



Worship Formation & Liturgical Resources: Frequently Asked Questions

What are the biblical roots of worship?

The worship staff receives a number of similar inquiries on worship-related topics from across the church.

These responses should not be considered the final word on the topic, but useful guides that are to be considered in respect to local context with pastoral sensitivity.

The response herein may be reproduced for congregational use as long as the web address is cited on each copy.

Christians can examine the biblical roots of our worship in two key ways: the pattern or shape of worship and the words of worship.

Biblical Pattern

Christians gather on the Lord's Day to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The service is divided into two major parts. The Liturgy of the Word derives from the Jewish synagogue service and is made up of scripture readings, psalms, and prayers. In Luke we have an account of Jesus in the synagogue, reading from the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:14-21). The Liturgy of the Meal is the sharing of bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Holy Communion has its roots in Jesus' meal with his disciples on the night before his death (Matthew 26:26-29). Our experience of worship is similar to the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The risen Jesus breaks open the word for us, and then is made known in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:13-25). With Easter faith, we confess that Christ appears to us as the scriptures are read and communion is celebrated. (See also Luke 24:27, 30-31a.)

Biblical Words

Scripture is foundational to Lutheran worship. The most obvious demonstration of this is the inclusion of three readings and psalm for each Sunday. These readings are set forth in a lectionary, which is a cycle of Bible readings spread over a three-year period and shared by many other Christians. (See also ["Where does the list of readings for our Sunday worship come from?"](#))

Beyond the reading of scriptures, the words we hear, speak and sing in worship come directly from scripture or are shaped by scripture. The Psalms, for example, inform much of our Christian hymnody. Below is a table that provides the biblical basis for the elements of worship. This listing is available to all worshipers in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pp.1154-1159.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Scripture and Worship

HOLY COMMUNION

GATHERING

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. . . .
(*Joel 2:15-17*)

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (*Matthew 18:20*)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. (*Acts 2:1-13*)

Confession and Forgiveness

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (*Matthew 28:19*)

Bless the LORD, O my soul . . . who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.
(*Psalms 103:2-3*)

God's mercy endures forever. (*Psalms 136:1*)

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [God] who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(*1 John 1:8-9*)

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." (*John 8:34*)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . .
You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (*Matthew 22:37-39*)

I will delight in your commandments. (*Psalms 119:47*)

Show me your ways, O LORD. (*Psalms 25:4*)

[Jesus] breathed on [the disciples] and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (*John 20:22-23*)

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . . I pray, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (*Ephesians 2:4-5; 3:16-17*)

Thanksgiving for Baptism

. . . the fountain of living water, the LORD. (*Jeremiah 17:13*)

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.
(*Deuteronomy 32:18*)

The LORD is my light and my salvation. (*Psalms 27:1*)

Gathering Song

Sing to the Lord a new song, God's praise in the assembly of the faithful. (*Psalms 149:1-4*)

They called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (*Luke 17:13*)

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors! (*Luke 2:14*)

Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(*Philippians 2:11*)

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast . . . Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. (*Isaiah 25:6-9*)

Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! . . . To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! (*Revelation 5:12-13*)

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (*2 Corinthians 13:13*)

[The angel] came to [Mary] and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (*Luke 1:28*)

WORD

Readings and Responses

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty. (*Isaiah 55:10-11*)

In the beginning was the Word . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us. (*John 1:1-5, 14*)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. (*Colossians 3:16*)

Hear the word of the LORD. (*Jeremiah 2:4*)

Give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. (*1 Timothy 4:13*)

No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. (*2 Peter 1:20-21*)

From the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God. . . ." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, "Hallelujah!" (*Revelation 19:5-6*)

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." (*John 6:68*)

Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, and your salvation according to your promise . . . I trust in your word. (*Psalms 119:41, 42*)

The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. (*Numbers 14:18*)

Prayers of Intercession

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. (*1 Timothy 2:1-2*)

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (*Luke 23:46*)

Peace

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (*Matthew 5:23-24*)

On that day, the first day of the week . . . Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (*John 20:19*)

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. (*Romans 16:16*)

MEAL

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (*Acts 2:42*)

Offering

Is not this the fast I choose . . . to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (*Isaiah 58:6-7*)

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. (*Matthew 25:35*)

Thanksgiving at the Table

Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven. (*Lamentations 3:41*)

We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly. (*2 Thessalonians 1:3*)

[The seraphs] called to one another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." (*Isaiah 6:3*)

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (*Matthew 21:9*)

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (*1 Corinthians 11:23-26*)

Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven . . . (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

Communion Song

The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (*John 1:29*)

When [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (*Luke 24:30-31*)

Simeon took [Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (*Luke 2:28-32*)

SENDING

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. (*Matthew 28:19*)

As the Father has sent me, so I send you. (*John 20:21*)

So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (*John 13:1-15*)

You shall say to them, the LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:23-26*)

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus . . . May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. (*Romans 15:5, 13*)

[Jesus] said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (*Luke 7:50*)

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. (*Romans 12:11*)

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor. (*Galatians 2:10*)

As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." (*Matthew 10:7*)

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (*1 Corinthians 15:57*)

HOLY BAPTISM

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (*Romans 6:3-4*)

[God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus. (*1 Corinthians 1:30*)

You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. (*1 Corinthians 3:23*)

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (*Galatians 3:27*)

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on [the promised one], the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (*Isaiah 11:2*)

In [Christ] you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. (*Ephesians 1:13-14*)

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (*John 8:12*)

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (*Matthew 5:16*)

RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions:

- ☪ Why worship on Sunday?
- ☪ What is the pattern of worship?
- ☪ Where does the list of readings for our Sunday worship come from?

Resources Available for Download on the ELCA Website:

- 📄 *Worship Formation Study Modules*. ELCA Worship Staff. Sessions that may help a congregation dig deeper into many aspects of worship.

Resources Available from Augsburg Fortress:

- 📖 Brugh, Lorraine S. and Gordon W. Lathrop. *Using Evangelical Lutheran Worship: The Sunday Assembly*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008.
- 📖 Burke, Suzanne and Martin Seltz, eds., *Worship Matters: An Introduction to Worship* Augsburg Fortress, 2012. (Leader edition and Participant edition also available separately).
- 📖 Hoyer, Christopher George. *Getting the Word Out: A Handbook for Readers*. Minneapolis. Augsburg Fortress, 2013.
- 📖 Lathrop, Gordon W. *Central Things: Worship in Word and Sacrament*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005. See especially Chapter 3: The Bible and the Central Things, pp. 27-35.

Other Resources

- 📖 For references on the foundations for the Christian assembly from the writings of the early Church and the Lutheran confessions, consider *The First Apology of Justin Martyr*, Chapter LXVII: Weekly Worship of the Christians (c. 150 A.D.), and the Augsburg Confession, article VII (1530).
- 📄 Scripture passages may be found online using sites such as www.oremus.org and www.biblegateway.com (new revised standard version)

Revised January 2013

Copyright © 2013 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. www.elca.org/worshipfaq.

This document may be reproduced for use in your congregation as long as the copyright notice appears on each copy.