can Holy Communion ever compare to Simeon’s unique honor of holding the infant Jesus in his arms during the child’s first visit to the temple at the tender age of 40 days (Lk 2:25-38)?

Of course, we would love to have been in the temple and shared in the experience with Simeon. For that matter, we would give anything to have been the first--along with the shepherds--to see the infant Jesus, or to have been with the Magi as they offered their gifts to him. But, as Luther so insightfully taught, we don’t find Christ in those places. Through the events of his incarnation, birth, crucifixion, and resurrection our Lord has accomplished our salvation. But the benefits of his saving work--forgiveness, life, and salvation--are distributed to us through his means of grace, his Word and Sacraments. We can’t go back to stand with Simeon in the temple. The good news is that we don’t have to.

So when, following our reception of the Lord’s Supper, we sing Simeon’s ancient song of faith--“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace”--nothing could be more appropriate. Indeed, our eyes have seen his salvation. Better yet, we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8). So, what could be better than holding the infant Jesus in our arms? How about eating and drinking his body and blood given for the forgiveness of our sins? This truly is heaven on earth, because here we have Jesus and all his benefits.

### **Benediction**

“The Lord bless you and keep you.” Recall again the words of Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats: “Come, you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom.” The blessing that God speaks to us in the Benediction prepares us for that final summons. Throughout the Divine Service, God is forming us in his likeness as he establishes in us a deeper and more lasting faith toward him and a persistent and steadfast love for one another.

“The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.” In their reports of Jesus’ Transfiguration, the evangelists tell us that Jesus shone more brightly than the sun, prompting Peter to say, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” In heaven we will have the same response because it will be good--very good--to be in the presence of the Light of the world. For the moment, we see only dimly, but then we will see face to face. Still, it is good to be here even now, in this heaven on earth that we call worship, for already here God showers us with his grace.

“The Lord lift up his countenance on you and give you peace.” We Christians are truly blessed in that God does not hide his face from us. In all other religions there is ultimately doubt as to their gods’ attitudes toward them. How can it be otherwise, given that their gods are the creation of their own imaginations? But ours is the creator of heaven and earth. To be sure, he is a stern judge who holds the sinner accountable. But in the person of his only Son, we see our Father’s true nature, his fatherly heart of love. That is the countenance that he lifts up toward us in his holy Word and Sacraments as he reveals his mercy and grace.

Where the Lord blesses and makes his face shine and lifts up his gracious countenance on us, there is peace. Not the peace of this world, but peace between God and his faithful people. We know that peace because even now, in Word and Sacraments, we have Jesus and all his benefits. And in heaven we will rest in his eternal peace.

**Cope** – A vestment worn over an alb or surplice, usually in processions and/or for the Daily Offices. The cope is usually in the color of the season.

**Crucifer** – The person who carries a cross in procession. Comes from two Latin words which literally mean “to carry a cross.”

**Crucifix** – A Middle English term derived from the Latin, meaning “fastened to a cross.” A crucifix is a cross that bears the image of the crucified Christ, pointing to the reality of the One who came in the flesh to be the Savior of the world.

**Daily Office** – Services of prayer offered at established times each day. Already at the time of Jesus, set times for prayer were customary (Acts 3:1). By the sixth century, eight services of prayer, which included psalms and readings from Scripture, were observed in the monasteries. Since the Reformation, this schedule has been simplified to three times of prayer: morning (Matins), afternoon/evening (Vespers), and close of the day (Compline).

**Divine Service** – The name commonly given to the regular weekly service that includes the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Derived from the German Gottesdienst (“God’s service”), its meaning is dual in nature. In worship, God serves us with his gifts of forgiveness and life, and we respond in service to him through our sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

**Doxology** – From the Greek for “words of praise.” It is an expression of praise to God, usually in a trinitarian formulation. The Gloria Patri (“Glory be to the Father and to the Son...”), is a common doxology used to conclude psalms and many canticles. Many hymns have a concluding, doxological stanza that praises the Holy Trinity. The most familiar of these stanzas is known as the Common Doxology (“Praise God from whom all blessings flow...”)

**Easter Vigil** – Occurring on the eve of Easter, the structure of this service dates back to the second century, making it one of our most ancient services. The service is constructed in four parts: light, Word, Baptism, and Lord’s Supper. The Vigil serves each year as the church’s first celebration of the resurrection.

**Epiphany** – From the Greek, meaning “to appear.” Observed on January 6, Epiphany is the church’s celebration of the proclamation of Jesus’ birth to the Gentiles; hence, the reading of the story of the visit of the Magi from Matt. 2. Originally, and still in the Orthodox churches, Epiphany served as the celebration of Jesus’ birth. It wasn’t until the fourth century that Dec. 25 was established in the western church for this celebration.

**Chalice** – A Middle English word from the Latin calix, meaning “cup,” the chalice is the cup used to distribute the blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar.

**Chancel** – The section of a church building beyond the nave where the altar and pulpit (and often the font) are located.

**Chanting** – A method of singing liturgical texts that are not metered (as in a hymn). Most chant consists of short phrases that are sung responsively between pastor and people. Psalms may also be chanted as well as parts of the liturgy (e.g., the Gloria in excelsis, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 17).

**Chasuble** (CHAZ-uh-bul) – A loose-fitting, poncho-like vestment worn by the celebrant at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It is usually in the color of the day.

**Church Year** – The church’s calendar, which developed over centuries, provides a yearly rehearsal of the life and teaching of Christ. The first half begins with Advent and continues with Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. The second half of the year (Sundays after Pentecost/Trinity) focuses on the ministry of Christ, concluding with an emphasis on the End Times.

**Ciborium** (sih-BOAR-ee-oom) – Similar in shape to a chalice and covered with a lid, the ciborium contains the wafers used in holy communion. Usually the wafers are transferred to a paten (plate) from which they are distributed.

**Collect** (KOLL-ekt) – A concisely written prayer that “collects” the prayers of the people. The Collect of the Day is prayed toward the beginning of the Divine Service, prior to the reading of Holy Scripture. The collect usually follows a pattern of: address to God, basis for the prayer, petition, desired benefit or result, and Trinitarian termination.

**Compline** (KAHM-plin) – Similar in nature to bedtime prayers, Compline is the last of the daily prayer offices that came into use during the Middle Ages. Prayed in later evening, the service is simple in nature and includes this appropriate antiphon for use with the Nunc Dimittis: “Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping, that awake we may watch with Christ and asleep we may rest in peace.”

**Concertato** (kahn-sir-TAH-toe) – Usually a hymn-based composition that brings together contrasting musical forces of congregation, choir, and instruments. Hymn concertatos bring variety and musical richness to hymn singing.

## LITURGICAL GLOSSARY

**Aaronic Benediction** – The familiar blessing that begins, “The Lord bless you and keep you.” It is given the name “Aaronic” because it is the blessing God commanded Moses to give to his brother Aaron to speak to the people (Num. 6:24—26).

**Absolution** – Following the confession of sins, the Absolution pronounces God’s forgiveness either in a direct form (“I absolve/forgive you”) or in a declarative form (“God forgives you all yours sins”). The word comes from the Latin, absolvere, which means “to loosen, set free, or absolve” (Jn 20:23).

**Advent** – The first season of the church year, Advent serves to prepare us for the coming celebration of Christ’s birth. The word comes from the Latin, advenire, which means “to come.” Advent themes include not only Christ’s coming at Bethlehem but also his coming now in Word and Sacrament and his final coming in glory.

**Agnus Dei** (AH-nyoos DAY-ee) – Latin for “Lamb of God,” this hymn in the communion liturgy draws on the words of John the Baptist who pointed his disciples to Jesus, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). In the context of the communion liturgy, we are praying to Christ who is there present in his body and blood to have mercy on us and grant us peace.

**Alb** – This close-fitting, white garment is the standard vestment for pastors, especially at the Divine Service. The name comes from the Latin word for white, alba.

**Alleluia** – Hebrew for “praise the Lord” (though in its Greek spelling). It is a word of joy and gladness. An ancient custom is to refrain from using Alleluia during Lent in order to distinguish the penitential nature of this season from the exuberance of the Easter season that follows.

**All Saints’ Day** – An ancient observance on November 1 that originally commemorated the martyrs of the church (those who had died for the faith). It has since been expanded to include all who die in the faith. Because all who belong to Christ are saints, the festival also rightly emphasizes our unity with all believers, both living and dead.

**Altar** – Together with the font and pulpit, the altar is the chief focal point of the church building. Here heaven and earth are united as the body and blood of Jesus are given under the elements of bread and wine for our forgiveness, and the prayers of God’s people are offered on behalf of the church and the world.

**Amen** – Of Hebrew origin, “Amen” means that what has preceded is “true and certain.” Thus, as the congregation’s response to prayers, the Amen is an affirmation that the prayer just prayed is the prayer of the entire assembly, spoken on their behalf. In the Small Catechism, Luther explained Amen with: “Yes, yes, it shall be so.”

**Annunciation** – A liturgical celebration on March 25 (nine months before Christmas) to observe the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God (Lk 1:26—38).

**Antiphon** (AN-tih-fonn) – A refrain-like verse from Scripture that begins and concludes a psalm or canticle. Sometimes it is also interspersed within a psalm.

**Apostles’ Creed** – Though not written by the apostles (a common assumption in the Middle Ages) the Apostles’ Creed faithfully summarizes the apostolic teaching of Holy Scripture. Its origins date back to the second century where it developed as a statement of faith in conjunction with Holy Baptism. In most churches it is still used at every baptism.

**Ascension** – Observed on the 40th day of Easter, always a Thursday, the Ascension commemorates Jesus’ final appearance to his disciples before ascending to the Father (Acts 1:1—11).

**Ash Wednesday** – This day, which marks the beginning of Lent, is 40 days before Easter. (Sundays are not included in the count.) The theme of the day is repentance, which in some churches is visually depicted by the placing of ashes on the forehead while the words of Gen. 3:19 are spoken: “From dust you are and to dust you will return.”

**Athanasian Creed** – One of the three ecumenical (universally accepted) creeds, it probably originated around A.D. 500. Though it bears the name of Athanasius (fourth century), it was certainly not written by him. This creed is a grand expression of the Trinitarian faith.

**Baptismal Garment** – The baptism service provides the option of laying a white cloth on the newly baptized, symbolizing the righteousness (purity) of Christ with which they have now been clothed (Gal. 3:27). This practice is reminiscent of an ancient practice of clothing the newly baptized in a white garment. A vestige of this tradition is the use of a christening gown which is often handed down from generation to generation. (See also Rev. 7:9—17.)

**Benedictus** (Beh-neh-DIK-tuss) – Zechariah’s song of praise following the birth and naming of his son, John the Baptist (Lk. 1:68—79). Benedictus is Latin for “blessed be.”

**Bowing** – Since early times Christians have bowed as a sign of reverence. Usually a slight inclination of the head or upper body, bowing is often done when approaching the altar and at certain places in the liturgy, like during the voicing of the triune name in the Gloria Patri. As with all customs that are neither commanded nor forbidden, bowing (or not bowing) should not be used as a test of one’s piety.

**Canticle** – A biblical song, other than a psalm. The most familiar canticles are the songs of Zechariah (the Benedictus; Lk. 1:68—79), Mary (the Magnificat; Lk. 1:46—55), and Simeon (the Nunc Dimittis; Lk. 2:29—32). There are numerous Old Testament canticles, including the songs of Miriam and Hannah and several from the book of Isaiah. The Revelation to St. John also includes several canticles.

**Cantor/Kantor** – One who leads singing, especially that of the congregation. One of Luther’s associates, Johann Walter, is considered the first Lutheran cantor. J. S. Bach is probably the most renowned cantor. The term is finding increased use among those who are called to oversee the congregation’s musicmaking and to work with the pastors in service planning.

**Cassock** – A full-length, black garment that is worn under other vestments, most often the surplice. In addition to the clergy, the cassock may also be worn by others, including acolytes and choir members.

**Catechumen** – A catechumen is a “learner,” one who is being instructed in the Christian faith. In the early church, a catechumen was one who underwent rigorous instruction in preparation for Holy Baptism. The word comes from the Greek and means “to echo” or “sound in the ear.” Catechumens were traditionally taught through question and answer, with the answer echoing back what was first taught. A catechism is a book of instruction, often in the form of questions and answers.

**Catholic** – In the original versions of the ecumenical creeds, the word “catholic” is used to describe the entire church or the Christian faith. In this context, to call oneself “catholic” is to confess the fullness of the Christian faith without alteration. In order to avoid confusion, it is best to use the full name, Roman Catholic Church, when referring to that church body.