

A Brief Explanation of Worship at Saint James

God gathers us together in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the name into which we were baptized. He gathers us to receive His gifts—Himself, His name, His flesh and blood Son, His Word of pardon and peace, His life, His grace and Spirit. In the Divine Service He distributes these gifts to us. Here we receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation Christ won for us on the cross. God calls and gathers us into His holy Christian church where we have communion with Him and all His saints in heaven and on earth. Heaven and earth intersect in the Divine Service.

The Invocation

The beginning of the service is marked by God calling us together as He promises: “Where two or three are gathered in My name, I will be there also.” His name is the name in which we are baptized by His command in Matthew 28:19-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The Opening Hymn

The opening hymn reflects the season of the church year, or the theme of the day, highlighting the teachings of the lessons.

Confession and Absolution

God asks us to confess our sins and authorizes the church through its pastors to forgive sins. He pronounces the absolution (forgiveness) on behalf of Christ who said, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, 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 20:21-23).

The Reading of the Psalm

The Book of Psalms was the Old Testament people’s songbook. There were tunes used in the chanting/singing of the Psalms and these were a vital part of the worship life of God’s people. These inspired writings are still a valued part of our worship life today.

The Kyrie

Kyrie Eleison is Greek for “Lord Have Mercy.” The Gospel of Mark records, “Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (Mark 10:46-48). It is still fitting today for God’s needy children to cry out to Jesus, “Lord have mercy.”

The Hymn of Praise

God calls us to sing and the hymn of praise is an opportunity to join with the angels and saints throughout the ages in singing the words they first sang, like those expressed at Jesus’ birth—the Gloria in Excelsis: “Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14), and John the Baptizer’s precious words, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”



(John 1:29). Another hymn of praise, *This is the Feast*, has its roots in the book of Revelation (5:12-13 and 19:5-9).

Propers of the Day

Readings, collects, etc., are those parts of the service that change with every service. They are selected to correspond with the season of the church year, and to give us a broad exposure to the Word of God.

The Salutation and Collect of the Day

The Salutation is a reference to 2 Timothy 4:22 where Paul closes his letter by saying, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.” The Collect is a short prayer meant to gather (collect) the thoughts of the readings, and the theme of the day into one concise short prayer.

The Readings

God reveals Himself to us through His Holy Word. So that “the whole counsel of God” can be covered as much as possible, we follow a lectionary or reading schedule. We read from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament Jesus is active, helping His beloved people as they await His coming and in the New Testament we learn the specifics of the Messiah’s birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and continued work among His people.

Old Testament

This section of the Bible contains 39 books which comprise the Bible Jesus and His direct followers used.

Epistle

The word epistle is Greek for ‘letter’ or correspondence, so we are hearing from a ‘letter’ written almost two thousand years ago for the benefit of Christians, both then and now.

Alleluia and Verse

One of the Biblical references we often sing is from John 6:68. Jesus had just asked His disciples if they wanted to leave Him as others had just done. Peter responds with, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” The Alleluias (meaning praise) are quite fitting as we prepare to hear the Gospel—the Good News about and from Jesus.

The Gospel

The Gospel has a grander introduction than the other readings in our worship services, which is quite fitting as we prepare to hear Jesus’ words. (We stand out of respect for our Lord as we listen to Him speak to us).

The Sermon Hymn

The sermon hymn or hymn of the day reflects the theme of the day and augments the thought of the sermon, lessons, and prayers. It gives us time to reflect on the readings as we prepare to hear an exposition of what we have heard from God’s Word.

The Sermon Text

The text is the basis of the sermon. The sermon grows out of God’s Word, crafted with the goal of explaining and proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour for this dying world. The Word of God is properly



preached when Law and Gospel are clearly spoken. The Law shows us our sin, the Gospel shows us God's love. The law tells us what we are to do and what we are not to do. The Gospel tells us what Jesus has done for us. The law works to drive us to the Cross for forgiveness so that we can live as forgiven people, redeemed by Christ the crucified. That is the heart of every Christian sermon—Christ crucified for a dying world.

The Sermon Theme

The title or theme conveys the central thought, or idea behind the sermon and helps us focus on that while listening. The sermon gives the preacher the opportunity to tie the Word of God to the everyday lives of the people he serves. Sermons are designed to teach, exhort, comfort, and convey the great truths about God which we so desperately need to live our life of faith. Paul writes, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." A powerful sermon proclaims God's Word.

The Creed

The *Nicene Creed* is traditionally used during communion services, the *Apostles' Creed* during other services and the *Athanasian Creed* is used on Trinity Sunday as well as at other times. These creeds are called ecumenical because all Christians adhere to what these creeds confess.

The Prayers

One of the greatest privileges we have as God's children is approaching His throne of Grace through prayer. We can pray at home and at worship. Prayers are crafted to reflect the theme of the day, specific needs of the church, as well as the needs of the world around us. St. Paul, writing to Timothy, encourages us, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

The Offering and Offertory

One of the ways we respond to God's love is to present our offerings before Him. We give to Him out of a thankful, renewed heart, not desiring a reward or trying to earn His favour with our offerings, but out of thankfulness. Following the offering we sing an offertory, both are our responses to our Gracious God who has blessed us with a hearing of His Word and an explanation of that Word.

The Service of the Sacrament

The service of the Sacrament begins with the Preface—starting with a rendition of 2 Timothy 4:22 where Paul writes, "The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen" finishing his second letter to Timothy. Then we greet one another, pastor and people, in remembrance of our renewed relation in Christ, Who invites us to His Precious Supper. The Proper Preface concludes the Preface. This part of the Preface changes according to the church season and is different for Advent, Lent, Christmas, Easter, Epiphany, Pentecost, etc., hence the title proper" meaning it is specific to that day or season in the church year, like the propers of the day.

The Sanctus

Sanctus means Holy. God is Holy as the Biblical reference of Isaiah 6:3 clearly states, "And one cried to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: The whole earth is full of His glory!'" This



repetition of 'Holy' combined with the Hosannas from Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:9) makes a wonderful hymn of praise

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

This prayer focuses our attention on what we are about to receive, as we marvel at God's gracious activity toward us undeserving sinners. We give Him our thanks in prayer.

The Lord's Prayer and the Words of Institution

Jesus has given us a wonderful prayer to use every day. We pray this prayer either before or after the Words of Institution realizing that Jesus has given us a perfect prayer. The pastor then speaks the Words of Institution, over the bread and wine. The Word of God is powerful and effective, and hence we believe what Jesus has said, "Take eat this is My body" and "Take drink this is My blood."

Pax Domini

The Peace of the Lord is shared. This Old Testament greeting, used by Jesus in John 20:19 after His resurrection relates to salvation—that is Peace with God, through the death of Jesus. We now have peace with God; we are reconciled.

Agnus Dei

The Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is sung because what we are about to receive is indeed the Lamb of God Himself, Jesus' body given for us, His blood shed for us. In the Old Testament, priests sacrificed a lamb to God to pay for the sins of His people. Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sins and is therefore the Lamb of God. The Agnus Dei contains the words from John 1:29, "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" This is our testimony also. Jesus takes away our sins.

The Distribution

God also reveals himself in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Christ's body and blood is in, with and under the bread and wine. The Lord's Supper is described in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32 as a most precious medicine for the soul. Like all medicines, it must be used at the right time for the right purpose by the right person, or it could do more harm than good. For this reason the congregations of Lutheran Church—Canada practice "close" communion. We commune those who have been properly instructed in the faith, are able to examine themselves, and have made a public profession of that same faith. Close communion is a loving practice, developed to ensure that those who commune know exactly what they are doing and why.

Distribution Hymns

These hymns aid us in worship while we commune. Their content often centres on the Lord's Supper, or may reflect the theme of the day.

The Post-Communion Canticle

Once again, God calls us to sing His praise for His grace and mercy. As with other parts of the service, these canticles are our response to our good and gracious God. They are prayers set to music. Since we have received Christ's body and blood for our salvation we sing our thanks to God. One example is the



Nunc Dimittis (Song of Simeon) which is from Luke 2:29-32 and is Simeon's song of praise. Eight days after Jesus' birth, Simeon was privileged to see and hold the long-awaited Christ.

The Post-Communion Collect

Remember a Collect is a prayer that collects thoughts into one brief prayer. We have options in our hymnals for these prayers. Each prayer has a different emphasis, but all centre on the great gift we have received through the meal which Christ has given us.

The Benediction

The Aaronic benediction was to be pronounced over the people of Israel—God's people. In Numbers 6:23-26, we read "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: 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."

The Closing Hymn

The Service usually ends with a hymn, as God, through song, reminds us of His gifts to us in the service. We thank God for all He has done for us through His Divine Service, for here He has served us in a marvelous way. To God alone be the glory.