

ABOUT OUR WORSHIP

As Christians in the Episcopal tradition—which is a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion—our worship is rooted in Holy Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer, a collection of prayers and services for all occasions based on ancient Judaism and early Christianity; it was first published in English in 1549. The hope of finding ourselves in the midst of this ancient tradition is that we might both learn from those who have come before us and add our own voices to the heavenly chorus. (*The Anglican Communion is the 3rd largest communion of Christians in the world after the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches)*

LITURGY OF THE WORD

Based on ancient Jewish worship, the first part of our worship involves gathering in God's name, proclaiming God's word and responding to God's word.

"Liturgy" means the work of the people in worship.

The Processional: The processional draws together our hearts, minds, and voices and attunes us to God's presence in our midst. The cross leads the procession, reminding us that Christ leads the way. Some people bow as the cross passes as an act of reverence. The torches flanking the cross symbolize the light of Christ among us.

Opening Acclamation: Reminiscent of ancient Jewish prayers, the opening acclamation between presider and people confirms the reason for our gathering and our lives: to honor God, to grow in knowledge and love of God and God's world, and to remember who we are: unconditionally beloved. Some people make the sign of the cross (*a practice dating back to the 2nd century*) as a way to physically connect the thoughts of our minds with the actions of our bodies.

Collect for Purity: Based on Psalm 51, this opening prayer asks God to prepare our hearts for worship. It's called a collect (pronounced cahl-eck) because it "collects" or "gathers up" our many voices as one.

Song of Praise: Often this is the *Gloria*, an ancient hymn drawn from the song of the angels to the shepherds on the night of Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom God favors" (Luke 2:14). The song of praise states the two-fold objective of our worship—to glorify God and to communicate God's desire of peace to all. During Lent (a 40-day period of renewal leading up to Easter), we typically say or sing the *Kyrie*, part of the Greek phrase for "Lord, have mercy." During Advent (4 weeks of preparing for Christ's birth and eventual return in glory) we typically sing the *Trisagion*, an ancient Eastern Orthodox hymn translated "Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal one, have mercy on us."

Collect of the Day: This prayer focuses on the themes in the day's lessons and summarizes our faithful response to God's story. The prayer begins with an ancient Jewish salutation from the book of Ruth affirming God's presence among us: "The Lord be with you...and also with you."

The Lessons: Our readings are organized in a 3-year cycle called *The Lectionary*, with each year built primarily around one of the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, or Luke. (John is read during Lent, Holy Week, and parts of the summer). Our readings include a combination of the following: a lesson from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament; a Psalm (*a collection of 150 songs and poems covering every mood of our relationship with God*); an Epistle reading (*letters to the newly-formed churches of the 1st century*) or a reading from the book of Acts (*a history of the early Church*); and a Gospel lesson (*stories about Jesus' life*). Following a practice that originated in the early church, the Gospel is carried from the altar and read in the midst of the people, symbolizing the coming of the Good News of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Some people make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart when the Gospel is announced to signify our desire that the Gospel will dwell in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. One final note about Scripture: it's important to remember that the Bible is a *collection* of 66 books of different genres requiring different ways of reading and interpretation—allegorical, literal, historical, metaphorical, literary, poetic, etc.

The Sermon: The sermon is meant to connect the readings to our present-day lives and provide a springboard for personal reflection and growth.

The Creed: In response to the Word proclaimed, we affirm the foundation on which we stand—usually with The Nicene Creed, which was written in 325 A.D., to capture the work of God: past, present, and future. The Latin word, *credo*, ("I believe") means to give one's heart rather than an assertion of intellectual confidence alone. The Creed is not intended as a "last word" about what we believe, but as a first word that in hearing many tenets of our faith all together, we may be recalled to its fullness. Priest and writer Barbara Brown Taylor notes: "When I say, 'We believe...' I count on that to cover what I cannot believe on my own right now. When my faith limps, I lean on the faith of the church, letting 'our' faith suffice until mine returns. Later, when I am able to say 'We believe...' with renewed confidence, I know that I am filling in for others who are indisposed for the time being, as they filled in for me." Sometimes our creeds vary depending on the church season.

The Prayers of the People: The prayers affirm that we are connected to a larger fellowship, the Body of Christ, on whose heart lies the cares and concerns of the world. We pray for the universal Church; the nation and all in authority; the welfare of the world; our local community; those who suffer and those in trouble; the departed, and any other special needs. Prayer isn't just about reciting a list of needs; it's a posture of attentiveness and reflection.

The Confession & Absolution: The confession is our opportunity to acknowledge what we have done and left undone that distorts our relationship with God, our neighbors, creation, and ourselves. The priest's statement of absolution that follows assures us that God's greatest joy is to forgive and free us from that weight of our failures and sins. Although God forgives without condition, our repentance and commitment to follow the way of Jesus' love and mercy closes the loop and transforms forgiveness into reconciliation with others, God, and creation. Some people again make the sign of the cross as a reminder that, being marked by Christ, we are promised forgiveness.

The Peace: The passing of the peace, which has been a part of Christian worship since the 2nd century, affirms our reconciliation with one another and reminds us that as Christians we are to be God's instruments of peace.

LITURGY OF THE TABLE

Based on ancient Jewish fellowship meals and worship in the early Christian church, the Liturgy of the Table is centered on the celebration of Holy Communion, also called the Eucharist (from the Greek word eucharisteo, meaning "thanksgiving"). In it, we recall Jesus' act of self-giving love for all creation and offer up our hearts for transformation.

The Offertory: Following the custom of the first Christians, we bring forth our offerings, usually money, a powerful symbol in our culture of who we are and where we place our priorities. We stand as the offerings are presented at the altar, because they represent our entire lives, everything we are offering to be blessed, broken, and transformed by God and given to a hungry and thirsty world.

The Eucharist: We begin by lifting up our hearts to God and highlighting God's presence and work as Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit. Sometimes this opening preface highlights a seasonal or Scriptural theme. We continue by singing *The Sanctus*, a hymn of praise and remembrance that echoes the voices of the angels who eternally praise God. It also recalls the words of the prophet Isaiah who was overwhelmed by God's presence. The second part of the song recalls the words proclaimed when Jesus entered Jerusalem his final week of life.

The Eucharist continues with the *Prayer of Consecration*, which includes our remembrance of: 1) God's creation of the human family in God's loving image; 2) God's invitation to live and share God's bounty and love; 3) those times when we failed in this high calling, and; 4) God's never-failing love and commitment to restore us to peace, and wholeness.

We continue by remembering Jesus' final meal before his death and collectively respond with the *Memorial Acclamation*, an echo of ancient Byzantine and Ethiopian traditions affirming Christ's death, resurrection, and eventual return to restore all things to perfection.

Next follows the *Epiclesis* in which we pray for God's living, breathing Spirit to transform the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood so that we might be blessed and strengthened to become outward and visible signs of God's love. While the bread and wine's physical properties remain unchanged, they have been imbued with God's grace.

The prayer concludes with the *Great Amen*, the only word in our liturgy in all capital letters. In it we all join in asking Jesus to be present in the bread and the wine. The bell is rung three times to symbolize that the bread and wine have become Christ's body and blood.

The Lord's Prayer: The link between our daily bread and the spiritual food we receive in the Eucharist is an ancient connection. In the Lord's Prayer we ask for daily bread, meaning the things we need to get through each day. Likewise, the bread symbolizes God's presence, which is also essential to our getting through the day.

Breaking of the Bread: This calls to mind not only Christ's breaking of the bread at the Last Supper, but also his broken body on the cross. As we see bread broken, we keep a moment of silence in awe and gratitude and are reminded that we, too, are Christ's Body.

The Communion: While it is customary to be baptized before receiving communion, Jesus ate with anyone and everyone to show the breadth and depth of God's love; thus, **our table is open to all who hunger**. If you would like more information on baptism, the sacrament of belonging and new life in which we are sealed in the power of God's Spirit and marked as Christ's beloved forever, please see the priest. We would love to celebrate and receive you.

Post-Communion Prayer: We thank God for renewing us as the Body of Christ and shift our focus outward that we might now go out in the strength of this unity.

The Blessing: Dating back to ancient Judaism, a blessing is an affirmation of God's favor and encouragement. Some people make the sign of the cross to affirm their reception of this blessing.

Dismissal: The dismissal asserts the relationship between our worship and living and invites us to embrace and share Christ's light and love in our daily lives.