

Sharing Life, Sharing Faith Discussion #6

Lutheran Liturgy and Worship

Worship is God speaking. It is our listening. Worship begins with God's Word. He is the content. Evangelical Lutheran worship begins with God giving us his Word. It comes to us and we respond in faith and devotion. It is God's action, not ours. He is the mover, the doer. Faith comes as a gift from God, not from our own doing or action.¹ (**Roger D. Pittelko**)

Worship is not an option for a Christian or for the church. It is the very substance, the essence of the Christian faith and life. Communion with God through his Word and holy sacraments is essential to the Christian and the entire people of God.² (**Roger D. Pittelko**)

I. History and Description of Ancient Worship

Why is this important for Christians today to know and understand the history and practice of the Old Testament Israelite worship? Remember that you, too, are part of Israel. Israelite worship reflects not just the practices of the forefathers of the Jews today, but those of Christians as well, who have been “grafted” into Israel. **We are Israel**, and this makes this the history of **our** worship.

The sacrificial animal of the Old Testament is completed and fulfilled in the one Lamb of God who is Jesus Christ, our Lord. However, the picture and identification of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world is meaningless unless you understand the temple and the worship of the people of Israel. To the end of his ministry, our Lord continues to take part in the worship of the Old Testament people of God. He visits the temple and participates in its worship.³ (**Roger D. Pittelko**)

A. Old Testament Worship

1. Time of Adam and Creation

- a. The Sabbath has been observed since the creation of time and it was practiced by Adam and Eve.

And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (**Gen. 2:3**)

- b. God Himself provided the first animal sacrifice.

The Lord made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (**Gen. 3:21**)

- c. The first record of a sacrifice and offering to the Lord follows shortly after this.

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. (Gen. 4:3-5)

2. The covenants with Noah

Webster defines *covenant* as simply, “an agreement; compact”. The Biblical term *Brit*, or *covenant* encompasses much more, and loses something in the translation. It generally implies some kind of divine constitution or ordinance with signs or pledges given on behalf of both parties. However, unlike the manmade covenants of the time, there was no negotiation of conditions. God makes the promises. God sets the terms!

Whenever you read about covenants in the Old Testament, remember that those covenants were **always** a type and foreshadowing of the New Covenant in Christ’s blood. When understood in that context, these Old Testament covenants take on new meaning and significance in our own lives.

- a. The first covenant we read about was the one God made with Noah. Before they entered the ark, He promised that they would be safe. (Gen. 6:18) After the flood, God made another covenant with him and his descendants that He would never again destroy the earth by flood. (Gen. 9)
- b. Noah also continued to follow the worship practices of his ancestors after the flood, when he came out of the ark. Remember that of the clean animals, seven pairs were taken onto the ark, and not just one pair, as with the unclean animals. This was in anticipation of the sacrifice which would be made upon their deliverance.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. (Gen. 8:20)

3. The covenant with Abraham

- a. Abram also continued the sacrificial system.

He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him (Gen 12:5-7)

From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD. (Gen. 13:34)

- b. Abram was the recipient of God's covenant and promise, sealed in blood, when God promised him that his descendants would become a great nation, as numerous as the stars in the sky. Picture the scene here as it unfolds and imagine what this must have been like for Abram:

Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--.....(Gen 15:4-18)

Why would God instruct Abram to do such specific things? What is the significance of the "blood path" evidenced in this story? Note that throughout all time, God uses language that His people can understand. In Abraham's day, men made covenants with each other all the time. These covenants, like today, were made regarding all aspects of life, from grazing rights to marriage contracts. These covenants between men were sealed in a "blood path", involving animal blood. God made His covenant with men using language and symbolism which they understood.

4. Moses and Aaron

- a. The Law was given through Moses. The Jewish Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible, the “Books of Moses”, and they contain the Law as given to Israel through Moses. As we’ve learned in our Law and Gospel lessons, the Law is of vital importance to us as Christians today. It convicts us of our sin and unworthiness before God, and once convicted, the Gospel message becomes so precious and sweet to our ears.
- b. This was the period after the Exodus from Egypt and while the Israelites were wandering in the desert. The Lord specified **exactly** how the tabernacle should be designed, as well as the Ark of the Covenant and the clothing which Aaron should wear. These instructions were so specific that we can duplicate them today. He also specified all the things that should be kept with the Ark. The priesthood of Aaron was established at this time also.

"Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor. Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest. (**Exodus 28:1-3**)

"Make an atonement cover of pure gold-- two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. (**Ex. 25:17**)
{about 3 3/4 feet long and 2 1/4 feet wide }

What exactly was this “*atonement cover*” or “*mercy seat*”? As you read this description, remember it again in the context of the Christian faith and what we know of the blood atonement of Jesus Christ.

From the BDB Lexicon:

n. propitiatory, *cover over sin*; it was a slab of gold 2 1/2 cubits x 1 1/2 c. placed on top of the ark of the testimony. On it, and a part of it, were two golden cherubim facing each other, whose outstretched wings came together above and constituted the throne of Yahweh. When the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement it was necessary that this highest place of atonement should be enveloped in a cloud of incense. The blood of the sin-offering of the atonement was then sprinkled on the face of and seven times before it.⁴

5. David and Solomon

Solomon was chosen to build the first House of God, or temple. David, the great king of Israel, was allowed only to plan for it, but because he was a man of war and had shed blood, God did not allow him to build the temple, but promised it to his son, Solomon.

Then King David said to the whole assembly: "My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. (I Chron. 29:1)

Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. (I Chron 28:11)

Note that the basic character of worship does not change throughout this time. The theme has always been thanksgiving for God's gift of forgiveness and atonement for sin by sacrifice. The blood covenant of the sacrificial system of Old Testament worship, both before and after the building of The House (temple) was a type of the new blood covenant we see in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

B. Description of the Lutheran Liturgy

The question often asked is "Why does liturgical worship follow such a set structure or order?" The question reflects an underlying assumption for many Christians that in the New Testament period worship was spontaneous, or reflects lack of knowledge about the origins of liturgical worship with the Judeo-Christian traditions. The fact is, the 'order' has its very roots in the Bible, and much of Judaism and Christianity have been worshipping this way - more or less unchanged - for over 2000 years.

Early Christian worship had an origin: Jewish worship form and practice. The early disciples did not create new worship practices any more than did Jesus Christ. They all prayed as Jews and worshipped as Jews. The earliest Christians were Jews who recognized and accepted Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah.

For these early Christians, the Jewish worship practices were continued with a brand new understanding of the centrality of the victorious Christ, and new-found joy. Christians did not view their Jewish liturgical practices as passe. Nor did they simply continue in some kind of mindless habit of outmoded ritual. They maintained this liturgy as their own, as described in the inspired Scriptures of the Old Covenant carried over into the New. In fact, that Jewish liturgy made the work of God in Jesus Christ comprehensible. The Old Testament worship practices, now fulfilled and given new meaning in Christ became the core of Christian worship within this New Covenant.

With the persecutions (as described in Acts 6 and 7) the life of the Church was changed because the result was exclusion from Judaism. And that meant exclusion from Jewish worship. Christians were no longer able to gather in the Synagogue, and were unwelcome in the Temple as well. The active Jewish persecutions excluded Christians from the Temple and forced them toward new worship practices. What was this resulting Christian order? The Synagogue worship structure, consisting of a litany of prayers, a confession, eulogies, readings from the Scriptures, an address or homily, and a benediction. This form constituted the core of what was to become specifically Christian worship.⁵

1. Liturgical Worship Today - A Comparison

The following table compares the liturgical formats of an Orthodox Jewish Torah Service with an Orthodox Lutheran Divine Service. While there are a few things that are unique to one service or another, and some things are done in a slightly different order, note how similar the formats are. This is not a coincidence! Note also that each of these formats have been done essentially the same way for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Orthodox Jewish Torah Service	Orthodox Lutheran Divine Service
Opening Hymn (usually <i>Shalom Aleichem</i>)	Opening Hymn
Psalms and meditations	Antiphon (Psalms read or chanted responsively)
Lecha Dodi, Sabbath	
Bar'hu, the call to prayer	Invocation
	Confession and Absolution
Sh'ma, V'ahavtah, the "creeds"	Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, Salutation, and Collect
Lectionary readings, Torah and Haftarah	Lectionary readings (Old Testament, Epistle, Gospel)
	Creed (Apostle's, Nicene, or Athanasian)
Amidah, prayers of gratitude and intercession	
Sermon or meditation on lectionary readings	Sermon based on lectionary readings
	Intercessory Prayer
	Lord's Prayer
Mourner's Kaddish	
	Words of Institution
	The Lord's Supper
Closing Hymn, usually <i>Aleinu</i> , or <i>Adon Olam</i>	Closing Hymn
Kiddush, blessing on wine and bread	

Wine: *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam boray pri ha-gafen. Amen.*
(Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.)

Bread: *Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam ha-motzi lechem min ha'aretz.*
(Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.)

2. The Liturgy and “Evangelism”

Let Lutheran practice be determined by Lutheran theology, and then it will be accorded the kind of respect which is the best possible basis for genuine missionary attraction. Integrity, not image or cheap verbiage, must draw men to the Gospel, and the Gospel itself converts and confirms. No one can doubt the Good Shepherd's missionary zeal and compassion for his sheep. Yet he draws them with a quiet dignity that is entirely free of that breathless pestering and pandering which is mere salesmanship.⁶ (Dr. Kurt Marquart)

C. Psalms in the Liturgy

Psalms were used extensively in the worship liturgy from the time of the United Monarchy to the present (in Israelite, Jewish, and Christian worship) The Bible also gives us instances where songs are sung prior to this time, such as Miriam's song at the Red Sea, Deborah's song, and Moses's song, so it is reasonable to think that prayers, poems, and songs were also part of the worship of earlier times as well. For example, let's read **Psalm 51:1-4, 10-13, 15**

**Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion
blot out my transgressions
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against You, and You only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
and blameless when You judge.**

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach the transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.**

**O Lord, open my lips
That my mouth may declare Your praise.**

Note that Psalms can be songs of praise as well as prayers of intercession.

Discussion Question: What are the differences between the Psalms and the modern “praise songs”?

II. Scenario Practice

You are sitting on an airplane and the man sitting next to you has just introduced himself. You chat for a while, and find out he is Jewish, and belongs to a Conservative Synagogue. You tell him that you are a Lutheran, and explain that that means orthodox Christianity. The conversation continues about family, work, and so on, and at some point he makes the following comment: "You know, I've heard people say that Judaism and Christianity are really pretty similar, almost amazingly so, at least from what I've heard." What do you say?

III. Journal Sharing

IV. Next Month

A. Judaism

B. Scenarios

C. Journal Sharing

D. Outside Reading

-Quote from "Lutheran Worship: History and Practice"

-Quote by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman regarding the Lectionary Readings

¹ Pittelko, Roger D., "Lutheran Worship: History and Practice", edited by Fred L. Precht, © 1993 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, pg 45

² Ibid, pg 57

³ Ibid, pg 49

⁴ Brown, Francis, "The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon" © 1906, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA

⁵ <http://www.liturgica.com>

⁶ Marquart, Dr. Kurt, "Lutheran Worship: History and Practice", edited by Fred L. Precht, © 1993 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, pg 72
