

WHY DO WE WORSHIP THE WAY WE DO?
PART 1
Ancient Roots of Lutheran Worship



During the summer months, we will be exploring together the development of Lutheran worship and experiencing ways that our forefathers and foremothers offered worship and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ and received his gifts through the Holy Sacraments. The following is an introduction to our worship journey. Join us each week to worship and learn why we do what we do on Sunday mornings.

“⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Act 2:42 NRS) “⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42, 46-47 NRSV)

Corporate worship has been central to the Christian faith since the very first followers of the Way gathered at the time of the Pentecost. Also, from the very beginning, sharing the meal we know as Holy Communion was a regular part of their gatherings.

Around 56 A.D. Paul wrote to the Christian community in Corinth to express his concern about inappropriate behavior during worship and the sharing of the Lord's Supper. He stressed the importance of the meal and its place in the worship of the church by repeating Jesus' words at the Last Supper with the disciples before his crucifixion- words that are still used today.

²³ 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, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1Corinthians 11:23-26 NRSV)

During most of the First Century, Christians gathered with their Jewish brothers & sisters for Sabbath services of scripture readings, interpretation, and prayers. Early on, they were considered a sect of Judaism; however, they differentiated themselves as a group through their additional “Lord's Day” (Sunday) gatherings in members' homes to share the Lord's Supper instituted by Jesus. As Christianity spread into the lands outside Israel, more and more Gentile believers joined the growing communities. This growth together with growing persecution from both the Roman government and Jewish leaders led to the establishment of the Christian church as an entity unto itself. By the end of

the Second Century, church leadership hierarchy, worship service content and structure, and church buildings had been established throughout the known world. By the end of the Fourth Century, Sunday- "The Lord's Day"- had become the primary day of worship in the week.

Below, are excerpts about worship practices from writings of early church leaders. Take note of how the content and structure of our worship has changed very little since the first centuries of the church: confession, psalms/hymns, prayers, scripture reading, sermon, offering, Holy Communion.

"But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations.

(The Didache, 50-120 A.D.)

"When you instruct the people, O bishop, command and exhort them to come constantly to church morning and evening every day, and by no means to forsake it on any account, but to assemble together continually; neither to diminish the Church by withdrawing themselves, and causing the body of Christ to be without its member... but assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath day. And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection, on which we pray thrice standing in memory of Him who arose in three days, in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the Gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food?"

(Apostolic Constitutions ca. 1st-4th cent. Bk. 2. 59)