

MUSIC AS A TOOL FOR OUTREACH: A LOOK AT ITS HISTORICAL AND MODERN
USE FOR REACHING NON-CHRISTIANS WITH THE GOSPEL.

BY

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Abstract

The Word of God is all that is needed to convert people from unbelievers to believers. But throughout the history of the Christian Church, music has been used as a tool to aid the proclamation of the Gospel. This thesis looks at the historical use of music for this goal throughout the Bible, in the early New Testament church, the Reformation and post Reformation era, and finally, what some of the churches in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are currently doing to use music to reach the lost. The goal of this thesis is to encourage readers to continue supporting musical education in any way they can, so that music as a tool for outreach can continue to be used in our church body.

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Introduction

The Lutheran Church is often referred to as the singing church. But why? Why is it that we as Lutherans hold music in such high regard and have such lively discussions about the roles and types of music in public worship?

In his literary work “*Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea*,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned, “music is the universal language of mankind - poetry their universal pastime and delight.”¹ His observation was that music spans all cultural and ethnical barriers. Every culture and ethnicity expresses feelings and thoughts through varying styles of music. While each culture focuses on different aspects of music in order to communicate emotion and meaning, the meaning from a particular style or even musical key varies greatly from culture to culture. While western music typically uses minor keys to express sadness or melancholy and major keys to inspire and uplift, some African cultures find major keys to sound sad or mournful! This brings wonderful diversity into our world and all different types of music.

However, every culture does have music. Music has the power to communicate even without words. But when words are set to music, the two can work together to express feelings and thoughts that neither poetry nor music can do by themselves.

In Matthew chapter 28, Jesus gave all Christians the command to make disciples of all nations by applying the Means of Grace. Music can be a powerful tool for communicating with people and helping them to apply ideas to their own lives. So when we want to communicate the truth of God's Word, we recognize that music is aptly suited for the task for the reasons stated above. We believe music is an effective tool to communicate with people no matter who they are or what their situation in life is. And we can use music as a tool to proclaim to them who God is and what he has done for them: that is, to share the Gospel with them!

Martin Luther was a strong proponent of using music to praise and proclaim God. When he presented a Bible as a gift to his friend Wolf Heinz, the organist in Halle, he noted about Psalm 149,

¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea* [book on-line] (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 1, (accessed 2 Oct 2015); available from <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=dSoAAAAAYAAJ&rdid=book-dSoAAAAAYAAJ&rdot=1>.

“A new miracle deserves a new song, thanksgiving, and preaching. The new miracle is that God through His Son has parted the real Red, Dead Sea and has redeemed us from the real Pharaoh, Satan. This is singing a new song, that is, the holy Gospel, and thanking God for it. God help us to do so. Amen. The stringed instruments of the following psalms are to help in the singing of this new song; and Wolf Heinz and all pious, Christian musicians should let their singing and playing to the praise of the Father of all grace sound forth with joy from their organs and whatever other beloved musical instruments there are (recently invented and given by God), of which neither David nor Solomon, neither Persia, Greece, nor Rome, knew anything. Amen.”²

This concept of music as an important tool in a Christian's toolbox of worship is not just a view to which Martin Luther held, however. A study of the history of the Christian church will reflect a history of musical praise and proclamation. In fact, the use of music for proclaiming who God is and what he has done for his people is a motif that can be found throughout the Bible! The most common use for music as praise to God is the Psalms, but that is only one example.

Music in the Old Testament

The very first song of praise to God recorded in the Bible is the song of Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea.³ Often this part of the Exodus is skipped when we teach the history of the Exodus, because it is bookended by God calling Moses from the burning bush and the 10 plagues on one side, and the giving of the Law in the Ten Commandments on the other. We tend to glance over the hymn without meditating on it.

Moses was raised in the household of Pharaoh and “was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22 NIV84). The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria understood his

² Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 982.

³ This is the first example of a song of praise which is written down. Adam broke into poetry when the LORD God presented the woman to him, but there is nothing in the text that suggested a song. In Job 36:24, Elihu mentions God's work being praised in song. While the dating of the events in the book of Job are unknown to us, we suspect they took place at least before the time of Moses, and possibly even before Abraham. From this, we can deduce that men were praising and proclaiming God in song before Moses and Miriam, but we do not have firm example. (For more on the dating of Job, see Rudolph E. Honsey, *Job*, 2nd ed., The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House,) 2004, 1.

education to have included “the whole science of rhythm and harmony and metre, and the whole of music, by means of the use of musical instruments.”⁴

After God performed his wonders through his servants Moses and Aaron among the Egyptians, he caused Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go and Moses led the nation of Israel, numbering at least 600,000 men plus women and children (plus animals and goods!), out of Egypt. They followed the LORD, who went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.⁵ The LORD led them to the shore of the Red Sea. Well, it was about that time that Pharaoh had a change of heart, in that the Lord hardened it by performed his terrifying strange work. Pharaoh pursued them with his army in order to wipe them out, but God saved his people. By a truly awesome display of his power, God drove back the water all night long and held the Egyptian army at bay while the nation of Israel crossed the dry riverbed “with a wall of water on their right and on their left” (Exodus 14:29).

After God brought the water back into place, wiping out the whole Egyptian army that had chased them, the children of Israel saw how powerful their God was, and how much he had done for them. Their response to this salvific act of God was a song of praise. How did the nation of 600,000 men plus women and children all sing the same song to God? God doesn't tell us the details. What we can observe from the text is that Moses wrote it. While, modern Bible critics look at the content of the song and claim that Moses could not have written it, we can be confident that he in fact did. The outline Keil and Delitzsch give divides the song of praise into 3 parts. They write, “The song is composed of three gradually increasing strophes, each of which commences with the praise of Jehovah, and ends with a description of the overthrow of the Egyptian host (See vv. 2–5, 6–10, 11–18).⁶ The critics' issue with Mosaic authorship of this song is that verses 16-17 boldly confess confidence in the future establishment of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan. Because there is a prophetic nature to the words, some believe this is a portion of text that was written later as a commentary to what God had done for his people. Others reject the notion that such fine poetry could have come from this time period, concluding

⁴ Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 461.

⁵ These events are described in Exodus 12 and 13.

⁶ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 353.

therefore, it would have had to be written later.⁷ But, as Keil and Delitzsch point out, there is nothing in this text to make us believe that anyone other than Moses wrote it.⁸

So how was this Mosaic hymn sung? This was an enormous assembly of people, and we assume that “the sons of Israel” (“וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל”) connotes that the whole assembly joined in singing. Did everyone learn the whole thing? Perhaps each tribe learned a stanza or two. Miriam’s addition in verse 15 in which she led the women in singing may have been a refrain as a response to the main body of the hymn of praise.⁹ This style of responsive singing might have been used by Moses as he drew on his musical knowledge gained in Egypt, and which the Israelites may have been exposed to in their four-hundred years of captivity.¹⁰

All speculation aside, we don’t know for sure how this was sung by a group so large.¹¹ What we can observe, however, is that Moses wrote a song to proclaim what God had done for his people and to praise him. And we can observe that Moses taught this song to the people so they could worship their savior God with music as a group. Of all the ways in which the Israelites could thank God for saving them, be it sacrifices, or in prayer, or giving the gold they had carried away from Egypt, Moses taught them and led them in a hymn of praise and proclamation.

This isn’t the only example of Moses using music as a tool to teach the children of Israel about God. In Deuteronomy chapter 32, we have a hymn that Moses recited “in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel” (Deuteronomy 31:30–32:1). This hymn has a slightly different writing style than the hymn Moses wrote to praise God at the Red Sea. This one, as Luther puts it is “full of denunciation and reproof,” a song “worthy of the ministry of the Law. He bites, prosecutes, denounces, threatens, curses, and shows nothing but wrath throughout his song.”¹² Why did Moses write this hymn this way? He wanted the people of Israel to learn and remember well who God is and what he is like, what mankind is and what they are like, and what mankind’s state before God is because of their sin. Moses was using music to teach the people in a way that would help them remember God’s Word. Looking at this song and the song of

⁷ E. H. Wendland, *Exodus*, 2nd ed., The People’s Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2000), 87.

⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 353-354.

⁹ Wendland, *Exodus*, The People’s Bible, 92.

¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 357.

¹¹ But we might someday! See Revelation 15:3.

¹² Plass, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, 290.

victory sung at the Red Sea, we learn that Moses saw music as a valuable tool to teach and proclaim God's almighty power and to praise him for his protecting power.

As we continue to look at the history of music in the life of the church, we jump roughly five hundred years after Moses to look at the life of David.¹³ When the subject of music in the Bible comes up, the Psalms are the prime example of how music was used by Christians in the Bible. Of course, David is the name most readily connected to the Psalms. David was a skilled musician who wrote many of the Psalms and had many others commissioned for specific events and purposes. We will take a brief look at the types of some of the Psalms to better understand how they were used to teach about God by praising and proclaiming of him at the time of King David.

The classification for each Psalm is often found in the heading of the Psalm. For example, מְזִמֹּר is the heading for Psalm 3. It is used as a heading for 57 of the Psalms and it is the word which, when translated as it was in the Greek Old Testament as ψαλμος, is our word for the whole book: Psalms. מְזִמֹּר means "a song" or "a melody." Professor John Brug suggests it can also mean "a song accompanied by a stringed instrument."¹⁴ Psalm 3 is a Psalm composed by David about the time period he fled from his son Absalom. Absalom had led a coup against his father and tried to usurp the throne. David's closest advisors and friends even abandoned him trying to protect their own lives in the case that Absalom would be successful.

Christians experience trouble in their lives because of their faith. Satan and the world persecute us trying to make us give up our faith and to stop trusting in the promises God has given us. This is what David experienced at the hands of his son. But even in the time of abandonment by family and friends on account of God's promises to him, David composed this Psalm confessing his faith in the LORD. By writing this Psalm, David took a real life example that he had experienced and made it a teaching moment. David confessed that the LORD is his shield (v. 3) and it is the LORD who must be his deliverer (v. 7). When Christians sing this Psalm in worship, we are using music to publicly confess the same faith in the power and promises of God that David confessed. We teach others that God is our shield and the only who keeps us safe.

¹³ The jump over the time of the Judges is intentional. In Judges chapter 5, we see a hymn of praise which Deborah and Barak sang together. While it is words set to music for the purpose of praising God and proclaiming what he has done and the first verse is even a call for the people of Israel to praise the LORD, it doesn't seem to be a song used in public worship, so it is not treated in this study.

¹⁴ John Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005), 14.

Another type of Psalm has the title מִקְתָּם. Psalm 16 is an example of this. Hebrew scholars are unsure what this word means. The footnote in the NIV on the word says “Probably a literary or musical term.” Luther connected מִקְתָּם to זָהָב, a poetic word for gold, which would make the מִקְתָּם Psalms “choice pieces” or “gems.” Another option is that מִקְתָּם refers to an inscribed prayer which was placed in the temple as a part of the temple artifacts.¹⁵ While there is nothing in the heading for Psalm 16 that directly points to it being a musical composition other than its broader category of a Psalm, another מִקְתָּם, Psalm 56, is written “For the director of music. To the tune of “A Dove on Distant Oaks.”¹⁶ Whatever the meaning of מִקְתָּם, we can safely say that a מִקְתָּם is a hymn used for public worship to teach and praise God for who he is and what he has done. A brief look at the words of this Psalm show an outpouring of trust in God’s promise that, no matter what happens to us in life, nothing will keep God’s people from dwelling with him in heaven for eternity, and it gives the reason for this hope: “You have made known to me the path of life” (Psalm 16:11). God has shown his Christians, even David who did not see Christ clearly as we do in the New Testament era, the road and the gate through which we must enter eternal life. A public reciting of this Psalm tells others about the hope that we in Christ.

The next type of Psalm we will examine has the heading שִׁירָה. This word means “song” and Brug notes that it is a title used for joyful songs.¹⁷ Psalm 18 is one designated as a שִׁירָה. It is another Psalm of David. He wrote it in thanksgiving to God for delivering him from the hand of Saul and from his enemies. In it, David celebrates the LORD’s care; for himself, but also for his descendant, king Messiah.¹⁸ This is an extremely important part of this Psalm. The Psalm teaches us, not only of God’s care for his people, but his ultimate purpose for everything he does: Everything he does for us, everything he does in the world, he does to bring us to salvation. His act of guiding and protecting not only David, but also all the history recorded in the Bible, is all centered on his preserving and fulfilling his promise given in the Garden of Eden: that he would save the world from its sins. David saw that a Psalm written for public proclamation of God’s guiding hand is a useful Psalm for teaching about God.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Ps 56: title.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., 238.

Psalms 120-134 are classified as “Songs of Ascents” by their headings. Brug outlines four ways these songs might have been used. The first possibility is songs sung when the Israelites were returning from exile in Babylon. Since the topic of some of them is a restored Jerusalem, this would fit with the homeward journey of the Israelites. A second possibility is of these being the Psalms sung when Israelites were converging on Jerusalem for the three great festivals: Passover, Pentecost (Feast of weeks) and Tabernacles. The third option is taken from later Jewish writers who understood these Psalms to be fifteen Psalms which were played by musicians ascending step by step and song by song on a set of fifteen steps in the temple complex. The fourth option is they are called the “Songs of the Ascent” due to the step-like progression of thought from Psalm to Psalm, each Psalm furthering and expounding a Word or concept from the previous.¹⁹ Whichever of these four options was the original use, or even if there was another that is unknown to us, these “Songs of the Ascent” portray and proclaim a trust in God to care for his people.

Psalm 132 ties these Psalms together and “connects the Songs of the Ascent with the messianic promises contained elsewhere in the psalms,” and the promise God gave to David in 2 Samuel 7: that God would establish an eternal throne for David through his greater Son Jesus in the Kingdom of Christ.²⁰ Whether this and the other Songs of the Ascent were sung on the road by Israelites coming home from captivity or tri-yearly for the festivals, or whether they were sung in the temple setting, they were used to proclaim the greatness of God and to praise him.

The last classification of Psalms we will look at is *שִׁירֵי הַמַּאֲזַחֵת*. This is the name of the book of Psalms in Hebrew. It means “a song of praise.” Psalm 145 is the only individual Psalm, however, to have this description in its heading. This Psalm serves as an introduction to the last five Psalms in this book.²¹ Each of the five begins and ends with Halleluiah, so this Psalm fittingly tells of the reasons to praise the LORD, the chief of them being his merciful love, which we see today in Jesus.

All of these Psalms which we have examined have another teaching point to which I have already alluded. They all teach about Christ whether in prophesy or in the merciful love of God toward his people. Psalm 3 is a typical prophecy in that something happened in David’s life that reminds us of an even in Jesus’ life. Just as David was surrounded by foes who said, “God will

¹⁹ John Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 73-150*, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2005), 375-377.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 489.

not deliver him,” Jesus was surrounded by foes on Calvary who mocked him as he willingly gave up his life. Psalm 16 is one of the best known messianic Psalms. The New Testament use of this by Peter in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2 and by Paul in Acts 13 show that this Psalm is not talking about David himself. David died and his body turned to dust as God promised happens to mankind in his natural state. In Psalm 16, we hear Jesus himself speaking through David and he tells us that even though he died, the grave had no power to contain him. And because he rose from the grave and gave people who trust in him the title “holy ones of God”, or saints of God, ultimately, we will not lay in the grave either. Psalm 18 is used by Paul in Romans 15:9 to describe the prophetic work of Christ to the Gentiles, and in the last verse, David looks ahead to his Offspring whose eternal kingship God protected and assured by preserving David’s earthly throne. As noted above, Psalm 132 from the Songs of Ascent and Psalm 145 do not contain any prophesies about Jesus, but they praise God for the undeserved love he shows his people. Christians, Old Testament or New, see this in God’s promise of righteousness given in faith. All of these Psalms are musical compositions written and recorded with the intention that groups of people would use them publicly to tell about who God is and what he has done and will do for his own.

The Psalms were written and had their greatest use as songs of worship in the temple. Since the Psalms were purposed for proclamation and praise in a public setting, the writers of the Psalms included notes about how to perform the pieces. Music notations in the text are believed by some to be instructions for which pitches to be played.²² Other notations for music are found in the headings to some of the Psalms. As mentioned above, Psalm 56 has the musical instruction, “To the tune of A Dove on Distant Oaks.” It seems to have been a tune name that musicians would have known. Other Psalms have similar instructions. Some Psalms appear to have instructions for which instruments to use to play the song. Stringed instruments were the most important.²³ That choice of instrument may have been influenced by David who played a stringed instrument. Other instruments mentioned in the Psalms are trumpets (Ps 150:3), flutes (Ps. 150:4) percussion instruments (Ps 81:2 and Ps 150:5).

²² For more on this topic, see Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, *The Music of the Bible Revealed*, (North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal Press, 1991).

²³ Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, 76.

In 1 Chronicles 15:16-22 and 16:4-7, we are even told the names of some of the musicians appointed by David to minister before the Ark of the LORD. Their job was to play in a specific manner as the Ark of the LORD, the symbol of his presence among the Israelites, was carried into Jerusalem. It doesn't take a Masters in musical performance to deduce that they would have taken great care in their preparation and performance for such a task! It was such a treasured part of worship that there were specific people, usually Levites, who were given the official ministry of music. Having dedicated musicians teaches something too. It set the ark apart as something special; something worth having dedicated musicians accompany it while it traveled.

While we don't fully understand the headings of all of the Psalms, what can we learn from them and their musical notation markings? We can infer two things. The first is that the notations and instructions for music were supplemental to the words of the text. The music's job was to serve and enhance the Word because it is the Word that teaches about God. That is why we aren't bothered today that we don't understand all of the instructions for tuning and style and instruments to be used and we don't know how to replicate the musical tunes listed. The second point is that the writers of the Psalms did take special care to give instructions for the performance of the music. They held the use of music in a public worship setting to be important and therefore worth doing well. It is by no accident of the Holy Spirit that they are included in the Canon of Scripture we have today. Perhaps they are included to help show us how important the Psalms were in the worship and education of the Old Testament saints.

A look at how the Psalms and music were used for worship after the time of David will show us how important the music and words of the Psalms remained in godly worship life of Israel in generations to come. In 2 Chronicles 20, roughly 150 years after King David, when King Jehoshaphat was facing war with the Moabites and Ammonites, he was told by the LORD not to be afraid and to march to war. When the army woke up the next morning to march out of camp into battle, Jehoshaphat appointed a choir to sing praises to God before they departed. This is striking. When King Saul was going to join in battle against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 13:1, his choice of offering to God was burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Jehoshaphat's offering of choice was music. The words they sang is the stanza that is very familiar to us from Psalm 118, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." Even on the battlefield, the

Psalms were in use for proclaiming and praising God. And God blessed their worship by sparing his people who, as Wendland notes, “looked more look more like a congregation leaving church than an army going to war.”²⁴ God sent ambushes against the enemy army which eventually caused the multinational army to destroy one another. God saw the musical praise they offered as an act done in faith and he fought for his faithful people. While they were proclaiming that God’s love for his people is great to each other and to anyone else present, God showed them how much he did love them when he saved them from having to join in battle.

Another example of the continued use of the Psalms in the worship life of God’s children is approximately 150 years after Jehoshaphat at the beginning of Hezekiah king of Judah’s reign. 2 Chronicles 29:3ff tells us that within the first month of his kingship, he repaired the temple of the LORD that had been allowed to fall into disrepair and disuse. He reestablished worship of the LORD in the temple, including the sacrifices prescribed in the book of the Law. He also reinstated the temple musicians and ordered them to sing praises to God with the words (and instruments) of David and Asaph. After years of idol worship in the land and kings leading God’s chosen people away from God, a priority of the king in calling the people of Israel back to the faith of their fathers was by teaching them by filling their lives and ears with 300 year old songs of praise and proclamation.

The last example we will look at of the importance of the Psalms for the Old Testament church is in Nehemiah 7. The timing of Nehemiah’s ministry is after the Babylonian captivity, after the first wave of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem. It was around the year 450 B.C. The people of Israel had been in exile for a little over 100 years, away from Jerusalem and the temple and Jewish worship life. Nehemiah first rebuilt the walls of the city to protect the exiles from bands of raiders. Nehemiah writes, “After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed” (Nehemiah 7:1). Verse 44 tells us the singers he appointed were descendants of Asaph. He was one of the men who wrote a number of the Psalms. And when describing the restored worship practices in the rebuilt Jerusalem in chapter 12, he says the musicians performed their services, “according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God”

²⁴ Paul O. Wendland, *2 Chronicles*, 2nd ed., The People’s Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2002), 239.

(Nehemiah 12:45-46). Again, here we see the singing and the music of the Psalms as a priority in the worship life of the Israelites to teach them God's Word and to restore faith in God and in his promises.

Music in the New Testament Church

The use of the music of the Psalms to teach about God did not end with the Old Testament era. The history of the New Testament church shows a continuation of the use of music for teaching people about God and his plan of salvation.

The disciples of Jesus sang hymns.²⁵ None of the Gospels specifically mention singing by the disciples until Maundy Thursday night, but when they do, it is in the setting of the traditional Passover meal.²⁶ The tradition was to sing Psalm 115 to Psalm 118.²⁷ But after Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as the reality of the shadow that was Passover, in which the disciples and all Christians afterward receive the true body and blood of Jesus given into death as a means by which God gives us his grace, the opening line of Psalm 118, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever," takes on a richer, fuller meaning as Christians use it to proclaim and praise God for his saving love. But what speaks even clearer of the importance of the Psalms is Jesus' use of them. Jesus quotes the Psalms more than any other book in the Old Testament as he taught people who he was.

The use of the Psalms continued with the apostolic era. Paul was a Jew by birth and by religion. And he was a good Jew. He was recognized as a leader, even when he was still young. He followed the Law as a Pharisee and took part in all of the customs and rituals. He knew Jewish worship. After Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and converted him by speaking to him and teaching him the truth of the resurrection, Paul became a faithful Christian and a tool God used to expound the truths of the Gospel. Paul did this by writing letters to the fledgling churches he and the other apostles has started all across the ancient Roman world.

²⁵ This is the first instance in the Gospels where we see anyone praising God in song. The headings in the NIV translation of the Bible (as well as many others) in the beginning of Luke's Gospel call Mary's praise of God in 1:46-56, and Zechariah's prophesy in 1:67-79 songs. However, there is nothing in the text that would make us believe that they were sung.

²⁶ We know they participated in other Passover meals, so they probably sang before that night.

²⁷ G. Jerome Albrecht and Michael J. Albrecht, *Matthew*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1996), 384-385.

Paul's method of sharing the Gospel was fairly consistent throughout the book of Acts. When Paul would come to a new city, the first place he would go was to the local synagogue. There, he would share the good news of Jesus with his own people, the Jews. God would use his preaching to bring some of the Jews to faith in Jesus, but a majority of the time, he was ignored or kicked out of the synagogue. So, he would turn to the gentiles in the city and tell them about Jesus. The core of believers that the Holy Spirit would gather by the spoken Word became the churches in cities like Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Colossi and the region of Galatia. These are the churches to whom Paul would write letters to encourage and strengthen their faith, and which letters make up a majority of our New Testament today.

In one of the letters, the letter to the congregation at Ephesus, Paul gave instructions to this mix of Jewish and Grecian Ephesian Christians how a dearly loved child of God lives their life. One of his most important points is how to be fulfilled in life. It is a common thread of mankind through all history to try to get an emotional boost from things. One of the chosen medications for this is alcohol. This is what Paul writes about in 5:18. He sets up a contrast: Don't get drunk. "Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Ep 5:18)" "Be filled with the real Spirit to guide you in wholesome activity that brings lasting benefit to you and others."²⁸ The way Paul tells this ethnic mix of Christians to accomplish this is to "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:19-20). Paul saw great benefit in the Psalms. This is how they could show their love to each other. This speaking of Scripture by means of the Psalms combined with hymns and songs is probably a description of early Christian public worship.²⁹ It would help them to resist sin of drunkenness and debauchery, keep each other from sin by means of encouragement of the Gospel, and it was an opportunity to teach each other about God and to praise him for everything he had done for them: to proclaim his greatness and goodness.

Paul saw the Psalms as musical tools useful in public worship. But look again at the setting of the Ephesians. This was not just a congregation of Jews, all of whom were familiar with the Psalms. This congregation at Ephesus was a mix of Jews and Gentiles! Paul viewed the

²⁸ Armin J. Panning, *Galatians, Ephesians*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1997), 200.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

hymns written for Jewish worship as beneficial to teach and develop the Christian faith of people who had not grown up in the Jewish faith. And then Paul also gave the guidance of using hymns and songs. We don't know what these were, but they weren't Psalms. They were some other spiritual songs written to praise God, and Paul put his approval on their use. In the next section we will look at how the generations after the apostolic era continued to use the Psalms but also to branch out from them and develop and use other music to praise and God and teach who he is.

Music in the Post-Apostolic Church

First we will look at how the Psalms were viewed by the generations of Christians after Paul. One of the early church fathers named Tertullian held them in high regard. He was born around 170 A.D. and lived and served in Carthage, Africa. He considered the Psalms important, especially for defending the true Christian faith from heresies. He wrote “[We look to the] Psalms on this point,—not the “Psalms” indeed of Valentinus the apostate, and heretic, and Platonist, but the Psalms of David, the most illustrious saint and well-known prophet. He sings to us of Christ, and through his voice Christ indeed also sang concerning Himself.”³⁰ This is just one of many references to the Psalms in the works of Tertullian.

Another early church father, Clement of Alexandria who was born around 150 A.D. taught what should be important in a Christian's life: “Prayers, and praises, and readings in the Scriptures before meals, and psalms and hymns during meals and before bed, and prayers also again during night. By these he unites himself to the divine choir, from continual recollection, engaged in contemplation which has everlasting remembrance.”³¹ He understood the privilege of being able to use the ancient Psalms in his day and combining his contemporaries' voices in the same words of praise and proclamation as the entire church to that point, and wanted to encourage Christians after him to continue to use them for teaching about God and strengthening

³⁰ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 538.

³¹ Clement of Alexandria, “*The Stromata, or Miscellanies*,” in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, vol. 2, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 537.

faith. A survey of other early church fathers in the first four centuries will also reflect a high regard for the Psalms as tools to teach the faith.

The early church fathers in the first three centuries used mostly Psalms as the music for worship. This seems to be a matter of confession. Heretical sects such as the Gnostics and the Arians and Apollinarians after them used non-Psalmic music to teach their false doctrines, and the Orthodox church all but condemned the used of music other than the Psalms so as not to be confused with their false sects. The council of Laodicea around 360 A.D.³² and the council of Chalcedon 451 A.D. prohibited the use of uninspired hymns for use in the church.³³

Of course, there were exceptions. Some of the parts of the liturgy have their origins in the early Greek church, such as the Gloria and Te Deum.³⁴ The value that the church as seen in especially these two hymns can't be understated. As they are historically part of the Ordinary, they have been sung weekly by the Christian church to praise God and to show what he did to save mankind.

But there are other less often used yet treasured hymns that have been handed down to us. Among these are "Shepherd of Tender Youth" by Clement of Alexandria, "O Splendor of God's Glory Bright" by St. Ambrose, "Of the Father's Love Begotten" by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius and "A Great and Mighty Wonder" written by St. Anatolius. This small list of hymns are examples of hymns that have been preserved in the Christian church and are still in use today to teach about God and proclaim what he has done.

By the sixth century, the early Greek Church fathers had realized the value of hymns and their potential for use in the church and wrote more.³⁵ Even though the use of music other than the Psalms was slow to be incorporated into the church after the Apostolic era, early Christians did learn to see the value of them and they used both the Psalms and other music in the early NT church era to teach Christ and his salvific work.

³² Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "*The Canons of the Synod Held in the City of Laodicea, in Phrygia Pacatiana,*" in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Henry R. Percival, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 158.

³³ Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 579.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 578.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 580.

Music in the ministry of Martin Luther

The next time period we will examine is Martin Luther's lifetime and what he thought of music. The reason we as Lutherans, even in the 21st century, are so enthusiastic about the music we use for worship is heavily influenced by Martin Luther. Martin Luther had a love for music that was developed in him at an early age. While we do not have very much information about what kind of music surrounded him in his young home life, his schooling was filled with music and Carl Schalk asserts that, "His experience in the schools laid the foundation that determined, to a significant degree at least, the direction that music would take in the churches of the Lutheran Reformation."³⁶ From the beginning of his schooling at Mansfeld through the equivalent of our sixth grade today, the students learned to sing all the parts of the Catholic liturgy along with the Psalm tones, hymns and basic music theory. Such attention was given to music to better assist their ability to participate in worship services as choir boys and general participation in worship.³⁷ These early years formed Martin Luther's love for music and showed him the value in setting words to music for the purpose of teaching.

Luther continued to surround himself with music in the later years of his education at Magdeburg and in Eisenach where he joined one of the school's choirs. He also sang door to door in the city with his fellow students for money and food.³⁸ After he joined the "Black Cloister" as a monk in Erfurt after his scare with the lightning bolt on the road, music was an even bigger part of his life. He and his fellow monks sang the liturgies daily, and learned the Psalms and the other music of the church.

But all of these experiences with music were not unique to Dr. Luther. Every other student that went through formal education similar to his also was surrounded by music. His experience in the monastery was common to all the other men there; they sang the same liturgies and they used the same Psalms. Where, then, was the difference that led Luther to use the same music for a different end goal than the rest of the monks in the Roman Catholic church?

The answer to that question lies in the heart of the Reformation: the desire to proclaim God's Word in truth and purity. The Holy Spirit led Martin Luther to a correct understanding of God's gift of salvation by grace through faith and he had a deep desire to share the unparalleled

³⁶ Carl Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

freedom that the Gospel gives. His goal with music was the same goal he held in the rest of his reforming efforts: to proclaim what God had done for the world through Jesus.

After the Diet of Worms when he was officially excommunicated by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, Dr. Luther employed music for various reasons as he sought to teach the truth of God's Word.

One of them is for the effect it has on the development of children. He wrote, "Speaking for myself, if I had children and could achieve my purpose, they would have to study not only the languages and history but also singing and music . . . For what is all this but mere child's play in which the Greeks in former times trained their children and which certainly developed them into men and women of wondrous ability, skilled in every pursuit."³⁹ Martin Luther wanted the study of music to be an educational pursuit from childhood for the way the studying and practicing music shaped and molded children.

He also loved music so much is because he found peace in music, and even inspiration to go out and preach!⁴⁰ He even felt that music had power to chase away the devil. In putting these observations into practice however, Dr. Luther showed that his trust wasn't in music as vibrations of varying frequencies that vibrate our ear drums and touch our emotions. When Dr. Luther wanted to find comfort in music, he fled to music that had the word of God attached to it. He prescribed:

"When sadness comes to you and threatens to gain the upper hand, then say Come, I must play our Lord Christ a song on the organ (be it the Te Deum Laudamus or the Benedictus); for Scripture teaches me that He loves to hear Joyful song and stringed Instruments. And strike the keys with a will, and sing out until the thoughts disappear, as David and Elisha (1 Sam. 16:23; 2 Kings 3.15) did. If the devil returns and suggests cares or sad thoughts, then defend yourself with a will and say: Get out, devil, I must now Sing and play to my Lord Christ."⁴¹

These two benefits that Dr. Luther found in music may be true. But he loved music so much not only because he found character building effects and peace from the attacks of Satan, but because it can also bring spiritual calm to the soul through the peace that comes only from the words and promises of God and because it is a wonderful vehicle to share it with others. Carl Schalk explained this key point for music in Dr. Luther's ministry by saying,

³⁹ Plass, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, 448.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 982.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 983.

“At the heart of Luther’s concern [for music] was his view of music as a gift of God to be nurtured and used by man for his delight and edification, as a means for giving praise to the Creator, and as a vehicle for the proclamation of God’s Word . . . For Luther, music was the vehicle for that doxological proclamation – proclaimed both to the world as “good news” and to God, praising Him for it and pleading it before Him.”⁴²

Martin Luther used this vehicle of proclamatory music as a teaching tool during the Reformation. Of the myriad problems in the Roman church, one that Dr. Luther worked tirelessly to remedy was the poor biblical knowledge of the laity. Even many of the priests did not know basic truths of Scripture!⁴³ Music in the public worship service was one of Dr. Luther’s tools to reach the laity and teach them. As mentioned above, musical settings of the liturgy were being employed in the Mass, but they were not being used in a way that allowed the congregation to join the clergy. The liturgies were not written and sung in the people’s native tongue, but rather in Latin, which only the wealthy class of society had the means to learn. The liturgies were written primarily for the priests and choirs to sing. The members of the congregation were all but silent observers.

The two reformations in the music of the worship service Dr. Luther made to teach the people were in the liturgy and in hymnody. Schalk’s understanding of Dr. Luther’s main focus is “The chief – though certainly not the only – locus for [music’s doxological] proclamation was the liturgy.”⁴⁴

Liturgical worship of Luther’s time included the five songs of the Ordinary: the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, and the *Credo*. These five texts had been in use musically in the church for public worship for around one thousand years.⁴⁵ They had stood the test of time and had proven themselves to be beneficial for proclamation and praise, even through the years the papacy ruled Christendom. However, not all of the parts of the liturgies were beneficial. There were parts in use in the Roman church that Dr. Luther eradicated, and for very good reason. They had strayed from orthodox teaching and were teaching works righteousness.

⁴² Carl Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism: Shaping the Tradition (1524-1672)* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 16-17.

⁴³ To get a feel for the conditions of biblical knowledge among the priests, read Dr. Luther’s preface to his Large Catechism. His estimation is that they were more inclined to feed their bellies than their own souls, let alone their flock.

⁴⁴ Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism: Shaping the Tradition (1524-1672)*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ James Tiefel, “What Do You Mean By Liturgical?” *Worship the Lord* No. 1 (May 2003) : 1-2, in *Worship the Lord—Liturgy* [database online]; Available from <http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/wtl-liturgy/>; accessed November 11, 2015.

Dr. Luther found the five ancient song texts to be beneficial and apt for use in worship, so he included them in his Masses. It is worthwhile to note the way they were used. If one studies his German Mass, one will notice his recommendation for how the parts of the ancient liturgy could be used. Not only were all the parts of the service (the musical settings of the texts, the Scripture readings, and the prayers) used in German, but the congregation was a part of the service, saying “we believe in . . .”

The reason Dr. Luther translated the liturgies into the language of the people was so they could be edified by the words of the songs. Words in languages not understood do nothing to edify and they may as well be resounding gongs and clanging cymbals, to use the Apostle Paul’s phrase in 1 Corinthians 13. When one takes time to meditate on and study on the words of the songs of the liturgy that we still use today in worship, it will be hard to miss the rich doctrinal content proclaimed and taught. For example, take the *Gloria in Excelsis* as found in Christian Worship:

*Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men. We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty. O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sin of the World; have mercy on us. You take away the sin of the world; receive our prayer. You sit at the right hand of God the Father; have mercy on us. For you only are holy; you only are the Lord. You only, O Christ, with the Holy Spirit, are most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.*⁴⁶

In this short hymn, the congregation singing it is able to proclaim many core doctrines of Scripture: The Trinity, salvation, redemption, and the Person and divinity of Jesus to name a few.

And as you read through these words, did you hum along? Could you sing the whole song right now? Those who have used this text as found in Christian Worship or a variation of them in another hymnal will find that these doctrines come easily to the lips and can be proclaimed and remembered in times of joy or sadness. This is the power of music that Dr. Luther sought to harness and maintain by keeping these words set to music in the worship lives of the people. Music when combined with the truth of Scripture is a powerful tool to teach and proclaim the Word of God.

⁴⁶Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House Page, 2005), 16.

The other, secondary musical reformation Dr. Luther made was in hymnody. As with the liturgy, hymnody in the Roman church was sung primarily by choirs. The way Martin Luther went about bringing hymns to the people in worship is explained by Carl Schalk:

“Luther drew from the heritage of Latin texts and melodies of the medieval Offices, transforming many of them into congregational vehicles for praise and prayer. Simplifying them melodically, and correcting and improving them theologically when necessary, Luther and others transformed hymns which in the late Middle Ages were intended for singing by monastic choirs, and made them accessible as vehicles for congregational participants.”⁴⁷

And just as the various liturgies in use in the Roman church were tainted with false doctrine, these hymns were often tainted as well. Martin Luther wrote speaking of the Roman church,

“They do indeed possess many admirable, fine musical compositions and songs, especially in the cathedral and parish churches. But they have adorned them with many foul, idolatrous texts. Therefore we have removed these idolatrous, dead, and nonsensical texts, have divested them of the fine music, and have used this for the living, holy Word of God, to sing, to praise, to glorify therewith, so that this fine ornament of music might be put to proper use and serve Its dear Creator and His Christians, that He might be praised and glorified and that we might be bettered and strengthened In the faith through His holy Word, driven Into the heart with sweet song. May God the Father, with the Son and the Holy Ghost, help us to this end.”⁴⁸

Dr. Luther describes that it wasn't the music in the church that was bad. It was the words that had been attached to the music that needed reforming. And that is what he did. Some of the new hymns which he incorporated into worship were hymns with old familiar music refreshed with new, but scriptural words. One example of this is *Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands*. The tune dates back to the 11th century as a Latin Easter sequence.⁴⁹ Dr. Luther took the words that were already there that had little theological value and rewrote the hymn to the outstanding Easter confession of Jesus' victory over sin and Satan.

Not all of Martin Luther's hymns were reworking of old music and old words, however. He wrote some hymns and the lyrics to go with them. *From Depths of Woe I Cry to You* is a hymn for which Dr. Luther wrote music, and the words he put to it give a strong statement that

⁴⁷ Carl Schalk, “The Hymn in the Liturgy: A Lutheran Perspective,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 16 (June 1989) : 214-215.

⁴⁸ Plass, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, 981.

⁴⁹ *Chorale Melodies used in Bach's Vocal Works* [Internet]; available from <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/CM/Christ-ist-erstanden.htm>; Accessed November 12, 2015.

forgives of sins is not anything we deserve, but comes to us solely through God's love and grace as he promises in his Word.

And some of the hymns that he incorporated into worship were new works he wrote that were set to music composed by others for reformed worship in Lutheran churches. An example of this is *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*, a beautiful Christmas hymn that teaches the reason Jesus became man and lived on earth. Martin Luther wrote the words of this hymn to teach about God's incarnation and the glory and praise that are due Him because of his love for us. All of these powerful songs which Dr. Luther purposed for post-reformation public worship clearly were opportunities for the laity to clearly teach each other and to be taught the truth of Scripture.

One more key way Martin Luther strove to use music was as a catechetical tool to teach children. Dr. Luther knew from his own experience that music in a child's education was something that would yield a return throughout life. So he sought to leverage the amazing impact music has on young students and their fertile minds to teach the basic tenants of the Christian faith as summed up in the six chief parts of the Catechism.⁵⁰

Martin Luther's use of music in his reforming work was vital in restoring true proclamation of who God is and what he has done for the sins of the world through Jesus. Martin Luther's emphasis on music as a tool to teach the Christian faith is yet one more example of the importance of music in the history of the Christian church.

Music in the Lutheran Church after Martin Luther

The leaders of the Lutheran church after Dr. Luther continued the tradition of education through music. Pastor Headrick noted,

“The repetition of these hymns in multiple areas of child's life shows how important the Lutheran church viewed the use of hymns in impressing the chief parts of the catechism. These hymns were sung in corporate worship. They were used in catechetical instruction at school and in the home. It shows just how serious they were

⁵⁰ Pastor Ian Headrick (then Seminary Senior) wrote his thesis on catechesis in the doctrines of the Bible for children using hymns. For the chart he supplied to show which of Martin Luther's hymns taught which doctrine, see appendix A.

about impressing the basic truths of the Christian faith on the hearts and minds of all people, especially children.”⁵¹

Teaching children was not their only goal, however. As the Lutheran church was forming many composers and musicians contributed to the advancement of worship music for the congregation as a whole. When we look at some of the men who were most influential in shaping the worship life of the early Lutheran church, we can observe a couple shared themes in their musical endeavors.

As already mentioned, music had been prolific in the Roman Catholic education system in which Martin Luther grew up. But music was sung in Latin and did nothing to benefit the congregation because they did not understand what was being said. Dr. Luther wanted music to aid the telling of the Gospel message, not hinder it and the church leaders that came after him showed by the music they produced that they felt the same way.

Johann Walter, a church musician who was a friend and advisor of Dr. Luther who Luther asked to help prepare the music for his Deutsche Messe, understood Martin Luther’s love of music and his desire to use it as a teaching tool. Walter’s primary focus for church music was for it to be an aid to the Word that didn’t add or detract from it. This shows one theme that ran through the hearts and minds of the early Lutheran musicians: Church music had to be based on the words of Scripture, not just music for music’s sake, as Schalk summarizes, “[His understanding was] that the role of music in the church was to *proclaim* the Word.”⁵² He also states, “Walter provided a bearing that would continue to guide the work of those Lutheran composers who were to follow him.”⁵³

One such composer was Michael Praetorius. He wrote many Lutheran chorales, and his musical compositions and writings show a second theme: “Church music must be solidly rooted and grounded in theology.”⁵⁴ The purpose of public worship is to praise and proclaim God. Music that isn’t based on God’s Word does nothing to aid the purpose of worship. The music he wrote for worship had the proclamation of God’s Word at its heart.

⁵¹ Ian Headrick, *The Catechism in Song: The Benefits of Using Hymnody in Teaching Catechism*, (March 2013) : 13-14, in *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File* [database online]; available from <http://essays.wls.wels.net/handle/123456789/88>. Accessed September 6, 2015.

⁵² Schalk, *Music in Early Lutheranism: Shaping the Tradition (1524-1672)*, 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

Another theme of the post Reformation musicians was to use church music to explain Scripture. Johann Hermann Schein, the “predecessor to Bach at Leipzig”⁵⁵ exemplified this and “sought to interpret the words [of Scripture] in his music.” He showed a “concern for a biblical exegesis” with his music. He was one of the first musicians to combine the expressiveness of Italian Baroque music with German music to bring the Words of Scripture to life in the art of music making.⁵⁶

All of these musicians wanted to spread the Gospel and they used the tool the Martin Luther held in such high regard. Even when music and musical instruction generally took a back seat to the Thirty Years War, there was a desire to keep music alive in the Lutheran church. Heinrich Schuetz, a musician in Saxony financed musicians from his own pocket when the Elector’s money was funding the war efforts.⁵⁷

All of the Lutheran musicians who contributed to the formation of Lutheran worship worked for the advancement of God’s kingdom by the proclamation and praise of God the Savior. They all contributed to what Schalk calls the “culmination of Lutheran church music” in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, the master of the Lutheran Chorale. The church music of Bach contains masterful examples of using the styles of music of his day to vividly tell the message of sins forgiven.

As you see, music has played an important role in the proclamation of scripture in the history of the church. And in every example of music used to praise and proclaim God, there is an element of musical education. Moses taught the Israelites the song, David had trained musicians purposed for the task of leading music in worship, and Paul instructed people to sing hymns. The early church Fathers continued this by teaching the Psalms and their Christocentricity to early Christians for the purpose of using them in worship. Martin Luther and the church leaders after him continued to use music that had been handed down to them and added to it to clarify and teach the truth about who God is and what he has done for mankind.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 163.

Music in WELS Churches

The extensive history of the use of music by the Christian church of which this study has barely begun to scratch the surface shows that it has been an important and effective tool for teaching God's truth to generation after generation of Christians. Its ability to solidify the words of Scripture in the memory is invaluable for its benefit in remembering Scripture for comfort or for rebuking falsehood.

Our church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, values music for its use in worship and education. Music is an important part of our corporate worship, being employed for hymnody and in the liturgical service, and we recognize its use for teaching the truths of God Word.

Because music is an art that has an extremely broad appeal to people of all ages and ethnicity, music can serve as a tool for outreach as well. When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they were not the only people to be freed. Exodus 12:38 "tells us that many other people went up with them." When they sang Moses' song of praise at the Red Sea those people learned about God through that song. When aliens living in the nation of Israel heard the songs of the Psalms sung as people traveled to Jerusalem, or during the worship at the temple, they learned about God. New Christians in the early church learned about God from the same Psalms, as well as from other hymns in the post-apostolic era. And we already looked at how the leaders of the Lutheran Reformation used music to teach people that were living in the darkness that was the Church of Rome.

How can we today continue to use our music as a tool for outreach? How can we use the beautiful gift of God to reach people that are on the road to Hell?

Two congregations in Minnesota have developed a way to do that.⁵⁸ The two churches we will learn from are St. John's Lutheran Church in Wood Lake and Christ Lutheran in Marshall. St John's is a church of about 350 members in a farming community of about 400, while Christ is a church of about 560 members in a community of about 13,000 people. Pastor Michael Berg of St. John's and Pastor Keith Schreiner of Christ recognized that they could use music as a means to reach out to the community to get to know their neighbors, as well as to

⁵⁸ The following information was gathered from two phone interviews. One was with Rev Michael J. Berg of St. John's Lutheran Church on November 20, 2015 and the other was with Rev Keith Schreiner of Christ Lutheran Church on November 23, 2015.

teach the members of their congregations. So in 2013, they launched a joint program of offering music lessons in summer to people in their respective communities.

The plan they came up with was to reach out to Martin Luther College to find a music teacher that could spend the summer working for their churches to teach music by instrument and voice lessons. A student who was working on a degree in music stepped up. A member of one of the churches boarded the student and the congregations paid a stipend for the summer work. The program they ran went from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

The target audience of their program was grade school aged kids, but they had high schoolers, college students and even a senior citizen sign up for lessons! In conjunction with the lessons which were offered Monday through Thursday, the student had a half hour to teach music related things: from music theory to introducing the attendees to instruments. They also offered a Bible Study session for the people who came for lessons.

The first year, the two churches shared the student music teacher, who would split time between the two churches. But they soon found a problem: they had to turn people away who were looking for lessons because they only had one teacher for the two churches!

Each year the first, both churches have each hired a student teacher to head up the music lessons in their respective programs. Both pastors each took their programs in a slightly different direction based on the needs of their communities, but each has the same end goal: they want to use their program as a means to tell people about Jesus. Pastor Berg of St. John's didn't originally start the program as a fix to a problem. He told me in a phone interview,

“I didn't start off by saying, ‘Hey I need to get people into my church. How can I trick them into coming into my building.’ Rather I said, ‘This is an opportunity that we can serve our people and the people of our community whether they are Christian or not, Lutheran or not. And if some evangelism efforts flow from that, wonderful! And if we get a future organist from this program twenty years from now, great! If we can connect to our families who normally don't come to church in summer, but now have to because their kids are singing once a month, great!’ So it's kind of one of those things where it was just good, beautiful, and wonderful, and the opportunity just naturally flowed. I would compare this to some of the soccer camps that are out there. Those are great and wonderful and fantastic. But we didn't have to say, ‘Let's reach out into our community with something [other] people want. We could just let something naturally flow from our theological and worship life. And it just fit that people would want to participate. Soccer camps are great, but there is no such thing as Lutheran soccer. There is such a thing as Lutheran music.

“Sometimes we have to divide things up in a church: some things are evangelism, some are more education. Theologically we need to do that: this is pre-evangelism, this

is evangelism, and this is strengthening the members that are already there. What was unique about what we did here is that not only practically, but philosophically, we didn't really have to divide that up. I think what is so beautiful about it is that it's something that St. Paul is talking about: Whatever is beautiful, whatever is praiseworthy, and so on. I just wanted to lift people up with music.”

“And I killed a lot of birds with one stone here,” he added with a chuckle.

The “birds he killed” are that not only is it good public relations with the community, but through their outreach they are providing for the betterment of society. They are reaching out to community with a valuable service offered for free, to people who might never have otherwise had an opportunity to learn how to play music, and doing it in a way that got community members through the door of the church.

Pastor Berg explains:

“We had a family that contacted us about the music program and the child was somewhat on the autism spectrum. His mom wanted to get him into music, and she thought this was a perfect opportunity. They were not churched. He was not baptized. She came every week for a half hour lesson. And there was no reason for her to drive home, so she would just sit in the back of the church listening. So for 12 weeks in the summer, this unchurched lady was in my church building voluntarily. So I would just happen to go up there when I knew he had a lesson, pretending like I had to do something at church. Or I would just go up and greet them. So he eventually came into our program and came into our catechism class and I baptized him. Still working on the parents, but just to have that person in the building for a half hour, every single week, was pretty huge.”

An enormous barrier for people to go to a church is the uncertainty of going to a new place with all new faces. Having a program like this is a very friendly and non-threatening way for them to come to church and find out what kind of church it is. Another “bird” with this program is one that will show in musicality of the congregation:

“[We are] reaching out in the community, and solidifying our future church musicians. That’s something I did say to sell it to our congregation. If you want future organists and future choir directors, and quite frankly, people in the pew that can follow music, you need to put your money where your mouth is. I very much see this as training my young people from preschool on to be good lay musicians even if it’s nothing else than knowing how to follow along and sing on Sunday morning.”

Yet another “bird” with this program is valuable experience for a future called worker. Pastor Schreiner pointed out, “[The student] gets lots of hands on experience and teaching. This is an important part of our mission as we are helping train and mold a future called worker.”

In his church, Pastor Schreiner has gone a slightly different direction. In their program, they were not seeing very many people stick around for Bible Study every day. So instead of a daily Bible study running in conjunction with the music lessons, they run a separate Vacation Bible School and have seen more attendees in that forum. The point that Pastor Schreiner made was, “[Reaching your community] is multi-faceted. It has to be more than just music: The Bible aspect of it needs to be there in some way shape or form. It has to morph.” So at the end of VBS week, the VBS attendees and the students who took lessons both participated in a final service: the VBS kids got to sing their songs and say their memory verses and the music students got to play for preservice and offering. The benefits to the music program that Pastor Schreiner identified are that the students got to practice playing in public, the members of the congregation got to see the results of the ministry they are supporting, and the hope is that they are fostering children to grow up to consider being church musicians later in life.

Both Pastors had some advice to give any congregations interested in starting a ministry like this. Pastor Berg said,

“Start about a year in advance. For no other reason than that we don't have very many music majors out there who are willing to do this. So whether [the students are from] Martin Luther College or Bethany Lutheran College or Wisconsin Lutheran College, I would say the first year, do it with [the kids in your congregation]. I don't think you need to go full-blown at first. Get yourself settled, get yourself a reputation. Sometimes it's better to go slow. And to do it! [Laugh] It really is a good program.”

Pastor Schreiner adds, “[A big thing is] leg work: advertising is big. I know the manager of a local radio station and I went to him. He set up an interview with [the student] and interviewed her over the phone.” He also says,

“Sell it to the members so they see it as a good thing. Tie it in with other things [in the church, so they can see] how else [they] can use this person. They can play for church during summer and give the regular musicians a break. It is also another young face in the congregation with the children. Make it not just a summer music program, but a summer music program/bible academy/VBS. Find other areas they can fit in with the congregation. Use their gifts to enhance worship. People will see the benefit.”

These are just two congregations that have found benefit in using music to reach out in their community. Whether combined with an intentional Gospel sharing initiative, or simply to be a part of the community's life, a music education program like these can be an effective tool for reaching more people with the Gospel message.

Conclusion

If we take a step back to think about all of this evidence of music's usefulness as a tool to help fulfill the Great Commission in Matthew 28, what will we make of it?

First, after seeing how valuable a tool music can be, to allow music to decline in importance in our worship would be a tragedy. It would be letting a time honored means of education in the faith and outreach slip away. With music being such a beautiful way to combine teaching God's Word and praising Him, it ought to be given high priority in the worship of a congregation.

Resources are a sizable part of the discussion in the topic of music in worship, and not only monetarily. Bigger churches generally have a bigger pool of people who have the gifts to make music for the Lord. Singing hymns to the accompaniment of a full brass ensemble or even a full orchestra is a treat that some congregations rarely get to enjoy.

But small churches are not excluded from being able to make music an important part of their worship. In an article published in *CrossAccent*, Carl Schalk makes the argument that "Smaller parishes can be an exhilarating place for worship and church music."⁵⁹ He recommends doing an informal or formal gathering of information: how many would sing in a choir, how many instrumentalists you have, and the quality of their instruments. He proposes a lot of time, music in a small church is often not exhilarating because a small choir or a small ensemble is trying to play music meant for a large scale production. He writes,

"Perhaps one of the most important developments in church music publishing. . . has been the publication of a rich treasury of materials designed specifically for smaller parishes with more limited musical resources. In no way "written down" to some simplistic level of musical ability, these publications have seriously taken into account the simple fact that many—if not most—parishes have small choirs with less usual or unusual groupings of voices, and instrumental resources that may consist only of a high-school trumpeter or three fledgling flute players"⁶⁰

One more bit of advice he offers is for organists of small parishes.

"Organists, perhaps more than any other church musicians, need to see that less is more. Living in a culture where we are bombarded by music at every turn, we increasingly hear but no longer listen. . . To clear the service of the sometime oppressive and continuous presence of the organ will not only relieve the organist of an unnecessary

⁵⁹ Carl Schalk, "Getting more for less: the smaller parish can be an exhilarating place for worship and church music," *Cross Accent* 20, no. 3 (November 2012) : 19-23, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, [database online] EBSCOhost, accessed September 1, 2015.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 21.

responsibility; it will help focus on the proper function of the organ in worship: to introduce and accompany the congregation's singing with sensitivity and effectiveness.”

If a small congregation would like, for lack of a better term, a contemporary feel to worship, the same words hold true: less is more. A single guitar with piano accompaniment is a better choice than possibly overwhelming singing by trying to incorporate a full band.

Whether a big congregation or a small congregation, have a well-developed plan for music in the worship service is key. Music and its performance that has not been well planned will rarely be well executed. The pastor or church musician whose task it is to prepare music for worship will serve the Lord and their congregation best with the music in worship that has been well thought out.

Because having music in worship is so valuable, allowing music to decline in importance in our educational programs would also be a tragedy. It isn't just the Christian church that recognizes the benefits of music: the secular world of education understands its value. In a 2011 article, Ruth Wills cites multiple studies of the effects of music on children. The studies' findings include improving creativity, personal development, and leading a child into a long-term way of life.⁶¹ Ruth Wills' discovery which she describes in her article is that music programs help children transform psychologically to the result that they are overall better students in all aspect of education.

As Christians seeking to use music to praise our Creator and Redeemer, we have even more reason to strive for excellence. That begins with teaching our children. We will find it very difficult indeed in the coming years to continue praising and proclaiming God in song if we are not putting priority in the musical instruction of children! Keep supporting musical training and show it is important by encouraging excellence. Make a special effort to encourage musicians to use their gifts. Tell your musicians how you appreciate them for adding beauty to the worship service with their gifts. When setting the yearly church budget, is what is designated for music in the church a reflection of the value the congregation puts on the gift of music? Perhaps setting up a line in the yearly budget to assist with instrument purchases or to assist or pay for private lessons would be a God-pleasing investment. While many musicians

⁶¹ Ruth Wills, “The magic of music: a study into the promotion of children's well-being through singing,” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 1 (February 2011) : 37–46, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, [database online] EBSCOhost; accessed September 2, 2015.

will gladly use their talents in service to God to beautify worship services, “the worker is worth his keep” (Matthew 10:10).

In concluding this study, this writer would like to encourage every reader to continue to support and encourage the Christians in your life, especially young Christians, to develop and use their musical gifts as an offering to God. Whether you are young or old, the gift of music can be used to serve the church to build others up in their faith and to inscribe the Words of God in the memory in a way that is unmatched by any other method. Since God has given different gifts to different members of His body of believers for use in the church, those who have been given the gifts and the means for developing those gifts have a wonderful opportunity to use them. Christians who have been given the gift of musicianship can use it to help grow God’s kingdom by sharing the Gospel by their music. So do it to his eternal glory!

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Appendix A

Table 1 – Luther’s Catechism Hymns

Title of Hymn	Chief Part of Catechism	CW Hymn
The Ten Commandments are the Law	The Ten Commandments	285
We All Believe in One True God	The Creed	271
Our Father, Who from Heaven Above	The Lord’s Prayer	410
To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord	Baptism	88
Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior	The Lord’s Supper	313
From Depths of Woe I Cry to You	The Ministry of the Keys	305