

All-Congregation Bible Study Lutheran Worship as Divine Service

— *handout 1* —

What Is Worship?

1. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *worship* as "the action whereby people honor or revere a supernatural being or power or a holy thing, to adore with appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies." Furthermore, the dictionary informs us that the word *worship* comes from the Anglo-Saxon words *worth* and *ship*, meaning "worth ship." In other words, we give worth or value to a being or thing and express this in acts of reverence or devotion.
 - a. Would you agree that this is the common understanding of worship, according to your experience?
 - b. Nevertheless, since the very beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, Lutherans have vociferously opposed this understanding of worship. Evaluate the dictionary definition of worship.

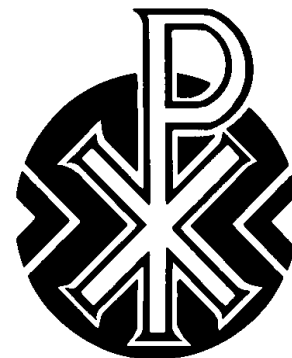
2. Lutherans have always struggled with the dictionary definition of worship. Consider the following Scripture passages and accompanying statements from the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. What do they say about the Lutheran understanding of worship?
 - a. "It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers" (AP IV, 49).

 - b. Read **Luke 7:44–50**. About this, we confess that "The woman came, believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. This is the highest way of worshiping Christ" (AP V, 33).

 - c. Read **Romans 4:16–25**. About this, we confess that "God wants us to believe him and to accept blessings from him; this he declares to be true worship." (AP IV, 228).

3. According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, Lutherans confess that "worship is faith." True worship is to believe the Gospel and to receive from the Lord (by His grace) forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Fill in the blanks:
 - a. According to the common definition of worship,
 - _____ do the action.
 - _____ is the receiver of our action.

 - b. By contrast, according to the Scriptural definition of worship,
 - _____ does the action.
 - _____ are the receivers of God's action for us.



4. Comment on Roger Pittelko^a summary of this discussion:

The usual meaning of this word [worship] leads us astray. Worship is usually defined as honoring or revering a supernatural being or power. This adoration is done with appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies.... The main thrust of the English word worship is from the worshiper to the worshiped. The direction is from us to God... Such a view of worship is antithetical to the Evangelical Lutheran understanding of worship. The dictionary understanding makes worship our action. It turns worship into an anthropocentric [i.e. man-centered] activity.... The evangelical Lutheran understanding of worship is just the opposite. It is from God to us. it begins with God. It has its foundation and source with God. it is theocentric [i.e. God-centered], and more specifically, it is Christocentric [i.e. Christ-centered].

5. Read **John 6:35–40**. Describe Jesus' action on behalf of all people. How does verse 40 relate to worship as faith?
6. Read **Matthew 17:1–8** to hear the Transfiguration account. Compare our worship experience to the experience of the disciples present at the Transfiguration (especially **verses 7–8**).
7. The Lord speaks of worship that has its origin in human ideas and activities instead of God's own teaching. Read **Isaiah 29:13**. Jesus uses these same words to describe the worship of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Matt. 15:8–9). Briefly describe worship that proceeds from a human heart that is far away from God.
8. Good gifts are given by God. Because of sin people pervert those good gifts. Yet, amazingly, God continues to give. Read **1 Timothy 4:1–5** and answer the following question: how are the good gifts received and sanctified by the Christian in true worship?
9. The Lutheran Confessions speak of the true worship of God. Read together the **Athanasian Creed** to answer the question: How is worship described?

Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith.

Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally.

And the catholic faith is this,

that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.

For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another.

But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

^a Professor of Pastoral Ministry at Concordia Theological Seminary & former District President of the LCMS English District. Quote from Lutheran Worship: History and Practice, (Fred L. Precht, ed.), St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993, p.14.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit:
the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated;
the Father infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite;
the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.

And yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal, just as there are not three Uncreated or three Infinities, but one Uncreated and one Infinite.

In the same way, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty;
and yet there are not three Almighty's, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;
and yet there are not three Gods, but one God.

So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord;
and yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.

Just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so also are we prohibited by the catholic religion to say that there are three Gods or Lords.

The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone.

The Son is neither made nor created, but begotten of the Father alone.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.

Thus, there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another;

but the whole three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal, so that in all things, as has been stated above, the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped.

Therefore, whoever desires to be saved must think thus about the Trinity.

But it is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man.

He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh;

equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His humanity.

Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ:

one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God;

one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.

For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ, who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds.

And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.

10. Read Third Commandment and Luther's explanation from the Small Catechism.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

- a. How do we keep the Sabbath Day holy?
- b. Who is the giver and who is the receiver during worship according to the commandment?

11. Evaluate the following statement from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod: "The Sunday morning gathering of the Christian congregation is not "worship" (our action), but Divine Service (God's action on our behalf).

Looking Ahead to handout 2:

Pick up the hymnal and page through one of the settings of the Divine Service. Try and see who is the giver and who is the receiver in the various parts of the service.

